Submission to the
Royal Commission into Family Violence

May 2015

Executive Summary

This submission for the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence is written by Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC), a generalist service provider working across the Whittlesea local government area (LGA). It begins by establishing WCC's role providing integrated services across a range of programs from which clients experiencing family violence might access support. It then sets the context, detailing the characteristics of the Whittlesea community and its experience of family violence.

Theme 1 explores WCC's organisational experience of family violence and the specific challenges faced by women and children experiencing family violence in our community. It then explores examples of current promising practice, including integrated service models, legal service responses, and three specialist projects – The Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project, the Hamdel Project, and the Housing Brokerage and Support Project.

Theme 2 considers options for improving the family violence system. It first explores 'on the ground' solutions, specifically calling for better integration of specialist and non-specialist services as well as increased funding for women's support groups and men's behaviour change programs. It then suggests system level changes, including state-wide respectful relationship training in all school curricula, improvements to both the legal and immigration systems' handling of family violence cases, and targeted funding models that reflect areas and communities most at risk.

The submission concludes with a list of recommendations for consideration by the Royal Commission.

Recommendations

Set out below are our recommendations for improving the sector across the spectrum of prevention, early intervention and response. First and foremost, encompassing all of the recommendations below, it is important that any funding models acknowledge communities at greater risk, based on a range of factors including family violence incidence rates, social disadvantage, population growth, at-risk cohorts, and remoteness/isolation.

Integration

- Investment in integrated service models that provide a range of services in the one location, offering multiple soft-entry points, streamlined holistic service delivery, and support across the prevention, early intervention and crisis response spectrum. This includes funding for coordinated

prevention/intervention projects that encourage multi-disciplinary partnerships. One model is one-stop community hubs where community members can access lawyers, social workers, family violence workers, and meet police. These are particularly pertinent to regional, rural or growth areas where lack of transport and distance make accessing services difficult.

- Support for increased presence of specialist family violence services in all LGAs.

- Consistent data collection across all services to better capture the reality of family violence in Victoria

- More work into unpacking the link between problem gambling and family violence
    - Funding for research to determine the link between problem gambling and family violence
    - Harm minimization legislation that decreases problem gambling harm, including $1 maximum bets, pokie machine venues banned from shopping precincts, and closing the loop- hole on cash-withdrawals in gaming venues.

Legal

- Increased access to justice for those experiencing family violence, including:
    - Specialist family violence support workers co-located at every community legal centre
    - Specialist family violence/family law lawyers in every Victorian community legal centre with resourcing to represent women in court and support VOCAT claims, particularly where eligibility for Victoria Legal Aid or Women's Legal Service may be limited
    - Local justice precincts that reduce the distance between communities and courts

- Changes to infringement system to recognise family violence as a 'special circumstance'

- Changes to privacy laws to improve information-sharing between police, hospitals, lawyers and family violence services while still maintaining client confidentiality.

CALD Communities

- Support to increase access of CALD communities to family violence services and projects
    - Additional accredited family violence training for interpreters
    - Family violence information provided as part of broader compulsory rights and responsibilities training during early settlement
    - Increased funding for CALD-specific family violence services to broaden their reach across the state

- Cultural-awareness and family violence responsiveness training for all police officers

- Changes to immigration law to better support family violence victims
    - Adjust eligibility for women on Temporary Partner Visas experiencing family violence to be able to access the crisis payment and special benefits, at a minimum
    - Family Tax Benefit paid to women with custody of children on leaving a violent relationship, regardless of visa status

- Faster visa processing that does not leave women vulnerable on bridging visas where fears about breaching the Immigration Department Code of Behaviour may stop them seeking family violence support
- Extend eligibility of settlement services to all forms of temporary visa holders who have experienced violence

Prevention

- Investment in community-led prevention and early intervention projects that utilise participatory flexible community development approaches. These should build community capacity and work with both women and men. Learning from current projects such as the Whittlesea CALD Communities FV Project and the Hamdel Project should inform these. Successful pilot projects should receive ongoing funding to continue their good work.

- While it is important that prevention work be funded to address the causes of gendered violence, a downstream upstream approach must be taken that recognises prevention and awareness will increase disclosures, thus specialist services must be supported to meet increases in demand.

- Respectful relationships training embedded in all school curricula alongside funding and capacity-building to support schools to deliver this

- Gender equity mainstreaming across all local Council's every day practice, using City of Whittlesea's Gender Equity Strategy as an example

Early Intervention

- Increased funding for generalist women's support groups, recognising that the more connected women are the more access they have to information and supports for family violence. This is a demonstrated key prevention and early intervention initiative as evidenced by the WCFVP.

Response

- More MBC programs including CALD and indigenous-specific courses. Mandating powers should be expanded across all courts and postcode eligibility widened to allow all men to be eligible.

- Better Centrelink response to family violence
  - Training for all staff
  - More efficient processing for family violence claims
  - Family violence specialist liaison officers

Recovery

- Continued support for women during the rebuilding phase of their journey
  - Increased rental assistance from Centrelink following the end of violent relationship
  - HBSP projects that support women to locate and sustain private rental
  - Additional support for children who have experienced violence to address impacts on their developmental and educational wellbeing
  - Specialist employment projects for women who have experienced violence to support them to re-enter the workplace and begin to rebuild their independence and self-esteem.

Background

Our organisation

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) is an independent community service agency based in Epping, Victoria with a municipal-wide profile and reach. WCC's vision is for a Whittlesea in which people and agencies work together to make a positive difference to their community, ensuring that everyone has equal access to the community's resources and services. Established in one of Victoria's most culturally diverse communities, WCC has a long-track record in service delivery, partnership development and the promotion of equity and access for disadvantaged members of Whittlesea's communities.

WCC has an approach that includes multiple entry points for receiving support and accessing opportunities; a large and diverse volunteer base creating pathways for community connection; service delivery and service planning with the community; and a community led approach to organisational governance and program development. WCC is committed to responsive approaches to the challenges posed by Whittlesea's changing population and its services and programs are driven by values that prioritise non-judgemental approaches and strengthen individuals, families and communities.

WCC is: -

- **Community-led.** It works alongside individuals and the community, creating opportunities to build and strengthen connections, supporting a community that is more resilient and therefore better able to support itself
- **Person-centred.** It aims to remove barriers to accessing information and support, working towards building individual capacity and strength.
- **Flexible.** It works to identify and create innovative, sustainable solutions to unmet needs that empower the community.

WCC Services and Programs

- A community information and referral service
- Settlement services
- Community legal services
- Volunteer resource services
- Community transport services
- Case support and management
- Emergency relief
- A Housing Brokerage and Support Service for people at risk of homelessness
- A family violence prevention and early intervention project for culturally diverse communities
- A 'Women-in-Work' training and social enterprise
- Learner driver and road safety programs
- Youth work
- Learning support programs
- Support groups

Our Community

The City of Whittlesea is located approximately 20 kilometres to the north of Melbourne and covers an area of 490 sq. kilometres. The LGA's large geographic boundaries includes both suburban and rural areas including the suburbs of Beveridge, Bundoora, Donnybrook, Doreen, Eden Park, Epping, Epping North,

Humevale, Kinglake West, Lalor, Mernda, Mill Park, South Morang, Thomastown, Whittlesea, Wollert, Woodstock and Yan Yean.

The municipality contains established urban, growth and rural areas and is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia; in 2013 the City's population was approximately 194,498, and this is expected to grow by 72 per cent over the next twenty years. This number is expected to increase to approximately 333,702 by 2036[1].

The City of Whittlesea is one of the most culturally diverse populations in Victoria with more than one third of its residents born overseas. The municipality is home to migrants from more than 140 countries.

An overview of the City of Whittlesea's statistics includes:

- The LGA is coping with a significant net population growth of almost 200 people a week, including a local birth-rate of 60 babies a week (equivalent to 2-3 kindergarten classes).
- The rapid urbanisation of green-field areas means communities with limited or no public transport, no local schools and no social or community service infrastructure.
- It has significant pockets of urban and inter-generational disadvantage – particularly in suburbs such as Thomastown and Lalor.
- It is one of the most multicultural communities in Victoria. 30% of residents come from a country where English is not the first language – double the Victorian average. 43% speak a language other than English at home.
- 30% of residents speak English 'not well' or 'not at all'
- In 2013 the top five birthplaces of migrants newly arrived to the municipality were India (22 per cent of new arrivals), China (12 per cent), Iran (10 per cent), Iraq (7 per cent) and Sri Lanka (6 per cent).
- The LGA lost $99m on poker machines in 2014, with an expected financial year loss of $105m. Each resident adult in the area loses an average of $700 per year, higher than the state average. Losses from poker machines increased by 12% last financial year compared to the previous period. This is a higher burden on our community compared to total state losses, which increased 1% between 2012/2013 to 2013/2014.

Family Violence in Whittlesea

The LGA has one of the highest rates of family violence in the north. Over the past five years the number of incidents reported to police has almost doubled (1,270 in 2009/10 to 2,359 in 2013/14). From 2012/13 to 2013/14 this rate increased by 12%; in comparison, in Victoria, the increase was only 7.4%. In 38% of Whittlesea cases children were present and in a third (33.1%) of cases an Intervention Order or Family Violence Safety Notice was issued or applied for.

[1] http://forecast.id.com.au/whittlesea/home (accessed 30/04/2015)

Theme 1: The Whittlesea Experience - Promising practice and community challenges

Whittlesea Community Connections' experience of family violence

Police statistics, of course, are only part of the picture and as an organisation we are well aware of the fact that many women who have experienced or live with family violence do not report this to the police. To understand this more and to help in our response to this critical issue in our community, WCC has developed its own data collection mechanism for recording cases and representations to us of family violence. The analysis of this is outlined below.

Whittlesea Community Connections sees almost two family violence cases for each working day. In 2014, 361 people sought family violence support, an increase of 29% from the previous year. The most recent quarter (Jan-March 2015) saw 103 family violence cases – the highest quarter on record – suggesting numbers are continuing to increase. Approximately half of those seeking family violence support are doing so for the first time and have not accessed another service or agency (including the police).
Of all the WCC service areas, our community legal service is traditionally the largest entry point (approximately 70-80% of all clients). However, recent quarterly reports have shown significant rises in those entering through the emergency relief service (more than doubling since the Jul-Sept 2014 period). Of those entering through the legal service, a majority (42%) came through WCC's lawyer out-post at the Greensborough Family Relationship Centre.

In the most recent quarter, nearly half (42%) of family violence clients were born overseas, and half of these spoke a language other than English at home. 44% of all clients had previously contacted police, and 42% had an intervention order.

This picture demonstrates the importance of generalist services as a key entry point for identifying, responding to and referring family violence cases. Our experience is that women are often not coming forward in the first instance to disclose family violence, but to seek other support which is required in rebuilding their lives as a result of family violence. It is all the more critical that generalist services like ours are resourced and trained to identify and respond effectively to family violence as a critical intervention point. We are then able to demystify the service system, reduce the stigma associated with disclosure and provide practical support for victims and perpetrators to gain access to specialist providers.

In addition to having multiple entry points, WCC's integrated service delivery model means once within the service, clients are able to access multiple supports in the one location. As well as delivering legal, case work, emergency relief and settlement services in partnership, a weekly half-day posting of a family violence worker from Salvation Army Crossroads Family Violence Service means clients can see a specialist worker onsite. In 2014, this worker provided 68 consultations to 50 individual clients. 56% of these clients were from CALD backgrounds. This service model has clear benefits to our clients which will be explored further in the submission. It is particularly pertinent in a large rapidly growing LGA where distribution and accessibility of services are far outstripped by demand.

Challenges for our community

As an interface growth area, Whittlesea faces a number of challenges which contribute to our community's experience of family violence.

Whittlesea ranks 6th of 31 Metropolitan LGAs for SEIFA disadvantage. It is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia and the 3rd fastest in the state, designated by the Victorian Government as a growth area of significance. The current population is forecast to increase by 72% over the next 20 years. For instance, in Mernda-Doreen, the current population is estimated to be 36,668, having grown dramatically from a population of 3,562 in 2006, and is anticipated to grow further to 54,942 (a net increase of 49.8%) in the next 20 years[2]. Neighbouring Wollert, presently an estimated population numbering in the hundreds, is projected to increase by a staggering 21,940% to reach 31,911 by 2031.

This creates unique challenges for women and families experiencing violence. Like many growth areas, service infrastructure has not developed alongside population growth. Social and geographical isolation are common and affect women's capacity to seek support. Women may not be aware of support services, or if they are, may face significant barriers to accessing them, such as lack of private transport, limited or non-existent public transport, or high costs to travel beyond the LGA to access regional services such as Berry Street, the regional family violence service (which could take several hours to get to via public transport, where it exists).

For the significant CALD population, lack of awareness of legal rights, family violence supports and connection to local services reduces the capacity of women to learn more about their rights and build the trust and confidence required to seek support. Additionally, Whittlesea LGA has a large and growing number of residents who are either on temporary skilled work, spouse or bridging visas and this insecurity can be a major deterrent to disclosing violence or seeking support. Anecdotally, many asylum seeker clients have disclosed that despite their growing awareness of rights and services, they will not take action in relation to their experience of family violence until they are afforded broader protection and security that a permanent refugee visa would entail. This stems from fear of negative impact on their or their partner's visa application including fear that reporting the violence may send their partner back into detention because of breaches to their asylum seeker Code of Behaviour.

For generalist services like WCC, the virtual non-existence of specialist services in the area makes providing suitable referrals difficult. While Berry Street and Salvation Army Crossroads both have a one-day a week outpost presence in the LGA, this is not sufficient. Rapid population growth means an increase in demand across all service areas, meaning more clients with complex family violence issues (for instance, clients simultaneously experiencing both family violence and homelessness, substance abuse, problem gambling, or financial stress). In the most recent quarter, 1 in 3 cases presented to us with a family violence component involved substance abuse, and 1 in 10 involved problem gambling. Problem gambling in particular poses many challenges to our community with losses at a higher rate than the state average. A 2013 statistical analysis conducted by City of Whittlesea found a strong correlation in areas with high rates of family violence and high rates of problem gambling, and further research is needed to fully understand this co-occurrence[3]. It is fair to say that it is an understatement to say that women in interface growth areas like Whittlesea face additional barriers and fewer options to addressing their family violence situation.

[2] http://forecast.id.com.au/whittlesea/about-forecast-areas?WebID=160 (accessed 23/1/2015)

[3] 'Family Violence and Gaming statistical analysis for Whittlesea Community Connections', City of Whittlesea Research Unit, September 2013.

What is working

Integrated service model

Whittlesea Community Connections has developed a distinct portfolio of services that cover a broad spectrum, from prevention and early intervention work undertaken through community education, grounded research and support programs to the provision of short term emergency funding and case work support for people in crisis. WCC's integrated systems make the transition from one service to another smooth and seamless. A community member coming to the agency for settlement support may be referred to the legal service for assistance with an infringement, and may then be referred to assessment for financial support, and may then be linked into support groups, or our volunteer resource service, or be provided with community transport all without having to travel from service to service or navigate a complex system that requires individuals to repeat their story and wait for lengthy periods before being assisted.

An integrated model for service delivery has many benefits:

- It allows multiple 'soft' entry points for women who may not yet have 'identified' their family violence situation, but allows them access to trained workers who may identify family violence and provide appropriate support and referral.

  Case study

  [redacted] first accessed WCC through one of the women's groups. [redacted] was new to Australia and knew few people. After attending for some time, she disclosed to the worker that she was afraid of her husband and wanted to know what supports were available for her in Australia. The worker referred her to the WCC caseworker who provided emotional support and information about services. [redacted] left Australia to visit family and within days of her return came to WCC wanting support to leave her violent husband. She received referrals and intensive support, including social work casework and legal support, and is now living in stable private rental, safe and independent from her husband.

- It also allows women to access a range of supports from a single location, with staff able to work across programs to best meet the needs of the woman.

  Case Study

  [redacted] came to Australia with her husband and two children. She was referred to WCC's settlement service by another service around concerns for her children's education and the deterioration of her husband's mental health. [redacted] did not have her license and was referred to WCC's adult driver education program, so as a result, she now is driving. Some time later, [redacted] disclosed the continued deterioration of her husband's wellbeing and treatment of her, and wanted to separate from him. [redacted] was referred to WCC's legal service for information on separation and was provided information on family violence services available to her. At this point the family violence [redacted] was experiencing was not physical, however it was escalating and workers helped her make a safety plan.

Not long after, [redacted] reported to WCC that over the weekend the police had attended their home due to husband's threats and violence towards her. [redacted] had taken an Intervention Order out on her husband. A settlement service worker attended and supported [redacted] at her court hearing a few days later for a full Intervention Order because she was too frightened to face her husband alone and found negotiating legal representation overwhelming.

The settlement service continued to support [redacted] post her family violence experience with casework that involved linking her to housing agencies for assistance with a bond loan and rent in advance. She was provided assistance through WCC's emergency relief service to assist in alleviating some of the financial stress she was experiencing as a result of family violence, being a newly arrived single parent. She was also assisted to apply for three philanthropic grants that contributed to large expenses including educational fees for her daughters, outstanding bond loan debts and prescription glasses. In addition, [redacted] was referred to WCC's Housing Brokerage project. [redacted] and her daughters moved into a new property and she did not have the savings to afford two weeks of the month's rent in advance. Through the Housing Brokerage project [redacted] was able to secure a loan and be supported in the transition to the new property. An affordable payment system was created via Centrepay with [redacted] and the loan is now paid off. Over this time [redacted] continued to be supported by WCC legal service with her separation and child access issues.

[redacted] continues to be linked in with WCC services, such as the Persian Speaking Women's Group. [redacted] has participated in meetings and trainings within this group for the Our Watch-funded Hamdel PVAW Project. She is having ongoing input into family violence prevention strategies within the Iranian community. From 2012 to present [redacted] has been linked across the services at WCC which has aided in her recovery from family violence. [redacted] now negotiates daily living as a single mother independently and the support [redacted] seeks from WCC has reduced significantly.

- Some clients are not yet ready to address the family violence, wanting only to address their presenting issue, but hold onto the information for a period of time until they are ready to act.

Case Study

[redacted] came to Australia on a refugee visa several years ago. Her family received support through WCC's settlement program and after some time [redacted] was referred to WCC's Youth Connections program due to trouble engaging in the Australian school system. After working with the Youth Connections caseworker for a while, [redacted] disclosed experiencing threatening and controlling behaviour from her older brother. The worker linked her in with the Salvation Army family violence worker but [redacted] didn't feel ready to seek help and didn't turn up to her appointment. Almost a year later things escalated at home. [redacted]'s family did not approve of her boyfriend and she was fearful for her life. She had received death threats from her brother and her mother. [redacted] had held onto the family violence worker's number and contacted her to make an appointment. The worker provided [redacted] with support in safety planning and in understanding her rights under that law. A month later [redacted] returned to WCC in a crisis situation where she could not return home. With the support of WCC staff to advocate on her behalf she was granted access into refuge and also provided with emergency relief assistance. [redacted] was in a fragile state and faced barriers in advocating for

herself to access refuge including a lack of knowledge in how to navigate the family violence system and low English levels.

[redacted] took steps towards creating a new life for herself but again faced barriers accessing vital services required for her to make a fresh start. As well as the system being extremely hard to navigate, [redacted] found Centrelink staff lacked family violence awareness to assist her with her claim. Her initial application for an allowance was rejected and she was without payment for over a month. The assessment interview was undertaken over the phone and [redacted] said she didn't get a chance to talk about the threats she had experienced. Centrelink had presumed she was leaving home to live with her boyfriend and had disregarded the expert evidence that the Youth Worker provided to support her application. They had not re-contacted the worker to discuss any discrepancies they had in their assessment of risk. [redacted] nearly became homeless as a result. [redacted] again requested the assistance of WCC staff to advocate on her behalf so that her payment could be approved. Eventually, after significant advocacy, payments were approved.

Her family found out where she was living and came to the property and continued to threaten her. Approaching the police was extremely hard for [redacted] but she knew it was necessary for her safety. However [redacted]'s experience exploring options with the police again left her confused and as a result of her encounter she took no action against her family as she was under the impression it would leave her vulnerable and under threat.

Currently [redacted] is still in a happy relationship with her boyfriend and is trying to make a new and independent life for herself.

- Some clients need support advocating for themselves for resources that would allow them to increase independence and reduce the impact of family violence on their lives.

Case Study

[redacted] is a mother of three young children. She arrived in Australia in 200[redacted] on a provisional spousal visa. [redacted]'s family is eligible for a Centrelink allowance but her visa status prevented entitlements being paid to her directly for two years, therefore all money was paid to her husband's account. [redacted]'s husband refused to provide her with any of the financial assistance the family receives or any of his own earnings. He exploited [redacted]'s dependency on him by preventing her from getting a drivers license or attending English classes. He routinely insulted her in front of their children.

[redacted] is now a permanent resident and came to WCC for assistance getting the Family Tax Benefit transferred into her own name. In order to have the entitlement changed she needed her husband's signature. WCC's settlement worker assisted her with the paperwork and provided her with support and referral options in relation to family violence, however she was not ready to take action. She feared the reactions of her family, friends and community. [redacted] has advised that she successfully had the Family Tax Benefit transferred into her name.

Case Study

[redacted] was referred to WCC by a local family violence service. She was on temporary Partner Visa after marrying her Australian born husband. She became pregnant, but her partner tried to make her have a termination. During her regular check-ups at the hospital her doctor asked questions that facilitated [redacted]'s disclosure of family violence including daily sexual assault and she was linked in to a number of support services and assisted to leave as a result. She feared reporting the incident to police, was unaware of her rights and didn't want to get her partner into trouble. He had started using drugs and his mental health was deteriorating. She left her husband and found temporary accommodation on a couch with a family she knew through work. She continued to work until the baby was born and was given a bridging visa.

Her application for a permanent visa was rejected by the Department of Immigration on the grounds that she was not in a genuine relationship. This was despite the history of violence, evidence from the hospital and a range of service providers, a pregnancy conceived within the relationship and the Department's own family violence provisions. The decision seemed to be made on the basis that her ex-husband did not corroborate her story and had refused to undergo a DNA test. She applied for a review of the decision with the support of a pro-bono lawyer as she was not able to receive any funded legal assistance at the review stage.

A number of services have withdrawn support because they were 'no longer providing family violence support' or had 'worked with her long enough', or because 'her visa application was rejected' despite a lack of basic income or housing security. WCC is assisting [redacted] in lodging the baby's birth registration application which her partner refuses to sign. Although the baby is an Australian citizen due to his parentage, Births Deaths and Marriages may not list the father's name on the certificate if they are not able to confirm his parentage which might jeopardise the baby and [redacted]'s entitlement to income support. The department have said they will not fast track the processing of her application as the father has not signed the form.

She is still sleeping on the couch with a newborn, has no income and no permanency despite having experienced ongoing serious violence at the hands of her partner. The family where she is staying says she needs to move in the next two months because a family member is coming to live with them. Her migration review may take up to a year. She is not eligible for WCC's Settlement Service but other program areas are doing what they can to support her because she is a local woman in need. We are advocating for other services to stay involved at least until she and her baby are safe. There is a risk she might decide to return to her husband if there are no financial options open to support her and her baby's survival.

Legal Service Responses

Whittlesea Community Legal Service has two lawyers specializing in family law (a dedicated family lawyer and a lawyer outposting to the Greensborough Family Relationship Centre). These two lawyers see a majority (67%) of legal service clients experiencing family violence and make up 46% of those seen across all WCC programs. This demonstrates the importance of dedicated Family Law positions at community legal services.

There are significant gaps in legal need which have been identified by Whittlesea Community Legal Service in recent times. The service offered by both the Magistrates' Court and courts of higher jurisdiction such as the Family Court are of no benefit to our clients unless competent work is on offer to such clients to enable them reasonable access to justice. There are significant barriers in the help available for women subject to violence in the region. Those barriers include:

1. There is no court in the region. The closest court is at Heidelberg. The Family Court is in Melbourne. For almost every woman facing difficulties with family violence, there is trouble in travel to these courts.

2. Guidelines for VLA, the largest provider of free legal representation in Victoria works against many women suffering family violence of the most severe kind, for whom for practical purposes, there is no alternative help available save for our legal service. Examples include situations where the woman has a job, or where previous legal help has been offered in the same matter, notwithstanding that circumstances have now changed.

Our service provides a range of legal supports to women experiencing family violence:

1. Applications for intervention orders which are not picked up by police;

2. Warm referrals to police where there is serious evidence of crime disclosed by a woman client who requests help in liaising with police;

3. Applications to the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal seeking compensation for acts of violence which includes immediate safety related expenses such as changes to locks and removal expenses; cash compensation awards and awards for items that might assist the victim in her rehabilitation from the offence in question;

4. Applications to the Family Court or the Federal Circuit Court seeking orders for Divorce, sole parental responsibility, passports for children etc.;

Regarding the necessary legal service enumerated above, the legal service offers the following help:

No.	Service:	Assistance Provided:
1.	IVO's	The legal service offers help in preparation of applications for intervention orders by way of completion of application forms and sitting down with the woman in question and getting her full story onto Affidavit which can then accompany the application when filed. Distant from the nearest Magistrates' Court as it is, and with the press of business at the office with limited staff, the legal service is unable to offer representation to women in such applications.
2.	Referrals	In every case where there is credible evidence of crime and the woman concerned gives her consent, our service will take a statement from the woman concerned and communicate with police.
3.	VOCAT	In every case where there is evidence of an assault upon our client with the

		necessary report to police, our service will bring an application in the VOCAT for the client and act for her to conclusion.
4.	Family Court	The Family Court being a superior court, applications to it are procedurally more time consuming and there is the necessity of often multiple court room appearances. Be that as it may, the service will offer assistance in areas where others providers, particularly VLA, do not.

In relation to Family Court or Family Law Act Orders which need to be changed, what is offered by this legal service is best illustrated by the following two case studies.

Case study

Our client came to see us after having first approached Victoria Legal Aid. She had been living in Queensland with her husband and young son. Misconduct by her husband to herself included multiple rapes and assaults. As time went by, she became aware of sexual abuse perpetrated by her husband upon her son. Her husband severely restricted her social contact and her fear of him stopped her initially from reporting his misconduct. She fled the relationship to Canada. She reported the matter to Canadian police who explained that they had no jurisdiction. However, they advised that if she wished to return to Australia (as was her intention), she should settle in a place as far distant from her husband as possible, and encouraged her to report the matter to Australian police.

She followed this advice, settling in Melbourne and immediately reporting the matter to the Sexual Assault Unit at [redacted] Police Station. [redacted] police liaised with police in Queensland whose enquiries revealed that our client's husband had left his last known address with no forwarding address. Warrants were issued for his arrest but he had not come to further police attention.

Our client sought orders from the Family Court allowing her sole responsibility of her child, to effect a change of name, and a divorce. She approached VLA for this purpose but VLA declined assistance as our client was working. However, her income was so modest that it would preclude her, for practical purposes, from obtaining legal assistance privately. She approached this legal service. WCLS initially tried to refer the matter to the Women's Legal Service who declined as their resources were too stretched to allow an offer of assistance. Given the high level of crime involved, perpetrated not only upon our client, but also upon her son, the efficacy of the orders she was seeking could not have been clearer.

The Whittlesea Community Legal Service issued applications for all orders sought by the client, settling paperwork which documented both the story of crime committed by her husband and subsequent liaison between Victoria and Queensland police. The matter coming before the Family Court, the presiding Judge remarked that these were precisely the orders that were necessary in this case and dispensing absolutely with service, made the orders ex-parte immediately. It is emphasised that legal help to obtain orders which both offer her protection and allow she and her son a clear pathway to recovery would have been denied her by every available provider of legal services save for this service.

Case study

A woman approached us having her application for aid declined by VLA and the Women's Legal Service. VLA had supported an application in the past for this client to apply to the Family Court for sole parental responsibility orders with provision for her ex-partner to spend time with their daughter on certain terms. Since the making of the orders by the family court, our client's ex-partner started taking ice and making serious and credible threats to both our client and the daughter, and had attended substance affected to pick up the daughter, resulting in the need to call police. Our client attended this legal service advising us that this change seriously altered the rationale for allowing the other party to continue to spend time with the child. VLA declined to act on the ground that it would not allow the client a second grant of aid in the same matter. Women's Legal Service were unable to assist also.

Mindful that making an application to the Family Court for variation is a cumbersome process, procedurally complex and often requiring multiple appearances in the court room, the legal service was also aware that the law allowed the Magistrates' Court, on an application by a woman fearing family violence, to vary any Family Law Act Order that was inconsistent with the terms of any intervention order. Our client advised that she had an intervention order, taken out over a year ago against the other party which had now lapsed. Her concern that she and her daughter may again be subject to violence and the well corroborated evidence of recent wrongdoing on his part, the legal service was able to apply forthwith to the Magistrates' Court which had made the initial intervention order to extend that order for a further year.

The presiding Magistrate made orders extending the past intervention order for a further two years, and varying the Family Law Act Order disallowing the other party to spend time with the child.

This case particularly demonstrates how this legal service, working effectively with its clients, is able though its thorough knowledge of the law and the extent of its application to the problems faced by our clients, can provide concrete remedies. What we lack however, is the resources required to give access to a court system that is difficult to reach or travel to or the required resources to appear for as many women whose situation warrants it. The best justice means nothing if you cannot access it.

Specialist Projects

Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project

WCC coordinates the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project, a place-based integrated violence prevention and early intervention program bringing together nine local, regional and state-based agencies (Whittlesea Community Connections; City of Whittlesea; Victoria Police; InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence; Berry Street; Salvation Army Crossroads Family Violence Service; Plenty Valley Community Health; Kildonan UnitingCare; Whittlesea Community Futures Partnership).The project is funded by a range of philanthropic grants that the partnership has applied for in seeking to meet a critical gap in the family violence sector. The project was established not because there is any evidence of greater prevalence of family violence in CALD communities but because we recognized that newly arrived communities were missing out on key resources and support, lacked information about rights and service systems and had needs that are not being met by generalist approaches.

The project model was developed after an extensive scoping research exercise with community members and agencies (see Whittlesea CALD Community Family Violence Project Scoping Exercise Report 2012) and brings together six integrated elements.

- Coordinating agencies via the steering group, as well as a women's advisory group consisting of local CALD women.
- Empowering women through providing brokerage funds and coordinated community legal education to local CALD women's support groups.
- Capacity-building community and religious leaders with community legal education and referral pathway training, as well as resourcing to advocate anti- family violence messages with their communities.
- Reducing recidivism with a pilot Arabic-language men's family violence group.
- Targeting young people with respectful relationships education in primary schools.
- Early intervention during the settlement process with an adapted version of Victoria Legal Aid's 'Settled & Safe' training.

It is being evaluated in partnership with Monash University (see first stage evaluation report attached).
The project has had many successes:

- Resource and staffing capacity limitations have been overcome by a strong commitment to coordination and integration, bringing together nine family violence specialist and non-specialist agencies to combine this workload. This means acknowledging and valuing the expertise of each member agency, with each agency focusing on the areas of work that intersect with their expertise. This has allowed the project to achieve more than if one individual organisation was attempting it, and means enhanced output that reflects a range of good practice frameworks.

- A Women's Advisory Group was established in 2014 made up of women representing local CALD community groups. The women meet monthly and provide input, feedback and advice to ensure the project remains responsive to the needs of the community. The group has supported resource development, helped contextualize presentations, and facilitated relationships between the project and community and religious leaders. They have also received a range of capacity-building training, including identifying and responding to family violence training, and prevention of violence against

women training, and are building confidence as community anti-violence champions. The group is also being supported to develop a series of family violence booklets in languages, that are tailored to specific communities in Whittlesea LGA (Farsi-speaking, Arabic-speaking and those from the sub-continent).

- One aspect of the project saw brokerage funds and family violence community legal education (CLE) sessions provided to local CALD women's groups. Across 2014/15, it is anticipated CLEs will reach more than 180 women. In 2014, 1 in 5 participants later accessed integrated legal/outreach support for themselves, and many more supported friends and family to access support. It also provided an avenue for women to access legal support for non- family violence related issues. Additionally, 29 women's group leaders were trained in identifying and responding to family violence (2014-2015), and supported to facilitate their groups. Women reported this approach allowed them to build the trust and confidence necessary to access support at a pace that suited them[4].

- The project will run a pilot Arabic language Men's Family Violence Group from May 2015. This ten week course will be facilitated by two bilingual workers who have both completed the Swinburne Graduate Certificate course. It is the first Arabic language program, to our knowledge, in Victoria or Australia. Learning from the pilot will inform future programs with the intention that further iterations will meet all NTV standards as an accredited MBC. This will ensure language and culturally-specific programs for men are available, increasing access to these important resources. The project has been enabled by a patchwork of funding and in-kind contributions from all steering group members, with close support from the InTouch-facilitated CALD MBC Reference group. This integration and cross-agency support has been crucial to the funding, design and implementation of this course.

- The project receives no ongoing state or federal funding. Projects that focus on CALD communities often receive 'pilot' funding and learning from evaluations is rarely if ever implemented in an ongoing way and able to inform larger, statewide, fully funded projects. CALD communities continue to be marginalized within generalist models which inadequately cater for their needs. This highlights the importance of ensuring specific ongoing funding for CALD community prevention, early intervention and response projects.

Case study

[redacted] participated in one of the funded women's groups in 2014 after a long history of abuse. During the information session she felt confident enough to talk about her experience with the lawyer who was presenting the session, and explained that she was currently caught in a seemingly never ending legal battle with her ex partner and felt completely trapped by her situation. [redacted] had been conflicted out of most community legal centres by her ex partner, but the lawyer was able to provide [redacted] with legal support around renewing her intervention order. Through her involvement in the group, [redacted] elected to join the WCFVP's Women's Advisory Group, and as her confidence grew, reported that it felt good to use her experience to help make sure other women did not suffer as she had. [redacted] built her friendship with other women in the Advisory Group and

[4] Evaluation of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project: Evaluation Report 1. December 2014-January 2015. Dr Deborah Western, Gender, Leadership and Social Sustainability Unit, Monash University.

she and another woman decided to establish a Malaysian Women's Group, applying for funding in the 2015 round of women's grants. They were successful and [redacted] with the support she has received through the project, has embraced her new role as group facilitator.

Hamdel Project: Working with Whittlesea's Iranian community to prevent violence against women and children

WCC is implementing a one-year pilot prevention of violence against women (PVAW) project funded by Our Watch and the Victorian Government Office of Women's Affairs. The project is being delivered with partner agencies Women's Health In the North and Salvation Army Crossroads Family Violence Service. Working with the local Iranian community, the project is capacity-building community members to design and develop PVAW activities. The project is:

- Training women's group members with a downstream to upstream approach, to design various community PVAW activities.
- A respectful relationships education and indoor soccer program for young Iranian men, providing targeted respectful relationships training adjusted to incorporate a human rights, legal education and settlement lens.
- Capacity-building and support for local Iranian community leaders to become anti-violence and gender equity advocates. In this case the community has identified Iranian GPs as having the relevant and critical leadership role in the community.

The project uses a women-centred approach, recognising that local CALD women are the experts on their own safety and on the unequal or harmful attitudes, beliefs and behaviours around violence and gender that create violence-supportive norms. This means the women identified which men and leaders would be the best to target, and are part of designing and shaping content to ensure that it covers issues specific to the Iranian community. Early successes of the program indicate that using a community development approach to design programs resonates, appeals and is meaningful to local CALD groups. It recognises communities as the experts of their lived experience, and supports them to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to design prevention activities and initiatives.

As with the WCFVP, this project is driven by the bringing together of expertise from a range of agencies and services, benefitting from this multidisciplinary approach, as well as ongoing participatory consultation and guidance from the women on all aspects of the project. Project training has utilised a downstream upstream approach, starting with building knowledge around understanding family violence, the law and support services, before unpacking the gendered nature of violence and exploring what prevention work means. The downstream upstream approach has been vital to working with a newly arrived community as participants establish a strong understanding of what constitutes violence against women in Australia, before starting the discussion around prevention. It also recognised that though the focus is on prevention, this undoubtedly led to disclosures so it was important that women felt confident of how and where to access support and specialist services must be resourced to meet this need, particularly CALD-specific services such as inTouch.

The women embraced the PVAW training and are actively engaged in designing a series of PVAW activities, including an adapted version of Victoria Legal Aid's 'Settled and Safe' program that has a heightened gender equality focus, and a series of family activity days to encourage safe, healthy families and parenting, through fun participatory activities that prompt discussion and unpacking of gender expectations, roles and conflict resolution (ie soccer training for the whole family, and an activity that supports parents around non-gender biased parenting approaches). The project is still in early days and evaluation will not be complete until end of 2015 through Our Watch.

Housing Brokerage and Support Project

WCC's Housing Brokerage and Support Project (HBSP) provides no interest loans to residents of the City of Whittlesea who experience barriers to accessing the private rental market. The project combines a loan with case management support to ensure people are able to overcome other issues which may impact their ability to sustain long term tenancy. This project has been effective in supporting women fleeing family violence situations.

Case study

[redacted] was referred to the Housing Brokerage and Support Project (HBSP) after visiting our emergency relief service where she was seeking financial assistance. She was extremely distressed during her interview as she was experiencing family violence from her brother and wanted to seek alternative accommodation. She was suffering depression as a result of the abuse. While the caseworker discussed options with [redacted] around an intervention order and seeking placement at a refuge, she explained that she had done this before and with no accommodation available upon leaving the refuge, she was forced to return home and this worsened the family violence. [redacted] explained that she preferred to seek private rental accommodation. Though [redacted] was able to find a property on her own, she did not have all the funds needed to pay for her bond and first month's rent in advance. Through the HBSP, [redacted] was assisted with the remaining funds. [redacted] was highly motivated and empowered throughout this process and required little casework support to pay off the loan. She reported a heightened sense of self-reliance knowing that it was a loan and that once she repaid it someone else could be assisted. [redacted] has since paid off her loan and is still residing in the property.

[redacted]'s circumstance is not uncommon for women in the Whittlesea LGA who have very few options for alternative accommodation once leaving the family home, particularly if they wish to remain within their community and close to their local connections and supports. With the assistance our project and support from a generalist social worker, [redacted]'s situation was stabilized and she was able to start rebuilding her life.

Theme 2: Ways forward – What can help?

The following suggestions consider both current good practice and ways to enhance and improve this. It considers both a 'system' level of change, as well as practical improvements to the current way of doing things.

On the ground – integrated services

Integrating services provides more opportunities for early intervention and holistic responses to family violence. The value of these services presenting as 'generalist services' with family violence capacity offers the opportunity to capture those experiencing family violence prior to things reaching crisis point, and to offer them a range of support options that are tailored to their needs. There is a range of ways this could be achieved:

- Creation of 'hubs' that offer a one-stop shop for support needs. Lawyers, social workers, health workers, family violence support workers, and access to police all available in the one location, meaning workers can co-case manage their responses easily. These would benefit from being in accessible safe areas such as shopping centres that are closely linked to public transport, and provide opportunities to access support without fear of being seen going into a family violence service. Many women report to WCC that a benefit of our location in Epping Plaza is that they can say they are simply going to the shops and that if the perpetrator is tracking their devices, it registers as such.

- These hubs are particularly important in growth areas, such as the Mernda and Doreen, where services do not currently have a presence but population growth is among the fastest in the nation. Existing Community Activity Centres could be used to house these hubs, providing a vital link to services. Additionally, further investment into community development activities from these hubs is important: opportunities for groups that promote social connectivity and information-sharing are important for building resilience, strengthening connectivity, and early intervention in family violence.

- It is important for family violence specialist services to have a strong presence in all LGAs. This could take the form of a family violence worker permanently stationed at every Community Legal Centre and able to work in an integrated way with lawyers. This would support strengthening the capacity of Community Legal Centres to respond to and manage family violence cases.

- Family violence lawyers should be available in each and every state funded community legal service. This would help meet demand, with these lawyers having capacity to complete VOCAT applications, make representations at Family Court, and appear at local magistrate courts for intervention order hearings as well as offer critical secondary consultation to other agencies and services.

- There is a need for more opportunities for women (and men) to build social connections and gain knowledge and confidence to interact with services, both as a prevention and early intervention strategy. This is applicable to the whole community, but especially so for newly arrived communities who without existing networks within their local area. WCC facilitates a range of groups – as well we those funded through the WCFVP, we also run our own Arabic-speaking men and women's groups, a Farsi-speaking women's group, English classes and homework clubs for young people. All these

provide far-ranging benefits for participants, and are excellent soft-entry points for people experiencing family violence. Research shows that socially connected women are more likely to seek assistance; funding for generalist women's support groups promote increased connectivity for women and build leadership capacity.

- Access to justice is another major issue, particularly in growth areas like Whittlesea. Attending court in either Heidelberg or the CBD can be an additional barrier for many women experiencing violence, not least because of difficulties traveling to these destinations. Ideally, a local justice precinct would better enable our community to access courts. It would also allow CLC lawyers to attend court more often as travel times would not prohibit this as they currently do.

- The need for more availability for Men's Behaviour Change courses is well discussed. In addition to more funding for MBC's, there also needs to be consideration of areas of greatest need in deciding where to run them. Only recently – 2014 – has any Whittlesea LGA postcode been included in the list of those from which magistrates can mandate men, and it is still only one postcode for the entire LGA. The inadequacy of this is starkly evident when you consider the high rates of family violence in the LGA.

- Additionally, it is important that specialized MBCs for CALD and indigenous men are funded to ensure these men have options to seek support. Culturally-specific groups are crucial to ensuring equitable access to programs. Funding to train facilitators and establish these groups are important, as is learning from and sharing in the wisdom of existing groups. Embedding ongoing funding for these programs in core work is necessary to both allow men opportunities to address their use of violence, and create opportunities for support to women and children through partner contact workers. It is important that these programs are adapted to meet the cultural needs of their target groups in order to be relevant and effective.

- There are many improvements that can be made to ensure CALD communities have better access to family violence information and services:
    - Compulsory training for all interpreters – we have had many women report to us who have experienced interpreters chastising them for speaking about family violence or divorce and making them feel ashamed. Additional training should be available for interpreters that covers things such as privacy, understanding sector jargon, and examining interpreters' own attitudes to family violence or violence against women. This would form an additional accreditation and these interpreters could be specifically requested by services.
    - Consideration of CALD specific awareness campaigns that recognise the need to not simply translate content, but adapt it to suit its audience's experience, culture and needs.
    - Family violence information provided during early settlement as part of compulsory settlement program about rights and responsibilities. This may reduce the problem of newly arrived women experiencing violence being isolated early on so that they have no further opportunity to interact with or find out about services. Funding could be provided to AMEP providers to work with community services to develop respectful relationships curriculum materials to assist newly arrived communities to become aware of rights, options and preventative strategies from a strengths based perspective.

    - CALD-specific specialist family violence services such as InTouch are invaluable resources for both women and workers, providing a critical link between services, newly arrived communities and government departments. They must be funded to increase their reach across the state, including key programs like their legal service.

- Funding for targeted prevention projects that incorporate community development principles and build community capacity. Projects such as the Our Watch-funded prevention project offer opportunities to build community capacity beyond simply the prevention of violence, but strengthens connections and supports amongst communities more generally. Projects should have the flexibility to design themselves around the needs and interests of the groups they are targeting, and should be supported beyond simply 12-month pilot funding. In general, there is a need to move beyond simply funding promising initiatives for a time-limited period. There should be commitment to longer-term funding for pilots that demonstrate success, as opposed to constantly seeking 'innovation'.

- While much improvement has been seen in police capacity to respond to family violence, the quality of the response is still very much dependent on the attending officers. We still see large numbers of clients who have not received an appropriate treatment from police or who have had their experiences minimised or ignored. More family violence training for police is required to improve the overall standard of service they provide. Particularly, training on cultural-awareness, responsiveness and respect when dealing with family violence cases is required.

- Continued support for women and their families during the rebuilding and recovery stage of their lives. Women who have escaped family violence face ongoing vulnerabilities and disadvantage as a result of the violence, including financial pressure and difficulty accessing or maintaining housing. A period of heightened support is required, for instance increased rental assistance from Centrelink, or access to HBSP-type schemes to support women with private rental. This financial support must be beyond the crisis payment; for many women forced to relocate following family violence, they move away from their community and face reduced supports, requiring extra help and assistance including with childcare, increased transport costs or suddenly supporting a family on only one income.

- Children too require additional support at this rebuilding stage, with many children who have experienced family violence having missed out on positive education and early learning opportunities.

- Similarly, specialist employment programs need to be established to provide assistance for women who have experienced family violence to re-enter the workforce, especially where they are ineligible for parenting payments (when their children are of school age), where their career has been impacted by the violence and/or where they have little previous workplace experience and low self esteem and self confidence as a result of the abuse they have experienced.

- Data collection must be improved and made consistent across services. In order to have an accurate picture of family violence, detailed data must be captured across all agencies, including police, specialist, non-specialist and community legal services. This data should investigate where and when

first disclosures are made as well as previous engagement with services (see WCC's data collection form attached as an example).

System level

- There is a need for respectful relationship training to be embedded into all school curricula. The 'Building Respectful Relationships' training package is a welcome start, but specific funding and resourcing is needed to support schools to implement it. Whole-school initiatives require resourcing, particularly for schools where curriculum will need to be adapted to suit specific target group needs, such as high-CALD population areas.

- City of Whittlesea's recently launched Gender Equity Strategy is an excellent example of mainstreaming gender equality into every day practice. Similar strategies should be supported across all LGAs, with training to support uptake of this. This is important in enabling communities to live in a gender equity-supportive and enabling environment where the values promoted in individual level PVAW work are reflected by the authorities around them.

- Many of our legal clients have fines incurred due to family violence. As a result, these clients are treated harshly within the infringement system and are often required to go through a long process to have these fines withdrawn. In some cases, clients are still required to pay the infringements. We believe this is partly due to family violence not being recognised as a 'special circumstance', which is only available if a client suffered from substance abuse, mental illness or homelessness at the time the offences were committed. 'Special circumstances' should also include family violence. People living with family violence are often forced into incurring fines for their partners in order to avoid an escalation of the violence or at times incurring fines themselves due to the pressures created by the family violence.

- Accessing Centrelink can be an issue for women experiencing violence. The process for Family Violence Crisis or Youth Allowance payments is difficult and often slow. Many women attend WCC for support in advocating to Centrelink for this payment, and this can be a disincentive to a woman leaving a violent home. Better training for Centrelink staff is required around family violence and the impacts of poor assessment and inflexibility can have on women and children's safety. Family violence cases need urgent prioritisation. Family violence specialist liaison officers within Centrelink with the capacity to respond with some degree of flexibility to meet the need (similar to the Community Engagement Officers who focus on homelessness prevention) would greatly assist the streamlining of services. Assistance for women in liaising with the Family Assistance Office and Child Support agencies would be critical in this role.

- Similarly, there are a range of ways in which immigration law can exacerbate women's experiences of family violence:
    - Women on Temporary Partner visas are not eligible for Centrelink for two years, which means they are dependent on their partners and face having no source of income in the first instance if they leave until they are granted permanency which can take a long time. They

are also not able to get Family Violence Crisis payments from Centrelink. Eligibility needs to be adjusted to ensure at minimum eligibility for crisis payment and special benefit until the outcome of their permanent visa application is known. If not, then the unequal power structures within relationships can limit women's capacity to seek support or leave, increasing their vulnerability to violence.

- Any Family Tax payments for children are paid to the sponsor (usually the male partner) and it is difficult to make changes to these arrangements on separation. Financial control of the Family Tax benefits by the male partner exacerbates other financial abuse in the relationship, with no capacity for women to receive the payment in their own right. Family Tax needs to be paid immediately to the woman with custody of her children on leaving a family violence situation, regardless of visa status.
- Clients on bridging visas have reported that the instability surrounding their circumstances is the major barrier to them accessing family violence support. Women are scared that reporting their partners will either adversely affect the processing of their visas, or that their partners will be sent back to detention for breaking the Immigration Department's Code of Behaviour. This is clearly a barrier to their safety and more consideration needs to be given into how long asylum seekers remain in a state of uncertainty on bridging visas.
- Extending eligibility for federally funded settlement services to those on all forms of temporary visas who have experienced family violence would ensure a greater level of safety of women and their children.

- The link between family violence and homelessness is well established and the lack of affordable housing and hidden discrimination from landlords/real estate agents is a major obstacle for women trying to escape violent relationships, particularly for women with children. When available, the quality of emergency housing is often very low. For instance, one client reported to us she had been in emergency housing for three weeks with her three children, during which time they had no gas to cook with, heat water or use of a heater. This meant they were forced to spend their money buying take away meals and showering at the local leisure centre. State funding for a flexible Housing Brokerage Support Project for those leaving family violence (alongside others at risk of homelessness) is vital. A model such as this would be much more effective if accompanied by a dedicated worker who could outreach to clients, support women to look at properties, and advocate to real estate agents.

- Currently, privacy laws make it difficult to share information between police, hospitals, lawyers and family violence services. Consideration needs to be made to improving this system while still maintaining confidentiality for clients as appropriate.

- Fund research that demonstrates links between problem gambling and family violence. A recent literature review suggests that up to 70% of problem gamblers experience family violence, either as perpetrators or victims. Existing data gathering mechanisms such as the Service Coordination Tool template have problem gambling as an optional question, which can be expensive to implement.

- Implement harm minimization legislation to decrease the harm from problem gambling, including $1 maximum bets, poker machine venues banned from shopping precincts, and closing the loophole on ATMs in gaming venues.

- Consideration must be made in allocating funding that acknowledges communities at greater risk. Growth areas like Whittlesea, for instance, face additional challenges including rapid population rise, lack of essential services, large pockets of disadvantage and vulnerable CALD communities. Targeting areas of need with funding and essential intervention and crisis services will ensure an equitable distribution of family violence resources. These funding models should take into account factors such as family violence incidence rates, social disadvantage, population growth, at-risk communities, and remoteness/isolation.

Recommendations

Set out below are our recommendations for improving the sector across the spectrum of prevention, early intervention and response. First and foremost, encompassing all of the recommendations below, it is important that any funding models acknowledge communities at greater risk, based on a range of factors including family violence incidence rates, social disadvantage, population growth, at-risk communities, and remoteness/isolation.

Integration

- Investment in integrated service models that provide a range of services in the one location, offering multiple soft-entry points, streamlined holistic service delivery, and support across the prevention, early intervention and crisis response spectrum. This includes funding for coordinated prevention/intervention projects that encourage multi-disciplinary partnerships. One model is one-stop community hubs where community members can access lawyers, social workers, health workers, family violence workers, and meet police. These are particularly pertinent to regional, rural or growth areas where lack of transport and distance make accessing services difficult.

- Support for increased presence of specialist family violence services in all LGAs.

- Consistent data collection across all services to better capture the reality of family violence in Victoria

- More work into unpacking the link between problem gambling and family violence
    - Funding for research to determine the link between problem gambling and family violence
    - Harm minimization legislation that decreases problem gambling harm, including $1 maximum bets, pokie machine venues banned from shopping precincts, and closing the loop- hole on cash-withdrawals in gaming venues.

Legal

- Increased access to justice for those experiencing family violence, including:
    - Specialist family violence support workers co-located at every community legal centre
    - Specialist family violence/family law lawyers in every Victorian Community Legal Centre with resourcing to represent women in court and support VOCAT claims, particularly where eligibility for VLA or Women's Legal Service may be limited
    - Local justice precincts that reduce the distance between communities and courts

- Changes to the infringement system to recognise family violence as a 'special circumstance'

- Changes to privacy laws to improve information-sharing between police, hospitals, lawyers and family violence services while still maintaining client confidentiality.

CALD Communities

- Support to increase access of CALD communities to family violence services and projects
    - Additional accredited family violence training for interpreters

    - Family violence information provided as part of broader compulsory rights and responsibilities training during early settlement
    - Increased funding for CALD-specific family violence services to broaden their reach across the state

- Cultural-awareness and family violence responsiveness training for all police officers

- Changes to immigration law to better support family violence victims
    - Adjust eligibility for women on Temporary Partner Visas experiencing family violence to be able to access the crisis payment and special benefits, at a minimum
    - Family Tax Benefit paid to women with custody of children on leaving a violent relationship, regardless of visa status
    - Faster visa processing that does not leave women vulnerable on bridging visas where fears about breaching the asylum seeker Code of Behaviour may stop them seeking family violence support
    - Extend eligibility of settlement services to all forms of temporary visa holders who have experienced violence

Prevention

- Investment in community-led prevention and early intervention projects that utilise participatory flexible community development approaches. These should build community capacity and work with both women and men. Learning from current projects such as the Whittlesea CALD Communities FV Project and the Hamdel Project should inform these. Successful pilot projects should receive ongoing funding to continue their good work.

- While it is important that prevention work be funded to address the causes of gendered violence, a downstream upstream approach must be taken that recognises prevention and awareness will increase disclosures, thus specialist services must be supported to meet increases in demand.

- Respectful relationships training embedded in all school curricula alongside funding and capacity-building to support schools to deliver this

- Gender equity mainstreaming across all local Council's every day practice, using City of Whittlesea's Gender Equity Strategy as an example

Early Intervention

- Increased funding for generalist women's support groups, recognising that the more connected women are the more access they have to information and supports for family violence. This is a demonstrated key prevention and early intervention initiative as evidenced by the WCFVP.

Response

- More MBC programs including CALD and indigenous-specific courses. Mandating powers should be expanded across all courts and postcode eligibility widened to allow all men to be eligible.

- Better Centrelink response to family violence

- Training for all staff
- More efficient processing for family violence claims
- Family violence specialist liaison officers

Recovery

- Continued support for women during the rebuilding phase of their journey
  - Increased rental assistance from Centrelink following the end of violent relationship
  - HBSP projects that support women to locate and sustain private rental
  - Additional support for children who have experienced violence to address impacts on the developmental and educational wellbeing
  - Specialist employment projects for women who have experienced violence to support them to re-enter the workplace

List of attachments

- Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project: Scoping Exercise Report 2012
- Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project: Annual Report 2014
- Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project: Evaluation Report 2015
- Whittlesea Community Connections Family Violence Monitor, Jan-March 2015
- Whittlesea Community Connections Family Violence Data Collection Form
- Whittlesea Community Connections Housing Brokerage and Support Project Evaluation 2015

Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer

[redacted]

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Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project

Scoping Exercise Report

September 2012

Report published by: **Whittlesea Community Futures & Whittlesea Community Connections**

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Whittlesea Community Futures, Melbourne, Victoria
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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4

- Context and Background 4
- Perspectives from Survivors 5
- Perspectives from Service Providers 6
- Perspectives from Community and Religious Leaders 7
- Perspectives from the Literature 8
- An Integrated Approach to Family Violence in the City of Whittlesea 9

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE 11

- Background/Context 11
- Project Aims/Project Objectives and Critical Success Factors 16
- Definitions 17
- Limitations 18

METHODOLOGY 20

- Project Leader 20
- Whittlesea Community Futures CALD Cluster Group 20
- Consultations 21

FINDINGS 23

- Consultations with Women 23
- Consultations with Young People 30
- Consultations with Service Providers 34
- Consultations with Community and Religious Leaders 41

LITERATURE REVIEW 45

- CALD Women: Multiple Complexities, Specific Vulnerability 45
- Refugees & Women Without Permanent Residency 49
- Addressing Family Violence in CALD Communities: Potential Models 51

FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICE MODEL 62

1. Co-ordination/Integration Mechanism 62
2. Empowering CALD Women 63
3. Building the Capacity of Community and Religious Leaders 64
4. Preventing Family Violence: Programs Targeting Young People 65
5. Reducing Recidivism: Increasing CALD Men's Access to Behaviour Change Programs 65
6. Prevention of Family Violence: Early Intervention in the Settlement Process 66

REFERENCES 68

APPENDIX 1 71

APPENDIX 2 74

APPENDIX 3 76

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context and Background

Family violence is a significant problem that impacts on all sectors of the community regardless of age, class, income, country of origin, religion or cultural background/ identity. All women who are subjected to family violence face difficulties and challenges living with violence, disclosing family violence, finding assistance, accessing support services, leaving and moving on from a family violence situation.

It is a gendered crime with a far greater number of female victims. 80% of reported family violence victims in Victoria are women (Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2010-2011) and police and court data shows that perpetrators of family violence against adult female victims are overwhelmingly male (91-95%) (Victims Support Agency, 2012, p.18). Family violence has been identified as the leading contributor to preventable death, illness and disability in Victorian women aged 15-44 (VicHealth, 2004, p.10).

This report presents findings from a scoping exercise conducted by the Whittlesea Community Futures CALD Cluster group with funding from the Scanlon Foundation. The scoping exercise was motivated by anecdotal evidence that existing service responses in the City of Whittlesea were not meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse ('CALD')[1] communities experiencing family violence. This was of concern given the relatively high incidence of reported family violence in the municipality and the (increasing) proportion of the population born overseas and not proficient in English.

The objective of the scoping exercise was to inform the development of a new approach to delivering family violence responses to CALD communities; developing an innovative, culturally appropriate family violence service model tailored to the needs of the multicultural community of the City of Whittlesea.

A range of methods were identified to tap into the local experience of family violence and family violence services by CALD communities. This included direct consultations and interviews with four key cohorts: female survivors of family violence, young people from CALD backgrounds, community and religious leaders and service providers who assist victims and perpetrators of family violence. An extensive literature review of more than 40 local, national and international sources were consulted and analysed to augment the findings from the primary research and to ensure a sound evidence base for the project's findings and the proposed model.

[1] For the purposes of this Report 'CALD' is adopted in preference to the term 'Non-English Speaking Background' and generally refers to people who were born overseas or who are Australia-born with one or both parents (or grandparents) born overseas and who speak a language other than English at home. This term includes migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. For further discussion of the use of the term 'CALD' refer to p.18

Perspectives from Survivors

Findings from consultations conducted with female survivors of family violence, service providers and community and religious leaders confirmed existing anecdotal evidence and identified a number of factors that disproportionately or only affect CALD women. These factors acted as additional barriers for CALD women disclosing family violence, finding assistance, accessing support services, leaving and moving on from a family violence situation:

Personal Barriers

- Immigration issues, uncertainty regarding visa status and fear of deportation;
- Language barriers caused by lack of or limited English language skills;
- Isolation from their own community and the broader Australian community and lack of support networks;
- Lack of familiarity with and knowledge of support services, including how and where to access them;
- Lack of knowledge about family violence, legal rights and legal processes in the Australian context;
- Cultural factors including beliefs and norms regarding marriage, separation, divorce and gender roles;
- Perceived and actual community pressures to stay in the relationship, shame and stigma associated with separation and divorce;

Systemic Barriers

- Ineligibility and exclusion from certain support services and payments due to visa status;
- Language and communication barriers between women and service providers;
- Practical difficulties associated with leaving a family violence situation including lack of financial support, difficulties finding suitable employment and difficulties finding suitable housing.

Many of the women interviewed had lived with family violence for many years before they felt able to disclose their experiences or seek help. The women shared similar fears when it came to disclosing family violence and encountered many of the same 'barriers' to accessing assistance and services.

Women spoke of encountering a number of practical difficulties when leaving a family violence situation including finding affordable and appropriate housing, accessing financial support for themselves and their children, knowing where to get assistance, filling out forms, being able to transport themselves to appointments and finding childcare. These practical difficulties were compounded for women without permanent residency in Australia. A number of women identified these practical difficulties as key factors in decisions associated with leaving a family violence situation, resulting in a decision by some women to stay in a violent relationship 'for the sake of their children' and because they could see no alternative.

Lack of information about family violence and legal rights and lack of familiarity with available support services was a particular barrier for women attempting to access assistance and this was acute for women who were newly arrived in Australia. Women described arriving in Australia with complete ignorance of their legal rights and no knowledge of how to 'navigate the system.' For women on partner visas this left them highly dependent on their spouse. One woman described herself as being 'at the mercy' of her husband who made her fearful of the police, government and other services that might have helped her. Most women reported that had they had access to

information about their legal rights and the availability of support services, they would have taken action in relation to the family violence impacting on them.

Being connected to external support often had not only an effect on the women themselves but also an effect on the perpetrator of the abuse. A number of women reported that once the perpetrator knew that others knew about the abuse and that the women had outside support this led to a change in their behaviour.

The value of support groups that connected women to each other and reduced their isolation was reported as especially important in empowering women. Women who were connected to support groups felt more confident, had greater self-esteem and felt more informed about their rights and the options available to them.

Perspectives from Service Providers

Service providers perceived and articulated the barriers faced by CALD women in accessing support and information in relation to family violence in much the same way as the women themselves. Among the 23 workers from specialist family violence and mainstream service providers consulted there was general consensus on ways in which support services and access for CALD women might respond to the barriers that were identified:

- More information about Australian laws, family violence and women's rights to be provided to women on arrival in Australia;
- Information also to be provided to men on arrival in Australia to address attitudes and behaviours;
- Making printed information available in Arabic and other languages as well as targeting women through community forums was suggested as an effective way of reaching CALD women;
- More information and education for CALD communities about service providers and what they do to address ignorance and mistrust;
- Greater access to legal support;
- Continuing opportunities to engage in groups such as the Arabic speaking women's group;
- More opportunities for women to engage in social and other activities outside the home.

Service providers generally agreed that CALD clients of their services were more likely to have been in contact with the police before accessing their services in relation to family violence than non-CALD clients. This was generally attributed to CALD clients having less knowledge of the service system prior to a crises and contact with the police.

The majority of workers agreed that CALD women, and in particular newly arrived CALD women, do not have the same family/social support networks that non-CALD women can rely on in family violence situations. It was also observed that these reduced support networks limited the options available to women when considering leaving a family violence situation. Women from smaller and emerging communities were seen as particularly vulnerable within this context.

All service providers agreed that women without Australian citizenship or permanent residency who are dependent upon their spouse or partner to remain in Australia are particularly vulnerable. The fear of losing the right to remain in Australia was so compelling for some women that they were 'locked' into violent relationships. Immigration status was perceived to increase a woman's vulnerability to family violence, making it harder for a woman to leave a family violence situation and reducing her options upon leaving a family violence situation.

The fear of losing the right to remain in Australia, whether real or perceived, was cited as a powerful disincentive for women to speak out about family violence. It was noted that this fear is readily exploitable by perpetrators of family violence with workers giving numerous examples of perpetrators using the threat of deportation, and in particular deportation and loss of access to children, as a means of controlling and keeping women in violent relationships.

Services reported on the increased challenges of supporting women where they have limited or no English proficiency. The language barrier was seen as important in compounding the disadvantage of a lack of information and social isolation. The use of interpreters, though standard practice among those interviewed, threw up further considerations for those from smaller communities where the likelihood of the interpreter knowing the victim or the perpetrator is increased.

A range of factors were identified by workers where community, religious and cultural norms and taboos impacted negatively on a woman's ability to seek and get help. Community and family pressures to preserve the relationship were often counterproductive to efforts for early intervention. Some workers highlighted the role of community and religious leaders in urging women to return to their partners.

A general fear amongst CALD women that they may lose custody of their children if they separated was reported as significant for some in considerations of whether or not seek help. The fact that CALD women face the possibility that their children may be removed and taken overseas was reported as a factor not normally experienced by non-CALD women.

Overall, service providers reported that it may be harder for mainstream and specialist family violence services to build trust with CALD women and advocated for partnership and integrated approaches with settlement and CALD specific agencies with greater and more developed relationships with women from CALD backgrounds.

Perspectives from Community and Religious Leaders

All community religious leaders who participated in the project had been approached by someone in their community who had experienced family violence. Most said this occurred regularly and ranged from 4 to 6 cases per year to being approached every weekend after delivering their sermon.

Community and religious leaders on the whole reported a preference for resolving family violence within the community if possible. Most also saw that they had a role in contributing to the prevention of family violence through their position as leaders within their communities.

All community and religious leaders expressed a willingness to be involved in education, training and professional development to improve their capacity to respond the family violence.

A particular need was identified for younger religious leaders to be supported through further education and training. Some leaders emphasised the need to ensure that family violence training conformed to the culture and traditions of communities. It was also implied by most that their role and capacity to contribute to family violence prevention was not usually acknowledged and deserved greater recognition.

Perspectives from the Literature

The literature review confirmed the findings of the consultations regarding the barriers that confront CALD women experiencing family violence.

The literature reveals that, comparative to the mainstream population, there are additional factors that only or disproportionately affect CALD women and compound the difficulties associated with disclosing family violence, finding assistance and early intervention, accessing support services and leaving a family violence situation.

A combination of factors, including lack of English language proficiency, low levels of participation in paid employment and family responsibilities, combine to increase the isolation of CALD women from the wider Australian community. Some research indicates that this isolation results in a lack of awareness of family violence laws and support services and increases dependence on the perpetrator, both socially and financially. Perpetrators may also seek to deliberately isolate women from support in order to entrench their power over them. A particular vulnerability is identified in the literature in respect to women who are dependent on their spouse or fiancé for visa status and the right to remain in Australia.

A theme is evident in the literature that supports the findings from both service providers and survivors that women who lack information about their rights and support services are more vulnerable to exploitation, manipulation and continuing family violence. There is strong emphasis in most of the literature, therefore, on the provision of information on family violence, the Australian legal system and support services.

The literature, acknowledging the complexities of the experiences of family violence by CALD women, is consistent in recommending models that are integrated, comprehensive and collaborative.

Research suggests that those models of service delivery that are integrated, comprehensive and collaborative are likely to be successful in addressing the interrelated factors that affect CALD women experiencing family violence and facilitating access to assistance. The literature in fact identifies a clear trend towards models for family violence service provision that are integrated and co-ordinated.

The literature emphasises the importance of targeted information and education aimed at CALD men as well as women. The experience of resettlement, particularly changes in women's social and economic status can increase tension and the risk of violence by men towards women. Whilst women often felt empowered by changes to their social and economic status, men reported feeling disempowered and attributed conflict within the relationship to these changes. The literature cites evidence that these changes in the gender dynamics within families often results in increased efforts by men to maintain or regain control, including through violence.

Whether the needs of CALD male perpetrators are being accommodated within existing groups is unknown but anecdotal evidence from consultations conducted with service providers as part of the scoping exercise suggested that CALD perpetrators often fail to have their needs met by English speaking men's behaviour change groups.

The findings from the literature review and the consultations were utilised to inform and influence the development of the service model. The service model takes a multifaceted approach to addressing family violence in CALD communities with a mixture of elements aimed at primary prevention of, early intervention in and response to family violence.

There is considerable support in the literature for targeting prevention and intervention strategies at children and young people as a distinct sub-group with school based programs aimed at preventing violence and promoting respectful relationships having the strongest evidence base for effective primary prevention work.

The special vulnerability of women without permanent Australian residency status receives particular attention as does the importance of group work and other efforts to reduce CALD women's vulnerability arising from social and community isolation.

A 'bystanders' approach to primary prevention is singled out as having potential for reducing violence against women. Within this context, the literature supports interventions aimed at building community and religious leaders' understanding of family violence and supporting them to respond appropriately and effectively to family violence within their communities.

An Integrated Approach to Family Violence in the City of Whittlesea

The experience of family violence within CALD communities is multi-layered and complex. This complexity demands that, in order to to break the cycle of family violence and empower communities to prevent violence against women, an appropriate mix of prevention and early intervention strategies be adopted.

This report recommends the establishment of a Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of all elements of an integrated model for delivering early intervention and prevention responses to CALD communities in the City of Whittlesea.

The overarching aim of an integrated model should be to support CALD communities, newly arrived migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, to break the cycle of family violence and empower communities to confront and respond to the challenge of preventing violence against women. The model will address:

The Empowerment of CALD Women

- CALD women's isolation by increasing social connectedness through participation in groups. The connections that women gain through group programs are vital to enabling women to access information about their rights and services and increase their confidence to seek and obtain support.

Building the Capacity of Community and Religious Leaders

- Community and religious leaders' response to disclosures of family violence and the information and assistance they give to CALD men and women has a critical role to play in determining outcomes for CALD women experiencing family violence. The model will increase the capacity of community and religious leaders to respond both to individual disclosures of family violence in their communities and to address family violence in their communities at a broader level.

- Anti-family violence tools, resources and messages will be developed in partnership with community leaders so that they have the capacity and support to deliver information and support to their communities in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Prevention of Family Violence: Early Intervention in the Settlement Process

- The model will address the pressures and stressors that newly arrived migrants and refugees often experience during the settlement process which may impact negatively on the ability of individuals and families to maintain equal and respectful relationships. This will be achieved through early intervention in the settlement process and in increasing the professional capacity of service providers to respond to the needs of those in the early stages of settlement.

Preventing Family Violence: Programs Targeting Young People

- Prevention programs aimed at young people have a sound evidence base for being effective in countering violence supportive attitudes and norms and building awareness of respectful and equitable relationships. Such programs also have the potential to impact on future attitudes and behaviours and the development of healthy intimate relationships. The model will support the piloting of a 'whole of school' approach to promoting respectful and equitable relationships at a school in the City of Whittlesea with the intention of future transferability to other schools and non-school settings.

Reducing Recidivism: Increasing Access to Behaviour Change Programs

- Men's behaviour change programs aim to increase the safety of women and children by addressing the causes of men's violent offending and requiring perpetrators to take responsibility for their behaviour. The model will increase access to men's behaviour change programs by CALD men through the development of language/culturally specific men's behaviour change programs.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The *Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project* ('the Whittlesea Family Violence Project') is a partnership project involving the organisations that make up the Whittlesea Community Futures (WCF) CALD cluster group.

The WCF is a partnership of multidisciplinary agencies working together towards a common goal, to improve opportunities for the people of the City of Whittlesea. The CALD cluster group is one of four such groups created by the WCF Partnership in 2010 to focus on priority areas including positive aging, families and children, youth and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

In its Action Plan for 2011-2016 the CALD cluster group identified family violence as one of three key priority areas along with Racism and Community Relations and Employment.

Family violence has now become an acute issue for Whittlesea as a whole. In 2011 as a result of efforts made by the Whittlesea Community Futures Partnership funding was secured from the Scanlon Foundation[2] to conduct a scoping exercise to document the reach of existing family violence services to Whittlesea's CALD communities, to assess the adequacy of existing services and identify gaps in service provision and to document key issues, challenges and barriers to service access.

The objective of the Whittlesea Family Violence Project is to develop an innovative, culturally appropriate family violence service model tailored to the multicultural community of the City of Whittlesea. The model will aim to support CALD communities, newly arrived migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, to break the cycle of family violence and empower communities to confront and respond to the challenge of preventing violence against women.

Background/Context

The impetus for undertaking a scoping exercise focussing on family violence and CALD communities in the City of Whittlesea were a number of co-existing factors including:

- the comparatively high incidence of family violence in the City of Whittlesea;
- anecdotal evidence that existing services were not meeting the needs of CALD communities ;
- the larger proportion of people in the City of Whittlesea born overseas when compared to the Melbourne metropolitan average;
- the larger proportion of people in the City of Whittlesea who speak little or no English when compared to the Melbourne metropolitan average;
- Recognition of the fact that women from CALD communities face additional barriers to accessing assistance for family violence.

Incidence of Family Violence

The number of incidents of family violence reported to police in Victoria has increased dramatically (by 108%) in the eleven year period from 1999, when reporting first commenced, to 2011. Analysis conducted by Victoria Police and the Victorian Government Department of Justice attributes this

[2] The Scanlon Foundation was established in 2001 with the purpose of enhancing social cohesion within Australia. In its mission to enhance social cohesion the Scanlon Foundation recognises the significance of cultural diversity within Australia and seeks to support capacity building including through grassroots Community based organisations and by investing in projects that develop skills and provide opportunities for people from CALD backgrounds to meaningfully contribute towards their families, education, work, cultural and community life.< www.scanlonfoundation.org.au>

increase to reforms implemented during this period[3] and an overall more proactive approach to family violence by police.[4]

The City of Whittlesea has a high level of reported family violence when compared to other municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne. In 2009/10 Whittlesea had the fifth highest number of recorded 'family violence incidents' in metropolitan Melbourne and the sixth highest in 2010/11. (The recorded change from 2009/10 to 2010/11 was unfortunately not explained by a drop in the number of incidents in Whittlesea but a rise in the number of incidents in Brimbank.)[5]

According to Victoria Police data reported in the *Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-year Trend Report*[6] the number of family violence incidents reported to police in Whittlesea increased from 329 in 1999/2000 to 1231 in 2009/2010 (an increase of 225%). Family violence incidents in the Whittlesea Local Government Area (LGA) in 2010/2011 were reported to be a contributor to between 40% and 50% of all assault related crime.[7] Whilst family violence reports in Victoria have increased overall during this period, local government data from the Whittlesea LGA indicates that the rate of family violence callouts in Whittlesea has increased in comparison to metropolitan Melbourne, from being roughly on par in 2002/2003 (577 to 567) to well above the Melbourne metropolitan average in 2009/2010 at 868 compared with 622.[8]

Court data included in the *Eleven-year Trend Report* also indicates that the number of finalised Intervention Orders involving affected family members from Whittlesea increased by 94% between 1999 and 2010 (from 467 to 904). The percentage of Intervention Orders initiated by police also increased from 9% in 1999/2000 to 46% in 2009/2010.In 2010/2011 143 family violence incidents attended by police in the Whittlesea LGA resulted in a Family Violence Safety Notice[9] (FVSN) being issued.

Demographic Snapshot

The Whittlesea Local Government Area is one of the geographically largest municipalities in Melbourne covering an area of 490 square km of both urban and rural land and is the sixth most socio-economically disadvantaged LGA in Melbourne and one of the most disadvantaged in Victoria.[10]

With a current population of 154,800[11] the City of Whittlesea is also experiencing rapid population growth which is projected to increase to over 280,000 by 2031.[12] Whittlesea had the highest level of growth amongst the northern metropolitan municipalities and is the fourth-fastest growing LGA in

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[3] Introduction of the Victoria Police *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence*; improved and standardised risk assessment and management practices; on-going training and education and the introduction of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* including Family Violence Safety Notices that can be issued by police and also serves as an application for an Intervention Order.
[4] Victims Support Agency, *Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-year Trend Report*, Victorian Government Department of Justice, Melbourne, 2012, p.50-53.
[5] Family Incident Reports – 2006/07 to 2010/11, Victoria Police Website <http://www.police.vic.gov.au>
[6] Victims Support Agency, *Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-year Trend Report*, Victorian Government Department of Justice, Melbourne, 2012
[7] Family Incident Reports – 2006/07 to 2010/11, Victoria Police Website <http://www.police.vic.gov.au>
[8] Victorian Local Governance Association < http://www.vlga.org.au/>
[9] Family Violence Safety Notices may be issued by Victoria Police when they attend a family violence incident outside of court opening hours to protect a victim of family violence, a child who has witnessed family violence or the property of a victim and may include a condition that the perpetrator leaves the house. A FVSN is considered to be an application for an Intervention Order (IVO) by police and operates until a Magistrate either makes an IVO or decides not to make an IVO.
[10] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)*, 2006
[11] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2011 Census of Population and Housing*
[12] Department of Planning and Community Development, *Victoria in Future 2012: Population and Household Projections 2011-2031*, http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/106518/Whittlesea-One-Page-Profile-VIF2012.pdf

Australia.[13] Population growth in Whittlesea during the eleven-year period from 1999 to 2010 was 31%, the second fastest and second largest population growth of any LGA in Victoria.[14]

Whittlesea's population is diverse with a larger proportion of people born overseas (34%) and a larger proportion of people born in non-English speaking countries (32%) than the Melbourne statistical average.[15]

The City of Whittlesea also has a larger percentage of people born in Italy, Greece, Macedonia, India, Iraq and other Arabic speaking countries and a smaller percentage of people born in the United Kingdom when compared to greater Melbourne.

Census figures indicate that the municipality is undergoing a demographic change with an overall decrease in the number of residents born in Italy, Greece and Macedonia and an increase in residents born in India, China, Sri Lanka, UK, the Philippines and Iraq with the biggest increases in the number of residents born in India, China and Sri Lanka.[16]

43% of City of Whittlesea residents speak a language other than English at home (either exclusively or in addition to English) a figure which is higher than the Melbourne statistical average (29%). The most common language spoken is Macedonian however the biggest increases have recently been in those speaking Arabic, followed by Vietnamese, Mandarin and Cantonese. City of Whittlesea also has a larger proportion (22.4%) of people who speak a language other than English but speak English not well or not at all.

A larger proportion of City of Whittlesea residents nominated a religion (80%) than in Greater Melbourne and the most commonly nominated religion was Christianity (81%) followed by Islam (8%).

The proportion of the overall population of the City of Whittlesea aged under 25 is 35% compared to 32% of Greater Melbourne. While the City of Whittlesea has a larger proportion of young people, it has a smaller proportion of those aged over 65 (11% compared to Melbourne's 13%).

Newly Arrived/Emerging Communities

Within the population of people born overseas there is a smaller sub-group of newly arrived migrants and refugees who have been in Australia for less than 6 years.

Within this group is an even smaller population of migrants arriving on Refugee and Humanitarian[17] or Family Stream[18] visas. Between 2007 and 2011 a relatively high number of this sub-group settled in the City of Whittlesea comparative to the rest of Victoria. The City of Whittlesea ranked 9th out of 80 Local Government Areas for the number of Humanitarian arrivals and 8th for the number of settlers arriving on Family stream visas. A total of 3215 migrants and refugees on Humanitarian or Family Stream visas settled in the City of Whittlesea in the last 6 years.

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[13] Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2009-10, *Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2009-10* Catalogue No. 3218.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra; City of Whittlesea.
[14] Victorian Local Governance Association < http://www.vlga.org.au/>
[15] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2011 Census of Population and Housing*
[16] Victorian Local Governance Association < http://www.vlga.org.au/>
[17] There are a number of visa sub-classes included within this category but essentially Refugee and Humanitarian visas cover those people who are either subject to persecution or substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of their human rights in their country of origin. <www.immi.gov.au>
[18] Family stream visas enable an Australian citizen or Australian permanent resident to sponsor immediate or extended family members to come to Australia. Both partner and fiancé visas are included in this category. . <www.immi.gov.au>

Of those migrants and refugees who arrived on Humanitarian or Family stream visas a higher proportion (62%) spoke either no English or had poor English. Of Refugee and Humanitarian settlers the top three languages spoken were Arabic, Tamil and Farsi and the top three countries of birth were Iraq, Sri Lanka and Iran. The makeup of Family Stream settlers was quite different with the top three languages Mandarin and other Chinese languages, Vietnamese and Arabic and the top three countries of birth India, China and Macedonia.

A higher proportion of women than men arrived on both Family Stream and Refugee and Humanitarian visas (61%) in this period and of these, 20% arrived on either a spousal or fiancé visa and more women arrived on a spousal visa than any other visa category.

Of those migrants who settled in the City of Whittlesea in the last 6 years, 21% were aged under 18 at the time of arrival and 41% were aged under 25. Humanitarian entrants had an even higher proportion aged under 18 (33%) and close to half were aged under 25 (48%).

CALD Women: Multiple Complexities, Specific Vulnerability

Family violence is a problem that impacts on all sectors of the community regardless of age, class, income, religion, country of origin or cultural background/ identity.

Family violence is however very much a gendered crime in which the majority of victims are females (80% of reported family violence victims in Victoria are women)[19] and the majority of perpetrators are males. Family violence has been identified as the leading contributor to preventable death, illness and disability in Victorian women aged 15-44.[20] In Victoria the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that approximately one fifth of the 95 victims of homicide in Victoria in 2010 were victimised by a partner or ex-partner.[21] Nationally, the National Homicide Monitoring Program found that 78% of female homicide victims in 2007/2008 were killed by an offender with whom they shared a domestic relationship.[22]

Results from the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Personal Safety Survey 2006* found that of those women who were physically assaulted in the 12 months prior to the survey 31% were assaulted by a current or former partner.[23] The Australian Institute of Criminology estimates reports that over one third of women who have ever had an intimate partner report experiencing one form of violence during their lifetime from a male partner.[24] The most common location for physical assaults on women was in the home irrespective of the sex of the perpetrator and this differs quite markedly from men's experience of physical assault. Men were more likely to be physically assaulted by a male stranger and the location of the assault is more likely to be a licensed premises or a public space.[25]

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[19] Victoria Police Crime Statistics 2010-11, in Victims Support Agency, *The Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-year Trend Report*, Victorian Government Department of Justice, 2012, p.22

[20] VicHealth, 2004 in Victims Support Agency, *The Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-year Trend Report*, Victorian Government Department of Justice, 2012, p.22

[21] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004 in Victims Support Agency, *The Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-year Trend Report*, Victorian Government Department of Justice, 2012, p.22

[22] Virueda, M., & Payne, J., 2010, *Homicide in Australia: 2007-08 National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report,* Canberra, Australian Institute of Criminology in Victims Support Agency, *The Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-year Trend Report*, Victorian Government Department of Justice, 2012, p.22

[23] Of those women who reported at least one incident of physical assault since the age of 15, 46% reported that in the most recent incident they had been assaulted by a current or former partner.

[24] Mouzos, J., and Makkai, T., 2004, 'Women's Experiences of Male Violence: Findings from the Australian Component of the Internationals Violence Against Women Survey', *Research and Public Policy Series No.56*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra in Victims Support Agency, *The Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 5: Eleven-year Trend Report*, Victorian Government Department of Justice, 2012, p.22

[25] Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2005, *Personal Safety, Australia, 2005 (Reissue)* Catalogue No. 4906.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

The scale of the problem and the impact that family violence has on the Australian community was captured by a 2009 KPMG Management Consulting Report which estimated the cost of family violence to the Australian economy to be $13.6 billion and projected to be $15.6 billion in 2020-2021.

The Report identifies some of the main costs that contribute to the economic impact of family violence including:

- Pain, suffering and premature mortality;

  the costs associated with pain and suffering attributable to violence and the cost of premature mortality which was calculated by attributing a statistical value to years of life lost.

- Health costs

  including private and public health costs associated with treating the effects of violence on the victim, perpetrator and children.

- Production-related costs

  including lost production (wages plus profit) through absenteeism, search and hiring costs, lost unpaid work, retraining costs, lost productivity of victim, perpetrator, management, co-workers, family and friends and permanent loss of labour capacity.

- Consumption related costs

  including costs associated with replacing damaged property, moving costs and settlement of bad debts.

- Second generation costs [26]

  including private and public health costs associated with childcare, changing schools, counselling, child protection services, remedial/special education, increased future use of government services, increased juvenile and adult crime.

Reliable estimates of the level of family violence in CALD communities as a distinct group are hard to come by. The results of the limited research that has been conducted in this area are mixed, with some studies indicating that women from CALD backgrounds experience higher levels of family violence[27] comparative to the general population and others indicating that CALD women experience lower or similar levels of family violence to the general population.[28]

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[26] KPMG Management Consulting, 'The Cost of Violence Against Women and Their Children' March 2009, 5-6 and 21.
[27] O'Donnell CJ, Smith A & Madison JR 2002 'Using demographic risk factors to explain variations in the incidence of violence against women' *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 17(12) 1239-1262 in Morgan, A & Chadwick H 'Key Issues in Domestic Violence' Research in Practice Summary Paper No.7, December 2009, Australian Institute of Criminology, 5
[28] Bassuk E, Dawson R & Huntington N 2006 'Intimate partner violence in extremely poor women: Longitudinal patterns and risk markers' *Journal of Family Violence* 21, 387-399; Mouzos J & Makkai T 2004 'Women's experiences of male violence: Findings from the Australian component of the international violence against women survey (IVAWS)' *Research & Public Policy Series No.56, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology* <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current series/rrp/41-60/rrp56.aspx> in Domestic Violence' Research in Practice Summary Paper No.7, December 2009, Australian Institute of Criminology, 5

What is repeatedly emphasised in the literature, and has been confirmed through consultations conducted through the project, is that CALD women experiencing family violence face additional barriers to accessing appropriate services. Specific factors that contribute to CALD women's vulnerability in family violence situations include:

Personal Barriers

- Immigration issues, uncertainty regarding visa status and fear of deportation;
- Language barriers caused by lack of or limited English language skills;
- Isolation from their own community and the broader Australian community and lack of support networks;
- Lack of familiarity with and knowledge of support services, including how and where to access them;
- Lack of knowledge about family violence, legal rights and legal processes in the Australian context;
- Cultural factors including beliefs and norms regarding marriage, separation, divorce and gender roles;
- Perceived and actual community pressures to stay in the relationship, shame and stigma associated with separation and divorce;

Systemic Barriers

- Ineligibility and exclusion from certain support services and payments due to visa status;
- Language and communication barriers between women and service providers;
- Practical difficulties associated with leaving a family violence situation including lack of financial support, difficulties finding suitable employment and difficulties finding suitable housing.

Project Aims/Project Objectives and Critical Success Factors

Prior to undertaking the scoping exercise it was of concern to service providers in Whittlesea that the anecdotal evidence suggested CALD women experiencing family violence were not accessing or not able to access support services in the same way or in the same numbers as non-CALD women. The anecdotal evidence suggested that existing services were falling short of being able to address family violence in CALD communities. The scoping exercise was intended to operate at two levels. At a local level, the focus was on gaining insight into the experience of family violence and family violence services by CALD communities. Feedback about these experiences was utilised to inform and influence the development of the service model.

At a second level, the scoping exercise was intended to draw out best practice and alternative models and approaches to preventing and responding to family violence from the existing literature. The experiences of female survivors of family violence within CALD communities as well as service providers they may have come into contact with and the perspectives of others from within the community who may have been witness to family violence and its consequences or have actively intervened where family violence has occurred, was analysed and contrasted with existing knowledge and theoretical frameworks to produce a model of service implementation tailored to the local community.

The scoping exercise was intended to inform a clear business plan for the improvement and enhancement of family violence prevention and intervention strategies targeted at Whittlesea's CALD communities. The business plan presents opportunities, costs, benefits and implementation strategies.

Definitions

Family Violence

Definitions of 'family violence' in both State and Federal legislation recognise that family violence encompasses a range of behaviours not limited to physical violence.

The *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic) provides an extremely broad definition of family violence which includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse as well as any behaviour that is threatening, coercive, controlling or dominating and causes a family member to fear for their safety or wellbeing or for the safety or wellbeing of another family member. The definition of 'family violence' in the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) now includes all of the behaviours listed in the Victorian legislation. This follows amendments that were made in 2011 with the intention of changing the definition to reflect a contemporary understanding of family violence and abuse, including explicitly stating behaviour that is considered unacceptable.

The project has been guided by the definition of family violence adopted by Berry Street, a key regional provider of family violence services, which recognises both the multiple behaviours that may constitute family violence and the fact that family violence is not confined to heterosexual intimate partner relationships:

'Violence is defined as any act which makes another person feel fearful, unsafe and not in control of their own destiny. Family violence can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, verbal and financial abuse. It can occur in current or past family, domestic or intimate relationships. Family violence is predominantly, but not exclusively, perpetrated by men against women and children. It occurs in all ethnic and cultural groups, in all kinds of relationships and families, including heterosexual & same-sex relationships & against older people and people with a disability'

CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse)

'CALD' stands for 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' and is now commonly used to describe those Australians who were born overseas or who are Australia-born with one or both parents (or grandparents) born overseas and who speak a language other than English at home. This term includes migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and is used in preference to the previous descriptor 'NESB' or 'Non-English Speaking Background'.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship adopted the term 'CALD' in 1996 in preference to 'NESB' in recognition of the fact that this is a diverse group within Australian society and barriers or disadvantages that may be faced by this group are not necessarily the product of language alone.[29]

The term 'CALD' also avoids defining a whole group by what they are lacking[30] rather than recognising that Australia is made up of a diverse group of people from different backgrounds all of whom contribute to Australian society. In this way Australia itself can be described as 'CALD' however in this instance the term has generally been used to define those Australians who are originally from non-English speaking countries, or who come from non-English speaking backgrounds

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29 Sawrikar, P & Katz, I 'How useful is the term 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' (CALD) in Australian research, practice, and policy discourse?', Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW, 4

30 The Department of Immigration and Citizenship identified four major problems with the term NESB including: (i). the term has conflicting definitions; (ii). it groups people who are relatively disadvantaged with those who are not disadvantaged; (iii). it is unable to separately identify the many cultural and linguistic groups in Australian society and (iv). it has developed negative connotations (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *The Guide: Implementing the Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity,* 2001).

or who may speak English as a first or second language but have come from a predominantly non-English speaking country or background.

It is also noted that 'CALD' is an extremely broad category and within this group there are a diverse range of backgrounds and a diverse range of experiences between and even within cultural groups. It is recognised that in formulating a model that addresses family violence in CALD communities, recognition must be given to the fact that CALD communities are not homogenous but may share common attributes and experiences that differentiate them from the mainstream.

Limitations

Scoping Exercise

The initial stage of the project was intended to be a scoping exercise with the purpose of identifying key issues, barriers to service access and gaps in existing services as well as potential solutions to increasing service access for CALD communities.

Limited Access to Statistical Data

Gaining access to accurate statistical data on the incidence and prevalence of family violence is problematic. Estimates as gathered from sources such as police records, court data and national and state crime surveys etc are generally acknowledged to provide only a conservative estimate of the incidence and prevalence of family violence due to barriers to disclosure faced by victims of family violence and inconsistencies in the definition of family violence which may lead to non-recording of some incidents.[31] As a result, only a percentage of incidents of family violence will ever be reported to police.

Victoria Police publishes statistics each year indicating the number of 'family incidents' police have responded to, where Family Violence Safety Notices were issued and where Intervention Orders were applied for. These statistics are extracted from the LEAP database and are broken down according to Local Government Area.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics *Personal Safety Survey 2005* found that women who experienced physical assault were more likely to be assaulted by a current or previous partner or other known person than a stranger. Of women who had experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator only 36% had reported the incident to police. Only 15% of women who had experienced sexual assault by a male perpetrator had reported the incident to police.[32] Police statistics on the incidence of family violence are therefore likely to represent a fraction of actual occurrences of family violence.

There are further limitations in attempting to break down family violence data to determine the incidence and prevalence of family violence in Victoria. Police also collect data through the LEAP database on the country of birth of perpetrators however the data is limited to those perpetrators involved in family violence incidents where charges are actually laid. Often Victoria Police attend family violence incidents where there are no charges laid so this data only captures a proportion of all family violence incidents. Victoria Police also collect data on the likely cultural background of perpetrators when they attend family violence incidents. This data is based on physical appearance only and is therefore considered unreliable as a true indicator of a perpetrator's cultural identity.

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[31] Mulroney, Jane, 'Australian Statistics on Domestic Violence', Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse; Phillips, Janet & Park, Malcolm 'Measuring Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Against Women: A Review of the Literature and Statistics', http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/SP/ViolenceAgainstWomen.htm

[32] Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2005, *Personal Safety, Australia, 2005 (Reissue)* Catalogue No. 4906.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

Victoria Police do not record data on the country of birth or cultural identity of victims of family violence.

Organisations that provide services to the City of Whittlesea generally collect statistical data about clients who access their services. However there is little consistency between organisations on the type of data collected and the method of data collection. Data collection may even differ within agencies between different program areas and the type of data collected is often dependent on reporting requirements for funding bodies.

At the beginning of the scoping exercise it was envisaged that statistical data would be collected from each organisation that provides family violence services to the City of Whittlesea, both family violence specialist and non-family violence specialist, to build up an accurate picture of who is and who isn't accessing services and the types of services that are being accessed.

A comprehensive questionnaire was prepared and distributed to each of the relevant organisations. However, only three agencies were able to access enough data to provide a partially completed questionnaire and only one agency was able to provide answers to all questions for all program areas. Both family violence specialist agencies were able to provide the most comprehensive data. One of the principal difficulties encountered by agencies in responding to the questionnaire was in separating data for CALD clients from non-CALD clients.

Ethical Constraints

At the beginning of the scoping exercise it was anticipated that identifying CALD women who would be willing to share their experiences of family violence for the project would be difficult. Prior to embarking on the consultation and community engagement aspect of the scoping exercise there was considerable discussion and preliminary work undertaken by the WCF CALD Cluster around how best to engage with individuals and communities in relation to this sensitive and often taboo topic. In particular the challenge was how best to ensure that the views of women who had experienced family violence were heard but in a way that minimised any harm or distress that might be caused by revisiting their experiences.

In fact there was a better than anticipated response to the scoping exercise by the local community with 10 women and 6 Community and Religious leaders agreeing to participate in consultations conducted by the Project Leader. Many of the women involved were eager to participate in consultations and share their experiences in order assist other women experiencing family violence.

Consultations with the community were underpinned by an ethical framework that was developed by the CALD Cluster group and based on the WCF Community Engagement Principles and *The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007).

Interview questions were structured so as to focus primarily on women's experiences of service access rather than their experiences of family violence.

All women who participated in consultations were asked to sign a consent form that provided referral information including contact numbers and information about family violence services where they could pursue further support if needed. It was also emphasised to the women that they were under no obligation to consent and their willingness to participate in the research would in no way be linked to their ability to access services in the future. Each woman who participated in consultations was provided with a voucher for Coles/Myer or Epping Plaza as appreciation for their contribution.

METHODOLOGY

During the implementation phase of the scoping exercise the following activities were completed:

Needs Analysis

Summarising and documenting key issues, challenges and barriers demonstrating a need for action to address family violence within Whittlesea's CALD communities

Service Mapping

Mapping existing family violence services in the City of Whittlesea or that cater for those in the City of Whittlesea and identifying gaps in service provision

Consultation and Community Engagement

Stakeholder consultation tapping into community member's experience of family violence, reflecting on its impacts and identifying approaches that work well and those that don't.

Research and Literature Review

Charting existing and past approaches and models based on local, national and international experiences.

Project Leader

A part-time Project Leader (3 days per week) was funded to implement and manage the project and take responsibility for achieving project outcomes.

The Project Leader was seconded from Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC). Day-to-day supervision of the project leader was provided by the CEO of Whittlesea Community Connections with the Project Leader reporting back to the CALD cluster group and providing updates on a monthly basis.

The WCC Arabic Speaking Settlement Support Worker also provided in-kind support to the project, in particular in facilitating and assisting with community engagement activities. Support was also provided by the Settlement Team Leader and the Whittlesea Community Connections Youth Worker in facilitating and conducting a group consultation with young people.

Whittlesea Community Futures CALD Cluster Group

The WCF CALD Cluster had overall responsibility for steering the Whittlesea Family Violence Project. The collective knowledge and expertise of the WCF CALD Cluster was utilised to ensure appropriate oversight and guidance of the scoping exercise. In particular, the Project Leader was able to utilise the knowledge and expertise of specific members of the WCF CALD Cluster outside of CALD Cluster meetings where necessary.

Consultations

Community consultation was a critical part of the scoping exercise. The family violence service model is intended to be tailored to CALD communities in the City of Whittlesea and it is therefore crucial that it is responsive to and informed by local experience.

The aim of conducting community consultations was to utilise the experience of the communities themselves to inform the project in relation improvements in service access and the potential strategies required to better address family violence within CALD communities.

Community consultations were conducted with three different cohorts:

- female survivors of family violence;
- young people;
- community and religious leaders;

Consultations were also conducted with service providers who offer services to people in the City of Whittlesea and who assist either victims or perpetrators of family violence.

All community engagement activities of the project team were guided by the Whittlesea Community Engagement Framework and Principles.

Following discussions within the WCF CALD Cluster interview questions were devised to guide the conduct of semi-structured interviews with each cohort.

Female Survivors of Family Violence/Women

The WCF CALD Cluster felt that consulting with female survivors of family violence was the most critical way to research women's experiences, any barriers they encountered and how these barriers impacted on their ability to seek help.

Consultations were conducted with a sample of women from CALD backgrounds who had experienced family violence and who currently reside in the City of Whittlesea.

In total 10 women were recruited through the Arabic Speaking Settlement Support Worker at Whittlesea Community Connections, caseworkers at Berry Street Family Violence Services and a Sikh religious leader. Two further case studies of women who had experienced family violence and sought assistance from service providers were also incorporated into the findings.

Interviews were conducted by the Project Leader either face-to-face or by phone with the Arabic Speaking Settlement Support Worker present to provide interpreting services for Arabic speaking women where necessary.

The women were asked questions from a set interview format **(see Appendix 1)**.

Young People

A group consultation was conducted with two groups of young people from CALD backgrounds.

In total, 5 young people participated in the group consultations with groups separated according to gender, one group of two girls and one group of three boys.

The group consultation was conducted by the WCC Youth Worker based on questions and scenarios from the *Be the Hero!* program[33] adapted by the WCC Youth Worker, WCC Settlement Team Leader and the Project Leader.

Community and Religious Leaders

In total 6 community and religious leaders were interviewed by the Project Leader either face-to-face or by phone.

The Religious leaders were chosen either because their Church, Mosque or Temple was based in the City of Whittlesea or large parts of their congregation reside in the City of Whittlesea.

Service Providers

23 individual workers from 5 service providers, both family violence specialist and non-family violence specialist agencies, participated in consultations either via face-to-face interviews with the Project Leader (individually or as a group) or by providing written answers to interview questions.

- Anglicare;
- Berry Street;
- Mary Anderson Family Violence Services;
- Plenty Valley Community Health;
- Whittlesea Community Connections

[33] The *Be the Hero!* program is a violence prevention program developed by the Victorian Women's Trust and Northcote High School with funding from VicHealth with the intention of 'providing a greater understanding of violence against women' and helping 'identify ways young men can safely be involved in taking a stand against violence against women.' The intention of the program is to generate discussion amongst small groups of young men around family violence and healthy relationships. <www.bethehero.com.au>

FINDINGS

Consultations with service providers, women and community and religious leaders revealed a number of common themes regarding CALD women and family violence. A general consensus emerged from consultations that CALD women who are victims of family violence also experience additional complexities which increase their vulnerability and make it harder to access assistance and support.

The complexities or 'barriers' that CALD women themselves identified were largely mirrored in the responses of service providers and the challenges they experience in providing services to CALD communities (refer to p.17 for a detailed description of the identified barriers).

Consultations with Women

Demographic Information

Just under half of the women interviewed for the scoping exercise were engaged with the Arabic speaking women's group run by Whittlesea Community Connections. Two case studies, from CALD women who had contacted service providers for assistance with family violence, have been included in these findings.

The majority of women interviewed identified as coming from a Middle Eastern background. The women identified themselves as coming from the following countries of origin:

- Egypt
- Iraqi-born (from Assyrian/Chaldean, Arabic and Kurdish speaking backgrounds)
- Lebanon
- Syria
- India

None of the women were born in Australia although half were now either Australian citizens or permanent residents. Most had originally migrated to Australia either as refugees, on spousal (either as the spouse of someone holding a refugee or student visa) or family reunion visas. Only two of the women came to Australia on a skilled migrant visa, both of whom migrated from India.

The majority of the women consulted were Arabic speaking with varying levels of English proficiency. Just over half were able to speak English fluently while the others had little or no English. The women's level of English language proficiency was not necessarily a reflection of how long they had been in Australia. Some of the women who were able to converse in English still felt more comfortable conducting the interview through an Arabic speaking interpreter.

The women were of mixed ages and had been in Australia for varying lengths of time. Four had been in Australia for less than five years (the period of time ranging from six months to four years) and the rest had been in Australia for six years or more and up to thirty years.

All but two of the women interviewed had children.

Awareness/Understanding of family violence

'I wouldn't describe what I experienced as family violence it was more persecution, punishment and loneliness'

As a preliminary question the women were asked about their understanding of the term 'family violence.'

The majority of women demonstrated an understanding that 'family violence' encompasses a range of behaviours and is not confined to physical abuse. However, despite this, four of the women did not identify what they had experienced as 'family violence', particularly if they had experienced verbal, financial and emotional abuse.

One woman said that whilst she would consider verbal and emotional abuse to be *'damaging and hurtful'* she would not consider it to be 'family violence.' Another woman who had been subjected to violence over a number of years, including one incident in which she sustained a broken bone, did not think that she had experienced 'family violence' because the violence was mainly confined to verbal and emotional abuse and the incidences of physical violence were isolated.

Perpetrators of family violence

The women were not asked directly who had perpetrated the violence but this was generally disclosed over the course of the interview.

Family violence was most often perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner although it was not necessarily confined to intimate partner relationships. Two of the women who experienced family violence at the hands of their husbands also experienced family violence at the hands of their husband's extended family and this was not confined to male relatives but also included mothers and sisters in law. Two women also experienced family violence at the hands of their own family, in these instances perpetrated by their brothers.

First Point of Disclosure

The women were asked who they first spoke to about the family violence they were experiencing.

- Half of the women first disclosed their experience of family violence to relatives either in Australia or overseas;
- One woman made a disclosure of family violence to a dietician who she had been referred to by her GP when she presented for weakness and exhaustion;
- One woman first disclosed family violence to the Arabic speaking settlement support worker at WCC;
- One woman first disclosed family violence to Victoria Police
- Two women made disclosures to religious leaders (one woman after first confiding in her sister);

The majority of women who disclosed family violence to a family member reported that their family was supportive and encouraged them to seek assistance either from the police or from support services. However, for those women who had family overseas or inter-State there was often a limited amount their family could do to assist. In some cases even if the woman's immediate family overseas was supportive their family and community in Australia were not necessarily so:

'Friends in Melbourne and my community were not supportive of my decision to leave my husband and in fact they actively discouraged me from taking my complaint further. I felt pressured to stay with my husband and I was also discouraged from seeking assistance from family violence services. I was told that those services are for 'white people' and this type of issue should be resolved within the family and within the community.'

Two of the women who disclosed to family members reported that they were not supportive; one woman was told that it was her choice to marry and her choice to emigrate and now she was on her own.

One woman whose family overseas encouraged her to contact Victoria Police also disclosed the family violence to her employer. She said that he was extremely supportive and encouraged her to be pro-active in seeking assistance. It was this support as well as her employer's willingness to allow her to take leave from work that encouraged her to finally get in contact with the police and also take steps to obtain an Intervention Order.

The women who made disclosures to religious leaders reported mixed reactions, one reported that she received an enormous amount of support and simply having people who were willing to listen, believe and understand her was enormously helpful. The other woman was very unhappy with the reaction to her disclosure. She felt that the religious leader was very much on her husband's side, that he was mainly concerned with preserving their relationship and discouraged her from seeking separation/divorce.

The women were also asked whether there was a particular event or incident that led to their decision to disclose family violence. Most women said that there was not one particular incident that was a catalyst for disclosing family violence or taking action it was more likely that there would be a gradual build up over time. Many women described simply reaching a point where they felt confident enough to take action or they had just reached the limit of what they could endure.

'Eventually I had just had enough because I realised that I have human rights and the violence was affecting my health and I just couldn't stand it anymore'

Many of the women interviewed had lived with family violence for years before they felt able to disclose what they were experiencing or seek assistance; some of the women were in their 50s or even 60s with adult children.

Barriers to Accessing Assistance

The women were asked to discuss whether there were any fears or concerns that prevented them from disclosing family violence or seeking assistance. They were also asked to discuss any difficulties they encountered in accessing support services.

Some of the women had disclosed family violence to an external agency and had sought assistance from police, the courts and other organisations whilst other women had only ever disclosed family violence to close family or friends or the Arabic speaking women's group and had not sought formal assistance from external agencies.

The responses to these questions indicated that the women shared similar fears when it came to disclosing family violence and encountered many of the same 'barriers' to accessing assistance and services including:

- Fear of deportation and loss of visa status (particularly for women on spousal or fiancé visas);
- Lack of information about family violence, legal rights and the availability of support services as well as how and where to access them;
- Difficulty getting information and communicating with services due to limited English language proficiency;
- Practical difficulties associated with finding housing and financial support;
- Fear of isolation from the community, shame and stigma associated with separation and divorce.

The women who arrived in Australia on partner visas[34] spoke of their fears that disclosure of family violence would affect their ability to remain in Australia and a number of women said that their partners used threats of deportation as a means to control them and prevent them from disclosing family violence.

'Initially my husband used threats to deport me back to my [country of origin] if I disagreed with him and initially I was frightened but after a while I stopped believing the threats.'

The women also stated that the way in which Centrelink payments are structured (for example the fact that it is the resident partner not the sponsored partner who is eligible to receive payments) gave the resident partner an enormous amount of power and control in the relationship.

Inability to access Centrelink payments also had flow on effects for women trying to find housing and financial support where the relationship had broken down or they had made the decision to leave a family violence situation. The women spoke of encountering a number of practical difficulties when leaving a family violence situation including finding affordable and appropriate housing, accessing financial support for themselves and their children, knowing where to get assistance, filling out forms, being able to transport themselves to appointments and finding childcare. These practical difficulties were compounded for women without permanent residency.

'I am struggling financially because the rent is very expensive and I am on a spousal visa and cannot receive income from Centrelink to support myself and my child. My husband and I have joint bank accounts but the child's Centrelink benefit goes straight to my husband's own account which I have no access to because all the forms are in his name and I cannot get him to sign the forms. When he left he took the car so I also have no access to reliable transport to get to and from appointments.'

Finding affordable and appropriate housing was nominated as a major impediment to leaving a family violence situation with women encountering difficulties finding accommodation in the private rental market and long waiting lists for public housing. One woman was desperate to leave a family violence situation but had remained for six months after first seeking assistance because she was not eligible to enter a refuge[35] and she could not find a safe private rental (for example, the only alternative accommodation available was in mixed gender rooming houses). Ultimately, the women said that these practical difficulties made the decision to leave a family violence situation more

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[34] Includes people intending to marry (fiancé), married partners or de factor partners of an Australian citizen or permanent resident who have applied to enter and/or remain permanently in Australia.

[35] The woman in this instance did not disclose why she was not eligible to enter a refuge. Common reasons cited by service providers and the literature for women being unable to enter a refuge include a lack of access to government benefits and the violence not being considered either severe enough or recent enough to place women into a category of immediate risk (see discussion on p.51, Literature Review).

difficult, particularly given that most women interviewed had dependent children and neither employment nor family support when they made the decision to leave the family violence situation.

A number of women said that the practical difficulties associated with leaving a family violence situation meant that they had chosen to stay in a violent relationship 'for the sake of their children' and because they could see no alternative.

Lack of information about family violence and legal rights and lack of familiarity with available support services was a further barrier for women attempting to access assistance and this was particularly acute for women who were newly arrived in Australia. The women described arriving in Australia with complete ignorance of their legal rights and no knowledge of how to 'navigate the system.' Women on spousal and fiancé visas were highly dependent on their partner for information and easily subjected to misinformation. One woman described herself as being 'at the mercy' of her husband who made her fearful of the police, government and other services that might have helped her. Other women described the experience as being like a return to childhood:

'Arriving in Australia from [country of origin] was like being a child again. I had no knowledge, no access to information and I was totally dependent on others.'

Women who were not proficient in English upon arrival (the majority of women interviewed) stated that this increased their isolation from the wider Australian community and acted as an additional barrier to gaining information and assistance. The women noted that the majority of information on websites, pamphlets, radio and television is in English as are official forms for getting access to housing and other services. Whilst the majority of services offered the use of telephone interpreters the first point of contact was generally in English which made it more difficult for the women to understand and communicate. In addition in their experience not all services consistently used interpreters and some relied on children and even perpetrators to provide interpreting and information about acts of violence:

'I was bashed by my husband and my wrist was broken. I contacted police but when they arrived I was not offered an interpreter and the police had to rely on my children, who witnessed the abuse, to act as interpreters.'

The women also cited cultural and religious beliefs about divorce, separation and gender roles as well as community disapproval associated with challenging these beliefs as bearing on their decision whether or not to leave a family violence situation or seek assistance from outside of the community. Many of the women had the perception that they were being disapproved of or judged for their decisions. Some of the women had even experienced community or religious leaders or others in the community actively trying to persuade them to return to their husbands or give them a 'second chance.' One woman said that she felt 'ostracised' from her community when she made the decision to separate from her husband:

'I have always felt very isolated from the mainstream community because I don't speak English and I have been ostracised by my own community because of my separation from my husband and the fact that he has left me alone is considered shameful. In my community the break up of the family is usually blamed on the woman.'

Whether for fear of the reaction from their community or due to a combination of the factors outlined above, what emerged through the interviews was that half of the women interviewed remained with the perpetrator of family violence.

Responses to Family Violence

As well as identifying the difficulties they encountered in seeking assistance with family violence the women were also prompted to reflect on what, if anything, did or would have made it easier for them to access assistance.

The women emphasised the importance of having both information and support when they were experiencing family violence. Most women stated that had they had access to information about their legal rights and support services sooner they would have taken action in relation to family violence much sooner:

'Even when I was in fear for my life, had I known about the services that I could access and had I had the information about my rights then I would have done something about the family violence, no matter what the consequences.'

Even where the women had ultimately chosen to remain with the perpetrator of family violence, they stated that having knowledge and information was empowering and could even go so far as to change the power dynamic within the relationship:

'I have now taken financial control back from my husband and he has just had to accept this. I now have the strength to stand up to my husband and tell him my point of view and even to disagree with him – I now know that I have a right to do this and he knows it'.

Having relevant information also increased women's options for dealing with family violence. For example, before she got in contact with the police one woman was unaware that she could apply for an Intervention Order and stay in her own home. Most women said that whilst they had a vague awareness that the Australian government provides support services for women what made a difference to them was having specific information and contact details or a contact person for services in their area. (The women who had received the domestic violence resource cards or 'pink cards' said these were a useful resource)

For most women, gaining awareness of their rights and options for dealing with family violence was a gradual process that happened over time through exposure to the mainstream community or through word of mouth in their own community:

'When I migrated to New Zealand and then Australia I was keen to mix with the general population as much as possible…I noticed that Australia and New Zealand are free societies with very liberal attitudes towards women. Through Australian and New Zealand women I learnt about my rights and gradually, over time, I became more assertive and stood up to my husband's controlling behaviour'

The women also often received information about family violence and referrals to specialist agencies when they came into contact with mainstream services such as a their general practitioner, their child's school/kindergarten or the police (for example, one woman received a referral to a legal service and information about obtaining an Intervention Order when her neighbour contacted the police after a family violence incident).

Being supported, either by family, friends or external services was also crucial for women in making the decision to seek assistance with family violence or leave a family violence situation. Most women said that having the support of family and friends was most important to them. The women who had accessed assistance from an external agency also emphasised that agencies that provided ongoing face to face contact and support were extremely beneficial and a source of strength. One woman gave the example of an agency who continued to send someone to see her once a week at a coffee

shop near her workplace for six months while she was separating from her husband. She said this support was crucial given that she had no family in Australia.

What the women were generally seeking from support services was firstly, a person they could trust, confide in and talk to and secondly a person who could provide practical assistance with referrals, paperwork, court support etc.

Having external support often had not only an effect on the women themselves but also a corresponding effect on the perpetrator of the abuse. For example, a number of women stated that once the perpetrator knew that others knew about the abuse and that the women had outside support they believed that this led to a change in their behaviour:

'...he knew there were other people aware of what was going on who cared for us and that changed the dynamic. He knew he couldn't continue to abuse us without consequences.'

Many of the women interviewed had accessed support and assistance from the Arabic speaking settlement worker at WCC. The women usually became aware of the Arabic speaking settlement worker through word of mouth in the community and the Arabic speaking women's group or through presentations and information sessions held at institutions where they attended English language classes. The women said that they felt particularly comfortable with someone who they knew they could trust, who spoke the language and who had a connection to their community.

The majority of the women interviewed were involved with the Arabic speaking women's group run by Whittlesea Community Connections. The women who were involved with this group stated that having the support of the group was extremely important to them and their involvement with the group helped build their confidence and self-esteem, allowed them to discuss their experiences with other women and build friendships, reduced their isolation and exposed them to different points of view and specific information about family violence through training and information sessions run by the group (for example, healthy relationships training provided by InTouch)

'Participating in the Arabic speaking women's group was a great support because I could speak to other migrant women with similar experiences and everyone supports each other and it improves your self-esteem. All the women listen to each other and help each other and it is also an outlet and a place to forget about the problems at home.'

For women whose activities outside of the home may have been controlled and monitored by their partners attending the Arabic speaking women's group had the advantage of being seen as a more acceptable activity than others. A number of women gave examples of their attempts to attend counselling being blocked by their husbands or their husbands insisting on accompanying them to counselling sessions.

Some of the women also emphasised the importance of having further opportunities outside of the home and the group such as engaging in paid employment or volunteering. The women who had undertaken volunteering said that this experience helped build their confidence and self-esteem, taught them self-reliance and other skills and made them feel like they were a part of broader Australian society. Whilst the women emphasised the importance of having a group environment where they felt safe and comfortable they were also concerned that women have the opportunity to step outside the Arabic speaking group and be exposed to the mainstream community, different cultures and points of view.

Whilst most of the women felt extremely comfortable discussing their experience of family violence within the Arabic speaking women's group, some women said that they felt more comfortable disclosing their experiences to people outside of their own cultural group because they wanted to maintain anonymity.

Improvements to Services

The women were asked to reflect on their experiences and suggest ways in which access to support services might be improved.

The women were keen to share their experience to assist other CALD women experiencing family violence. The suggestions that were made for ways in which support services and access for CALD women might be improved were largely a reflection of the barriers that were been identified through the consultations:

- More information about Australian laws, family violence and women's rights to be provided to women on arrival in Australia;
- Information also to be provided to men on arrival in Australia to address attitudes and behaviours;
- Making printed information available in Arabic and other languages as well as targeting women through community forums was suggested as a potentially effective way of reaching CALD women;
- More information and education for CALD communities about service providers and what they do to address ignorance and mistrust;
- Greater access to legal support;
- Continuing opportunities to engage in groups such as the Arabic speaking women's group;
- More opportunities for women to engage in social and other activities outside the home.

Consultations with Young People

The aim of the consultations with young people was not to determine whether the young people in this particular group had experienced family violence but to take a sample group of young people from a CALD background and gauge their level of understanding and awareness of family violence, their level of understanding of what constitutes a 'respectful relationship' and their level of awareness of support and services available in the Whittlesea LGA.

Demographic Information

All of the young people who participated in the group consultation were from Sudanese backgrounds, had been born overseas and had been in Australia for 4-6 years. All of the young people and their families had migrated to Australia on refugee visas.

The young people were aged 14-17 years with the girls slightly younger at age 14 and the boys aged 15-17.

The young people who agreed to take part in the consultation were all attending secondary school and were already engaged with the Homework Club run by Whittlesea Community Connections.

In order to generate discussion the groups undertook a number of activities led by the Whittlesea Community Connections' Youth Worker for newly arrived young people.

- First, they were asked to brainstorm words that could be used to describe a 'healthy' or 'respectful' relationship then they were asked to brainstorm words that could be used to describe an 'unhealthy relationship';
- Second, they were given two scenarios taken from the *Be the Hero*! Program and asked a series of questions regarding the scenarios.

Task 1

The girls group came up with eleven adjectives to describe a 'healthy relationship':

- shared values;
- commitment;
- respect;
- helping;
- caring;
- encouragement
- honesty;
- fairness;
- love;
- sharing;
- communication;

The boys group also came up with eleven of the same or similar adjectives to describe a 'healthy relationship'.

Both groups, probably due to their young age, when asked to describe a 'relationship' emphasised relationships between siblings, children and parents, friends, cousins, teachers and students rather than boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife relationships.

The girls group required more prompting to come up with adjectives to describe an 'unhealthy relationship' (although one girl described this task as *'easy'* in comparison to describing a 'healthy' relationship). 'Bullying' and in particular 'cyber-bullying' was mentioned by both groups and was a topic they said had been discussed extensively in school. Both groups thought 'physical' and other' bullying' behaviour could occur within relationships.

The boys group was able to come up with three times as many adjectives and behaviours to describe an 'unhealthy relationship' as the girls group including:

- cheating/infidelity;
- not trusting each other;
- fighting/arguing;
- lack of communication;
- selfishness;
- financial abuse;

Both groups were asked whether they thought it was important to discuss 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' relationships and why.

The boys group agreed that it was important to discuss 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' relationships to prevent making mistakes that *'...might wreck future relationships'.* The girls group were less sure of the value of discussing 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' relationships. One girl said that it was important because it was important to *'know what to expect'* before entering a relationship while the other said she didn't care.

Task 2

The first of the two scenarios involved a teenage girl whose mother meted out physical punishment to her daughter after she returned home from a party that she did not have permission to attend.

Both groups were asked to discuss:

- whether the mother's use of physical punishment was appropriate;
- whether there was an alternative possible response from the mother;
- whether physical punishment in this context is violence;
- what consequences might flow from the mother's use of physical punishment;
- what advice they would give to the girl if she confided in them or sought help;
- how they would react if they were in the mother's position;

Both groups were sympathetic to both the mother and the daughter in this scenario.

Girls Group

The girls group thought that physical punishment was sometimes appropriate and were quite condemnatory of the girl's behaviour saying she had contributed to or in some way deserved physical punishment.

The girls group distinguished between a one off situation and an ongoing pattern of behaviour on the part of the girl. Where it was a one off they thought a verbal warning or grounding might have been a more appropriate response, but where it was a pattern of behaviour they believed the mother's response was justified. One girl equated physical punishment with violence, the other did not.

The girls group listed some of the consequences of ongoing physical punishment as: having a negative impact on the girl's relationship with her mother, the girl experiencing fear, behaviour change in the girl (e.g. not leaving the house without permission, telling her mother where she is going etc).

In offering advice to the girl the girls group emphasised ways in which she could modify her behaviour to avoid physical punishment, for example encouraging her to *'stay home and study'* instead of going out.

Boys Group

The boys group thought that it was not appropriate for the mother to use physical punishment but they also thought the girl's behaviour was not appropriate.

Again they emphasised that there was a difference between a one off situation and an ongoing pattern of behaviour but they were less likely to see physical punishment as ever being an appropriate response and all in the group equated physical punishment with violence.

The boys group came up with more suggestions for alternative ways the mother could have dealt with the situation including calling the police if she was worried, increasing communication and trust with her daughter, discussing with her daughter the reasons for her behaviour.

If advising the girl as a friend the boys group said they would tell her to listen to her mother and try to communicate better. If communication failed the boys group suggested that the girl could speak to her father, another trusted family member or teachers at school.

The second scenario involved a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship. The boyfriend was described as persistently texting and phoning his girlfriend, checking her whereabouts, demanding to know where she was at all times and putting her down.

Both groups were asked to discuss:

- whether this was an example of a healthy relationship and why or why not;
- what the boy's friends could say or do to help the situation;
- what the girl's friends should say if she came to them for help;
- what the girl should do if her boyfriend's behaviour continued;
- whether the girl should tell someone what is happening and who;
- whether the girl may be afraid to tell someone and why.

Both groups recognised that this was not an example of a healthy relationship.

Girls Group

The girls group did not immediately recognise that the boyfriend's behaviour could be classified as 'controlling' and they did not equate this type of behaviour with 'stalking' or 'violence.' Rather the girls group said the relationship was unhealthy because the boyfriend didn't know his girlfriend's whereabouts and this was *'bad'* and she may be *'cheating on him'* without his knowledge.

When asked what the girl should do the girls group emphasised ways in which she could change her behaviour to make her boyfriend feel more secure, including talking to him about where she goes and who she usually hangs out with as well as suggesting that he meet with her friends so he knows who she is spending time with.

The girls group also said that the boyfriend's mates should tell him to *'get over her,' 'get another girl'* and stop worrying too much about her. One girl said that the problem with this was that he might do the same thing to another girl.

With some prompting the girls recognised that it was unreasonable for a boyfriend to expect his girlfriend to stop seeing her male friends altogether. They also said that if the boyfriend's behaviour continued even after the girl had spoken to him then she might consider breaking up with him.

The girls group suggested that the girl confide in a school counsellor or her parents if she was having trouble resolving the situation. The girls were aware that outside of school there was also counselling available and they suggested that the girl could talk to other family and friends and even contact police or a lawyer (*'like in law & order'*) if the situation got really bad.

The girls group raised fears that might prevent the girl from confiding in someone as: embarrassment, worrying about what other people might think (e.g. disapproval over boyfriend/girlfriend relationships), worrying about what her boyfriend might think or do if he found out.

Boys Group

The boys group were better able to recognise that the boyfriend's behaviour in the scenario was controlling and abusive. (This is possibly due to the fact that the boys group were slightly older than the girls group)

The boys group stated that the relationship was not healthy because there was a lack of trust and communication. While they explained the boyfriend's behaviour as indicating that he cared for his girlfriend they recognised that the behaviour was not acceptable and the boyfriend should have

more trust in his girlfriend. The boys group also said that more communication from the girlfriend in terms of where she was going and who she was with would help the boyfriend to develop trust.

The boys group also recognised that 'put downs' were examples of 'emotional hurt' *'...and for girls that's pretty bad.'* They thought that the girl would eventually break up with her boyfriend if it continued and the behaviour may even lead to fights with other boys who disagreed with his behaviour.

The boys group said that the boy's mates should tell him that he needed to act differently, it was not a 'healthy relationship' and he was being too protective and controlling. They also suggested talking to the girl to see if she was alright and if there was anything that could be done to resolve the situation.

If the behaviour continued the boys group suggested the girl either break up with her boyfriend, ask a friend to talk to him or confide in somebody. The boys group also suggested the girl confide to a school counsellor and/or her parents. The boys group also nominated fear of what other people, especially parents, would think about a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship (they commented that it was generally not acceptable in African culture to be in a relationship before finishing school) as one reason the girl may be fearful of confiding in others. The boys group were concerned that if the girl confided in a school counsellor they may notify the police or the girl's parents.

Consultations with Service Providers

23 individual workers from 5 service providers, both family violence specialist and non-family violence specialist agencies, participated in consultations either via face-to-face interviews with the Project Leader (either individually or as a group) or by providing written answers to interview questions.

Consultations with service providers were conducted from a pre-prepared list of interview questions **(See Appendix 2).** Service providers were asked to discuss whether there are differences between CALD and non-CALD clients in terms of demand for services, referral pathways and the types of services accessed; identifiable barriers for CALD clients wishing to access assistance for family violence; how services respond to CALD clients including any special measures adopted to engage with CALD clients and facilitate access; any gaps in service provision and existing models for delivering family violence services to CALD clients that are operating in City of Whittlesea or may be adapted to City of Whittlesea.

Referral Pathways

Service providers identified a number of referral pathways through which both CALD and non-CALD clients gain access to family violence assistance including direct referrals from Victoria police, courts, family violence crisis services, child protection services, community and religious leaders and health services including GPs and Maternal Child Health nurses.

For the two agencies that provide specialist family violence services the most common referral pathways were Victoria police, after attendance at a family violence incident and (commonly) the issue of a Family Violence Safety Notice, and the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service. Secondary referrals were also often received from non-specialist family violence agencies and there was no noted difference in referral pathways between CALD and non-CALD clients.

For non-specialist agencies the most common referral pathways for CALD clients were self referrals through word of mouth in the community and secondary referrals from other agencies (e.g. settlement services).

Most service providers were not able to provide detailed information about who the victim first disclosed family violence to or whether their service was the first point of disclosure beyond general observations that women are more likely to disclose family violence to someone they trust and this is likely to be someone within their own family or community.

It was a general observation made by service providers that CALD clients were more likely to have been in contact with police prior to accessing services than non-CALD clients. This was attributed to the fact that CALD clients are likely to be have less familiarity with family violence and other support services and may only become aware of these services through contact with police rather than through other avenues such as the family violence crisis line.

Barriers to Accessing Services

Service providers were asked to identify and discuss whether, in their experience, CALD clients face additional barriers to seeking assistance with family violence when compared with the mainstream population.

Service providers emphasised that it is difficult to draw generalisations about CALD clients and barriers to accessing services because 'CALD' describes such a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. A person's ability to access services is also likely to be influenced by other factors such as level of education, class, age, amount of time spent in Australia as well as country of origin and region (for example, a person who comes from an urban area may have vastly different experiences from a person who comes from a rural area).

Despite these differences, analysis of the data drawn from consultations with service providers revealed that there were a number of common barriers identified as hindering the ability of CALD clients to access assistance with family violence. (Refer to p.17 for a detailed description of the barriers CALD women experience)

Immigration Status

All service providers agreed that women without Australian citizenship or permanent residency who are dependent upon their spouse or partner to remain in Australia are particularly vulnerable. All workers bar two (91%) identified a woman's immigration status as a barrier to accessing assistance in a family violence situation. Immigration status was perceived to increase a woman's vulnerability to family violence, making it harder for her to leave a family violence situation and reducing her options upon leaving a family violence situation.

The fear of losing the right to remain in Australia, whether real or perceived, was cited as a powerful disincentive for women to speak out about family violence. It was noted that this fear is readily exploitable by perpetrators of family violence with workers giving numerous examples of perpetrators using the threat of deportation, and in particular deportation and loss of access to children, as a means of controlling and keeping women in violent relationships.

It was noted by service providers that women are able to use the family violence exception in the *Migration Act 1958* to remain in Australia where their relationship has broken down and family violence is a factor, however women often lack accurate information and awareness of their legal rights due to limited English proficiency and dependency on their partner for information. Practical difficulties associated with accessing the family violence exception were also highlighted including

the fact that women must prove the existence of family violence which can prove difficult where there is no Intervention Order and no Police Report. In this circumstance a woman must obtain two Statutory Declarations from 'competent people', which again may prove difficult, and in the meantime will require a worker to support her through the process and attend to urgent needs such as housing and financial support. Women who are in Australia on fiancé visas are not able to rely on the family violence exception at all making them a particularly vulnerable group.

If a woman cannot take advantage of the family violence provisions she is left with limited legal options for remaining in Australia.

Service providers also indicated that immigration status may act as a barrier to women accessing family violence services because the category of visa a woman possesses will impact directly on her eligibility for government benefits:

'Refuges are reluctant to take women who don't have access to benefits because they are not subsidised for medical visits, they have to pay full fares on public transport, they are less likely to be eligible for public housing, etc, etc'

It was noted that family violence is often a precipitating factor in homelessness and there is an added risk for CALD women on partner visas:

'Women who have left a family violence situation and are not eligible for Centrelink benefits cannot pay their rent. For this reason they will need access to housing assistance but they cannot get housing assistance because without Centrelink they have no budget and their income is not deemed sustainable.'

Some service providers also raised the fact that even where a woman is entitled to Centrelink benefits, if she leaves the sponsored relationship early her guarantor may incur a Centrelink debt which acts as a further disincentive to leave.

Isolation/Lack of Support Networks

The majority of workers (18 of 23 or 78%) agreed that CALD women, and in particular newly arrived CALD women, do not have the same family/social support networks that non-CALD women can rely on in family violence situations.

It was observed that CALD women often experience increased isolation due to the fact that they are in a new country often without family or friends who are not connected to their partner and it is not uncommon for them to be actively isolated by their partners. Workers cited examples of women they had encountered who were not allowed to leave the house unaccompanied and had very little contact with the mainstream community. Isolation from the mainstream community was further exacerbated for women with limited proficiency in English.

A woman without support networks has reduced options when leaving a family violence situation because she cannot rely on friends or family members to provide a place to stay, childcare and financial support. It was noted that these problems are exacerbated for women from smaller communities:

'Women from smaller communities often have smaller support networks to draw on and may have more at stake if they speak out about family violence. A woman from a smaller community risks being ostracised by the entire community if she speaks out and being from a smaller community makes it harder for her to find anonymity'

Lack of Information about Family Violence, Support Services & Legal Rights

The majority of service providers (22 of 23 or 96 %) stated that CALD women generally have limited knowledge of the concept of 'family violence' under Australian law and their legal rights as well as available support services.

It was observed that CALD women generally find it harder to navigate the system and to access help from external agencies because they may not know that help is available or they may be aware that help is available but not where to go and how to access it. It was noted that newly arrived women were particularly lacking in an understanding of their legal options such as Intervention Orders, how they are obtained and implemented.

In many countries of origin there are simply no equivalent services for women and their first knowledge of these types of services, particularly legal services, is the information they are given upon first arrival by migration services. It was noted that whilst migration services often provide a lot of detailed information about the migration experience and may provide some information about family violence, this information is not specifically about the law in Victoria.

For women who may not even be literate in their own language, let alone in English, acquiring this knowledge is also problematic with one worker giving the example of a woman she encountered who did not even know her own address and other instances of women not being permitted by their partners to attend English classes.

'Advising someone who doesn't have good English about Intervention Orders and how they work is incredibly challenging.'

Lack of understanding of the concept of 'family violence' represents a barrier in itself. Service providers encountered many CALD women who come from countries of origin with different legal systems and less robust notions of women's rights. Service providers highlighted the fact that for many women 'family violence' is a common occurrence and they are often not aware, firstly, that family violence encompasses more than just physical violence and secondly, that family violence is wrong or illegal. Sexual abuse within relationships, for example, is likely to be particularly under reported amongst CALD women who may view sexual access as part of a husband's right.

Language Barrier

For service providers, providing information to and communicating effectively with CALD women is more challenging where they have limited or no proficiency in English. The language barrier compounds and contributes to other disadvantages experienced by CALD women such as isolation from the community and lack of information.

Whilst most service providers stated that they have access to and use telephone and on-site interpreters they noted that use of interpreters raises issues of confidentiality and anonymity for some women, particularly those from smaller communities where the likelihood of the interpreter knowing the victim or perpetrator is increased. Service providers were aware of these issues and most had adopted common practices to deal with them such as using an interpreter from inter-state if they knew that they would be speaking to a woman from a small community. However, many service providers were aware of and gave examples of women who had difficulty communicating

with other service providers who did not have a budget for interpreters or who did have access to interpreters but did not necessarily use them as part of their usual practice.[36]

'Mainstream agencies often don't use or don't have access to interpreters and this is a problem. This is the first point of contact for most women & it is therefore crucial that she is able to communicate. Given how difficult it is to make the decision to seek help, the way in which first contact occurs will influence whether the woman goes on to access further services.'

One worker used the example of a female client who described a situation in which a neighbour had called the police after a string of physical assaults by her husband. When the police arrived they spoke to the woman's husband, who spoke fluent English, but did not interview the woman separately nor offer an interpreter. As the police car drove away the woman described feeling trapped and utterly helpless and *'…dropped to her knees in despair'*.

The quality and neutrality of interpreters was also said to be variable which can affect women's access to services. Most service providers cited instances in which they had been aware that the interpreter was not simply translating but also giving the woman additional information or advice, against their professional code of ethics.

While they have oral competency in their first and additional languages, many CALD women who are not proficient in English are often also not literate in their own language and many require greater assistance and time from service providers. For example, a worker may need sit down with the woman and go through forms with a telephone interpreter before assisting her to fill them out (either because she cannot comprehend written English or she is not familiar with using forms and interacting with written materials) or they may need to liaise with other services assisting the woman, such as legal services, because the woman has received either written or telephone advice in English that she doesn't understand.

Service providers who run group work sessions, either for women or Men's Behaviour Change groups, stated that the language barrier can also present a challenge when attempting to accommodate CALD people in group work programs delivered in English. For example, workers who were involved with Men's Behaviour Change groups noted that introducing an interpreter into this type of group can prove difficult because men in the group are often already difficult to engage and having an interpreter present can alter the group dynamic. If there are men present from more than one language group then it simply may not be possible to accommodate these men within the group even using interpreters. Providing one on one counselling sessions is one way to accommodate CALD men however using this approach means that CALD men miss out on the benefits of the group context. [37]

Practical Obstacles

Service providers agreed that whilst all women leaving a family violence situation face significant disruption to their lives and practical difficulties such as accessing housing and financial support, for CALD women these difficulties are magnified.

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[36] General Practitioners were used as an example a number of times. It was observed in a 2010 article in the *Australian Family Physician* that although interpreter services are highly accessible for Australian doctors in comparison with other countries their services remain '…underused, and frequently misunderstood, by GPs,' Phillips, C., *Australian Family Physician*, v.39, no.4, April 2010.

[37] Also refer to discussion at p.41 'Engaging with CALD Communities'.

Service providers stated that similarly to Australian born women, CALD women considering leaving a family violence want to know what their alternatives are: where they will live, where their children will go to school, where they will get financial support, wow they will support themselves.

'Often the women are quite isolated and they want to be reassured that if they leave they are not going to be worse off than before and this is difficult because there are lots of barriers to housing etc.'

Finding appropriate housing is a huge challenge for service providers with a shortage of suitable emergency and temporary accommodation for women or women and their children (for example, service providers said that rooming houses are almost always unsuitable for women and children but these are often the only form of accommodation available to women).

Service providers were concerned about the shortage of long-term housing options for women beyond the crisis phase. It was the experience of service providers that CALD women who do go into refuges often stay longer than non-CALD women because they have fewer options for alternative accommodation once they leave (for example, they may find it harder to come up with a lump sum for a bond to get into the private rental market and may also have few if any family and friends to fall back on). Service providers described experiencing CALD women's frustration at being unable to find housing and having difficulty managing their expectations of what the service provider could do.

Some service providers stated that whilst it may be relatively easy for women to get access to legal advice and assistance regarding Intervention Orders, especially through the duty lawyer service at the Magistrates Court; it is harder to find legal practitioners who are experienced in family violence and can assist women with family violence related matters such as property and migration advice, mortgage arrears, child custody disputes etc.

Cultural Beliefs

Cultural taboos and beliefs regarding gender roles, separation and divorce were raised by 17 of 23 or 73% of service providers as a factor that influenced a woman's decision whether or not to leave a violent relationship. It was agreed that cultural and community expectations add a layer of pressure to stay in a relationship that is less prevalent or influential for non-CALD women.

'Some women who have arrived on skilled migrant visas may be quite well educated and knowledgeable about their legal rights and family violence but they are still often reluctant to leave the marriage because of strong cultural taboos around divorce.'

Service providers cited many instances they had come across where CALD women experienced pressure from family overseas as well as pressure from within the community in Australia to keep the relationship together. Some women were visited by religious or community leaders who urged them to return to their husbands because they had changed and deserved a second chance or they were told they had brought shame on themselves and their families.

There was also a perception that for CALD women it was less acceptable to speak out about family violence particularly when this involved talking to people from outside the family and community.

'There is shame attached to taking a 'private' family matter to a public arena like a court which is an added pressure against applying for an IVO'

For some women, particularly those women from smaller communities, speaking out about family violence means risking being cut off from the entire community.

Whether as a result of these factors or not it was noted that a marked difference in the way that CALD as opposed to non-CALD clients accessed services was that non-CALD clients were more likely to access services at the point at which they had made the decision to leave the relationship whereas CALD clients were more likely to access services with some hope that they could save the relationship.

Another fear for CALD women is what would happen to their children if they separated from their partner. Service providers found that this often weighs very heavily on women's minds, particularly if they come from a cultural background where the father traditionally takes sole custody of the children if the couple separate. It was highlighted that women often hold fears that their children will be removed from Australia by their ex-partner post-separation. Service providers pointed out that these fears are not necessarily unjustified with a partner or ex-partner with family, friends or connections overseas often having greater means and motive to take children from Australia back to their country of origin. For Australian born women this scenario is a much more remote possibility.

Engaging with CALD communities

Service providers were asked whether they encountered difficulties engaging with people from CALD backgrounds and whether there were any particular measures or practices their agencies adopted to facilitate access by people from CALD backgrounds.

The majority of workers said that they did not generally find it more difficult to engage with clients from CALD backgrounds although there was a general perception CALD women may be less forthcoming about their experiences of family violence and it may be harder for service providers to build trust with these women and convince them to open up and discuss family violence. As has been discussed previously, given the limited statistical data available, there is no way of verifying whether this perception amongst service providers is reflected in the number of CALD clients accessing their service.

Service providers who delivered group work for CALD women or men said that engaging people from CALD backgrounds in group work presents specific challenges arising from language barriers. Some service providers had attempted to address this challenge by using interpreters in a group situation but said that this could be disruptive for other members of the group, particularly when they were already difficult to engage (for example, men's behaviour change groups). Rather than using interpreters some service providers chose to facilitate access for CALD men by delivering group content in one-on-one settings or providing individual counselling with the drawback that this is much more resource intensive and has the added drawback of CALD men missing out on the benefits of content delivered in a group context. Service providers agreed that utilising bi-lingual group facilitators or referring CALD men to language specific groups could be a more effective way to accommodate these clients but they had no specific experience of this type of group. There was also the suggestion that an inability to accommodate the needs of CALD men meant that they were simply screened out of the intake process.

It was common practice for service providers to use interpreters to communicate with CALD clients and workers were aware of specific issues that may arise with the use of interpreters (for example, protecting confidentiality) and adapted their practices accordingly (for example, using interpreters from inter-state). Multi-lingual workers were seen as a valuable resource but it was not always possible to have an on-site worker who speaks the relevant language and some women expressed a strong preference not to deal with a worker from the same cultural background due to fears around confidentiality.

Some mainstream service providers also maintained links and networks with CALD specific services in order to draw on their expertise (for example, discussions at network meetings around particular issues specific to CALD clients or through secondary consultations with CALD specific services in relation to individual clients).

Consultations with Community and Religious Leaders

The Project Leader conducted one to one interviews with six recognised community leaders representing a number of religious groups and communities in Whittlesea. As may be expected, all of these religious and community leaders were male. These leaders were consulted due to the likelihood of them being a first point of contact for community or congregation members disclosing family violence and seeking assistance. They were drawn from a variety of backgrounds including Indian, Middle Eastern and African and they represented a number of religious denominations including Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Muslim and Sikh and one Sudanese community leader was also consulted whose leadership role is non-religious.

The community and religious leaders were relatively experienced in their roles and all were senior members of their institutions. Within this group there was a broad range of skills and experience including one leader who had a Masters degree in family counselling and another who had previously worked in a community organisation.

Consultations were conducted from a set list of pre-prepared questions **(Refer to Appendix 3)** that were intended to gauge whether community and religious leaders are confronted with family violence in their communities, how often this occurs, what assistance and information they are providing to victims and perpetrators of family violence and the level of knowledge and expertise that they have around family violence, legal rights and responsibilities and services.

Incidence of Family Violence

All community and religious leaders who participated in consultations had been approached by someone from within their community who had experienced family violence.

Most often they were approached by the victim of family violence (and the victim was most often female) but it was not unusual to be approached by the perpetrator. Religious/community leaders explained this phenomenon as a result of the fact that such leaders are almost always male and men in the community feel comfortable talking to and seeking assistance from a male leader which may not be the case for women. It was observed by more than one religious leader that men were more confident seeking assistance and it was not unusual for men to represent themselves as *the* victim or *a* victim in the situation.

It was more unusual for a community or religious leader to be approached by family or friends of the victim or perpetrator or other concerned bystanders.

Community and religious leaders acknowledged that family violence was occurring in their communities and most said that they were regularly approached by people seeking assistance with family violence although one religious leader was adamant that family violence was only a ‘rare occurrence’ within his community because it was not condoned by religious teachings.

Being approached on a 'regular' basis was variously expressed as:

- seeing on average 4-6 cases of family violence per year;
- seeing on average 9-10 cases per year;
- being approached every weekend after delivering the sermon.

Why Community/Religious leaders are chosen to disclose family violence to?

Community/religious leaders offered the following factors to explain why they were approached in relation to family violence:

- they are well known and trusted within the community;
- they have an approachable manner;
- they have ability and experience communicating with and advising people;
- they can offer spiritual guidance;
- they have authority in the community, particularly, in some cases, the authority to grant marriage and divorce;

Understanding of family violence

One observation made by nearly all community/religious leaders was that people who sought assistance in relation to family violence often did not talk specifically about 'family violence' or frame their experience in this way. It was more common for people to ask for assistance with 'relationship' or 'family problems' or request general spiritual guidance.

The religious and community leaders interviewed noted a general perception within communities and amongst both victims and perpetrators that non-physical violence is not necessarily 'family violence.'

Amongst community/religious leaders themselves there was generally a good understanding of the range of behaviours that constitute family violence and recognition that family violence extends beyond physical abuse.

Types of assistance sought from Community/Religious Leaders

Religious/community leaders reported that people seeking assistance wanted guidance on their rights and responsibilities according to their religion, general advice and support and sometimes active intervention. They also suspected that sometimes people were looking for a person who would be willing to make a decision on their behalf.

It was the perception amongst all community and religious leaders that people were generally seeking ways to reconcile or salvage the relationship and keep the family together (preventing family violence occurring in the future formed only a part of this goal).

There were varying levels of intervention or assistance community/religious leaders felt comfortable offering in relation to family violence. Most community/religious leaders offered one-on-one counselling as well as mediation between the two parties and sometimes involving parents and extended family.

The amount of level and type of assistance and advice offered was quite often dependent on the perceived seriousness of the violence, whether other assistance had also been sought and whether the relationship was perceived to be in 'crisis.' Two religious/community leaders specified that where there was physical violence or children were potentially in danger they would involve the police or other agencies.

The advice and involvement community/religious leaders were willing to offer was also dependent upon their perception of their own role and expertise in dealing with family violence. Some community/religious leaders were more comfortable defining their role narrowly to providing 'spiritual guidance' to the individual or couple and making referrals where other assistance was needed. Referrals might be made to external counsellors or psychologists with a preference expressed for referrals made to members of the faith or the immediate community where possible. Other community/religious leaders felt comfortable giving advice on a range of issues and were less willing to refer except in extreme cases.

Some community/religious leaders felt that it was better to refer parties where there was a possibility that they might separate or divorce because they wanted to avoid the perception that they had a hand in the breakdown of the relationship. Community/religious leaders also sometimes directly experienced anger from perpetrators, including physical violence.

The leaders consulted also spoke of walking a fine line in terms of the community's perception of their role; on the one hand they wanted to assist female victims of family violence but on the other hand they were keen to avoid being seen as too proactive for fear of losing the trust of their community.

Generally there was observed to be a greater willingness on the part of religious leaders to intervene where they felt there was a chance to reconcile the parties. The religious/community leaders' own emphasis was on preserving the marriage and whilst it was stated that the prevention of future occurrences of family violence was important 'success' in resolving a situation was often described as moving the parties away from divorce or separation. Despite the different backgrounds from which the religious/community leaders were drawn there was a common approach that favoured avoidance of divorce and separation.

There was a general preference expressed by community/religious leaders for resolving family violence issues within the faith or community if possible and not through the legal system if it can be avoided and resort to legal action was often actively discouraged or a case of last resort.

Most religious leaders also saw themselves as having a role in the prevention of family violence through raising awareness in their communities via sermons and religious teachings as well as counselling couples entering into marriage. One religious leader's common practice was to send a strong message that violence is unacceptable by offering all women entering into marriage an information sheet, in front of their future husband, with contact details for family violence services.

Knowledge and perception of services

Most community/religious leaders were aware that victims of family violence could seek assistance from the police and through the courts as well as specialist family violence services and some had made referrals to these agencies but not all community/religious leaders had a detailed understanding of the specialist and non-specialist family violence agencies in their area and the services they provided.

Two religious leaders commented that there was a negative perception within the community that family violence services focus too much on women to the detriment of men and encourage the separation and break-up of the family.

What is needed to address family violence in CALD communities?

Community/religious leaders were asked to consider the resources they and their communities' need to assist them with family violence.

Some community/religious leaders had already attended formal family violence training but all expressed a willingness to be involved in future education, training and professional development opportunities. There was a particular need identified for professional development for younger religious leaders although some religious leaders said they would have to ensure that family violence training conformed to the culture and traditions of the institution.

Most community/religious leaders also expressed a desire to receive greater recognition for their role.

Community/religious leaders spoke of 'addressing the skeptics' in their communities through knowledge and information to alter community perceptions:

Further suggestions made by those consulted to address family violence included:

- in collaboration with community/religious leaders conduct community meetings and education sessions around family violence;
- build partnerships between family violence and other agencies and the community, religious and language schools and encourage information sharing;
- provide education to the community about legal rights and responsibilities including victim's rights and consequences for perpetrators;
- address power imbalances within relationships and aim to prevent family violence occurring through the provision of respectful relationships training.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the literature review was to draw on existing research into family violence to identify promising examples and models based on local, national and international research with the potential to be adapted for the City of Whittlesea. The literature review also intended to augment the findings from the primary research conducted as part of the scoping exercise and to ensure a sound evidence base for the proposed model.

Approximately forty sources (see references) were compiled and reviewed. A variety of sources were consulted including peer reviewed academic research, research conducted by government and statutory bodies and research conducted by community and philanthropic organisations.

A major limitation encountered in the conduct of the literature review was the limited amount of existing research focussing specifically on CALD communities and family violence (Aly & Gaba, 2007; Erez, E. et al, 2009; Ghafournia, N., 2011; Pease & Rees, 2008; Pittaway, E., 2004; Raj, A. & Silverman, J., 2002;). Though in recent years it is noted that there has been more research conducted in this area (Dimopoulos, M., 2010) this is still a largely neglected area of study. A further limitation is the fact that of the CALD focussed research that has been conducted there are only a small number of peer reviewed, quantitative studies and those that have been conducted have limitations.[38] (Yoshihama, M. in Runner et. al., 2009) Most of the research consists of small-scale, qualitative studies based on specific migrant groups. (In Touch Inc., 2010, Raj, A. & Silverman, J., 2002, Runner et. al., 2009).

Due to these limitations, it was necessary to also draw on non-CALD focussed family violence research to inform the development of the family violence service model.

CALD Women: Multiple Complexities, Specific Vulnerability

Family violence is recognised as a major health issue in Australia that causes significant and long-term harm for victims, the majority of whom are women (Morgan & Chadwick, 2009). It is sobering to reflect that in Victoria intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and ill-health in women aged 15-44, ahead of illicit drug, alcohol and tobacco use (VicHealth, 2004, p.10)

There is also a significant economic cost attached to family violence, not just for individuals and families but for government and the community as a whole (Office of Women's Policy, 2009).[39]

All women who are subjected to family violence face difficulties and challenges living with violence, disclosing family violence, finding assistance, accessing support services, leaving and moving on from a family violence situation.

In terms of the incidence and prevalence of family violence in CALD communities there is no conclusive evidence that CALD communities experience a greater level of family violence[40] although there is some evidence of a lower likelihood of reporting family violence to the police in cases

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[38] Limitations identified by Yoshihama include exclusion of portions of the migrant or refugee population where studies have been conducted in English, inattention to differences between race and ethnicity within populations studied, aggregating different groups together, lack of attention to socio-cultural context and lack of comparability due to differing sampling criteria, data collection methods etc (Yoshihama, M. in Runner et. al, 2009, p.42-43)

[39] For more detailed information regarding the cost of family violence in Australia refer to discussion at p. 16 and the findings of the KPMG Consulting Report.

[40] Morgan & Chadwick report that studies draw differing conclusions, higher levels of family violence were reported in a study by O'Donnell, Smith & Madison, 2002 whereas lower or similar rates of violence were reported in studies conducted by Bassuk, Dawson & Huntington 2006 and Mouzos & Makkai, 2004. Morgan & Chadwick, 2009, p.5

involving CALD women (Morgan & Chadwick, 2009). There is also confirmation in the literature and anecdotal evidence from the City of Whittlesea that CALD victims of family violence are less likely to access services for assistance with family violence. (Morgan & Chadwick, 2009, Rees, 2004, Raj & Silverman, 2002).

The literature reveals that, comparative to the wider Australian born population, a number of additional factors that only or disproportionately affect CALD women compound the difficulties associated with disclosing family violence, finding assistance and early intervention, accessing support services and leaving a family violence situation (InTouch Inc., 2010, Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007, Morgan & Chadwick, 2009, Nelson & Spalding, 2009,) This is concerning given that "violence against women is one of the most common victimisations experienced by immigrants" (Erez, et. al, 2010, p.36) Bui & Morash note that CALD women also experience disadvantages comparative to CALD men "…immigrant women arrive with disadvantages in social status and basic human capital resources relative to immigrant men."[41]

Across the literature, both national and international, the additional factors that affect 'CALD' women as a distinct group are surprisingly consistent despite differences in country of origin, country of re-settlement, migration experience and other differences. (Bartels, Dr. L, 2010, Ghafournia, N., 2011, InTouch Inc., 2010, Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007, Morgan & Chadwick, 2009, Nelson & Spalding, 2009, Raj & Silverman, 2002, Runner et. al., 2009) Common factors that were identified in the literature include:

- **Visa dependency issues:**

Research indicates that newly arrived women who are dependent upon their spouse or fiancé for visa status and the right to remain in Australia experience a heightened vulnerability to family violence (see discussion below at p.50).

- **Social isolation and lack of support networks:**

The experience of migration often results in disconnection from immediate and extended family and loss of contact with traditional support networks that existed in the country of origin (Erez, et.al, 2010, Raj & Silverman, 2002, Versha & Venkatraman, 2010). Pease & Rees' research into family violence in refugee communities found that isolation from family support was an "…important factor preventing women from speaking out about violence" (Pease & Rees, 2008, p.28, Nelson & Spalding, 2009, p.46), a finding confirmed by research conducted by the University of NSW Centre for Refugee Research which also found, through qualitative interviews conducted with a large number of refugee communities, that traditional family support networks are viewed as a source of protection for migrant women and their loss increases women's perception of vulnerability to family violence (Versha & Venkatraman, 2010, p.44, Erez et. al, 2010, Pease & Rees, 2008).

Due to a combination of factors, including lack of English language proficiency (see discussion below), lack of participation in paid employment and family responsibilities (Pease & Rees, 2008), CALD women also commonly experience isolation from the wider Australian community (Versha & Venkatraman, 2010, Morgan & Chadwick, 2009, Bartels, Dr. L, 2010). Pease & Rees' research indicates that this isolation results in a lack of awareness of family violence laws and support services and increased dependence on the perpetrator, both socially and financially (Pease & Rees, 2008, Erez et al., 2010). Perpetrators may also seek to deliberately isolate women from support networks

[41] Bui, H. & Morash, M. (1999) 'Domestic Violence in the Vietnamese Community: An Explanatory Study', *Violence Against Women*, 5, p. 769-795

(Raj & Silverman, 2002, Erez et. al, 2010). For example the women in Erez et. al's study reported that social isolation was a common tactic used by abusers to perpetuate dependency and included preventing women from attending English classes, going to school, having employment and speaking to family and friends (Erez et. al, 2010)

- **Language barriers:**

Limited English language proficiency may act as a barrier to women accessing services and compounds many of the other factors that affect CALD women (Aly & Gaba, 2007, InTouch Inc., 2010, Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007, Runner et. al, 2009). For example, an inability to communicate with the wider community has been found to increase social isolation (Ghafournia, N., 2011, Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007, Pease & Rees, 2008) and reliance on the perpetrator, giving the perpetrator the opportunity to disseminate misinformation and increase their power and control in the relationship (Ghafournia, N., 2011, Pease & Rees, 2008, Runner et. al, 2009).

Limited English language proficiency also presents a barrier to employment, increasing women's financial dependence on the perpetrator (Ghafournia, N., 2011, Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007).

- **Cultural factors**

Any discussion regarding the influence of 'culture' on CALD women's experience of family violence must be approached with caution. There is a tendency, noted in the literature, that where family violence in CALD communities is discussed 'culture' can become a convenient explanation for the occurrence of family violence (Morris, B., 2007, Pittaway, E., 2004). There is also concern that citing culture as a relevant factor can lead to stereotyping of CALD communities and a failure to recognise the existence of a diversity of views and beliefs about family violence between and within cultures (Morris, B., 2007) as well as the contribution of individual and structural factors to the occurrence of family violence. (Morris, B., 2007, Pittaway, E., 2004).

Nevertheless, the literature illustrates that CALD women's understanding of and response to family violence is influenced to some degree by cultural factors (Erez et. al, 2010, Ghafournia, N., 2011, Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service, 2006, Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007, Morris, B., 2007, Pittaway, E., 2004, Raj & Silverman, 2002, Pease & Rees, 2008, Runner et. al, 2009). For example, CALD women may migrate from countries of origin where family violence is not recognised as a crime and where there are weak or non-existent community and/or legal sanctions against it. (Erez, et. al, 2010, p.47-48, Raj & Silverman, 2002, p.369-371). There is evidence that CALD groups and individuals often hold traditional views about gender roles (research shows that this is a known risk factor for family violence) (Powell, Dr. A, 2011, VicHealth, 2006) and it is noted that for CALD women there is often an additional stigma attached to separation and divorce when compared with non-CALD women (Erez, et. al, 2010, Brewer, 2009, Nelson & Spalding, 2009).

Erez et al's research contends that community views about family violence affect women's response to abuse, prolong marriages and prevent women from seeking outside help (Erez et. al, 2010). As a result, women may fear being ostracised from their community if they speak out about family violence with a combination of "shame, gossip and guilt" being employed to keep women in violent relationships (Erez, et al., 2010, p.48). Cultural beliefs that regard family violence as a 'private' or 'family' matter discourage women from seeking external assistance (Erez, et. al, 2010, Brewer, 2009, Nelson & Spalding, 2009, Raj & Silverman, 2002). Raj & Silverman note that at times this may result in CALD women seeking help through informal avenues within the community, for example, from

friends or religious leaders, where they often encounter attitudes that condone family violence, discourage separation or promote fear of police or the legal system (Raj & Silverman, 2002).

It is also a phenomenon observed in the literature that where there is fear within a certain group that their cultural identity is under threat the response is often to affirm traditional values and beliefs (Pittaway, E., 2004). Reporting of family violence in this context can be viewed as betraying or undermining the group's reputation and CALD women may experience increased pressure not to discredit their community by highlighting social problems (Pittaway, E., 2004).

- **Limited knowledge of services, legal rights and options:**

It is widely reported in the literature that CALD women who are experiencing family violence often lack knowledge of laws that may protect them and services that may assist them. (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011, Erez et. al, 2010, Dimopoulos, M., 2010, InTouch Inc., 2010, Raj & Silverman, 2002). Legal remedies[42] can represent a pathway out of family violence but, as Curran & Noone point out, the ability to assert legal rights is predicated on "knowledge, capacity, capability and understanding…". (Curran & Noone, 2007, p.63-64 in Curran & Buck, 2009, p.1) A recent report by InTouch Inc. examining the barriers to the justice system faced by CALD women experiencing family violence recognised that lack of information about legal rights and the legal system led to CALD women delaying seeking help or, when they did access the justice system, receiving less favourable outcomes. (InTouch Inc, 2010, p.16).

CALD women often immigrate from countries where there are no equivalent services or laws (Erez, et. al, 2010, Dimopoulos, M., 2010, Raj & Silverman, 2002) and acquiring relevant information is made more difficult where there is a language barrier(Aly & Gaba, 2007, Dimopoulos, M., InTouch Inc., 2010). A 2008 study with African refugee communities, by Springvale Monash Legal Service identified a lack of proficiency in English as one of a number of barriers to new migrants accessing information through the 'usual channels'.[43] As well as lack of proficiency in English, lack of literacy in their own language is a further compounding factor for CALD women identified by the literature (Dimopoulos, 2010).

Women who lack information about support services and Australian laws are more vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation by their abuser (Erez, et al, 2010, Dimopoulos, 2010, InTouch Inc, 2010). Being deported (Erez, et al, 2010, InTouch Inc, 2010, Raj & Silverman, 2002) and losing custody of children (Erez et al. 2010, p.46-47) were some of the fears held by CALD women reported in the literature which could lead to a reluctance to report family violence.

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[42] Such as criminal charges, Intervention Orders under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic) and the family violence exception under the *Migration Regulations 1994*.

[43] For example, lack of proficiency in spoken English made it difficult to access information by phone and lack of proficiency in written English meant that information was not available through written materials. Further barriers identified by the research were a lack of resources in African languages, over-reliance on others in the community for information, reliance on children for information, unrealistic expectations of service providers and reluctance to seek help in relation to family issues. Springvale Monash Legal Service, 2008, *Comparative analysis of South Sudanese customary law and Victorian Law,* Springvale Monash Legal Service, Victoria in Dimopoulos, 2010, p.6.

Refugees & Women Without Permanent Residency

As has been discussed previously, 'CALD' is an extremely broad categorisation that covers many different groups and individuals with a multitude of different characteristics and experiences. Within this group, the literature identifies certain sub-groups of 'CALD' women who have a heightened vulnerability in relation to family violence. Refugee and newly arrived CALD women without permanent residency are two such groups. (Brewer, R., 2009, Pittaway,E., 2004, Pease & Rees 2006, Pease & Rees 2008, Rees, S., 2004).

Refugees

Refugees (both women and men) bring to their country of settlement the effects of traumatic pre-arrival experiences. The refugee experience is typically characterised by exposure to high levels of violence,[44] persecution and human rights violations, loss of family members as well as disruption and upheaval (Pittaway, E., 2004, Rees, S., 2004, Pease & Rees, 2006, Pease & Rees, 2008). Pittaway describes the combination of these pre-settlement experiences, both in the country of origin, refugee camps and during flight as well as post-resettlement as "cumulative risk factors" which heighten refugee women's vulnerability to family violence (Pittaway, E., 2004, p.8). Rees agrees that whilst refugee women share many of the same risk factors for family violence as CALD women more broadly, these factors are compounded for refugees "...who are more isolated, have reduced opportunities to learn English and find employment, and for those who experience ongoing mental and physical effects of torture, rape and trauma" (Rees, S., 2004 in Pease & Rees, 2008 p.39).

There is no definitive evidence that the prevalence of family violence is higher in refugee communities (Kaplan, I. & Webster, K. (2003), 'Refugee Women and Settlement: Gender and Mental Health', p.110 in P. Allotey (ed.) *The Health of Refugees,* Victoria in Pittaway, E., 2004, p.8) although existing research is limited and a case is made in the literature for further study of this issue (Rees, S., 2004).

Women Without Permanent Residency

Newly arrived women without permanent residency, who are the spouses or fiancés of Australian citizens or Permanent Residents, are also particularly vulnerable to family violence (Erez et. al, 2010, Ghafournia, N., 2011). Australian migration law leaves such women highly dependent upon their spouse/fiancé, both for their legal status, because the right to apply for Permanent Residence is dependent upon the permanence of the relationship with the Australian citizen or Permanent Resident.[45]

Erez highlights the fact that migration laws that create 'marriage-status' dependencies for visas and residency make migrant women more vulnerable to the family violence power dynamic (Erez et al, 2010, p. 46). Women's dependency leads to further entrenchment of gendered inequality, creates

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[44] For women this often includes experiencing rape and sexual abuse, Pittaway, E., 2004, 'The Ultimate Betrayal: An Examination of the Experience of Domestic and Family Violence in Refugee Communities', Centre for Refugee Research, University of New South Wales, Occasional Paper 5, p.17.

[45] For example, a woman on a temporary spousal/partner visa is currently entitled to work and access Medicare but is not entitled to access the full range of Centrelink benefits. A woman on a temporary prospective marriage/fiancé visa is permitted to work but is not entitled to access Medicare or Centrelink benefits. The temporary spousal visa lasts for an initial period of 2 years after which time the relationship is reassessed and a permanent visa granted if the relationship is considered to be 'genuine and continuing'. For holders of fiancé visas, the marriage must take place within 9 months and then a temporary spousal visa can be applied for. *Migration Act 1958* (Cth) and *Migration Regulations 1994* (Cth), Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011.

new ways for men to control and abuse their partners and traps women in family violence situations.[46] (Erez et al., 2010, p.36)

CALD women's financial dependency also influences their ability to access services and the resources available to them when escaping from a family violence situation. For example it has been noted by the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service that an increasing number of women entering women's refuges do not have Permanent Residency Status.[47]It is also noted that these women stay in interim/refuge accommodation longer due to a combination of lack of permanent accommodation options, financial and immigration issues and require more intensive support before they can be referred to external services.[48]

Only a few of the women who were consulted for the scoping exercise came to Australia as refugees however a large number of the women who were consulted had originally migrated to Australia on spousal or fiancé visas. The responses from these women concur with the findings of the literature review that uncertain visa status prevents women from disclosing family violence, is often used as a tool of power and control by abusers and increases women's economic dependency on their partners. All but two workers from service providers consulted for the scoping exercise also identified a woman's immigration status as a barrier to accessing assistance, making it harder for her to leave a family violence situation and reducing her options upon leaving and all agreed that women on partner visas are particularly vulnerable.

In 1994 a 'family violence exception' was introduced into the *Migration Regulations 1994* (Cth) with the intention of discouraging visa applicants from remaining in violent relationships in order to secure permanent residency in Australia. (Ghafournia, N., 2011, Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011) The provisions allow a grant of a permanent visa to be considered if the relationship between the visa holder and the applicant has broken down, the visa holder has withdrawn support for the application and (depending on the visa class applied for) the visa applicant or their child or family member has suffered family violence at the hands of their ex-partner[49]

In order to meet the criteria for the family violence exception it is necessary to substantiate the claim that family violence is occurring, either through judicially[50] or non-judicially[51] determined evidence.

The family violence exception is not available to prospective marriage (fiancé) applicants whose relationship breaks down due to family violence prior to the marriage taking place.

A recent report by the Australian Law Reform Commission (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011) cited DIAC statistics that indicate that despite an increasing number of claims made through the family violence exception since 2005, such claims still only account for a fraction of partner visa cases.[52] In its report the ALRC makes a number of recommendations for reforms to increase the accessibility of the family violence exception to genuine victims of family violence whilst still

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[46] The InTouch Inc. Report also highlights the effect of visa dependency issues for CALD women in Australia at p.17

[47] This is a trend that has continued over a number of years, the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service reports that in the 2010/2011 financial year, 36% of women who entered refuges did not have Permanent Residency Status. Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Annual Report 2010-2011, p.10 <http://www.wdvcs.org.au/files/H1124123149.pdf >

[48] Ibid, p.10

[49] Migration Regulations 1994 (Cth), schedule 2.

[50] For example, an injunction under the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth), or intervention order made under State legislation or a finding of guilt against the perpetrator under the criminal jurisdiction.

[51] *Migration Regulations 1994* (Cth), reg. 1.23 (2)-(14), including a joint undertaking by the victim and perpetrator, a police record of assault plus a statutory declaration from the victim and a 'competent person' or three statutory declarations, one from the victim and two from differently qualified competent people.

[52] 1.5% , Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011, p.492.

maintaining the integrity of the visa system (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011, p.492) among them that the family violence exception be extended to cover prospective/fiancé visa holders, that targeted education and training be provided to 'competent people'[53] and that there be better information dissemination to prospective visa applicants regarding their legal rights and family violence support services prior to and on arrival in Australia (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011, p.490).

Addressing Family Violence in CALD Communities: Potential Models

The VicHealth family violence framework and background paper (VicHealth, 2006) defines three levels at which strategies for the prevention of violence against women can be implemented: intervention strategies[54], early intervention strategies[55] and prevention strategies.[56]

Evidence from consultations conducted with CALD women and service providers confirms the findings in the literature review that there are additional complexities that present barriers to CALD women disclosing family violence, finding assistance and early intervention, accessing support services and leaving a family violence situation.

Given that the research also demonstrates that CALD women are less likely to seek both informal and formal assistance with family violence (Raj & Silverman, 2002, p.381) it was the aim of the scoping exercise to determine how an understanding of the needs of CALD communities can assist service providers to facilitate greater access to services.

The literature suggests that for services to be both effective and empowering they must recognise the additional complexities that hinder CALD women's ability to access services and adopt strategies to address these complexities (Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007, InTouch Inc., 2010, Runner et. al, 2009, Raj & Silverman, 2002) and meet a 'multiplicity of needs' (Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007, p.33).

Strategies for overcoming language barriers, addressing visa and migration issues, challenging social isolation and providing information are key to a successful model of service delivery.

Integrated Service Delivery

The research suggests that those models of service delivery that are integrated, comprehensive and collaborative are likely to be particularly successful in addressing the interrelated factors that affect CALD women experiencing family violence and facilitating access to assistance (InTouch Inc, 2010,

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[53] 'Competent people' are those professionals, including registered nurses and family violence specialist agencies, which the Migration Act deems able to give statutory declarations in support of a claim for family violence on the basis of non-judicially determined evidence and includes medical practitioners, registered psychologists, registered nurses, social workers, family consultants, a manager or co-ordinator (or person in a position that involves decision-making power) of a women's refuge, a manager or co-ordinator (or person in a position that involves decision-making power) of a crisis or counselling service that specialises in family violence.

[54] implemented *after* violence has occurred and aimed at providing support and treatment to victims of violence and to perpetrators who use violence in order to deal with the violence, prevent its consequences and stop it from recurring or escalating. VicHealth, 2006, p.8-9

[55] targeted at individuals or groups who display early signs of either perpetrating or being subject to violence. Aimed at changing behaviours or increasing skills at an individual or group level or in environments where there are strong indications that violence may occur. VicHealth, 2006, p.8-9

[56] aimed at preventing violence before it occurs and delivered to the population as a whole or targeted at particular groups at higher risk of experiencing or using violence. Strategies can aim to change the behaviour and build the knowledge and/or skills of individuals but also target the structural, cultural and societal contexts in which violence occurs as well as addressing underlying causes of violence. VicHealth, 2006, p.8-9

Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007, Klevens, J., 2007, Mulroney, J., 2003, Raj & Silverman, 2002). According to Mulroney 'integrated service provision' means:

'coordinated, appropriate, consistent responses aimed at enhancing victim safety, reducing secondary victimisation and holding abusers accountable for their violence' (Mulroney, 2003, p.2).

There has been a recent trend towards models for family violence service provision that are integrated and co-ordinated (Mulroney, 2003).

In the United Kingdom integrated approaches were applied to dealing with high-risk victims of family violence and these MARACs (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences) provide an example of an integrated, multi-agency model aimed at addressing the needs of high-risk family violence victims.

A 2011 review by the United Kingdom Home Office into the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of MARACs concluded that the MARACs have the potential to greatly improve victim safety and reduce re-victimisation. As a model they are therefore considered to be extremely 'cost effective.' (Steel et. al., p.5) For example, the results of a six month evaluation of the MARACs conducted in 2004 in Cardiff showed that 6 in 10 victims reported a complete cessation of abuse within 6 months of the MARAC and 4 in 10 victims were still free of abuse within 12 months (Steel, et. al, 2011, p.5).

Enhanced information sharing between agencies was viewed as the key component to the effectiveness of MARACs along with appropriate agency representation and involving IDVAs (Independent Domestic Violence Advisers) to engage the victim in the process. Having a mix of agencies including statutory agencies, specialist domestic violence services and voluntary and community organisations was also considered crucial as was the creation of an atmosphere in which there was active participation rather than just attendance (Steel, et. al, 2011). In order for information sharing, particularly highly sensitive or confidential information, to occur it was essential that there was a high level of trust and good working relationships between agencies. (Robinson, Dr. A, 2004, p.15-17)

Additional factors identified as being central to facilitating effective practice were strong links between agencies and a strong commitment from agencies within the partnership to tackle family violence, strong leadership (through the MARAC chair) and good co-ordination (through the MARAC co-ordinator).

The Hume Strengthening Risk Management Demonstration Project is a local example of a coordinated multi agency approach to strengthening family violence risk management. The pilot project is currently being run at two sites, Hume and Geelong, and will continue until 30 June 2013 with the intention of trialling integrated governance arrangements, new roles and responsibilities and new ways of working collaboratively to ensure an integrated response to the needs of women and children. An evaluation will be conducted at the conclusion of the Project with a view to transferability of this approach to other areas of Melbourne.

The literature reinforces the on-the-ground experience and suggests that in relation to CALD communities, collaboration between CALD specific and mainstream services can increase the capacity of mainstream services to respond to family violence in CALD communities. (InTouch Inc., 2010, Klevens, J., 2007, Pham, A., 2011) Concerns were raised by Australian CALD specific services consulted by Pham that the mainstreaming of services, whilst important in principle, can place extra pressure on existing CALD specific services where mainstream services lack the capacity or expertise to address the complex needs of CALD communities. (Pham, A., 2011, p.7). Interviews with service providers conducted for the scoping exercise revealed mixed responses regarding whether existing service providers already have the capacity to address the needs of CALD communities.

Research conducted in Australia (In Touch Inc, 2010) and the US suggests that service providers may experience difficulties establishing trust within CALD communities (In Touch Inc, 2010, Runner et. al, 2009). The In Touch Report found that CALD women felt more comfortable accessing settlement services and had an expectation that these services would be able to address all of their needs (In Touch Inc, 2010, p.23). The report also found that there is a high level of trust in CALD specific services amongst CALD communities but these services lack expertise in family violence (In Touch Inc, 2010, p. 28) In consultations with CALD women and service providers for the scoping exercise there was a perception amongst some sectors of the community that family violence specific services promote or encourage divorce and the breakup of families. Partnerships and collaboration between CALD specific and family violence specialist agencies may increase the capacity of both of all agencies to address the needs of CALD communities. (In Touch Inc, 2010, Klevens, J., 2007, Runner et. al, 2009).

Challenging Social Isolation – Mentoring and Group work

The literature and the consultations conducted for the scoping exercise highlighted the fact that CALD women commonly experience social isolation and this can be exacerbated by other factors including being newly arrived, lacking social connections and lacking English language proficiency.

The literature identifies a number of strategies that may assist women to break social isolation and establish social connections including group work and mentoring.

There is recognition in the literature that group work can be a successful way of working with women who have experienced trauma and as an intervention is particularly suited to assisting victims of family violence. (Flannery et. al, 2000) Drawing on their experience conducting twelve support groups for women experiencing family violence, including three in languages other than English, Flannery, Irwin and Lopes identify four main benefits to working in groups with women who have experienced family violence:

- **Counteracting secrecy:** groups can provide a safe environment for women to talk about and understand their experiences as well as challenging abuse. Sharing experiences with other women also provides validation for their experience.
- **Challenging isolation:** it is a common feature of family violence that the abuser seeks to isolate the victim from others which can contribute to loss of confidence and self esteem. Groups provide women with an opportunity to re-establish contacts and relationships and provide women with a sense of belonging
- **Facilitating empowerment:** hearing from other women who have experienced family violence and survived can be empowering. Sharing experiences can assist women to identify survival strategies and recognise their own strengths;
- **Linking private and public worlds:** groups can be an effective way to identify and challenge dominant beliefs that have been influential in women's lives. For example, the belief that women are responsible for their own victimisation. (Flannery et. al, 2000, p.15-16)

Laing noted in 2001 that much group work practice with victims of family violence takes place in local and community settings and is therefore undocumented (Laing L.,2001). In order to address this gap, the Northern Integrated Family Violence Partnership brought together the intuitive wisdom of those who have been running facilitated family violence support groups for women in the Northern region for the past twenty years with the aim of providing a sound knowledge base for family violence group work (Women's Health in the North, 2006, *Collected Wisdom: Facilitated Family Violence Support Groups with Women in the Northern SubRegion*).

The manual includes a section specifically looking at group work and CALD women. The major benefits to delivering culturally sensitive group work for CALD women who have experienced family violence cited are that CALD women feel more comfortable in a group setting as opposed to individual counselling with a stranger and engage more quickly with a facilitator who speaks their language and knows their culture. Group work is also seen as an effective way to '…facilitate the development of social networks for women isolated from their own or the wider community'(Women's Health in the North, 2006, p.19).

Responses from women interviewed for the project who were engaged with the Arabic speaking women's group suggest that group work provides an antidote to social isolation, allows women to connect and share their experiences with other women in a safe environment and may also be a useful forum for the provision of information to women experiencing or at risk of experiencing family violence.

In setting up and delivering groups for CALD women, Women's Health in the North recommends avoiding the use of interpreters where possible and engaging bilingual/bicultural facilitators, particularly people who already have links with the community. They also recommend forming partnerships between agencies to share relevant skills and expertise, such as language expertise (Women's Health in the North, 2006, p.18).

Mentor models are identified in the literature as a potential model for addressing CALD women's social isolation and facilitating engagement with services. The MOSAIC Project (Mother's Advocates in the Community) was designed to pilot and evaluate whether mentors (who were themselves mothers) could improve the lives of pregnant women and their children who were experiencing family violence (Kerr, C., 2009, p.4). The MOSAIC study included women from CALD backgrounds, with about one third of women recruited for the study born overseas. (Taft et al, 2011, p.4) The women were referred into the program by their GP or Maternal Child Health Nurse. (Kerr, C., 2009, p.4)

The MOSAIC project drew on research suggesting that peer support, mentoring and advocacy can assist women experiencing family violence and that pregnancy is a known risk factor for family violence (Kerr, C., 2009, p.5). In the evaluation there was evidence of a true difference in reduced partner violence in women who had been mentored (when compared to the control) but there was only weak evidence of other benefits such as reductions in depression and improvements in physical and mental well-being. (Taft et al, 2011, p.7) There were also some other reported benefits to mentored women which included twice the proportion of mentored women (32%) taking up new studies or training or returning to further training or education (Taft et al, 2011, p.5).

Amongst the group of mentors recruited for the study were women from a diverse range of backgrounds who were fluent in a number of languages. It was suggested that if setting up a mentoring program in a diverse community in future it would be considered highly desirable to recruit bilingual mentors. However it was recommended that caution should be exercised in simply matching women on the basis of cultural background because some women do not wish to receive mentoring from a woman of the same cultural background.[57]

[57] It was noted that women may fear their partner or ex-partner, family and friends finding out and in some situations a woman's safety might be compromised. It was recommended that women be consulted before being matched with a mentor from the same cultural background. Kerr, C., (2009), *MOSAIC: Mothers' Advocates in the Community – Project Manual: Setting Up a Mentor Project for Mothers Experiencing Intimate Partner/Family Violence, Mother & Child Health Research*, La Trobe University, Melbourne, p.10.

Provision of Information about Legal Rights and Support Services

Responses from consultations with women and service providers correspond with findings from the literature that CALD women often lack knowledge about their legal rights, the availability of support services and this presents a barrier to gaining access to services and asserting legal rights.

The literature emphasises the importance of ensuring that information regarding family violence, the Australian legal system and support services is provided to CALD communities both prior to migration and after arrival in Australia, with particular emphasis placed on the provision of information and education regarding legal rights. (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011, Dimopoulos, 2010, Fisher, 2009, InTouch Inc., 2010, Raj & Silverman, 2002). The Australian Law Reform Commission Report notes that the Department of Immigration provides settlement programs to newly arrived migrants and refugees that includes providing such information but recommends that greater collaboration between migration service providers, Community Legal Centres and industry bodies is needed to ensure that information regarding migration law and the family violence exception reaches visa applicants and visa holders (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011).

As part of its strategy for ensuring greater access to the family violence exception the ALRC Report also recommends that the Australian Government, Community Legal Centres and industry bodies collaborate to provide training and education to 'competent persons'. (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011, p.508) Evidence from competent persons is crucial in establishing the existence of family violence where there is no judicial evidence (e.g. Intervention Order). Competent persons have specialist expertise and knowledge as family violence service providers but concern was expressed that they may not have sufficient knowledge of migration law (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011, p.508-509)

Community legal education is a common aspect of family violence prevention efforts. (Dimopoulos, 2010) The literature establishes that provision of information about rights is empowering (In Touch Inc, 2010, Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007) and this is reflected in the responses of CALD women consulted for the scoping exercise. Dimopoulos points out that whilst there have been numerous education and empowerment programs aimed at new and emerging communities there has been very little evaluation of the effectiveness of such programs in the prevention of violence (Dimopoulos, 2010). Drawing on evidence provided by three case studies[58], Dimopoulos concludes that factors that can improve the level of knowledge of the law as it relates to family violence in CALD communities include adopting a whole of community approach involving both men and women, involving '…trusted community mediums to convey key messages', building the capacity of community leaders to understand the impact of family violence and to effect change in their communities (Armstrong, 2010, p.14), providing information face to face as well as through written materials, building relationships and trust with individual communities (Dimopoulos, 2010, p.17, Armstrong, 2010). In Touch suggests information provision through education in schools, English language classes, Maternal Child Health Nurses, Centrelink and settlement services (In Touch Inc, 2010, p.26) The literature underlines the importance of providing information early in the settlement process (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011, In Touch Inc, 2010, Raj & Silverman, 2002) '…information needs to reach women sooner and be reinforced repeatedly' (In Touch Inc, 2010, p.26). Legal empowerment strategies for CALD communities should also include pathways to lawyers with expert knowledge of criminal, migration and family law (Raj & Silverman, 2002).

[58] Justice for Refugees Program, Victoria; Islam Opposes Violence Against Women, Islamic Women's Welfare Council; Legal Information Project for Sudanese Youth, Centre for African Australian Women.

Community legal education provision to new and emerging communities should be informed by an understanding of the broader context and experiences of these communities including pre and post-arrival experiences and laws and legal processes in countries of origin (Armstrong, 2010,Dimopoulos, 2010).

The literature also highlights the importance of also engaging with and including newly arrived men in education strategies (Dimopoulos, 2010, InTouch Inc, 2010, VicHealth, 2006). The literature acknowledges that refugee men are affected by pre-arrival experiences of war, torture and trauma (Pease & Rees, 2006) and experience difficulties in adjusting to western societies where gender roles are less rigid and defined (Pease & Rees, 2006).

The literature underlines the importance of targeting information and education at CALD men as well as women. (Fisher, 2009) Fisher's report advocates strongly for the involvement of CALD men to ensure the success of family violence prevention strategies (Fisher, p. xxi). It is demonstrated in studies reported in the literature that the experience of resettlement, particularly changes in women's social and economic status can increase tension and the risk of violence by men towards women (Erez et. al, 2009, Pease & Rees, Pittaway, 2004, 2006, Rees, Raj & Silverman, 2002). Pease & Rees found that whilst women often felt empowered by changes to their social and economic status, men reported feeling disempowered and attributed conflict within the relationship to these changes (Pease & Rees, 2006, p.4) Drawing on studies from Asian and Middle Eastern communities in the US, Raj & Silverman report that changes in women's behaviour often results in increased efforts by men to maintain or regain control, including through violence (Raj & Silverman, 2002, p.370). Pittaway's research with refugee communities concludes that changes to men's social status in combination with other factors such as unemployment and lack of financial security can increase the risk of violence. (Pittaway, 2004, p.30) Some pre-arrival experiences, particularly torture and trauma, are known to have ongoing psychological effects and make resettlement and adaptation more difficult (Easteal, 1996 in Pittaway, 2004, p.28).

Working with Perpetrators - Men's Behaviour Change Programs

Programs targeted at male perpetrators of family violence have been a common aspect of intervention strategies since the first perpetrator programs emerged in the mid 1970s (Salter, 2012, Day et. al, 2009, Day et. al, 2010, Laing, Dr. L, 2002, Feder et al., 2008). Programs that attempt to address perpetrator's behaviour by holding them accountable and changing their behaviour are included as part of the Federal Governments' 10 year Action Plan for Reducing Violence Against Women and Children (The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, 2009). The VicHealth framework identifies men and boys as a key group to target prevention strategies both as perpetrators but also as part of a broader prevention strategy (VicHealth, 2006, p.50). Under Victorian law, courts may refer perpetrators to men's behaviour change programs as a condition of sentencing or bail under the criminal law or in relation to an Intervention Order proceeding (The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, 2009, p.135). Currently, court mandated counselling orders can only be made in the family violence division courts at Ballarat and Heidelberg for people in postcodes included within the court's catchment area. A number of postcodes in the Heidelberg catchment area fall within the City of Whittlesea.

Perpetrator programs have proved to be a controversial aspect of intervention strategies with the effectiveness and appropriateness of engaging perpetrators the subject of ongoing debate (Day et. al, 2009, Feder at al, 2008, Gondolf, E. 1999, Laing, Dr. L, 2002).

Evaluations of men's behaviour change programs conducted to date have produced mixed results as to their effectiveness[59]. There have also been fundamental disagreements amongst those seeking to evaluate such programs as to how 'effectiveness' should be measured. For example, should the sole indicator of success be a reduction in rates of family violence reoffending as measured by quantitative data or should other more qualitative measures be relied on, including improvements in quality of life or feelings of increased safety on the part of victims? (Salter, M., 2012, Howard & Wright, 2008, Day et. al, 2009, Gondolf, E., 2009) Commentators argue that any program offered to family violence offenders should be able to demonstrate a reduction either in the frequency or intensity of violent behaviour and/or an improvement in women's and children's safety (Day et. al, 2009, p.204). On this measure researchers contend that many men's behaviour change programs are not effective (Feder et al, 2008, Gondolf, E., 1999). However, others point out that the partner contact component of men's behaviour change programs can have benefits for victims, including gaining access to support and services, increasing feelings of safety, giving women space to consider the future of the relationship and providing strength and validation (Howard & Wright, 2008, p.31).

Despite these controversies, Men's Behaviour Change programs continue to form a part of violence intervention strategies in Victoria with approximately 37 Men's Behaviour Change groups currently running in metropolitan Melbourne.[60]

Very little research regarding the success of men's behaviour change programs in engaging men from CALD communities has been conducted either in Australia or internationally (Laing, Dr. L, 2002, InTouch Inc, 2010, McIvor & Markwick, 2009). In two separate studies from the United States, race was found to be a strong predictor of whether or not men dropped out of the program, with men who were classified as belonging to an 'ethnic minority' less likely to complete the program when compared to Caucasian men[61]. In one study 'race was the strongest predictor of treatment dropout and number of treatment sessions completed by individual members…'(Taft et al, 2001, p.395-396 in Laing, Dr. L, p.20) Of the men's behaviour change programs currently running in metropolitan Melbourne none are language or culturally specific.

Whether the needs of CALD male perpetrators are being accommodated within existing groups is unknown but anecdotal evidence from consultations conducted with service providers as part of the scoping exercise suggested that CALD perpetrators often fail to have their needs met by English speaking men's behaviour change groups. Service providers gave examples of strategies they had employed to accommodate CALD perpetrators within existing groups, including using interpreters or providing one on one sessions, but there were real limitations highlighted in both of these strategies. There was also evidence that because of the difficulties in accommodating CALD perpetrators, service providers may simply screen these men out of their intake process.

A pilot program for establishing and delivering perpetrator programs to Vietnamese speaking men in Melbourne's North Western Region concluded in 2011 after delivering three groups.[62]

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[59] A systematic review of ten experimental and quasi-experimental studies from the US concluded that court mandated treatment does not reduce the likelihood of reassault, Feder et al, 2009. An evaluation of men's behaviour change programs that are part of the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response gave the researches some "cautious optimism" about the ability of group interventions to change perpetrator's behaviour. Reported in Day, et al, 2010.

[60] Figure provided by Victorian umbrella group 'No To Violence' <www.ntv.org.au>

[61] Babcock, J. & Steiner, R. (1999) 'The Relationship between Treatment, Incarceration and Recidivism of Battering: A Program Evaluation of Seattle's Co-ordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence, *Journal of Family Psychology*, v.13, no.1, p.36-59; Taft, C, Murphy, C, Elliott, J, & Keaser, M (2001) 'Race and Demographic Factors in Treatment Attendance for Domestically Abusive Men', *Journal of Family Violence,* v.16, no.4, 385-400 both quoted in Laing, Dr L, 2002.

[62] InTouch Inc, 'Vietnamese Men's family Violence Program – Evaluation Report'

The evaluation report concluded that there is a strong need for recognition that CALD specific groups are necessary to enable CALD men to embrace behavioural change and reduce violent behaviour.

Primary Prevention Models

There has been an increased focus on the development of primary prevention models aimed at preventing violence before it occurs alongside intervention and early intervention strategies. (Powell, Dr. A, 2011, VicHealth, 2006) At both State and Federal level a 'high-level framework' for the prevention of violence against women has been developed through a number of policy documents[63] that identify 'effective and promising strategies, priority areas, population groups and sites.' (Powell, Dr. A, 2011, p.4)

Primary prevention models aim to stop violence before it occurs by promoting non-violent social norms and equal and respectful relationships between men and women (VicHealth, 2006). Primary prevention strategies may be targeted at changing individual and peer group norms and behaviours or more broadly at societal and institutional level (Powell, Dr. A, 2011).

Drawing on the existing literature, the VicHealth framework outlines a number of reasons why primary prevention should be targeted at CALD communities specifically including:

- consensus in the literature that primary prevention should be tailored to the needs of individual communities;
- the fact that some migrants and refugees have immigrated from countries where there is greater gender inequality, more rigid gender roles and greater cultural acceptance of violence against women;
- evidence from the literature that communities experiencing transition from traditional societies to societies where gender relations are more equal experience a heightened, though temporary, risk of increased violence against women;
- findings from a Community Attitudes Survey that there is a higher level of support for attitudes associated with acceptance and perpetration of violence against women in CALD communities (VicHealth, 2006, p.54)

One area of primary prevention that has been singled out for further development is the potential role of 'bystanders' in the prevention of violence against women. (Powell, Dr. A, 2011) Bystander theory and practice models in the area of violence against women are aimed at explaining and promoting 'pro-social' bystander behaviour. (Powell, Dr. A, 2011) Pro-social bystanders are those who take action to intervene either in an individual act of violence or by challenging social norms and attitudes that perpetuate violence in the community (Powell, Dr. A, 2011).

Primary Prevention Models Aimed at Community & Religious Leaders

The primary research conducted for the scoping exercise indicated that both victims and perpetrators make disclosures of family violence to religious leaders and seek their advice and assistance in family violence situations. Religious and community leaders also have authority and respect within their communities and therefore have the potential to influence attitudes towards family violence.

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[63] Preventing Violence Before it Occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria (Vichealth, 2007), A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women 2010-2010 (State Government of Victoria, 2009), Time for Action, the National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children (National Council to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children, 2009)

The literature and the primary research provide examples of CALD women encountering attitudes within their own communities that are unsupportive and which encourage actions that potentially put them at greater risk of violence such as returning to a violent relationship (Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007).

There is support in the literature for interventions aimed at building community and religious leaders' understanding of the nature of family violence with the aim of encouraging leaders to respond to individual disclosures of family violence with support and assistance (Runner et al, 2009, Justice Institute of British Columbia, 2007) and to change attitudes within their own communities by acknowledging and condemning violence (Runner et al, 2009).

Interventions that provide community and religious leaders with the skills and confidence to respond appropriately to disclosures of family violence are important because the research shows that lack of knowledge about how to intervene and the perception that intervention would be ineffective present obstacles to taking action (Powell, Dr.A, 2011 p.21). It is observed in the evaluation of the Northern Interfaith Relationships Project, and confirmed by the responses provided by the community and religious leaders interviewed for the scoping exercise, that there is a need to build the capacity of religious leaders to respond appropriately to disclosures, for example, by making referrals to external agencies (Holmes, S., 2012, p.52). Other recommendations for future capacity building in faith communities that come out of the project evaluation include the importance of identifying and targeting those individuals who are most likely to be able to act as agents for change and encouraging partnerships between community and other organisations and faith organisations (Holmes, S., 2012, p.55). The responses from the religious and community leaders interviewed for the scoping exercise indicated a high level of receptiveness to participating in education about family violence and engaging with local organisations.

The 'Religion and Family Harmony Project' from Western Sydney provides an example, drawn from the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse 'best practice' database, of a partnership project aimed at engaging and educating community and religious leaders about family violence and its impact on their communities.[64] A reported outcome of the project was a noticeable shift in attitudes towards family violence from 'denial, resistance and rationalisation of violence' towards a more pro-active stance towards family violence prevention (formal evaluation of the pilot training program is ongoing). A central aspect to its success was the development of strong networks with community and religious leaders.

Models Targeting Children and Young People

There is considerable support in the literature for targeting prevention and intervention strategies at children and young people as a distinct sub-group (Flood et. al, 2009, Flood & Fergus, 2008, Powell, Dr. A, 2011, VicHealth, 2006)

In their report for the White Ribbon Foundation, Flood and Fergus outline in detail a number of reasons why violence prevention efforts should be targeted at this cohort including that young people are already exposed to, and influenced by violence; that young people may be subject to or perpetrate violence within their own intimate partner/dating relationships, the evidence that young people hold attitudes and norms supportive of violence and evidence that violence prevention programs for young people are effective (Flood & Fergus, 2008, p.4-5).

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[64] The database can be accessed from
< http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/goodpracticedatabase.html>

A comprehensive study into young people's experience of and attitudes towards family violence was conducted by the Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research between 1998 and 1999 in which qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from 5,000 young people aged between 12 and 20 in all States and Territories. (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research, 2001 in Indermaur, D., 2001) The study revealed that approximately one quarter of the young people had witnessed an act of physical violence directed at their mother or step-mother (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research, 2001 in Indermaur, D., 2001, p.2). Police data from the City of Whittlesea (2007/2008) indicates that in 45% of family violence incidents at least one child was present.[65]

The potential harm caused by childhood exposure to family violence is well documented in the literature with a range of potential negative impacts including:

- depression, anxiety, mood and temperament problems;
- behavioural problems such as increased aggression, antisocial behaviour and peer conflict;
- pervasive fear and trauma symptoms;
- difficulties at school;
- impaired cognitive functioning;
- increased likelihood of alcohol and substance abuse. (Indermaur, D., 2001, p.3, Laing, L., 2000)

The evidence regarding whether young people who are exposed to family violence are more likely to go on to perpetrate family violence is inconclusive and controversial, with some studies finding that being exposed to or being the victim of violence in childhood has a direct impact on later perpetration of intimate partner violence (Flood & Pease, 2006) whilst other studies have concluded that the majority of children who are exposed to family violence will not in fact go on to become perpetrators. (Humphreys, C., (2000), *Social Work, Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Challenging Practice*, The Policy Press, Bristol in Laing, L., 2000, p.22). Flood & Fergus conclude that there is conclusive evidence of an association between exposure to family violence in childhood and perpetrating family violence in adulthood but there is no conclusive evidence of a causal relationship between the two (Flood & Fergus, 2008).

It was also estimated in the national study that one in ten young people live in households where a male carer has been physically violent towards them or their siblings (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research, 2001 in Indermaur, D., 2001, p.4) (excluding cases of physical discipline). In City of Whittlesea, police data (2007/2008) indicates that in 7% of family violence incidents the affected family member was aged under 18 at the time a family violence incident report was made and in 22% of incidents the affected family member was aged under 25.[66]

The national study revealed that one in three young people has been subjected to physical violence in their intimate relationships (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research, 2001 in Indermaur, D., 2001, p.4) and 14% of girls (and 3% of boys) had been sexually assaulted within an intimate relationship. Young people who lived in homes where there was adult family violence were more likely to be both victims and perpetrators of violence within their own relationships (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research, 2001 in Indermaur, D., 2001, p.4)

Data from Australia shows that young women (aged 18-24) are at an increased risk of experiencing violence in intimate partner relationships.[67]

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[65] Victoria Police family violence statistics can be accessed at < http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=782>
[66] Victoria Police family violence statistics can be accessed at < http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=782>
[67] ABS + Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health

School based programs aimed at preventing violence and promoting respectful relationships are noted as having the strongest evidence base for effectiveness of all primary prevention strategies (VicHealth, 2006 p.18, Flood & Fergus, 2008). VicHealth's evaluation of effective and promising bystander models for primary prevention includes a number of models that have been implemented in schools and universities both in Australia and internationally[68] that employ both peer mentoring and education and social marketing components (Powell, Dr.A, 2011). Reflecting on what makes these programs effective, the literature identifies an emerging consensus on 'good practice' in this area which can be distilled into five principles for delivering the most effective programs which are:

- a whole-school approach;
- a program framework and logic that incorporates a theoretical framework for understanding violence and a theory of change;
- effective curriculum delivery;
- relevant, inclusive and culturally sensitive practice; and
- evaluation (Flood, et al, 2009, p.23)

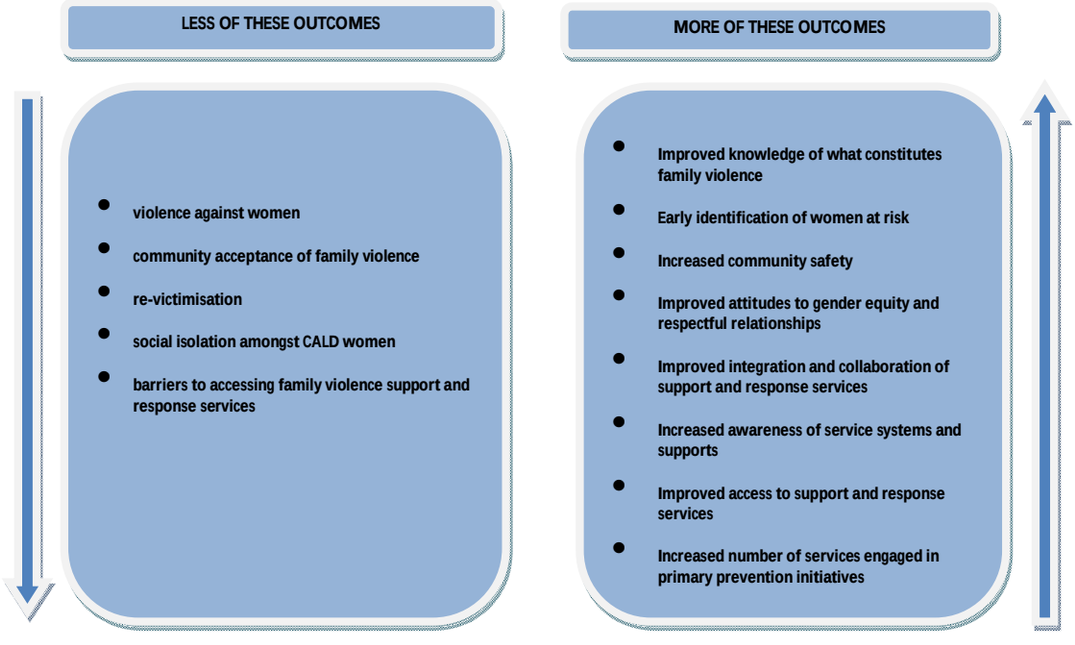
[68] Sexual Assault Prevention Program for Secondary Schools (SAPPS) (Australia), Mentors in Violence Prevention (US), Know Your Power: Step in, Speak Up (US)

FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICE MODEL

Based on the findings from consultations conducted with female survivors of family violence, community and religious leaders, service providers and young people as well as evidence gathered from the literature review, this report recommends the adoption of a co-ordinated, integrated family violence service model.

The proposed model comprises six elements, each element addressing a specific need identified through the research. Whilst each element can be delivered independently, given the complex and multifaceted nature of family violence in CALD communities, it is recommended that all elements be implemented as part of an integrated approach to build a culturally responsive, effective service system that helps to reduce family violence and the impact of family violence in CALD communities in the City of Whittlesea. However, should limited resources not allow for the model to be implemented in its entirety it is still considered that there is value in one or more of the elements being delivered as a particular initiative to address an identified need.

Figure 1: Expected Outcomes – Family Violence Service Model



1. Co-ordination/Integration Mechanism

The research suggests that those models of service delivery that are integrated, comprehensive and collaborative are likely to be particularly successful in addressing the interrelated factors that affect CALD women experiencing family violence and facilitating access to assistance.

Models such as the United Kingdom's Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference Model demonstrate that a multi-agency integrated approach promotes shared understanding of the risk factors and interventions for family violence and enables a comprehensive and client-centred response. The Hume Strengthening Risk Management model and the Northern Integrated Family Violence Service

provides a local (Northern Metropolitan) example of the use of integrated approaches to address family violence.

- A Steering Committee will be established with participants drawn from the City of Whittlesea, the WCF CALD Cluster and the broader membership of the WCF partnership with expertise, knowledge and linkages relevant to the key elements to be implemented;
- An action plan identifying key strategies, actions, timelines and responsibilities will be drawn-up and agreed upon that will guide the work of the Steering Committee;
- The Steering Committee will monitor the progress of the project and implementation and facilitate the sharing of skills and knowledge across agencies;
- The Steering Committee will oversee the evaluation process and develop strategies for project sustainability beyond the funded period.

2. Empowering CALD Women

The research highlighted the fact that CALD women commonly experience social isolation which can be exacerbated by other factors including being newly arrived, lacking social connections and lacking English language proficiency. Consultations conducted during the scoping exercised revealed that gaps in information regarding family violence, legal rights, entitlements and services represented a significant barrier to CALD women's ability to access assistance for family violence, increasing women's vulnerability. This gap was more pronounced though not limited to newly arrived women who had been in Australia for less than six years and was particularly evident among CALD women who did not have permanent residency.

The literature identifies a number of strategies that may assist women to break social isolation and establish social connections, for example, participation in groups. Consultations conducted with women during the scoping exercise revealed a strong correlation between the level of empowerment survivors of family violence felt and their level of connection to other women and supports. These connections were vital to enabling women to access information about their rights and services. For some women, being connected to a group increased their confidence to assert their rights and to seek and obtain support. Knowing that support existed was sufficient to empower disclosure of family violence and seek early intervention.

- The project will establish a clear mapping of existing women's support groups that are available to and accessed by Whittlesea residents and will aim to identify gaps in available support groups. The capacity of existing groups will be built with support and assistance to participate in programs and initiatives aimed at increasing women's empowerment in relation to family violence;
- Where gaps exist in access to support groups, financial and other support will be provided to establish new groups specific to isolated and marginalised women;
- Family violence, community legal education and women's leadership resources will be developed to assist existing and new groups to empower women;
- Whittlesea Community Legal Service and family violence agencies will contribute to the training and education of women's group facilitators, building their capacity to inform, educate and support women in relation to family violence;
- Regular information and community legal education sessions will be delivered by legal, health and family violence services and organisations through the existing and new groups.

3. Building the Capacity of Community and Religious Leaders

Consultations conducted with community and religious leaders during the scoping exercise revealed that these leaders are often the first point of disclosure for both CALD women experiencing family violence and CALD men perpetrating family violence. All community and religious leaders consulted had been approached at least once in relation to family violence and most reported being approached for guidance on a regular basis.

Community and religious leaders' response to disclosure of family violence and the information and assistance they give to CALD men and women has a critical role to play in determining outcomes for CALD women experiencing family violence. Consultations with community and religious leaders revealed differences in their understanding of family violence and the available services, experience and training leading to differing responses from these leaders. There was a noted emphasis by community and religious leaders on reconciliation of the relationship and discouragement of divorce and separation. All community and religious leaders who participated in the project expressed interest in participating in training and education activities specifically addressing disclosures of family violence.

- The project will seek to recruit community and religious leaders from established and emerging CALD communities and provide them with the support to develop a local leadership network;
- The network will provide leadership on matters related to family violence and targeted training and education will be delivered to the network to support their leadership. WCC's links with refugee and migrant communities will be key to engaging community groups to participate in this project;
- The project will access and harness the knowledge and expertise of Whittlesea Community Legal Service and specialist family violence agencies to deliver information and training sessions on Australian residents' rights and responsibilities particularly in relation to legal protections for victims of family violence under State law and the federal *Migration Act* and available support services;
- Family violence prevention tools, resources and social marketing messages will be developed in partnership with the network to ensure that community and religious leaders have the capacity to deliver information and support to their communities in ways that are sensitive and appropriate;
- Community leaders will be provided the opportunity to link with service providers who will provide secondary consultation outside of network meetings, advice and guidance on appropriate and effective responses following disclosures of family violence.
- Representation from a diverse range of faiths and communities will establish a foundation for inter-community relationship building that will contribute to community cohesion at a local level. Once established the network will develop a unified voice that does not commit, excuse or condone violence against women in their communities.

4. Preventing Family Violence: Programs Targeting Young People

There is considerable support in the literature for targeting prevention and intervention strategies at children and young people as a distinct population group. The literature suggests that young people are already exposed to, and influenced by violence, that young people may be subject to or perpetrate violence within their own intimate partner/dating relationships and that they hold attitudes and norms supportive of violence. In the City of Whittlesea police data indicates that in 45% of family violence incidents at least one child was present. The negative effect of childhood exposure to family violence is well documented in the literature. City of Whittlesea data also indicates that a significant proportion of migrants who settled in this area in the last 6 years were aged under 25 at the time of arrival with the proportion even higher for Humanitarian entrants.

Research indicates that prevention programs for young people are effective in countering violence supportive attitudes and norms, in building awareness of respectful and equitable relationships and developing an understating of family violence. Such programs also have an impact on future attitudes and behaviours and impact on the development of healthy intimate relationships. There is a strong evidence base for delivery of such programs in school settings and there are a number of good practice principles that can be drawn on to guide the implementation of a program in Whittlesea.

- The project will identify and engage with a school located within the Whittlesea LGA with a high level of cultural diversity to determine the feasibility of piloting a whole of school approach for the prevention of violence and the promotion of respectful relationships;
- A lead agency will be identified to oversee the development of a targeted training program that incorporates best practice principles;
- In partnership with the chosen school, the lead agency will have responsibility for the implementation and evaluation of the program. The evaluation component will inform the expansion of the program into other schools within the Whittlesea LGA;
- Partnerships and connections between the school, local community organisations and family violence agencies will be encouraged through the involvement of senior members of the school community in the project steering committee;
- The lead agency will establish a Steering Committee for the pilot program that will include staff, students and parents and ensure the involvement, support and ownership of the program by the whole school community and that the program and resultant changes are sustainable;

5. Reducing Recidivism: Increasing CALD Men's Access to Behaviour Change Programs

Programs targeted at male perpetrators of family violence have been a common aspect of intervention strategies since the first perpetrator programs emerged in the mid 1970s and continue to be an integral part of Victoria's response to family violence.

Evidence gathered from CALD women, service providers and the literature revealed that not all CALD women will choose to or be able to leave a relationship where family violence is occurring even after assistance has been sought from external services. CALD women were noted by service providers to be more likely to access external services with the intention of maintaining or reconciling the relationship whereas people from non-CALD backgrounds were more likely to access services where a decision to leave the relationship had already been made.

In this context, addressing the causes of men's violent offending and requiring perpetrators to take responsibility for their behaviour is a necessary part of ensuring women's and children's safety.

Evidence gathered from the scoping exercise indicates that CALD men may have less access to existing men's behaviour change programs and these programs may be less effective in assisting CALD men primarily due to language barriers. The research indicated that there are currently 35-40 men's behaviour change programs in existence in Victoria but none of these are language or cultural specific.

- The project will aim to address the current gap in the provision of men's behaviour change groups to CALD communities through the development and piloting of a language or cultural specific men's behaviour change group in the City of Whittlesea;
- The most appropriate language or cultural group (or groups) to pilot the implementation of the initial men's behaviour change group will be identified by drawing on demographic data from the City of Whittlesea;
- A lead agency with specific experience in delivering men's behaviour change groups will be selected to oversee the development and implementation of the group;
- The lead agency will be responsible for identifying and/or organising training for group facilitators and partner contact workers ;
- The lead agency will draw on the experience of previous groups run in Melbourne's West to identify referral pathways for entry to the group that are relevant for the City of Whittlesea;
- The lead agency will oversee the implementation of the men's behaviour change group and the evaluation that will form the basis for further groups to be delivered in the Whittlesea LGA.

6. Prevention of Family Violence: Early Intervention in the Settlement Process

The research identifies newly arrived migrants, particularly those migrants and refugees arriving with limited supports and high settlement needs as experiencing increased vulnerability in relation to family violence. Additionally, women arriving under spouse or fiancé visa categories are identified as facing a range of additional barriers to accessing support, information and services when compared to other members of CALD and non-CALD communities.

The settlement process itself presents new arrivals with a range of pressures and stressors that may impact negatively on the ability of individuals and families to maintain equal and respectful relationships.

Professional development and the provision of information regarding the pre and post migration experiences of new migrants, the impact of specific visa categories and the specific pressures of settlement will be provided to family violence workers to ensure currency of skills and knowledge and to increase the professional capacity of family violence specialist agencies.

- The project will draw on teachings from VicHealth's work on the primary prevention of violence against women which showcases a number of best practice examples (specifically adaptation of the 'Baby Makes 3' model to the settlement process) to deliver early intervention and targeted prevention support to men and women during the settlement process;
- An information and education package will be developed for newly arrived CALD couples aimed at addressing the stressors experienced during the settlement process that lead to a heightened risk of family violence;
- The Steering Committee in partnership with a lead agency will be responsible for the development of the information and education package and the recruitment of participants;
- The Steering Committee in partnership with a lead agency will be responsible for selecting, training and supporting a contact worker to deliver information, training and support to the participants;

- The contact worker drawing on the support of the lead agency and the Steering Committee will carry out an evaluation of the project;
- The project, through the mechanism of the Steering Committee, will create links between family violence specialist agencies and agencies that deliver settlement services to facilitate an exchange of knowledge and skills and encourage cross referrals and collaboration.

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APPENDIX 1

Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project

Interview Format

Cohort 1: Women who have experienced family violence

1. How long have you been living in Australia? What is your residency status?
2. What is your cultural background?
3. What is the main language you speak at home?
4. Who did you first speak to about the family violence you were experiencing?
5. Why did you choose that particular person/organisation to speak to first?
6. What prompted you to make the decision to first speak to someone about the family violence you were experiencing?
7. When you first spoke to that person/organisation about your experience what information/advice did you receive from them?
8. How would you describe the information/advice that you received?

(If the first point of disclosure was not an organisation that assists victims of family violence)

8.1 Did that person refer you to an agency/organisation for assistance?

8.2 If yes, which agency/organisation did they refer you to?

8.2.1 Did you choose to make contact with the agency/organisation that you were referred to?

8.3 If no, did you go on to access services from another agency/organisation for assistance with the family violence you were experiencing?

8.3.1 If yes, how did you find out about that agency/organisation?

8.3.2 f yes, why did you choose to make contact with that particular agency/organisation?

(If they have already accessed services for assistance with family violence)

9. When you first chose to seek assistance from the agency/organisation, what information/advice did you receive?
10. How would you describe the information/advice that you received?
11. What particular services did you access?
12. When you first made contact with the agency/organisation was there any particular assistance that you were hoping that they could offer to you?
13. Was there any particular assistance that you wish could have been available to you that wasn't?
14. Would you say that it was easy to access assistance from the agency/organisation or difficult?

14.1 If it was difficult, why was it difficult?

14.2 If it was easy, why was it easy?

14.3 If it was difficult, was there anything that the agency/organisation could have done differently to make it easier for you to access assistance?

14.4 Is there anything else that you can think of that would have made it easier for you to access assistance from the agency/organisation? (e.g. access to childcare, public transport vouchers etc)

15. Reflecting on your experience, was there anything about the way in which people you know reacted to your disclosure of family violence that was good/helpful?
16. Was there anything about the way people you know reacted to your disclosure of FV that you wish could have been better/different?
17. Reflecting on your experience, is there anything that would assist women in a similar situation to you to get better help?
18. Did you have any fears or concerns that prevented you from seeking assistance at an earlier point in time?

19. Is there anything that would have addressed some of your fears and concerns and enabled you to seek assistance at an earlier point in time?
20. Reflecting on your experience, if a woman experiencing family violence were to come to you today seeking assistance, what advice would you give her?

APPENDIX 2

Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project

Interview Format

Community Organisations

1. What description best suits your organisation?
    a. Community Service Organisation
    b. Health Services Provider
    c. Welfare Organisation
    d. Family Violence Service Provider

2. Does your organisation assist people from CALD communities who are experiencing family violence?

3. If someone from a CALD background is referred to your agency/organisation for assistance, in your experience, who are they most often referred by?
    a. Does this differ at all from the general population?
    b. If yes, why do you think this is?

4. In your experience, are there any identifiable barriers to people from CALD communities seeking assistance with family violence when compared to the general population?
    a. If yes, what are these barriers?

5. In your experience, is there a greater or lesser demand for your services from CALD communities when compared with the general population?
    a. Why do you think this is?

6. Do you face difficulties in engaging people from CALD communities experiencing family violence in accessing your services?

7. Are there any measures in place or practices your organisation has adopted to facilitate access by people from CALD communities?
    a. If yes, what are these measures/practices?
    b. In your opinion, how effective are these measures/practices in facilitating greater access by CALD communities?

8. In your experience, for people in CALD communities, who is the first point of disclosure?
    a. Does this differ at all from the first point of disclosure for the general population?
    b. If yes, why do you think this is?

9. In your experience, are there any identifiable barriers to people from CALD communities in the City of Whittlesea seeking assistance with family violence when compared with the general population?
    a. If yes, what are these barriers?

10. Are there any gaps in family violence service provision for CALD communities in the City of Whittlesea?

11. If yes, are there any ways in which these gaps in family violence service provision may be addressed?

12. Are there any models for service provision in the City of Whittlesea that work well for CALD communities?

    a. If yes, why do you think this is?

13. Are there any case studies that you have come across that illustrate barriers faced by people from CALD communities in accessing assistance with family violence?

14. Are there any case studies that you have come across that illustrate people from CALD communities effectively overcoming barriers to accessing services?

APPENDIX 3

Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project

Interview Format

Cohort 3: Community & Religious Leaders

1. Have you ever been approached by someone seeking assistance/advice in relation to family violence?
    a. If yes has this happened more than once?
    b. If yes, how often are you approached for assistance/advice in relation to family violence?

2. If you have been approached for assistance/advice who has approached you?
    a. Victim
    b. Perpetrator
    c. Friend/family member/concerned bystander of victim
    d. Friend/family member/concerned bystander of perpetrator

3. Which group most often approaches you for assistance/advice?

4. Why do you think that people in your community choose to approach you in relation to family violence?I

5. When you have been approached for advice/assistance what has that person been seeking? (e.g. information about their rights, information about where to get assistance, a sympathetic ear, direct intervention etc)

6. What assistance/information or advice have you offered them?

7. Why did you offer that particular information/assistance/advice?

8. Have you ever referred the person to an agency/organistion(s)?
    a. If yes, which one(s)?
    b. Why did you choose to refer to that particular agency/organisation(s)?
9. To your knowledge, when you make referrals to an agency/organisation(s) does the person actually go on to seek assistance from that agency/organisation(s)?

10. When you have been approached for assistance in relation to family violence, how well informed was the person seeking assistance about:
    a. Family violence generally? (e.g. recognition of what constitutes family violence and whether what they are experiencing constitutes family violence)
    b. Support services available to them?
    c. Their legal rights in relation to family violence?
11. Do you feel comfortable in your role as someone who is called upon to give advice/assistance about family violence and to people experiencing family violence?

12. How confident are you about giving assistance or advice in relation to:
    a. Family violence generally (e.g. what constitutes family violence?)
    b. Family violence support services?
    c. Legal rights in relation to family violence?

13. Is there anything that you need to enable you to feel confident offering assistance/advice in relation to family violence?
14. I n your experience, is there a greater or lesser demand for your services from CALD communities when compared with the general population?
15. Have you ever attended any formal training in relation to family violence?
    a. If yes, please describe the training you attended?
    b. Would you say that it was beneficial?
    c. If yes, whey was it beneficial?
    d. If no, why wasn't it beneficial?

16. In your opinion, is there anything that your community needs to assist them in relation to family violence?

whittlesea CALD communities family violence project

Annual Report

2014

City of Whittlesea
Berry Street Since 1877 We never give up
Victoria Police
Plenty Valley Community Health
The Salvation Army crossroads Network
UnitingCare Kildonan Making a positive difference
inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
whittlesea community futures
Whittlesea Community connections

Executive Summary

In 2014 the Whittlesea Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities Family Violence Project (WCFVP) achieved some major successes in its first full year of implementation.

Under the guidance and support of a proactive, action-orientated steering group, the project delivered $20,000 of brokerage grants to support local CALD women's groups and provided family violence community legal education and training to 74 women from these groups. 1 in 5 women later accessed family violence support from Whittlesea Community Connections and many reported feeling confident to support friends and family to access support services. Six women from these groups went on to form the basis of the project's Women's Advisory Group, a group established and supported to provide ongoing feedback and input to ensure the WCFVP remains responsive to the needs of the community.

Initial consultations were held with eight local community and/or religious leaders. This resulted in a family violence forum that attracted 110 participants from the local Chaldean community, and plans to deliver similar forums or activities with other local faith groups.

The project explored options for providing early intervention support during the settlement process and received handover of Victoria Legal Aid's successful Settled and Safe program, with a pilot to be adapted and developed with the local Iranian community in 2015.

Similar work was undertaken to explore potential models for developing a whole of school respectful and equitable relationship program to be piloted at a local primary school. Funding to further scope and develop this element continues to be sought.

With generous support from inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (inTouch), project members came together to raise the funds to pilot an Arabic-speaking Men's Family Violence Group. The WCFVP joined with inTouch to recruit and support two bilingual Arabic-speaking facilitators who are set to complete the Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) facilitator's course at the close of 2014. To our knowledge this is the first time this has occurred in Victoria. The successful implementation of this pilot in 2015 will provide valuable learnings for a fully accredited Arabic-speaking MBC in the future.

2015 brings many exciting opportunities to expand each element of the project. It will also see implementation by the WCFVP of an interrelated Our Watch[1]-funded project working specifically with the local Iranian community to design and deliver violence against women and children prevention activities.

[1] Formerly the Foundation for the Prevention of Violence against Women and Children

Family Violence in the City of Whittlesea

Current Victoria Police figures place the City of Whittlesea as one of the highest Northern Metropolitan Local Government Areas (LGAs) for reported incidents of family violence; a rate of 1,316 per 100,000 people. Reported incidents to police have increased by 35% from 2011/12 to 2013/14. Over the past 14 years, there has been an increase of 268% for the rate of family violence in City of Whittlesea compared to 172% for Victoria.

Whittlesea is one of Victoria's most diverse areas; over a third of residents are born overseas and more people come from non-English speaking backgrounds than Greater Melbourne (31.4% compared to 24%). Extensive consultation with local culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities undertaken as part of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project scoping report (2012) confirmed the findings of international research which states that: whilst rates of FV are not necessarily higher in CALD populations, these communities face extensive additional barriers to accessing information, services and supports to address FV and the issues that compound this. This adversely impacts their ability to participate, relate to and integrate with the wider community, as well as contributing to intergenerational cycles of violence.

Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project

The Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project (WCFVP) brings together a range of key local agencies to design, deliver and evaluate an integrated place-based model to reduce and prevent FV in Whittlesea's CALD communities.

The WCFVP was designed following a scoping exercise that incorporated a review of international literature with extensive consultation with survivors of violence, community representatives and support agencies. It works across prevention, early intervention and response, aligning with the *Victorian Framework for Primary Prevention of Violence against* Women and the recently released Second Action Plan for the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*.

The project aims to support CALD communities, newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to break the cycle of family violence and empower communities to confront and respond to the challenges of preventing violence against women and children.

The project is managed by a steering group consisting of representatives from:

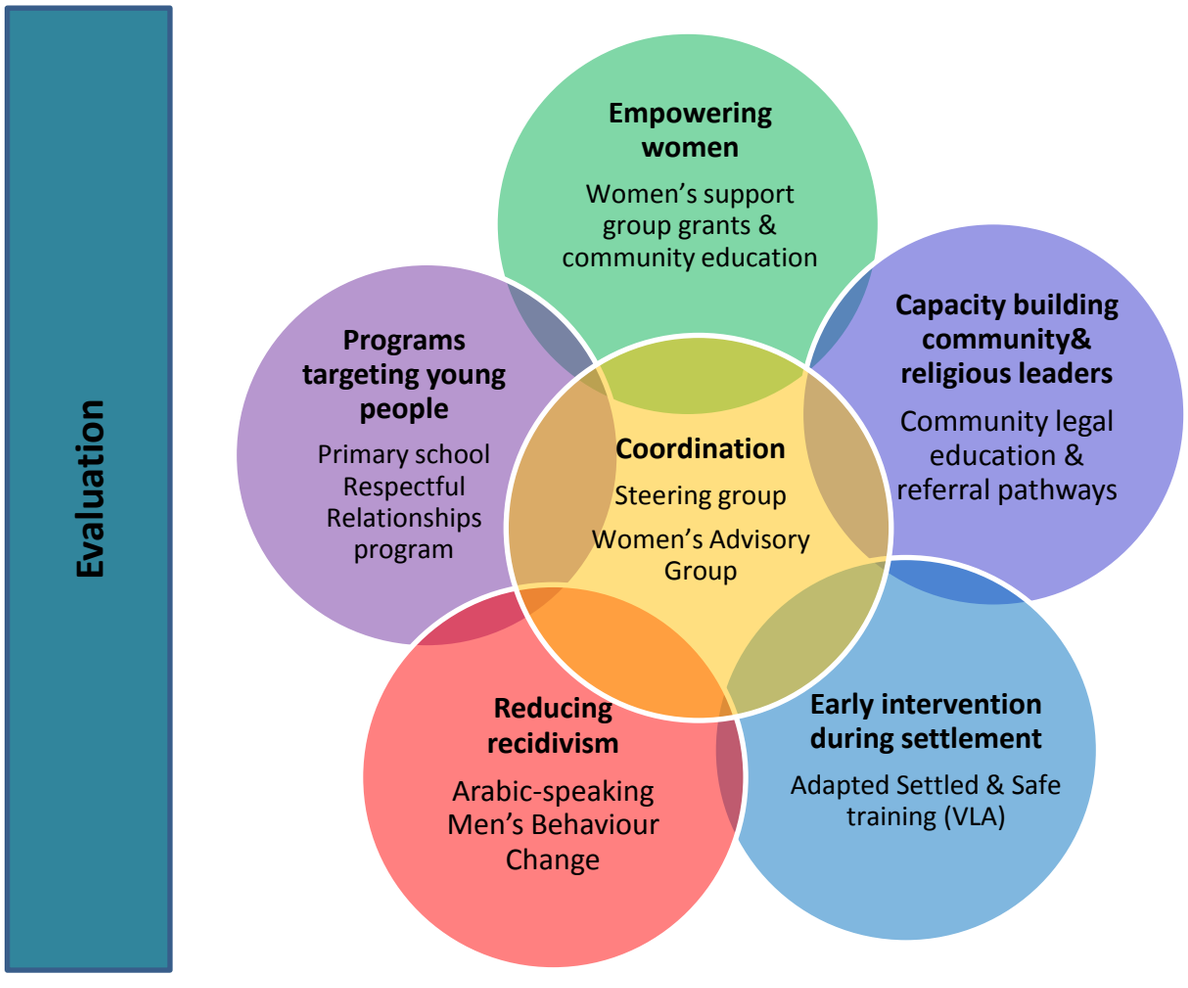
- Whittlesea Community Connections (lead agency)
- City of Whittlesea
- The Salvation Army Crossroads Family Violence Services
- Kildonan UnitingCare
- Berry Street Northern Family and Domestic Violence Service
- Whittlesea Community Futures
- Plenty Valley Community Health Service
- Victoria Police
- inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (joined June 2014)

A project worker, based at Whittlesea Community Connections, coordinates the project. In 2013/14 this position was funded by Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) under the 'Family violence, Rural regional and remote (RRR) and homelessness projects'. From July 2014 Whittlesea Community Connections has provided funding for this position from within its community legal service portfolio of funding.

Family violence is a one of the top five priority areas of the Whittlesea Community Futures Partnership. The project is supported by the Whittlesea Family Violence Taskforce as well as a range of networks across City of Whittlesea and the northern region.

The project is being evaluated in partnership with Monash University's Gender, Leadership and Social Sustainability unit. The evaluation framework considers each element separately and as part of the integrated approach. The completed evaluation will produce recommendations for a transferable model for use in other LGAs.

The Model



Funding

Total funding

$221,000

The WCFVP has attracted funding of approximately $221,000 since 2012. This includes generous donations from Victoria Legal Aid, the Scanlon Foundation, Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust (VWBT)/Grosvenor Foundation and City of Whittlesea Community Development Grants. Victoria Legal Aid funding allowed the project to employ a project worker in 2013/14 and Whittlesea Community Connections continued to fund this from June 2014.

VWBT/Grosvenor Foundation and Scanlon Foundation grants funded a successful CALD Women's Support Group Grants scheme, distributing $20,000 in grants to six local women's groups in 2014 and enabling the project to provide these groups with family violence training, community legal education sessions and other support. VWBT/Grosvenor Foundation funding also supported creation of a women's advisory group consisting of local women to provide ongoing feedback and support to ensure the project continues to meet the needs and requirements of the community.

Using Scanlon Foundation funds, the project started developing partnerships with local community and religious leaders aimed at building their capacity to become anti-violence community advocates. It also allowed the project to engage Monash University's Gender, Leadership and Social Sustainability unit to develop and begin implementing a robust evaluation framework.

Project partners and donors rallied together when the opportunity arose to deliver a pilot Arabic-speaking Men's Family Violence Group in early 2015. The funding goal was met following generous financial and in-kind contributions from inTouch, Victoria Legal Aid, Scanlon Foundation, City of Whittlesea, The Salvation Army Crossroads, and Men's Behaviour Change specialist Tom Griffiths.

In 2015 remaining funds will be used to implement a second round of CALD Women's Support Group Grants with additional training and support opportunities for these groups. The project will continue to build relationships and capacity build local community and religious leaders, and will provide opportunities for the Women's Advisory Group to build their skills in primary prevention of violence as well as develop culturally and linguistically relevant anti-violence resources.

The Arabic-speaking Men's Family Violence Group will provide valuable learnings towards implementing an accredited Men's Behaviour Change Group, for which funds will be sought.

In addition to the WCFVP, 2015 will see design and delivery of a $150,000 partnership project, funded through peak prevention body Our Watch, to engage Whittlesea's Iranian community in activities to prevent violence against women and children. Lead by implementing partners Whittlesea Community Connections, The Salvation Army Crossroads, and Women's Health In the North (WHIN), the project will provide valuable tools, resources and learnings to inform prevention work in CALD communities across Australia.

$150,000 for prevention of violence against women

Funding challenges remain in resourcing the research, development and implementation of a whole of school program promoting respectful and equitable relationships in a local primary school. The project will also seek to secure funding to continue implementing project elements beyond 2015, as well as secure funding to implement an accredited Arabic-speaking Men's Behaviour Change program. Project worker funding is also not secure beyond June 2015.

Coordination and integration

Objective: *Establish a multi-agency steering group to oversee the progress, implementation and evaluation of the project*

Key achievements in 2014

Steering Group

- Convened 8 times after a vote to move to bi-monthly meetings from June 2014
- Terms of Reference revised June 2014.
- inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence joined steering group June 2014
- Evaluation framework developed in partnership with Monash University Gender, Leadership and Social Sustainability Unit and evaluation underway for project elements 1,2 and 3

Future: The group will continue to provide oversight to the WCFVP in 2015, and will be a valuable source of support for the new Our Watch project.

Women's Advisory Group

7 members representing Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran and Iraq

- Established May 2014 to provide ongoing community feedback and advice on all elements of the project through monthly meetings
- 7 members representing Sri Lankan, Indonesian, Malaysian, Iranian and Iraqi communities
- 6 meetings held
- Members received training in identifying and responding to family violence
- Supported project through facilitating engagement with community and religious leaders, and suggesting ways to make information sessions more accessible/relevant.
- Two members established their own women's groups and successfully applied for CALD Women's Group Grants 2015 funding
- One member obtained paid work facilitating a new women's group funded through CALD Women's Group Grants 2015, utilising the skills and experience she has gained through participating in the WCFVP in 2014
- Successfully applied for grants from Victoria Women's Benevolent Trust and City of Whittlesea Community Development Grants to cover meeting costs in 2015 (including interpreters and childcare), allow meetings to extend from 1 to 1.5 hours, and engage WHIN to deliver prevention of violence against women (PVAW) training to 2015.

Future: As well as continuing to build their community advocacy skills, the group will provide feedback and support in developing CALD-specific resources to use during the next round of information sessions.

Empowering CALD women

Objective: *The model will facilitate increased access to support groups by CALD women as a means to enabling women to access services and increase their confidence to seek and obtain support.*

Key achievements in 2014

- $20,025 in grants delivered to 6 women's support groups
- Training/community legal education delivered to 74 women

16 group leaders trained in identifying and responding to FV

55 women participated in community legal education sessions

1 in 5 participants later sought support for themselves or someone they knew

	Pre-training	Post-training
'I know a lot about what family violence is and what my legal rights are'	**8%**	**92%**
'I know where to go for information and advice about family violence support'	**52%**	**100%**

- 6 women from these groups joined the Women's Advisory Group and have become key advocates for their groups and wider communities.

"The women felt great, important, independent, to have a voice, are capable of meeting people in different positions, to have more confidence in using English and have socialised with other women from different communities."

"Throughout the sessions, there were moments of laughter, joy and sadness as the bonds grew between the women and the ups and downs of life were shared."

"Providing childcare and transport services has been immensely beneficial for the group, assisting them to overcome the transport barriers and family responsibilities that often prevent women from participating in community events."

"It helps us belong"
(Feedback from Final Reports)

Future: Round two of the grants will support more local women's groups, with additional training opportunities and enhanced community legal education sessions. An adapted version of this element will be implemented with the local Iranian community as part of the Our Watch project, including both women and men's groups, and enhancing training and engagement opportunities.

Capacity building community & religious leaders

Objective: *The model will develop networks with community/religious leaders to build capacity to respond to family violence, and develop anti-violence tools, resources and messages to support their communities.*

Key achievements in 2014

- Eight local religious leaders engaged, representing Chaldean, Syriac Orthodox, Sikh, Shi'ite, Pentecostal, and Sri Lankan community elders
- 'Families Free from Violence' forum with 110 participants at Chaldean Church with presentations from priest, community lawyer, police officer and FV support worker.

8 religious leaders engaged

110 participants at a 'Families free from Violence' forum

Future: Further sessions with Chaldean Church to be delivered (for women and young people). Networks and partnerships explored with other leaders, including members of the Farsi-speaking Iranian community as part of the Our Watch project.

Similar forums/information sessions scheduled with:

- Thomastown Shi'ite community
- Sri Lankan Senior Citizens group
- Encompass Church Mernda

Reducing recidivism

Objective: *The model will increase access to behaviour change programs by CALD men through developing of language/culturally specific programs.*

Key achievements in 2014

- Two Arabic-speaking Men's Behaviour Change Program facilitators currently undergoing training in Graduate Certificate of Social Science: Male Family Violence (Swinburne University)
- Combined funding/in-kind contributions to run Arabic Men's FV Group in 2015 ($25,853), lead by implementing agencies InTouch and Kildonan UnitingCare.

Future: A pilot Arabic-speaking Men's FV Group will run in the first half of 2015 and funding sought to implement a fully accredited Arabic-speaking Men's Behaviour Change Program.

Early intervention during settlement

Objective: *Through early intervention in the settlement process and in increasing the capacity of services to respond in the early stages of settlement, the model will address stressors often experienced during settlement that impact negatively on the ability to maintain equal/respectful relationships.*

Key achievements in 2014

- VLA Settled & Safe training handed over to Whittlesea Community Connections legal and settlement teams.
- Funding secured to develop and deliver adapted Settled & Safe training with Iranian community as part of Our Watch project.

Future: Development and delivery of pilot training program with Iranian community, with learnings used to inform delivery of this training with other communities in Whittlesea. Funding will be sought to do so.

Programs targeting young people

Objective: *A 'whole of school' approach piloted to promote respectful and equitable relationships with the intention of future transferability to other schools and non-school settings.*

Key achievements in 2014

- Preliminary discussions with Northern CASA to develop primary school whole of school respectful relationship and gender equality program for delivery in high-CALD population primary school.
- Membership of DVRCV's Partners-in-Prevention Primary and Secondary Networks.
- Multiple funding submissions made for 'Respectful Relationships and Gender Equality' primary whole of school program

Future: Continue to explore avenues to fund schools program

Evaluator's Report

Dr. Deborah Western
Monash University Gender, Leadership and Social Sustainability Unit

Project evaluation began in late 2013 and will be a continuing component of the project. More specifically, the evaluation will appraise and review the project model. As each element is funded, developed and implemented, the activities and processes in that element will be evaluated. Then, the overall model will also be evaluated to see how successful it was as an integrated approach for family violence reduction and prevention in CALD communities in Whittlesea.

The evaluation activities will provide information and ideas that can contribute to knowledge and practice in preventing family violence in CALD communities. We will also look at how the elements of this model might be able to be adopted/adapted by other organisations in their prevention of violence against women work.

Evaluation activities included focus groups, interviews and an electronic survey, as well as consideration of evaluation gathered internally from project facilitators. In 2013-2014 two elements of the model were evaluated. These elements were:

1. The coordination/integration component which is primarily the responsibility of the Steering Group.
2. The empowerment of CALD women through Women's Support Groups.

The coordination and integration activities of the Steering Group are being successfully achieved. Many original priorities have been met, such as the appointment of a project worker, completion of the first round of Women's Support Groups, contact with religious leaders, and consolidation of the roles and responsibilities of Steering Group members. The Steering Group members represent a wide range of organisations and communities, and strong partnerships have been made with a focus on action and achieving tasks, rather than solely networking. This was unanimously seen as a key feature of the Steering Group and driver behind the project's successes in 2014. Foundational work around all the elements of the project, including those that are yet to be funded or fully implemented has been undertaken. The thoroughness of this work has contributed to the legitimacy with which the community and organisations view the project, as well as ensured momentum continues across all project elements.

Future challenges for the Steering Group will be maintaining strong and consistent attendance by members over time, ensuring new and continued funding can be secured so that all elements of the project can be implemented, and coordinating and managing the project as new elements are funded and the workload grows. A key priority identified was ensuring funding was secured for the Project Worker position, which was unanimously seen as central to the success of project implementation. Initiatives and planning are currently underway to tackle these challenges.

The first round of Women's Support Groups were successfully facilitated and acquitted. Feedback from participants included appreciation of the connections and friendships made, increases in their confidence and independence, and the opportunities to share their experiences whether these were about family violence, living in Whittlesea, or ideas for cooking and recipes. A range of activities were available for women, depending on the group they attended, and this contributed to women learning about community resources and supports available to them, about family violence, human rights and self-care, and learning about different cultures. Women became more confident in seeking referrals to other organisations such as the legal centre and reported feeling increased confidence in supporting friends or family experiencing violence. In order for women to feel confident in attending groups, the groups need to be held in safe and easy to access locations, and the atmosphere within the group needs to be safe and accepting of differences amongst different women. Evaluation demonstrated that women felt the groups achieved this and were a strong setting for participating in community legal education about family violence.

Evaluations will start again in early 2015, expanding to include the Women's Advisory Group and Arabic-speaking Men's Family Violence Group, as well as shared learnings between this project and the Our Watch-funded prevention project.

Moving Forward

2015 promises many exciting opportunities to continue to expand and enhance the WCFVP.

- A second round of Women's Support Group Grants will allow more CALD women in Whittlesea to build friendships and connect with their community, whilst learnings from round one inform a closer approach to capacity building the groups through training and workshop opportunities.
- Existing partnerships with community and/or religious leaders will be strengthened and new relationships developed, as we support these leaders to advocate and deliver anti-violence messages in their communities.
- Implementation of the pilot Arabic-speaking Men's Family Violence Group will produce valuable learnings to support our efforts to secure funding for an accredited Arabic-speaking Men's Behaviour Change program.
- The Women's Advisory Group will continue to provide ongoing feedback and input into the WCFVP as well as work with us to develop a trial group of FV resources targeted to a handful of CALD communities within Whittlesea.
- Funding will continue to be sought for unfunded elements, including a pilot whole of school program and project worker wages beyond June 2015.

In addition to the original WCFVP model, the project won selection to design and deliver prevention-focused activities with Whittlesea's Iranian community. Funded by the State Government and managed by peak national prevention body Our Watch, this project will be overseen by lead implementing partners Whittlesea Community Connections, The Salvation Army Crossroads, and Women's Health In the North with support from other steering group members.

The partnership will receive one-off funding of $150,000 to engage with representatives of the local Farsi-speaking Iranian community to design and deliver a range of culturally appropriate and linguistically relevant strategies to prevent violence against women and children. Strategies include empowering women and engaging men by supporting and resourcing community groups; building the capacity of community and religious leaders as PVAWC advocates; supporting newly arrived community members through early settlement legal education; and the development and design of other community-led PVAWC activities. The WCFVP worker will be seconded to this project for three days and a support worker brought in to backfill this position. The project will intersect and complement WCFVP work, and allow the piloting of early settlement legal education (WCFVP element 4) with the Iranian community.

EVALUATION OF THE WHITTLESEA CALD COMMUNITIES FAMILY VIOLENCE PROJECT:

EVALUATION REPORT 1. DECEMBER 2014-JANUARY 2015.

1. Introduction and Background to the Evaluation.

The evaluation of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project began in late 2013 and it comprises an ongoing component of the Project. More specifically, the evaluation will appraise and review the Whittlesea CALD Communities Integrated Family Violence Model. This will encompass two aspects:

1. Firstly, there will be individual evaluations of the six elements of the model, as well as the activities and processes employed to support and achieve the aims of each element.
2. Secondly, building on the findings and outcomes of these individual evaluations, the overall model will then be evaluated.

Other existing resources include a program logic and a three-year business plan, both created to guide the project and inform the development of the evaluation framework.

The integrated model is guided by the *'Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project: Scoping Exercise Report'* and incorporates six elements:

1. Coordination/integration
2. The empowerment of CALD women
3. Building the capacity of community and religious leaders
4. Prevention of family violence: early intervention in the settlement process
5. Prevention of family violence: programs targeting young people
6. Reducing recidivism: increasing access to men's behaviour change programs.

Diagram 1 shows the ways in which the six elements of the model interlink with each other. The element of Coordination and Integration, which is primarily the responsibility of the Steering Group, sits in the middle and connects with all other elements.

Diagram 1: The six elements of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Integrated Family Violence Model

Purposes of the Project Evaluation

- To assess both the process and outcomes of the integrated model and its six elements for internal learning and development purposes
- To develop learning tools and guides for other organisations/family violence academics who may wish to adopt and/or adapt the model
- To build a credible and professional evidence-base for funding for further CALD-specific family violence projects
- To provide accountability, engagement and partnership with beneficiaries and stakeholders.

The evaluation will provide information and assessment throughout the project cycle, concluding with a final evaluation report for external distribution to stakeholders, funders and other community and academic bodies. Internally, the evaluation will provide information and feedback to project staff and steering group member agencies throughout the project cycle and provide a final assessment of the model and six elements for internal learning and planning purposes. Evaluation of all elements of the project is a continuing iterative process with evaluation findings informing the ongoing development and refinement of the model, and therefore, the project.

Scope of the Project Evaluation

The evaluation will explore three key questions:

1. How successful was the model as an integrated approach for family violence reduction and prevention? Did it achieve its short, medium and long term outcomes as defined by the program logic document?

2. How successful were the strategies and activities within the six elements in achieving the individual objectives of each element?

3. How does this project contribute to knowledge and practice in preventing family violence in CALD communities? What key learnings and recommendations for improvement can be taken from the project as a whole? How can the elements of this model be adopted/adapted by other organisations?

For more background information, please refer to the Evaluation of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Model Evaluation Brief.

Evaluation framework

The evaluation framework is being developed in partnership between project staff and Monash University. Due to the staged implementation and cyclical development process of the project, evaluation frameworks for each element are being designed as implementation of that element becomes a reality. Frameworks have not yet been developed for elements for which limited funding or design has occurred.

The framework incorporates a range of process and outcome indicators, including quantitative data provided by ongoing project staff, and evaluation of activities and qualitative analysis of participants, staff and steering group members undertaken by Monash University. Please see Appendix One for more detailed information about the evaluation framework.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS EVALUATION REPORT

This Report provides an evaluation of two elements of the project: the Steering Group of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project (WCFVP) and an evaluation of the WCFVP Women's Support Groups (Round 1) for 2014. Evaluation of the Steering Group relates to the Coordination and Integration element of the model. Evaluation of the Women's Support Groups relates to the element of the model that focuses on the empowerment of CALD women.

2. Evaluation of the Steering Group of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project (WCFVP)

Information for the evaluation of the Steering Group of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project was sourced from the discussions that occurred during two Steering Group members' focus groups, (the first on 6 November 2013 and the second on 1 May 2014); one electronic survey available during the week of the second focus group; and an interview with the Project Worker on 11 April 2014. Diagram 2 provides a representation of the evaluation methods employed in the evaluation of the Coordination – Integration element of the Model.

The Women's Advisory Group, which is also a component of element one, will be evaluated for the first time in early 2015. This evaluation will be part of the ongoing evaluation and development of the model and the project.

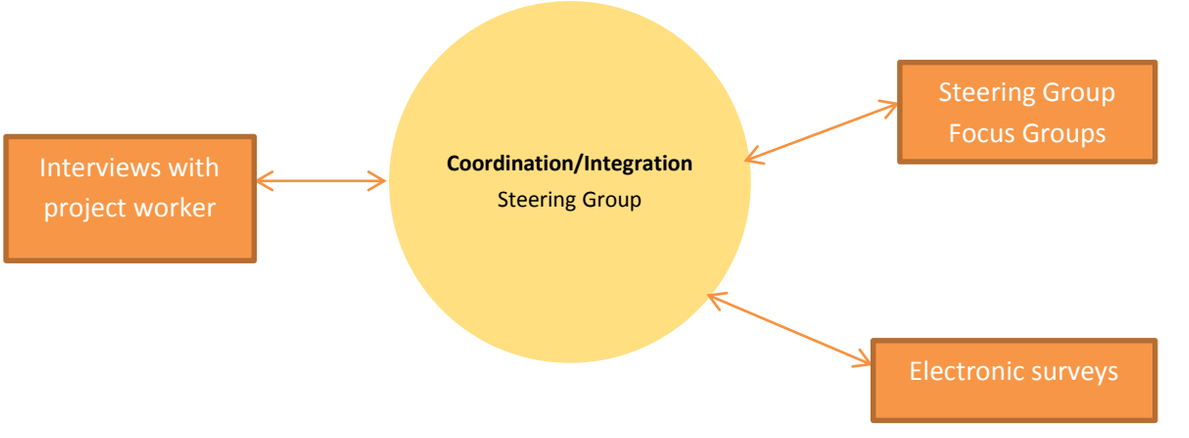


Diagram 2: Evaluation methods for Element One of the Model: Coordination and Integration

Purposes of the evaluation of the Steering Group of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project (WCFVP)

The evaluation questions and discussions explored participants' understandings of the roles of the Steering Group, their thoughts about how well the Steering Group was meeting its purpose in its first year of operation, and their ideas about the strengths and limitations of the Steering Group. Participants were asked about where they thought the project was in terms of its development, and to reflect on the project's achievements, strengths and challenges. Participants' ideas about the ways in which the Steering Group activities linked with, and demonstrated, the integration and coordination aspects of the project were also sought.

The questions that guided the evaluation discussions in the focus groups, the survey and the interview were developed by the project worker and the external evaluator (Dr Deborah Western) during the development of the evaluation project. The questions were semi-structured and aimed to encourage open reflection and discussion from participants.

The objective for element one (Coordination and Integration) of the project is to:

> *Establish a multi-agency steering group to oversee the progress, implementation and evaluation of the project.*

In summary, the coordination and integration activities and roles of the SG are being achieved. Progress in original priorities such as the appointment of a project worker, completion of the first round of Women's Support Groups, contact with religious leaders and consolidation of the roles and responsibilities of SG members has been made. Foundational work around all the elements of the project, including those that are yet to be funded or fully implemented has been undertaken. The thoroughness of this work has contributed to the legitimacy with which the community and organisations view the project.
The findings from the evaluation of the WCFVP are presented in four areas:

1) The roles and strengths of the Steering Group
2) Outcomes of work undertaken by the Steering Group
3) Challenges experienced by the Steering Group and the Project
4) Future directions and plans of the Steering Group

1) The Roles And Strengths Of The Steering Group (SG)

The findings regarding the roles and strengths of the Steering Group are provided together in this section because of the considerable overlap of these two aspects.

Development of the Steering Group

When forming the Steering Group, one of the aims was to invite the participation of organisations that had a clear link to the issue of family violence and CALD communities in Whittlesea and that, as members, could contribute to the development and/or implementation of each element within the model. A strong belief that a place-based model for preventing violence against women can be effective and workable informed the development of the Project and continues to guide the Steering

Group. With a focus on CALD communities in Whittlesea, resources and time can be prioritised within and toward that area.

The development of the Steering Group and the model/project[1] has been a continual process of learning and reflection and this reflects one of the original aims of the project: to develop over time and to be continually informed in its development by consultation, evaluation, learnings and feedback. This cyclical process ensures that the project has flexibility and relevance to meet the needs, both identified and emerging, of Whittlesea CALD communities in relation to preventing violence against women

A sense of direction, purpose and confidence within the Steering Group has grown over the last 18 months. This is demonstrated in the developing sense that SG members have of all working together toward a common goal. This has become apparent through linking the work achieved with the project with the work achieved in member organisations and more broadly in the community around family violence and CALD communities.

The SG models what it hopes to see the model/project achieve in the community in terms of integration and coordination, partnerships, collaboration & cooperation.

Membership and representation of the Steering Group

During the formation of the SG, consideration was given to its size and membership. This ensured that the SG could be representative of different communities, could enable participation of relevant organisations, and include members with a range of knowledge, skills and experience. It was also important, though, to ensure that the number of members was not so large that the SG risked losing focus or that individual members had competing goals. This balance has been achieved through a number of strategies. Firstly, additional organisations may be recruited as consultants for their expertise and knowledge in relation to particular issues or a specific element of the model/project. They would not be recruited to the Steering Group and would not provide input through the SG about the strategic direction of the project. Secondly, a major focus of the SG is on action and development; it is not a group for networking, although shared information to assist project implementation is a core activity. The focus on project development and implementation has also meant that the focus of the SG has not shifted to the broader family violence agenda. The generalist nature of organisations, rather than family violence-specific organisations, represented on the SG has provided a balance of perspectives.

The wide representation on the SG sends a positive message to other organisations and funding bodies about the high level of community interest, commitment to and participation in preventing violence against women strategies in Whittlesea's CALD communities. The resulting profile and reputation of the SG and the Project, including the presence of partnerships formed to assist in the implementation of activities and processes, opens "possibilities for the SG …to be considered as partners in future funding opportunities and collaborations".

[1] Whilst the terms 'model' and 'project' refer to different concepts, they are combined in much of this report because many evaluation findings are relevant to both of them. The model is the overall structure of the WVFVP, as seen on p. 2. The project involves the operationalising of the model through the activities that are undertaken in each of the elements of the model.

Commitment to the Project and to a focus on action in the Steering Group

The commitment of SG members to attend meetings and to support, advocate for, promote, and participate in the ongoing development of the project has been a major strength of the SG. SG meetings have been held regularly and consistently and have provided a central point of focus for the project. Whilst commitment from a small number of organisations has waned over time, this was significantly addressed by reducing the number of meetings from monthly to bi-monthly and increasing the electronic dissemination of information and project updates.

The focus on action has been a key motivating factor in maintaining the high level of member attendance at SG meetings and their consistent level of involvement in project development and implementation. Consequently, there has been continued momentum and progress with the project.

The focus on action has also provided clarity around the roles and responsibilities of SG members. There is an underpinning agreement to complete actions decided upon during SG meetings and to report back on progress and outcomes at subsequent SG meetings. These tangible tasks and outcomes have significantly contributed to the ongoing motivation of SG members and their sense of achievement and progress with the project.

SG members have been involved in actions such as facilitating and contributing to workshops and information sessions, liaising with media, taking information about the project back to their organisations and sourcing information for activities such as submission development. In this way, the work undertaken by SG members is not separate from their 'usual work'. It fits into the prevention of violence against women work undertaken in their organisations and creates a two-way, mutually beneficial dynamic between the SG and a range of community organisations. SG and project work feeds back into organisational work and organisational work feeds into the project work. SG members "integrate (SG work) as part of what we're doing in our agencies". A strong example of this integration is the inclusion of the project into City of Whittlesea action plans and its Family Violence Strategy.

Building partnerships

The partnership focus within the Project has been crucial and it has also been an outcome of the SG membership and the SG work that has been undertaken. The importance of partnerships is underscored by the size of the overall Project, the length of time it will run and the unpredictable nature of ongoing and future funding for the Project. As one SG member commented, "This project could not be undertaken by any one organisation on its own".

The partnership approach and the concentration on the development and implementation of the project have meant that the issue of family violence in Whittlesea and efforts to prevent it has unequivocally been the focus of the SG. This has helped avoid a networking approach and discussion about what individual organisations provide. Prevention of violence against women activities and strategies need to be "agency neutral" and community focused; "The issue has to drive us and not the agency drive us".

Organisational cooperation, mutual support, communication and openness have contributed to the cohesive nature of the SG. The Terms of Reference provided guidance here through early acknowledgment of the need for transparency in activities such as applying for funding. Plans and decisions regarding family violence funding are brought to the SG. Risk management through anticipating possible conflicts of interests and planning how to manage them ahead of time has been important. All SG members are involved in decision-making about the Project and no decisions are made without the knowledge or support of SG members. This prevents individual members and their organisations from acting independently from the SG or the Project goals.

Leadership and central coordination

Strong leadership by the lead agency (Whittlesea Community Connections) has clearly contributed to the success of the development and implementation of the project to date. Strong leadership was required to bring the wide range of SG members together and to provide an environment where joint work could be undertaken and partnerships nurtured. Whittlesea Community Connections, with its focus on Whittlesea compared with organisations with a region-wide or cross-regional focus, was considered the most appropriate organisation to take 'lead agency' status.

The need for a project worker was identified early during the development of the model/project. The project worker position was identified as a strength of the project because of its capacity to provide a central coordination, management and information dissemination point.

2) Outcomes of work undertaken by the Steering Group

In addition to the strengths of the Steering Group identified above, more specific outcomes from work undertaken by the Steering Group members were noted.

Increased awareness of family violence in CALD communities in Whittlesea

The Steering Group and the implementation of the Project have provided a vehicle for actioning family violence work in CALD communities in Whittlesea and in a variety of organisations. The severity and prevalence of violence against women has been increasingly recognised and preventing violence against women (PVAW) work now has a strong profile in Whittlesea. Establishing connections with media representatives has contributed to increasingly comprehensive and informed coverage of the Project and associated PVAW work.

Partnerships and community links

The development of strong partner relationships amongst Steering Group members has enabled a unified, rather than "agency-specific", response to preventing violence against women in CALD communities. In addition the project work has established and strengthened links for SG members with various organisations in the community. These links go in both directions between SG members and organisations and a good example of this has been links between the SG and the family violence outreach service from Mary Anderson Family Violence Service. One SG member commented that "Being involved in the project has raised the level and sophistication of our work

around the issue of family violence". The Steering Group has gained "legitimacy" because of its members and the organisations they represent.

3) Challenges experienced by the Steering Group and the Project

A variety of challenges in relation to the evolution of the Steering Group and in implementing and coordinating the project have been experienced. As the project progresses, monitoring of these challenges will be needed to ensure they can be managed. Steering Group members anticipated that new challenges may also arise in the future. Solutions to these challenges were not sought in the evaluation discussions.

Membership and representation of the Steering Group

Whilst regular attendance and commitment to the Steering Group and the project by SG members has been a strength of the Project, attendance by a small number of members has fallen away over time. In some organisations, demands on members' time, role changes, and changes in personnel available to attend the Steering Group explain inconsistent attendance. This is particularly the case with Victoria Police although the organisation remains committed to participating. In other cases, contact from organisations has dropped considerably. Irregular attendance by SG members and a reduction in commitment to the Project could pose difficulties when more work is required and when more elements of the project are funded. The cohesion within the SG may be threatened, particularly if members do not remain up to date with events, decisions needing to be made, implementation plans, and decisions around future funding. A further possible consequence is the loss of knowledge and skill of members regarding particular elements of the model/project.

The challenge: How can the continued attendance and representation of Steering Group members be ensured over time?

Future development of the Project and of the Steering Group role

The leadership and management of the Project has been a major key to the successful coordination and implementation of the Project. Implementation of the Project has been incremental, but progression has been steady and continuous. Steering Group members are aware of the importance of not being complacent with the current level of progress and achievements. Within the continuing development of the Project and the Steering Group role, there are two major challenges.

Securing ongoing and sufficient funding constitutes one of these challenges. Given the significant value placed on the project worker position, continued funding for this position is a high priority. An associated consideration is ensuring that the project worker position continues to be embedded into the project and not into an organisation. This is a continual learning process for not only the project worker and Steering Group members, but for community members and organisations new to the Project as further elements of the model/project are implemented.

New and continued funding for all elements of the model/project will also require continued attention from the Steering Group.

A second major challenge will revolve around developing, implementing and coordinating the Project as further elements are funded. The scope and size of some elements, such as the school programs with a whole-of-school approach, are considerable and suggestions were made that they may require their own project worker. In light of this challenge, considerations for the SG include:

- deciding the ways in which an increased work load will be "spread around", coordinated and monitored;
- continuing to ensure the good will amongst organisations in order to prevent organisational competitiveness, especially regarding funding opportunities;
- maintaining clear and strong communication between members and between organisations;
- ensuring the partnership feature of the SG remains cohesive and strong in order to provide the foundation to manage the extra work;
- reviewing the leadership and management roles within the Steering Group and the ways these are undertaken when more elements of the model/project, particularly the bigger elements like programs targeting young people, are implemented.

The challenges:

Securing new and continued funding for all elements of the Project and for the project worker position.

Developing, implementing, coordinating and managing the Project as further elements are funded and the workload involved with the Project becomes more complex.

4) Future directions and plans of the Steering Group

This evaluation focused primarily on the strengths, achievements, challenges and learnings identified by the participants. Some attention was given to future directions and plans within the Steering Group; future evaluations will provide more opportunity for this discussion.

Briefly, the identified future directions and plans revolved around building on the achievements of the Steering Group and of the Project to date. Continuing to develop strategic relationships and partnerships with community organisations was considered a high priority. This reflects the success of the partnerships that have so far been established and the united focus on the Project that has consequently been enabled.

A clear goal was to maintain the membership of the Steering Group and ensure consistent and regular attendance of Steering Group members despite the challenges that were identified with this.

Implementation of the full model/project is the ultimate goal of the SG and the Project. To this end, seeking ongoing and further funding was seen as crucial. While working toward full implementation of the model/project, Steering Group members will be cognisant of the emergence of other preventing violence against women projects and activities more generally and within CALD communities. This awareness will ensure the Project remains relevant to the Whittlesea community and that it can build on learnings from other community projects.

3. *Evaluation of the WCFVP Women's Support Groups (Round 1)*

Information for the evaluation of the WCFVP Women's Support Groups (Round 1) was sourced from a focus group held on 1 July 2014 with facilitators of the Women's Support Groups (Round one) after the completion of all final sessions. Diagram 3 provides a representation of the evaluation methods employed in the evaluation of the Empowering Women element of the Model. Whilst all these evaluation activities were undertaken with the facilitators in 2014, this report presents only the findings from the focus group.

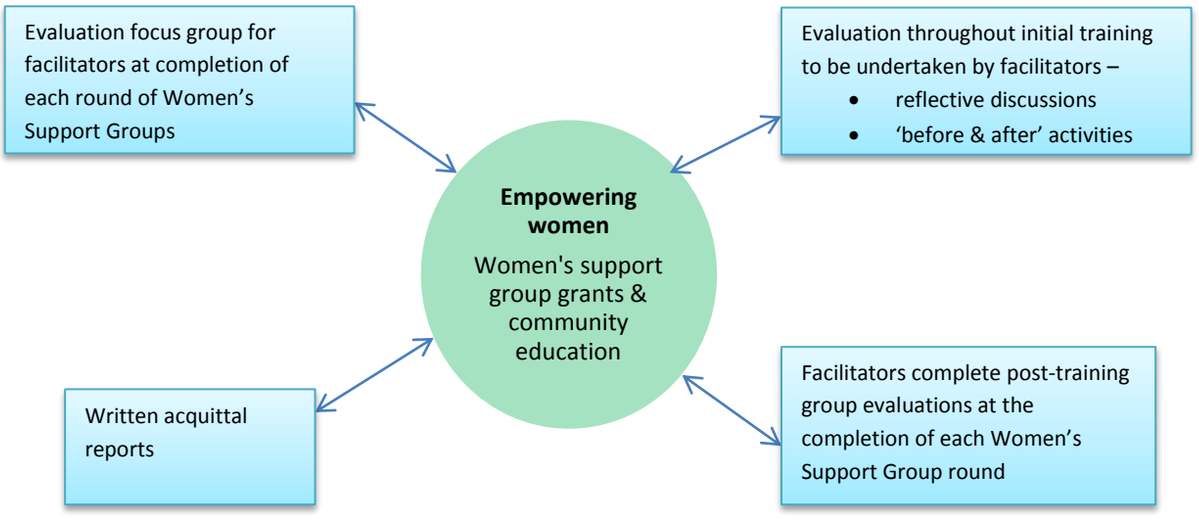


Diagram 3: Evaluation methods for Element Two of the Model: Empowering Women

Purposes of the evaluation

In the evaluation focus group the WSG facilitators were asked to reflect on and discuss their thoughts about the processes involved in the facilitation of the Women's Support Groups and the outcomes and achievements (strengths and limitations) of the Women's Support Groups.

The questions that guided the evaluation discussions in the focus group were developed by the project worker and the external evaluator (Dr Deborah Western) during the development of the evaluation project. The questions were semi-structured and aimed to encourage open reflection and discussion from participants.

The facilitators from each of the Women's Support Groups were invited to participate in the focus group. The Women's Support Groups facilitated in round one were: Ava Iranian Women's Choir; Whittlesea Persian-Speaking Women's Group; Little Red School House Playgroup; Sri Lankan Women's Playgroup; Mernda Women's Multicultural Cooking Group; and 'I Care for Myself' group.

The objective for element two of the project (Empowering CALD women) is to:

> *Facilitate increased access to support groups by CALD women as a means of enabling women to access services and increase their confidence to seek and obtain support.*

The findings from the evaluation of the Women's Support Groups facilitators are presented in four areas:

1. Purposes and outcomes of the Women's Support Groups
2. Strengths of the Women's Support Groups: What worked well?
3. Limitations of the Women's Support Groups: What could be improved?
4. Outcomes, challenges and future directions related to the Women's Support Groups element of the project

1. Purposes and outcomes of the Women's Support Groups (WSGs)

This section looks at the purposes and related outcomes of the Women's Support Groups. They fall broadly into two categories:

- the provision of support and development of relationships;
- learning about resources and developing new skills.

The variety of group purposes identified by facilitators confirmed that the Women's Support Groups were effective in achieving the objective of element two: to increase access to support groups by CALD women as a means of enabling women to access services and increase their confidence to seek and obtain support.

Whilst each group had an explicit purpose or focus, such as the Iranian Women's Choir Group and the Multicultural Cooking Group, additional outcomes were identified for all groups. Chief amongst these additional purposes was the opportunity for women to come together, have time to themselves, develop relationships and share knowledge and experiences. These outcomes were also noteworthy because women from different cultures and backgrounds joined together in the groups.

The provision of support and development of relationships

Supporting other women, reducing isolation and loneliness, making connections and developing friendships with other women in their local communities were highly valued outcomes of the WSGs. Through these supports and connections, women developed a sense of hope and belonging within their cultures and within their broader local communities. One facilitator described the women's groups as engendering a sense of family, particularly important for those women whose families remained in their home countries. The groups were "Like family. Like family who are here".

Through their stronger sense of belonging and connection, the confidence, self-esteem, independence and the belief in themselves of many women increased. Comments from facilitators underscored the importance of these aspects of the groups for women: "People come to group,

because we want to love each other for who we are, as one" and "So it's women supporting women, you know". Given that family violence puts women 'last' and that many women can't afford activities for themselves, self-care activities proved highly successful: "Something that actually made them feel like, "Oh, I'm worth it." And you could see the smile and, you know, the happiness on their face".

Facilitators recognised that change could take time and that different women might achieve their goals at different rates. As one facilitator commented, "You take your time. It takes time to make you feel happy, so she come and join us, because she really got depressed".

Sharing activities such as cooking enabled women to feel comfortable about sharing and discussing personal issues such as sexuality, childhood violence, domestic violence, depression, other problems, as well as what contributed to their happiness and sense of purpose. Through shared activities and discussions, women became comfortable with each other's emotions and the expression of emotions. This strengthened the sense of safety and worth that women felt within their groups.

Perhaps a good indication of the successful achievement of group aims and the relationships developed amongst group members was the desire of women from some groups to continue contact once their group finished and/or to attend a follow-up group.

Learning about resources and developing new skills

Learning about the resources and services provided by organisations was a very successful outcome of the Women's Support Groups. Information about family violence support, legal options and services, and the rights that women have to live safely and free from violence were commonly provided through information sessions and shared conversations. 1 in 5 women sought further information and advice outside the group after attending these information sessions.

New skills learned by women included English language skills, self-care strategies, cooking, budgeting and assertiveness. Unexpected outcomes occurred at times. A good example of this was women using the group as an opportunity to learn and practise English, particularly where this was not necessarily a group objective. Facilitators noted that group members "… ended up becoming their own supports" and "They teach each other and they talk amongst themselves to get the message across if they're not sure".

The process of working together, taking turns to share information, skills and cultural practices, and meeting people from different cultural backgrounds contributed to women developing confidence in their own skills and abilities. New skills were also taken outside the group; an example of this being trying new recipes at home. Some women decided to undertake further education and study and others became more involved in community activities. One facilitator described how one group member now facilitates her own group, "At the beginning she was not really talking, but how at the end, like, she was empowered and talked about that (family violence experienced over many years). Now this woman is facilitating her group for her community".

2. Strengths of the Women's Support Groups: What worked well?

This section looks at the activities and processes within the Women's Support Groups that contributed to the achievement of element two. The activities and processes fall into five categories:

- Group processes and dynamics
- The group facilitator role
- Information provision
- Variety of group activities
- Understanding and learning about family violence

Group processes and dynamics

The Women's Support Groups that most effectively achieved their goals were those where attendance of group members was regular and consistent. This assisted in the building of bonds amongst group members who were involved in a "mutual constructive activity together". In some groups, existing and new members were brought together. This was beneficial in some instances where these members encouraged even more women to join, leading to increased membership. However, bringing new and existing members together required solid facilitator and leadership skills to ensure the smooth introduction and integration of members.

In order for women to attend their group regularly and to participate in group activities, they needed to experience the group as a safe space. Safety was established through the provision of informal, comfortable environments for the group and by allowing women to talk only about topics they felt safe and ready to discuss and share. In some groups, facilitators assisted in the development of safety through setting rules that encouraged sharing and turn-taking in discussions and activities.

Group facilitators – and group members – acknowledged that women's 'readiness' to attend groups needed to be monitored and respected. One facilitator noted that "Maybe the first or second week they little bit hesitant, and then they come up ... telling you".

Unity and cooperation in the groups were key factors in the groups running smoothly. The message given by one facilitator to her group was, "My policy was, I said, "Okay, because sometime we are 12, sometime 50, but we've got not less of nine people, why we are going to be divided?"

The group facilitator role

The group facilitators played a varied and key role in the Women's Support Groups. Their role varied from providing a safe, comfortable, (sometimes catered) environment for the group through to facilitating the development of group rules; actively leading the group by modelling behaviours and maintaining focus and harmony; and working to achieve the goals of the group. Leadership skills, creativity, an awareness of group processes, an understanding of family violence and women's

rights, and a strong knowledge of the local community were key factors in facilitators' ability to engage with the group and work collectively with group members to achieve group goals.

Group facilitators often used their local knowledge and knowledge of women in the community to recruit women to their group. Whilst facilitators may have known or suspected that some women were experiencing family violence, they could use the group's explicit purpose, rather than referring to the group as family violence based, to encourage women to attend. This was also important in encouraging women to attend when their male partners were suspicious about the group purposes.

Facilitators 'knowing' their group members enabled them to anticipate difficulties, resistance or adverse effects from information about, for example, legal options regarding separation and divorce or family violence provided by guest speakers. Facilitators managed anticipated difficulties by introducing initial discussion about topics before guest speakers' sessions. It was also good practice for facilitators to brief guest speakers about women's concerns, backgrounds and possible impacts on them of the information that was going to be presented.

Given that Australian and international research indicates that immigrant and refugee women are at high risk of experiencing the impacts of family violence and can face additional barriers to accessing services, facilitators need to have an awareness of what constitutes family violence and the factors that increase the risk for women. Groups that were most effective in providing information about family violence and response options were those where facilitators and guest speakers demonstrated consciousness of and sensitivity to women's backgrounds, prior experiences including those of torture and trauma, refugee experiences, fear of authority figures such as police, and possible distress reactions. Additionally, guest speakers need to present information in straight-forward ways, using language that is easy to understand for women from CALD backgrounds.

Group work literature recognises the usefulness of group rules in order to encourage and monitor member participation, ensure member awareness of group process (such as attendance expectations), and to protect confidentiality of issues discussed within the group[2]. Group facilitators varied in the extent to which they developed group rules. Some facilitators were quite directive in their leadership role and set rules themselves in order to delegate tasks (washing up after cooking activities, for example) amongst group members to ensure everyone participated equally in benefits, outcomes and responsibilities. Rosters worked well because women knew who had what responsibility and this took the onus of full responsibility away from group facilitators. Peer pressure played a role in women adhering to their responsibilities and tasks, but reflecting the importance and influence of group cohesion, women wanted to show respect for each other too. As one facilitator noted, "For cooking I said we do it like this: one day, if she's washing and you do the chopping and you do the cleaning, and then we just do it. Without telling each other, you just understand, before we start".

[2] See, for example, McDermott, F. 2002. Inside group work: a guide to reflective practice. Allen and Unwin, Melbourne; Western, D. 2013. Gender-based violence and depression in women: A feminist group work response. Springer, New York; Trevithick, P. 2012. "Group work theory and practice" in Stepney, P. and Ford. D. (eds). 2012. Social work methods, models and theories: A framework for practice. Russell House Publishing Ltd. Lyme Regis.

Rules also clarified the issues that would not be discussed in the group because they were not relevant to group aims and/or generated too much conflict between group members, an example of the latter being women on different visas and the perceived benefits of one over others.

Other facilitators were more relaxed about the process of developing rules and encouraged women to participate in setting rules themselves and, in doing so, to practice making decisions. Different facilitators had different idea about how to encourage women to learn to be independent. Some facilitators trusted in the group processes, modelling from other women, and the development of relationships between group members to enable this to happen. Whilst some facilitators saw the provision of resources such as taxi vouchers as important in enabling women to attend the group, other facilitators saw this as preventing women from learning independence and being able to "count on themselves".

Many of these leadership and facilitation activities were undertaken in beginning phases of groups, either when planning the group or prior to facilitating each group session. This enabled time to be used efficiently once group sessions began.

Information provision

Family violence information sessions were considered highly important for the women. To maintain the sense of safety within the group, these sessions by police and legal staff are best provided at around the mid-point of the group sessions. Women may not fully engage in the information sessions if they are presented early in the life of the group before group members have a sense of trust amongst each other and 'readiness' to hear and discuss potentially confronting information. As one facilitator noted, "The idea of having the police in the women's own social setting is important for people who perhaps haven't had opportunity to trust police in the past".

Variety of group activities

The provision of a range of different activities for group members contributed to the achievement of group purposes and the development of group trust, cohesion and bonding. Activities included visits to public institutions and organisations, including GP clinics, courts and legal services; cooking; participation in community activities and in community performances such as choir singing. These visits were seen as important because they informed women about how public institutions work in Australia. Visits to court were considered important because women could see what they would need to do if they came to court or wanted legal assistance such as intervention orders. The creativity of some group facilitators came to the fore here as they considered the most effective ways in which to use their funding.

Understanding and learning about family violence

A strength of group work – in whatever setting – is the opportunity for group members to realise that they are not alone in their experiences. This was true of the group members in the Women's Support Groups and was particularly important in relation to women's experiences of family violence. Group members realised that other women shared their experiences and the impacts of violence. This helped reduce the stigma associated with violence and encouraged women to think about their rights and options for change.

Ensuring clear, consistent and open explanations of what constituted family violence was an important focus within the Women's Support Groups. Understanding that family violence was not a function of a person's culture was another crucial part of learning about family violence for the women.

3. Limitations of the Women's Support Groups: What could be improved?

This section looks briefly at the activities and processes within the Women's Support Groups that could be modified in order to ensure the consistent outcomes required for element two. Further suggestions for future groups are explored in the next section.

The information sessions with police generally worked well. Preparation with police prior to their attendance is crucial so they can minimise behaviour that might be perceived as intimidatory by women given possible prior negative experience with police and authority figures. Clear communication, rather than the use of police jargon, is also important.

Facilitators suggested the information session with lawyers and police be split into two sessions. Given the amount of information presented and the number of questions asked, groups can run out of time for members to understand, process the information and ask further questions. Time for interactive discussion about the information was considered important. If possible, information sessions need to be personalised for each group and group members.

4. Outcomes, challenges and future directions related to the Women's Support Groups element of the project

This section looks at the broader outcomes and challenges related to the Women's Support Groups and the ways in which element two has been achieved. Future directions for element two and for future Women's Support Groups have been incorporated into these discussions. There are four broad categories:

- Community awareness and integration
- Structural support
- Group membership and structure
- The role of men in women's support and empowerment

Community awareness and integration

The most significant outcome on a community-structural level has been the increase in community awareness of family violence and the integration of the Women's Support Groups and element two of the project into the community. As facilitators explained, "So the community's starting to own the program and trust it, whereas before it was only they worked with us" and "You need time for community to trust and to grow".

As more Women's Support Groups have been facilitated, referrals have come from more and different sources. More women themselves, including isolated women and women with limited English language, have self-referred and joined groups.

Community development principles have provided a solid foundation for the structuring and facilitation of the Women's Support Groups. A capacity building approach has been taken and examples of this include instances where groups and facilitators model skills to other potential facilitators, and where a family violence worker who has acted as an interpreter can skill up other interpreters for working in family violence. Identifying and building on opportunities for learning has been a strong feature of this element of the project.

Further exploration and/or evaluation of how the Women's Support Groups become part of the community may be useful. Questions of sustainability for these groups arise and facilitators reported that women were often keen to stay involved with other group members in some capacity post the conclusion of their specific group. Similarly, how possible is it to link women in with other groups at the conclusion of their own group. This would help ensure that women continue to be supported and that facilitators don't need to run the same group continually.

Structural support

The input and support from Whittlesea Community Connections and from the Steering Group for the Women's Support Groups was highly valued.

- Project worker

There was very strong endorsement for the existence of a project worker to coordinate the piloting of the project and the Women's Support Groups element. The worker was described as engaging and group facilitators appreciated the ways in which she had developed strong and trusting relationships with them. Prior experience working in communities was considered important because this enabled the provision of advice and prompt responses. Facilitators commented that "She's really, I guess, enabled us and supported us to, you know, to run these groups" and that the project worker was "Very aware of issues that impact across all cultures". Her patience and flexibility was also noted: "She made the process (easy) where we didn't have to write lots of reports (for grants, acquittals etc)".

- Training sessions for group facilitators

Facilitators reported that there was too much information in their sole training session. A lot of information was presented and more time was needed to discuss it, understand it and plan how it would be incorporated into group activities. Two training sessions were suggested by facilitators.

Consideration might also be given to equipping facilitators with basic skills about group work/group dynamics and leadership skills prior to the beginning of groups. This could include strategies for identifying and managing tensions or conflicts between group members; responding to cultural differences; and recruiting group members.

Self-care for group facilitators and ideas about how to manage their own personal responses/triggers to the issues discussed in the group was another area of concern for some facilitators. Strategies for how to manage disclosures from women and the emotional responses from group members or the group as a whole, and information about the support that group facilitators might be required to provide to group members were requested.

These additional skills and strategies might be included in the training sessions for group facilitators. Other suggestions included the provision of one or two debriefing sessions throughout the ten weeks of the Women's Support Groups where group facilitators meet together to discuss how their groups are going, raise and resolve any concerns, and share experiences.

- Funding

The limited, non-recurring funding for the Women's Support Groups was frequently mentioned as a challenge. Facilitators were not critical of the Steering Group members or their decisions; their concerns about funding were directed towards funding bodies. Some groups asked for small donations from members each session to cover costs and/or to save additional monies. Longer-term funding may enable group projects to run for a longer time and achieve the group purposes.

- Interpreters

Not all groups needed or wanted interpreters. Some group members chose to use opportunities to practice English and facilitators saw this as a way to strengthen the women's independence.

In the instances where interpreters were accessed, it was preferable to have one of the workers, such as a bilingual family violence outreach worker, to be the interpreter rather than engage an external interpreter. Group members felt comfortable engaging with them, asking questions, and being open. Having an interpreter from the same cultural background, and with a knowledge of family violence, meant they could understand any cultural issues and have an understanding of the sensitivity, complexity and issues surrounding family violence. The facilitators were warm in their recognition of the interpreters: "It was just like having a friend sit at the table and talk about this stuff" and "She'd understand all that shorthand as well as the language, so it's that dual cultural and language as well, that just really helps the communities engage better when you have a bilingual worker of the same culture".

Group membership and structure

Group facilitators raised questions about how they could ensure that the women's groups were as inclusive and inviting of all women as possible. Some facilitators also expressed some uncertainty about how, as facilitators, they could encourage group members' acceptance of diversity in their groups. Facilitators wanted to know, for example, how they could encourage lesbian women to attend the groups and how family violence in same-sex relationships might be broached within the groups. Facilitators requested ideas to help them involve women who haven't experienced family violence with women who have experienced family violence.

Finally, some facilitators questioned whether women from outside the geographical area should be able to attend the groups, even though the groups are clearly funded for the Whittlesea specific area. This question came from facilitators who felt frustrated and unsure about how to respond when they meet women who would benefit from attending a group, but don't live in the designated area. This may be a topic that can be addressed in the training sessions for facilitators.

The role of men in women's support and empowerment

Whilst the involvement of men in the Women's Support Groups was not a component in this element of the project, one group facilitator invited men to attend the group to learn about what the women were doing. The facilitator's rationale for this was to take the mystery out of the women's group with the aim of reducing potential conflict between women and their partners, especially if men had thought that women's involvement was taking time away from children and the family.

Caution must be taken with this approach, particularly where family violence is occurring within a family. Inviting men to attend a women's only support group increases the further risk of violence and provides violent men with the opportunity to prevent their partners from attending the group. Groups are successful in achieving their aims when the women feel safe and accepted. Bringing men into this environment would likely remove this sense of safety.

Initial and periodic guidance with group facilitators in order to clarify and reinforce the aims of the women's support group element of the project, along with the criterion for group membership and the expectation that women only will attend the groups would seem to have some value. This could take place in training sessions and in any 'check in' sessions with group facilitators.

4. Concluding Summary

In 2013-2014 two elements of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Project (WCFVP) were evaluated. These elements were:

1. The coordination/integration component which is primarily the responsibility of the Steering Group.

2. The empowerment of CALD women through Women's Support Groups.

The coordination and integration activities of the Steering Group are being successfully achieved. Progress in original priorities such as the appointment of a project worker, completion of the first round of Women's Support Groups, contact with religious leaders and consolidation of the roles and responsibilities of Steering Group members has been made. The Steering Group members represent a wide range of organisations and communities, strong partnerships have been made and a focus on action and achieving tasks, rather than solely networking, were seen as positive features of the Steering Group. Foundational work around all the elements of the project, including those that are yet to be funded or fully implemented has been undertaken. The thoroughness of this work has contributed to the legitimacy with which the community and organisations view the Project.

Future challenges for the Steering Group will be maintaining strong and consistent attendance by members over time, ensuring new and continued funding can be secured so that all elements of the project can be implemented, and coordinating and managing the Project as new elements are funded and the workload grows.

The first round of Women's Support Groups were successfully facilitated and attended with women appreciating the connections and friendships they made, increases in their confidence and independence, and the opportunities to share their experiences whether these were about family violence, living in Whittlesea or ideas for cooking and recipes. A range of activities were available for women depending on the group they attended, and this contributed to women learning about community resources and supports available to them, about family violence, human rights and self-care, and learning about different cultures. Women became more confident in seeking referrals to other organisations such as the legal service. In order for women to feel confident in attending groups, the groups need to be held in safe and easy to access locations, and the atmosphere within the group needs to be safe and accepting of differences amongst different women.

Evaluations will start again in early 2015.

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February 2015.

Appendix 1

Note: The evaluation framework below was created in late 2013 and amended in January 2015 to include refined evaluation methods for the Reducing Recidivism element. Future adjustments will be made to the specific methods for elements not yet designed/underway.

Evaluation of the Whittlesea CALD Communities Family Violence Model

The evaluation will explore three key research questions:

1. How successful was the model as an **integrated approach** for family violence reduction and prevention? Did it achieve its short, medium and long term outcomes as defined by the program logic document?

2. How successful were the strategies and activities within the **six elements** in achieving the individual objectives of each element?

3. How does this project – the implementation and evaluation of the model – **contribute to knowledge and practice in preventing family violence in CALD communities**? What key learnings and recommendations for improvement can be taken from the project as a whole? How can the elements of this model be adopted/adapted by other organisations?

Considerations

- English language and literacy levels of participants/beneficiaries.
- Use of translation services.
- Many elements and activities of project currently not yet designed.
- WCC/other partner data collection – how is data being captured? Does this capture what is required for this evaluation?

Element	**Objectives (from program logic model)**	**Key Questions** (Process & Impact)	**Data Collection Methods**	**Responsibility; Timeline**
1. Coordination/integration	• To improve integration and collaboration of legal and support service responses	<u>Process:</u> Who is involved (individuals & organisations)? What are the challenges and good practice actions for a coordinated approach? <u>Impact:</u> What changes have occurred? What lessons were learned? What strategies/activities have been most effective, and why?	<u>Process:</u> Minutes from SG meetings SG TOR Project coordinator reflective journal <u>Impact:</u> Disclosure/referral tracking Focus group with SG members (Comparative evaluation mapping exercise – animate?) Semi-structured interview with project worker SG individual surveys	WCFVP; ongoing WCFVP; completed WCFVP; ongoing WCFVP; ongoing GLASS; 6 monthly @ SG meeting (1hr) GLASS; 6 monthly via surveymonkey GLASS; 6 monthly via surveymonkey
2. The empowerment of CALD women	• To map existing women's supports groups and identify gaps • To increase CALD women's participation and reduce social isolation • To increase CALD	<u>Process</u> Who is involved (individuals and organisations)? What is being delivered? How is it being delivered? <u>Impact:</u> What changes have	<u>Process</u> WCFVP records and publications including: - Scoping report - Steering group TOR &minutes Attendance records from group facilitators	WCFVP; ongoing WCFVP; ongoing

Element	**Objectives (from program logic model)**	**Key Questions** (Process & Impact)	**Data Collection Methods**	**Responsibility; Timeline**
	women's knowledge of family violence and legal rights and responsibilities. • To increase CALD women's awareness and access to service systems and supports.	occurred? What lessons were learned? What impact has the 'integrated approach' had? What strategies/activities have been most effective, and why?	Acquittal report Coordinator reflective practice notes <u>Impact</u> WCFVP data including: - WCC FV Monitor - SG organisation data Training pre/post evaluation Evaluation meeting (Most Significant Change theory) Acquittal report – data/progress and impact	GLASS; November 2014 WCFVP; ongoing WCFVP; ongoing WCFVP; November 2013 WCFVP/GLASS; end of October 2013 GLASS; October 2014 WCFVP; November 2014
3. Building the capacity of community and religious leaders	• To build capacity of community and religious leaders to respond to family violence • To increase community and religious leaders' knowledge of family violence and legal rights and	<u>Process</u> Who is involved (individuals and organisations)? What is being delivered? How is it being delivered? <u>Impact:</u> What changes have occurred?	<u>Process:</u> Minutes from C&R sub-group meetings C&R sub-group TOR Anti-FV tools, resources and training materials <u>Impact:</u> Disclosure/referral tracking	WCFVP; ongoing WCFVP; ongoing WCFVP; ongoing WCFVP; ongoing

Element	**Objectives (from program logic model)**	**Key Questions** (Process & Impact)	**Data Collection Methods**	**Responsibility; Timeline**
	responsibilities. • To increase community and religious leaders' awareness and access to service systems and supports.	What lessons were learned? What strategies/activities have been most effective, and why?	Semi-structured interviews with sub-group members	GLASS; mid-point & end of project
4. Prevention of family violence: early intervention in the settlement process	• To address settlement stressors that impact on equal/respectful relationships • To increase newly arrived refugees and migrants knowledge of family violence and legal rights and responsibilities • To increase newly arrived refugees and migrants awareness and access to service systems and supports • To increase early identification of women and children at risk	<u>Process</u> Who is involved (individuals and organisations)? What is being delivered? How is it being delivered? <u>Impact:</u> What changes have occurred? What lessons were learned? What strategies/activities have been most effective, and why?	<u>Process:</u> Tools, resources and training materials <u>Impact:</u> Disclosure/referral tracking Semi-structured interviews with participants Semi-structured interviews with settlement service	WCFVP; ongoing WCFVP; ongoing GLASS; mid-point & end of project GLASS; mid-point & end of project
5. Prevention of family violence: programs	• To improve whole-of-school attitudes to	<u>Process</u> Who is involved (individuals	<u>Process:</u> Tools, resources and training	WCFVP; ongoing

Element	**Objectives (from program logic model)**	**Key Questions** (Process & Impact)	**Data Collection Methods**	**Responsibility; Timeline**
targeting young people	gender equity and respectful relationships • To increase the school community's knowledge of family violence and legal rights and responsibilities • To increase the school community's awareness and access to service systems and supports • To increase early identification of women and children at risk	and organisations)? What is being delivered? How is it being delivered? <u>Impact:</u> What changes have occurred? What lessons were learned? What strategies/activities have been most effective, and why?	materials Process-evaluation surveys for students <u>Impact:</u> Disclosure/referral tracking Staff/student pre/post program surveys Semi-structured interviews with staff Focus group with students	GLASS; ongoing WCFVP; ongoing GLASS; pre & post project GLASS; end of project GLASS; end of project
6. Reducing recidivism: increasing access to men's behaviour change programs.	• To improve CALD men's attitudes to gender equity and respectful relationships • To increase CALD men's knowledge of family violence and legal rights and responsibilities • To increase CALD men's	<u>Process</u> Who is involved (individuals and organisations)? What is being delivered? How is it being delivered? How has it been adapted for access and equity needs?	<u>Process:</u> Tools, resources and training materials Pre/mid/post interviews with facilitators and contact worker Pre/post interview with lead staff (Kildonan, WCC, inTouch) Participant pre/mid/post	WCFVP; ongoing GLASS; pre/mid/post GLASS; pre/post

Element	**Objectives (from program logic model)**	**Key Questions** (Process & Impact)	**Data Collection Methods**	**Responsibility; Timeline**
	awareness and access to service systems and supports • To prevent the revictimisation of women and children	What learnings are there for other partnership projects? How does it reflect NTV standards? What gaps in NTV standards does it demonstrate? <u>Impact:</u> What changes have occurred in men's use of violence? What changes have occurred in men's attitudes and beliefs that may support violent behaviour? What impact has the project had on women's assessment of their/their children's safety? What was the impact of adapting the group to meet access and equity needs? What lessons were learned? What strategies/activities have been most effective,	surveys Partner/ex pre/mid/post surveys Tick box self-evaluation (lead agencies and facilitators) <u>Impact:</u> Participant pre/mid/post program surveys Pre/mid/post interviews with facilitators and contact worker Partner/ex partner pre/mid/post surveys	Facilitators; pre/mid/post Facilitators; pre/mid/post WCFVP; end of project GLASS; pre/mid/post GLASS; pre/mid/post

Element	**Objectives (from program logic model)**	**Key Questions** (Process & Impact)	**Data Collection Methods**	**Responsibility; Timeline**
		and why?		
7. Overall model	• Reduced violence against women and children • Increased community safety • Reduced community acceptance of FV • Prevention of re-victimisation of women and children • Decreased social isolation amongst CALD women • Removal of barriers to CALD communities accessing legal and FV support and response services	How has the Strategy been used? What effects has the Strategy had? What works/what doesn't work? How sustainable is the Strategy? How transferable is the Strategy?	Survey Focus Groups and Interviews Observations of researcher Case studies Comparative evaluation mapping tool	GLASS; end of project GLASS; end of project GLASS; end of project WCFVP/GLASS; end of project GLASS; ongoing

WHITTLESEA COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

FAMILY VIOLENCE MONITOR

DATA FROM PERIOD

January 1 – March 31 2015

Contents

THIS EDITION

Quarter 1 (Q1)	**January 1 – March 31 2015**
Quarter 4 (Q4)	**April 1 – June 30 2014**
Quarter 3 (Q3)	**July 1 – September 31 2014**
Quarter 2 (Q2)	**October 1 – December 31 2014**

Summary and key information	**page 4**
Outreach Worker	**page 5**
Case studies	**page 6**
Abuse profile	
FV incidents	**page 7**
Service entry point	**page 8**
Type of abuse	**page 10**
Prevalence of co occuring factors	**Page 11**
Relationship of individual to perpetrator	**page 12**
Client profile	
Country of birth	**page 13**
Gender	**page 14**
Age	**page 15**
Suburb of residence	**page 16**
Discussion	
Discussion from this quarter	**page 17**
Discussion from previous quarter	**page 17**

About this report series:

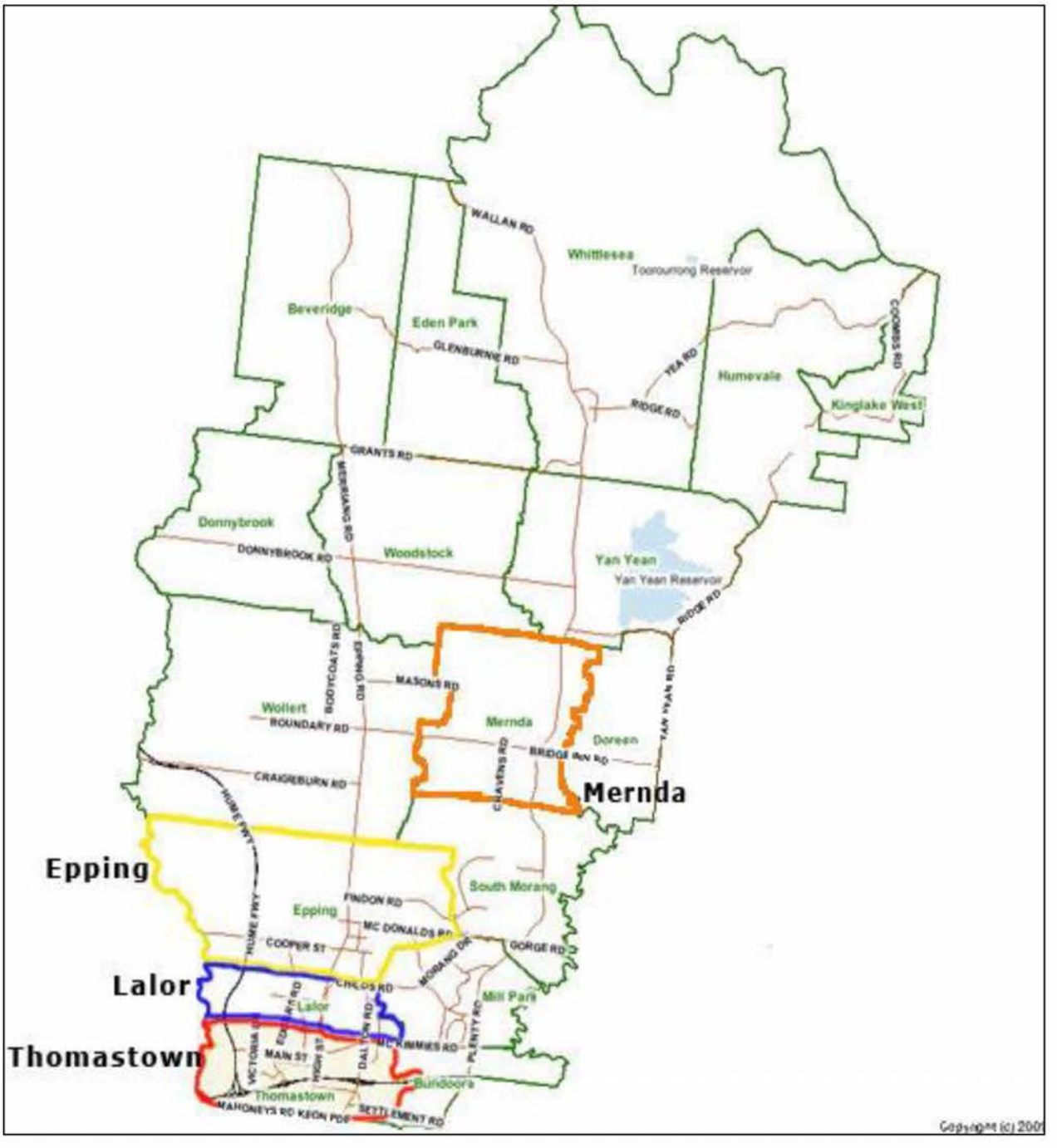
Whittlesea is a municipality in Victoria with one of the highest recorded incidence of family violence. It is an acute issue for Whittlesea as a whole.

In 2011, all major Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) program areas identified family violence (FV) as a major issue. As such, FV was included within WCC's priority plan 2011-2012 year. In response to the increasing incidence of individuals presenting to the agency with family violence disclosures, WCC endeavoured to collect data on all who presented to the agency and reported incidents of family violence as a way of measuring the rate of increase in incidents over a period of time. FV is again one of three service priorities in WCC's 2014-15 Priority Plan.

A data collection template was developed to capture information about each time FV was reported to the agency. Guidelines for doing this were set so that each individual's case was only recorded once and not duplicated between internal referrals and each time they came to the agency. This form will continue to change as needed to best record information.

The data maps the number of incidents reported, including the client's suburb, their cultural background, the type of violence being experienced, and the types of services they are accessing. This data will help to identify local experiences of FV and will assist our responses to the issue both at an individual level and through broader advocacy.

City of Whittlesea



Summary

This eleventh report focuses on family violence (FV) incidents reported at Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) during January to March 2015 (Q3). Included is data collected over a 12 month period from April 1st 2014 to March 31st 2015. Data considers clients seen by WCC staff and a FV worker from Salvation Army Crossroads who attends WCC offices one half-day per week. In cases where a client is first seen briefly by a WCC staff member before referral to the FV worker, this client is only recorded once as part of the FV worker stats. Previous quarters have been adjusted to reflect the inclusion of FV worker stats in the total.

KEY INFORMATION THIS QUARTER

- This quarter, 103 new people presented to WCC for family violence.
- There were 59 working days. This equates to close to 2 cases presenting at WCC per working day.
- February had the highest number of reported cases (48).
- Whittlesea Community Legal Service (72 cases) continues to receive the highest number of incidents, followed by emergency relief (12), casework (9) and settlement (7).
- In 47% of cases (48) this was the first contact with a support agency.
- 44% of the cases (45) had contacted police and 42% (43 cases) had applied for an intervention order.
- A majority of cases (85%) involved multiple forms of abuse. Each client disclosed an average of 2.7 types of abuse.
- 38 cases reported that children had witnessed the violence (37%).
- Overwhelmingly, perpetrators were recorded to be ex-partners. This quarter 63% of cases involved ex-partners. 22% of cases involved current partners.
- 80% of cases reported that the violence occurred during their relationship.
- 42% of cases (43) involved people who were born outside of Australia.
- Of those born outside of Australia, 50% spoke a language other than English at home.
- 4 cases required interpreting.
- 100% of females identified as victim. 67% of these women identified their ex partner as the perpetrator and 26% their current partner.
- 8 men identified as victims and 10 as perpetrator. 1 man identified as victim and perpetrator.
- No females identified as perpetrator.
- The 26-40 age group had the highest representation with 49% of incidents (51 cases).
- The majority of people – 73% – live within the City of Whittlesea.
- Lalor and Epping represented the largest proportion of contacts within the Whittlesea LGA at 20% and 19% respectively.
- Co-occurring factors were present in 50% of cases.
    - Substance abuse was present in 35 cases (34%)
    - Problem gambling was present in 11 cases (11%)
    - Technology was used to stalk/harass in 28 cases (27%)

SUMMARY SALVATION ARMY CROSSROADS WORKER

A worker from Salvation Army Crossroads has been providing specialist family violence support at Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) since November 2013. The worker attends WCC each Tuesday from 9:30am-1:30pm, providing support to clients who are referred through the various programs and projects based at WCC, as well as secondary consult to staff. These include emergency relief/social work case management, legal, and settlement services, as well as through the CALD Communities FV Project community information sessions. Originally attending from 9:30am-12:30pm, the time was extended by an hour following a reflection meeting in March 2014.

FV Outreach worker:	Quarter (Jan-Mar 2015)	Year (Apr 2014-Mar 2015)
Half-days attended	9	41
Consultations provided	1	43
New clients	1	26
Follow up	0	17
Number of female clients	1	42 (98%)
Number of female clients identifying as victim	1	47 (96%)
Violence still occurring	1	35 (81%)
Clients from outside of Australia	1 (Cyprus)	18 (69%) Including: Iran (50%) Other (5% each)
Interpreters required	0	3
Largest proportion of clients came from	Craigieburn (100%)	Epping (30%)

There was only one new client in this quarter and no follow up appointments. However, in this quarter the FV worker provided multiple secondary consults to WCC staff and had multiple clients referred by other WCC workers who could not attend their scheduled appointments.

CASE STUDIES

SETTLEMENT SERVICES

Reeta* is a mother of three young children. She arrived in Australia in 2007 on a provisional spousal visa. Reeta's family is eligible for a Centrelink allowance but her visa status prevented entitlements being paid to her directly for two years, therefore all money was paid to her husband's account. Reeta's husband refuses to provide her with any of the financial assistance the family receives, or any of his own earnings. He exploits Reeta's dependency on him by preventing her from getting a drivers license or attending English classes. He routinely insults her in front of their children. Reeta is now a permanent resident and came to WCC for assistance getting the Family Tax Benefit transferred into her own name. In order to have the entitlement changed she needs the signature of her husband. WCC's settlement worker assisted her with the paperwork and provided her with support and referral options in relation to family violence, however she was not ready to take action. She feared the reactions of her family, friends and community. Reeta has advised that she successfully had the Family Tax Benefit transferred into her name.

LEGAL SERVICES

Carolyn* and her husband have a young son. Her husband recently lost a significant amount of money on the pokies. When Carolyn confronted him about his behaviour he became verbally abusive toward her. The confrontation escalated and Carolyn contacted the police. The police issued a family violence safety notice against him and later applied for an intervention order on her behalf. Despite this situation Carolyn remains supportive of her husband and sought assistance from WCC to get the assault charges against her husband dropped and the intervention order revoked. She was advised that it is not possible to withdraw charges laid by police, however she was given the option of providing a statutory declaration to the police stating that the abuse had been verbal and not physical. Carolyn made an appointment to draft the statutory declaration but she did not present for this appointment.

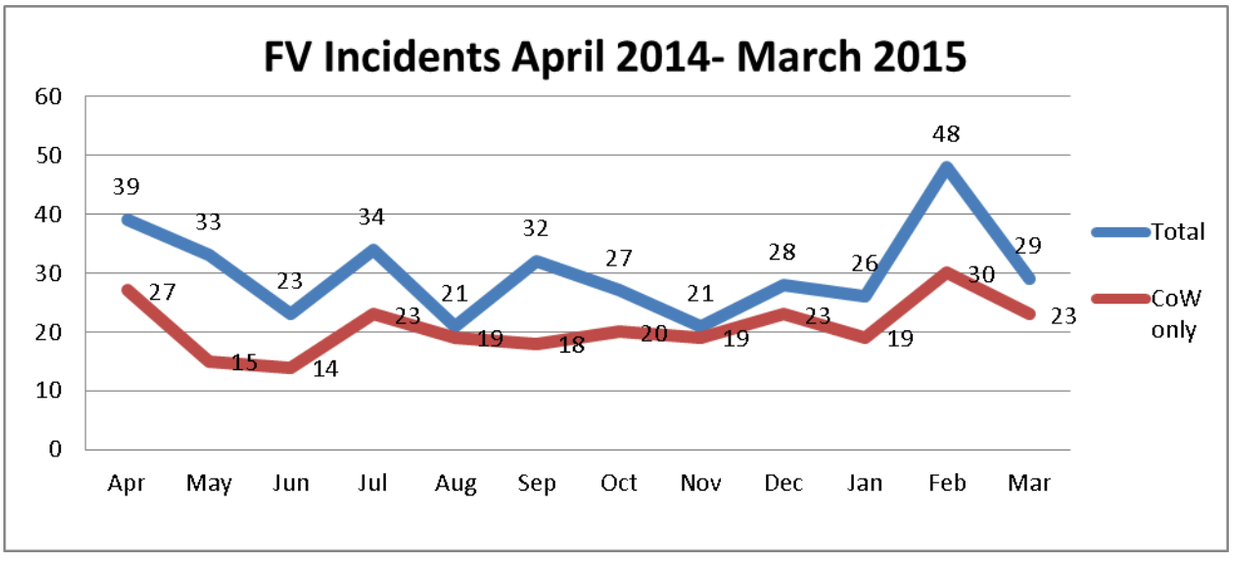
CLIENT SERVICES

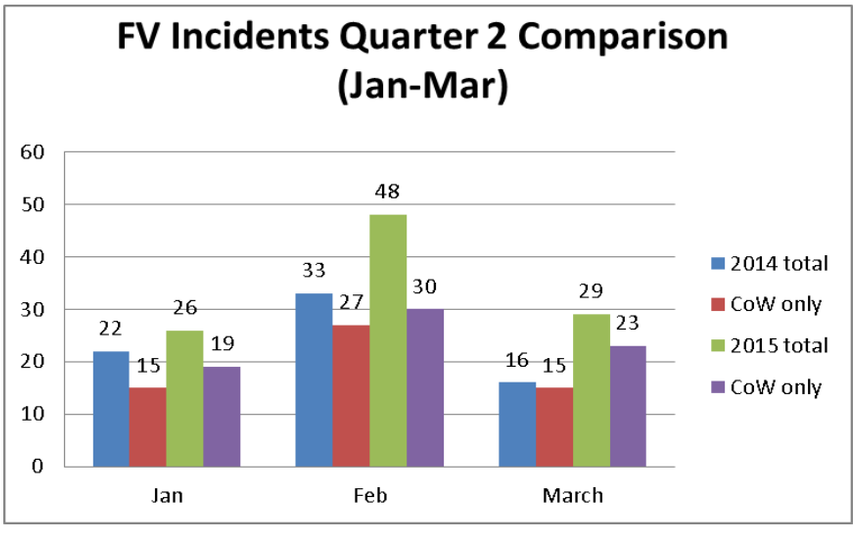
Sharon* currently lives with her daughter, her daughter's partner and her infant grandchild. Since living in the home, Sharon has experienced physical, emotional, psychological, financial, verbal and elder family violence at the hands of her daughter's partner. He is often controlling of her daily life, including over the cooking and shopping, and he recently physically assaulted her. After the incident Sharon sought advice from the police. He was waiting as she left the police station and questioned her reasons for being there. Her daughter has also been verbally and emotionally abusive toward her. Despite the violence, she has chosen to remain in the home to care for her grandson and look out for her daughter. On the recommendation of a friend Sharon came to WCC for support. She was referred to a community lawyer and a family violence outreach worker for education about intervention orders and developing a safety plan. Sharon decided to obtain an intervention order allowing the family to continue living together on the condition that her abuser stops using family violence against her.

*Names changed for case studies

ABUSE PROFILE

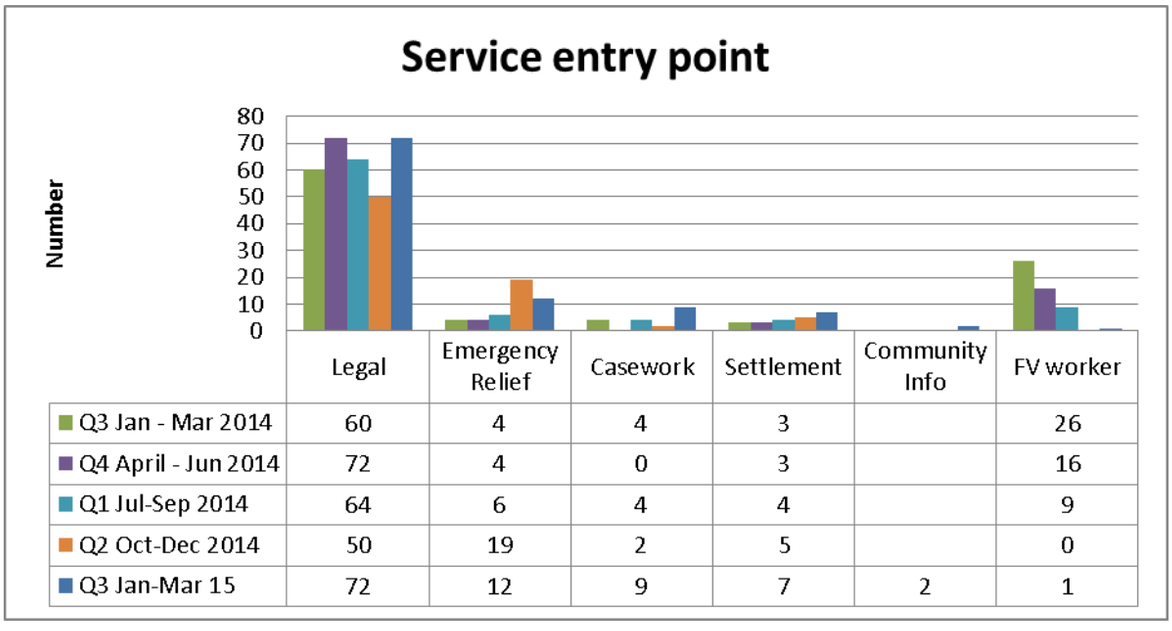
FV INCIDENTS





- This quarter, 103 new people presented to WCC for family violence, a 36% increase from the previous quarter. This compares to 76 in the previous quarter) and 71 in the equivalent 2014 Jan-March quarter).
- In 2014/2015 (Apr-Mar) there were 361 new people presenting to WCC for family violence, or more than one per working day. This is a 16% increase from 2013/2014 (Apr-Mar) (311).
- This quarter there was an average of 34 clients per month.
- There were 59 working days. This equates to 1.75 cases presenting at WCC per working day over the quarter. In February there was an average of 2.4 cases presenting to WCC per working day.
- February had the highest number of reported cases (48).

SERVICE ENTRY POINT



	Jan- Mar 2015	Oct- Dec 2014	July- Sep 2014	April – June 2014	Jan – Dec 2014
	Q3	Q2	Q1	Q4	Q3
Legal	**70%**	66%	77%	76%	62%
Emergency Relief	**12%**	25%	7%	4%	4%
Casework	**9%**	3%	4%	0%	4%
Settlement	**6%**	7%	4%	3%	3%
FV worker	**2%**	0%	10%	17%	27%
Community Info	**1%**	--	--	--	--

- Whittlesea Community Legal Service (72 cases) continues to receive the highest number of incidents, followed by emergency relief (12), casework (9) and settlement (7).

- In 47% of cases (48) this was the first contact with a support agency, a decrease from the previous quarter (55%).

- 74% of clients (76 cases) had experienced repeated incidents of family violence before contacting our service. Of these, 59% (45 cases) had previously sought support from another service. Our data does not capture which services or when they were contacted, or the reason for moving to our service. We do not also capture if the client has sought FV or other support from WCC before.

- There were 51 self-referrals (49%) and 45 external referrals (44%), compared with 36% self-referrals and 42% external referrals for the previous quarter. (This quarter 4% were internally referred and 3% left blank.)

- The 45 external referrals were made up of:

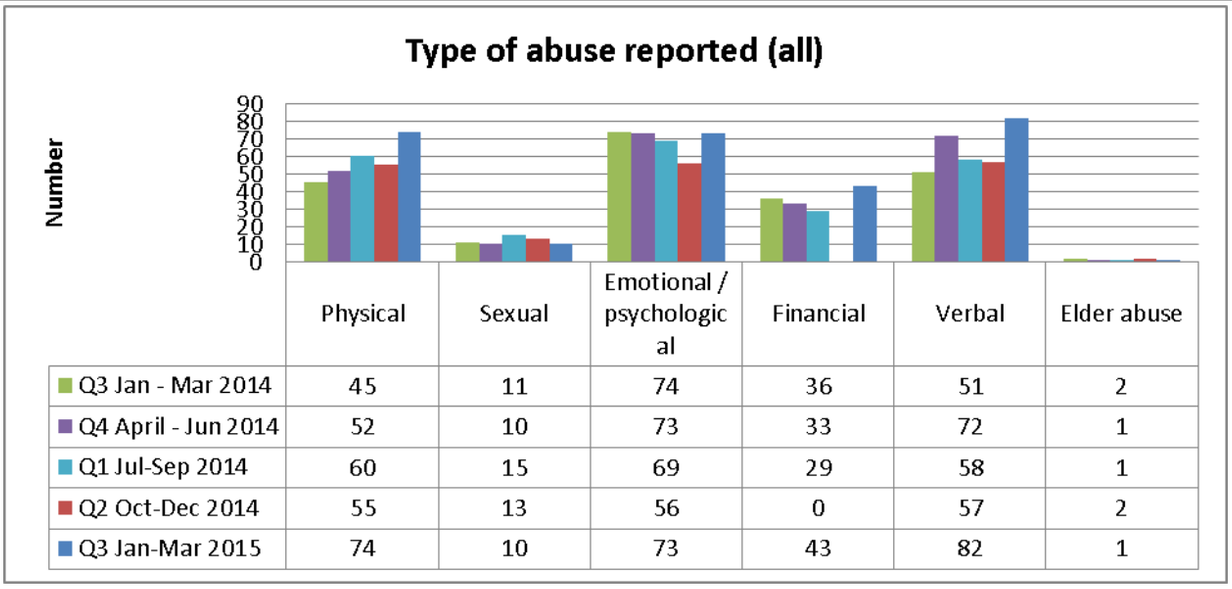
- 20 referrals from Greensborough Family Relationship Centre (where WCC has an outreach lawyer)
- 4 referrals from Berry Street Northern Family and Domestic Violence Service
- 3 referrals from Legal Aid
- 2 referrals from Centrelink
- 2 referrals from South-West Northern/Northern Hospital
- 2 referrals from Court (Heidelberg Magistrate's Court)
- 1 referral from Safe Steps (formerly WDVCS)
- 1 referral from Haven Home Safe
- 1 referral from Elizabeth Hoffman House
- 1 referral from Kildonan UnitingCare
- 1 referral from Victoria Police
- 1 referral from Whittlesea Council
- 1referral from VOCAT
- 1 referral from Relationship Australia
- 1 referral from Sarina Russo Job Access
- 1 referral from a social worker
- 1 referral through media coverage
- 1 left blank

- 78% of self-referrals had experienced multiple incidents of FV, and 47% of self-referrals were approaching a support service for the first time.

- WCC also tracks which agencies we refer clients to. In this quarter referrals were provided for*:
  - Police (19)
  - Women's Legal Service (17)
  - Private solicitor (4)
  - Other CLC (4)
  - Safe Steps (formerly WDVCS) (3)
  - Legal Aid (2)
  - InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence(2)
  - Berry Street Northern Family and Domestic Violence Service (1)
  - Centrelink (1)
  - Kildonan Uniting Care (1)
  - Greensborough Family Relationship Centre (1)
  - International Social Services (1)
  - North East Housing (1)
  - Men's Referral Service (1)

*Does not include referrals made to Salvation Army Crossroads FV worker

TYPE OF ABUSE REPORTED



	Physical	Sexual	Emotional / psychological	Financial	Verbal	Elder abuse
Q3 Jan - Mar 2014	45	11	74	36	51	2
Q4 April - Jun 2014	52	10	73	33	72	1
Q1 Jul-Sep 2014	60	15	69	29	58	1
Q2 Oct-Dec 2014	55	13	56	0	57	2
Q3 Jan-Mar 2015	74	10	73	43	82	1

- 85% of cases (88) involved multiple forms of abuse. Each client disclosed an average of 2.7 types of abuse.

- This quarter verbal abuse was present in 80% of cases. Physical abuse was present in 72% of cases and emotional/psychological in 71% of cases. Financial abuse was present in 42% of cases.

- Of the cases involving only a single type of abuse (14%), physical was the most prevalent (50% or 7 cases), followed by verbal (36% or 5 cases) and emotional and financial abuse present in 7% or 1 case respectively.

- 44% of the cases (45) had contacted police and 42% (43 cases) had applied for an intervention order. Of those that reported to police, 82% (37) sought an intervention order. Intervention orders were sought in 6% of cases (6) without prior police involvement.

- 38 cases reported that children had witnessed the violence (37%).

PREVALENCE OF CO OCCURRING FACTORS

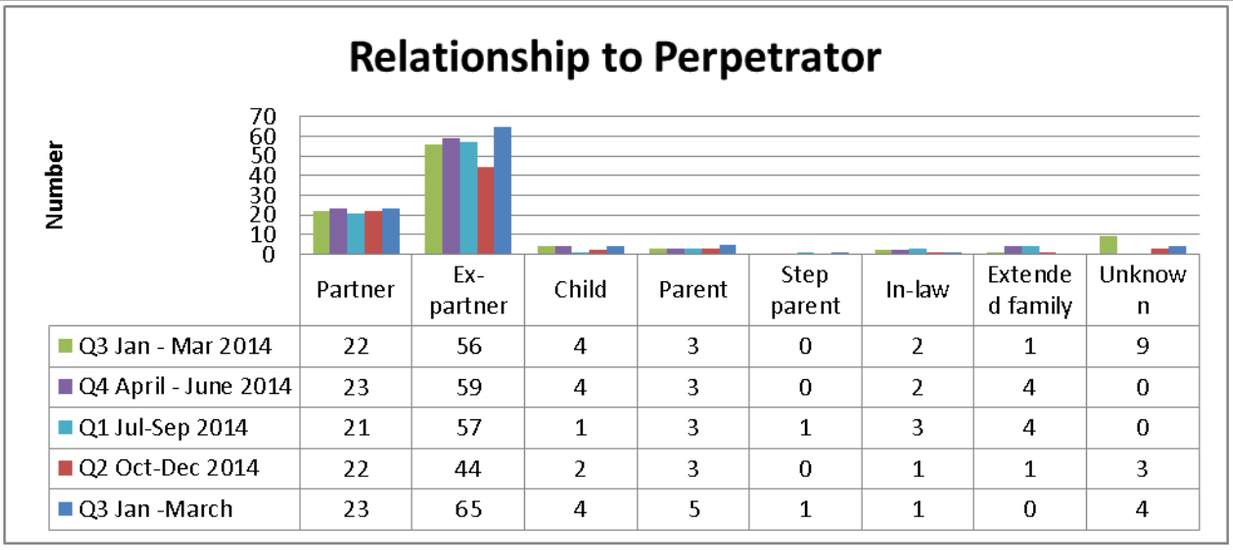
- Midway through Q2 (2014), data collection forms were adjusted to include whether substance abuse, problem gambling, and technology used to stalk/harass were disclosed.

- In this quarter:
  - Substance abuse was present in 35 cases (34%) or 1 in 3 cases
  - Problem gambling was present in 11 cases (11%), or 1 in 10 cases
  - Technology was used to stalk/harass in 28 cases (27%) or 1 in 4 cases

- In 15% of cases (15) there were multiple co occurring factors present. In 35% of cases (36) there was one co occurring factor and in 50% of cases (52) there were no co occurring factors.

- In all cases where there were multiple co occurring factors, substance abuse was present.

RELATIONSHIP OF INDIVIDUAL TO PERPETRATOR



	Partner	Ex-partner	Child	Parent	Step parent	In-law	Extended family	Unknown
Q3 Jan - Mar 2014	22	56	4	3	0	2	1	9
Q4 April - June 2014	23	59	4	3	0	2	4	0
Q1 Jul-Sep 2014	21	57	1	3	1	3	4	0
Q2 Oct-Dec 2014	22	44	2	3	0	1	1	3
Q3 Jan -March	23	65	4	5	1	1	0	4

	Jan-March 2015	Oct-Dec 2014	July-Sep 2014	April – June 2014	Jan – Mar 2014	Oct – Dec 2013
	Q3	Q2	Q1	Q4	Q3	Q2
Ex-partner	**63%**	58%	63%	62%	58%	58%
Partner	**22%**	29%	23%	24%	23%	26%
Parent	**5%**	4%	3%	3%	3%	1%
Child	**4%**	3%	1%	4%	4%	4%
Extended family	**0%**	1%	4%	4%	1%	0%
In-law	**1%**	1%	3%	2%	2%	0%
Step parent	**1%**	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Not specified	**4%**	4%	0%	0%	9%	11%
Total	**100%**	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

- Overwhelmingly, perpetrators were recorded to be ex-partners. This quarter 63% of cases involved ex-partners. 22% of cases involved current partners.
- 80% of cases reported that the violence occurred during their relationship.
- 52% of cases reported the violence was still occurring at the time of contact with WCC.
- 9% reported the violence started after the relationship ended.

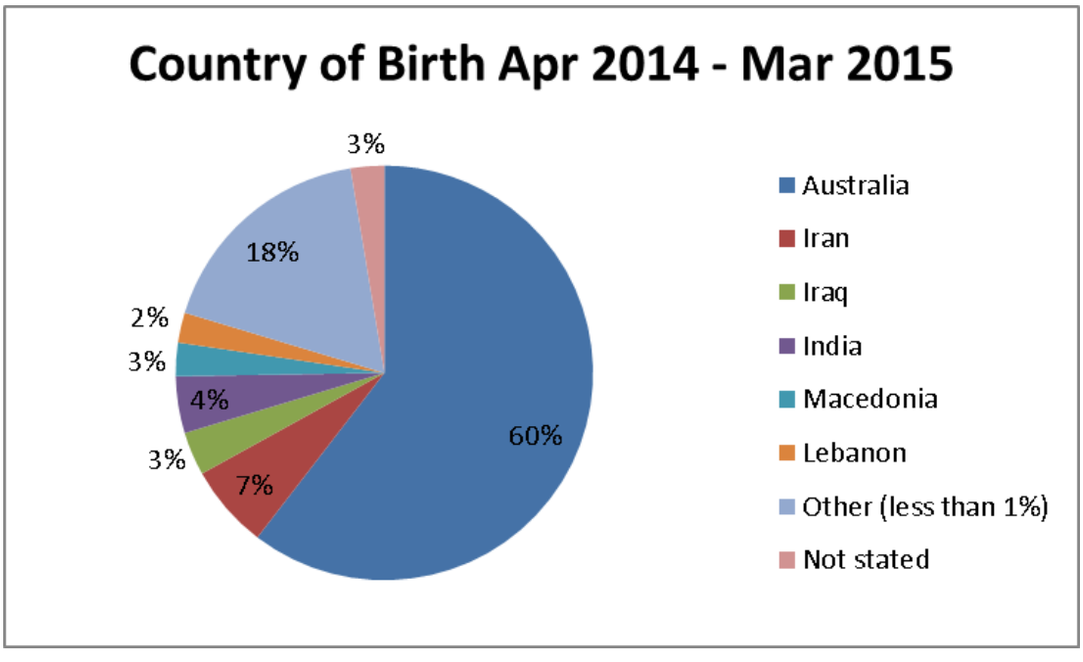
CLIENT PROFILE

COUNTRY OF BIRTH

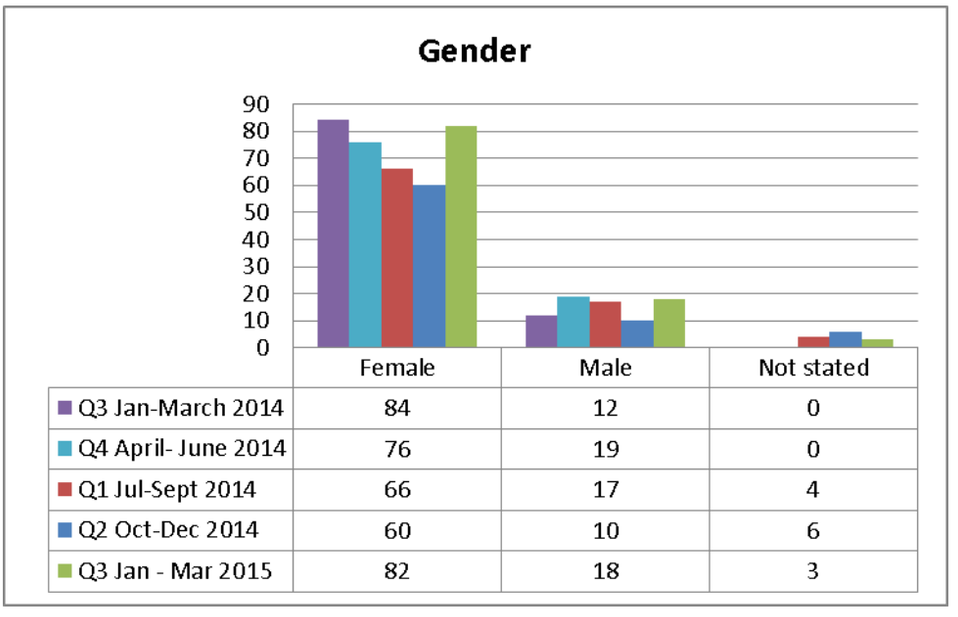
Top 5 Countries by Birth

Q3 Jan-Mar 2015	Q2 Oct-Dec 2014	Q1 Jul-Sep 2014	Q4 April - June 2014
Australia (61%)	**Australia (71%)**	**Australia (58%)**	**Australia (67%)**
Iran, Iraq (4%)	Macedonia (7%)	India, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon (all 3%)	Iran (9%)
India (3%)	India (5%)		India, Indonesia, Iraq, Macedonia, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam (all 2%)
Macedonia, Lebanon (both 2%)	Iraq, Iran, Turkey (all 3%)		

- 42% of cases (43) involved people who were born outside of Australia.
- Of those born outside of Australia, 50% spoke a language other than English at home.
- In this quarter WCC averaged 8 clients per month who were born outside of Australia and spoke a language other than English at home.
- 4 cases required interpreting.



GENDER



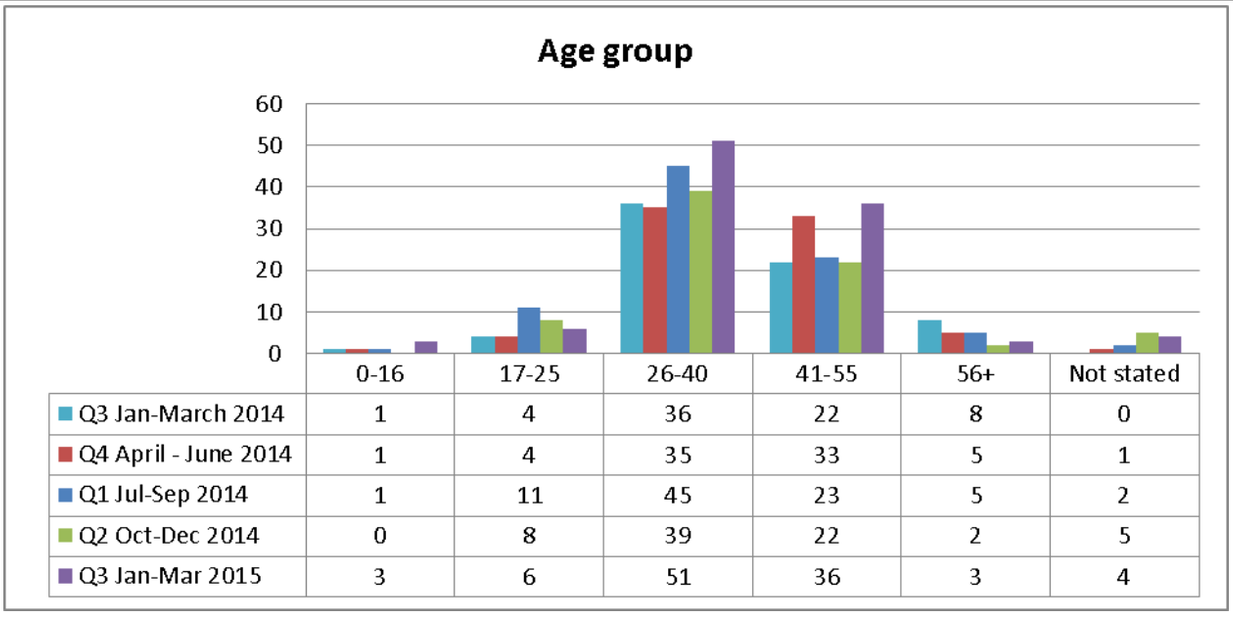
	Female	Male	Not stated
Q3 Jan-March 2014	84	12	0
Q4 April- June 2014	76	19	0
Q1 Jul-Sept 2014	66	17	4
Q2 Oct-Dec 2014	60	10	6
Q3 Jan - Mar 2015	82	18	3

- 100% of females identified as victim. 67% of these women identified their ex partner as the perpetrator and 26% their current partner.

- 8 men identified as victims and 10 as perpetrator. 1 man identified as victim and perpetrator.
- Of the men who identified as victim, perpetrators included ex partners, parents, children, step parents, and in-laws.

- 0 females identified as perpetrator.

AGE GROUP



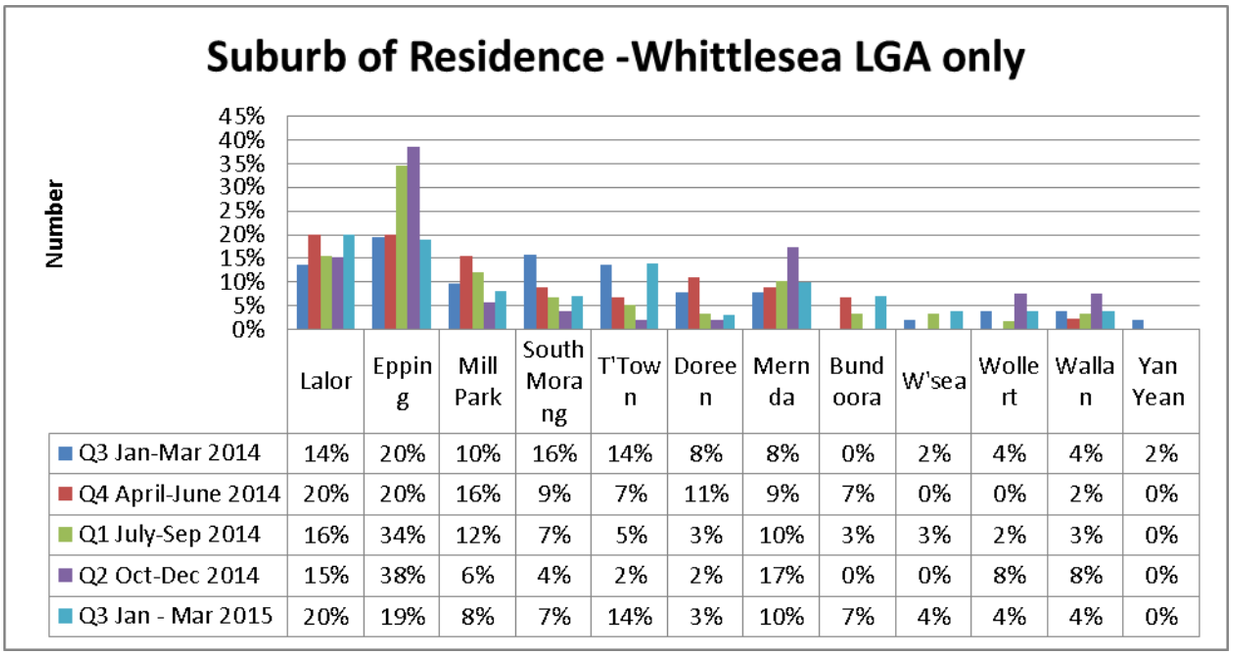
	0-16	17-25	26-40	41-55	56+	Not stated
Q3 Jan-March 2014	1	4	36	22	8	0
Q4 April - June 2014	1	4	35	33	5	1
Q1 Jul-Sep 2014	1	11	45	23	5	2
Q2 Oct-Dec 2014	0	8	39	22	2	5
Q3 Jan-Mar 2015	3	6	51	36	3	4

	Jan-Mar 2015	**Oct-Dec 2014**	**Jul-Sep 2014**	**April – June 2014**	**Jan – Mar 2014**
	Q3	Q2	Q1	Q4	Q3
0-16	**3%**	0%	1%	1%	1%
17-25	**6%**	11%	13%	5%	6%
26-40	**49%**	51%	52%	44%	51%
41-55	**35%**	29%	6%	42%	31%
56+	**3%**	3%	2%	6%	11%
Not stated	**4%**	7%	0%	1%	0%
Total	**100%**	100%	100%	100%	100%

- The 26-40 age group had the highest representation with 49% of incidents (51 cases).
- 10% of clients had no means of financial support.
- 62% of clients were dependent on a pension or benefit.
- 6% of clients were on a mixed wage/pension.
- 20% of clients had a wage.

SUBURB OF RESIDENCE

	Lalor	Epping	Mill Park	South Morang	T'Town	Doreen	Mernda	Bundoora	W'sea	Wollert	Wallan	Yan Yean	Other
Q3 Jan-Mar 2014	7	10	5	8	7	4	4	0	1	2	2	1	14
Q4 April-June 2014	9	9	7	4	3	5	4	3	0	0	1	0	32
Q1 July-Sep 2014	9	20	7	4	3	2	6	2	2	1	2	0	29
Q2 Oct-Dec 2014	8	20	3	2	1	1	9	0	0	4	4	0	27
Q 3 Jan - March 2015	15	14	6	5	11	2	8	5	3	3	3	0	28



	Lalor	Epping	Mill Park	South Morang	T'Town	Doreen	Mernda	Bundoora	W'sea	Wollert	Wallan	Yan Yean
Q3 Jan-Mar 2014	14%	20%	10%	16%	14%	8%	8%	0%	2%	4%	4%	2%
Q4 April-June 2014	20%	20%	16%	9%	7%	11%	9%	7%	0%	0%	2%	0%
Q1 July-Sep 2014	16%	34%	12%	7%	5%	3%	10%	3%	3%	2%	3%	0%
Q2 Oct-Dec 2014	15%	38%	6%	4%	2%	2%	17%	0%	0%	8%	8%	0%
Q3 Jan - Mar 2015	20%	19%	8%	7%	14%	3%	10%	7%	4%	4%	4%	0%

- The majority of people – 73% – live within the City of Whittlesea.
- 27% came from outside Whittlesea, including Greensborough, Rosanna and Eltham.
- Lalor and Epping represented the largest proportion of contacts within the Whittlesea LGA at 20% and 19% respectively.
- The suburbs of South Morang, Doreen and Mernda make up approximately 30% of the Whittlesea population. 20% of cases within the Whittlesea LGA were from these areas.
- The suburbs of Lalor, Epping, Epping North, Thomastown and Mill Park make up 56% of the Whittlesea population. 61% of cases were from these areas.

Discussion:

- This quarter WCC reported its highest number of family violence clients since reporting began. There was a significant increase (36%) in clients since last quarter (103 compared to 76) and compared with the equivalent quarter in 2014 (71). February was the busiest month with 48 cases. It is also the shortest calendar month for the year and WCC saw an average of 2.4 family violence clients per working day. Interestingly, the data reveals that in February WCC saw the highest number of clients from outside the Whittlesea LGA for the month (18 clients, 37%). Legal services tend to see the highest proportion of WCC FV clients and this continued this quarter. Though emergency relief saw fewer clients than in the last quarter (12% compared with 25%), the number of clients is above the average over the last five quarters (10%). This may indicate an increasing trend in the number of clients with family violence issues presenting to emergency relief workers. There were also increases in the number of clients entering though both settlement (a 40% increase) and case work services (a 350% increase). For case work, more than 50% of these clients were referred by external agencies, suggesting more services are utilising WCC as a FV referral point. Some of the increase in casework has been from specialist family violence services referring women to WCC for the extra case work the service can provide. The increase in settlement clients may be due to wider increases in financial hardship, as well as continuing conflict in country of origin that can lead to increased stress for family in Australia and escalations of abuse.

- This quarter data collection continued around substance abuse, problem-gambling and use of technology to facilitate stalking/harassment. Co occurring factors were present in 50% of cases, with multiple co occurring factors present in 35% of cases. The most common factor, and the factor present in all cases where there were multiple co occurring factors, was substance abuse. Technology used to stalk and harass was present in 27% of cases and problem gambling was present in 11% of cases. In more than half of cases where technology was used to stalk and harass, substance abuse was also present. The data suggests that family violence does not occur in a vacuum and providing holistic support and assistance around co occurring factors is required. It also supports calls that more research into the intersection of these co occurring factors take place in order to design prevention and intervention strategies that consider their co occurrence.

- This quarter, the suburb of residence data showed a more even spread of clients from across the Whittlesea LGA. Epping went from having the highest percentage in the last quarter (38%) to 19% in this quarter, second to Lalor with (20%) though this did not reflect a substantial decrease in the number of clients from Epping (20 to 14). Thomastown saw a significant increase from 2% in the previous quarter to 14% this quarter (1 client to 11). The number of clients from Bundoora and Whittlesea went from 0% in the last quarter to 7% and 4% respectively. Wollert and Wallan both saw a decrease from 8% in the last quarter to 4% this quarter, though the actual number of clients seen didn't reduce significantly (4 to 3). This quarter only Yan Yean had no representation in the client base. Overall, it appears that WCC is increasing its reach across the whole LGA though further work needs to be done in this area.

- The family violence contact group this quarter decided to adjust the data collection form to include 'group' in service entry point. This will capture women who have attended one of WCC's groups and sought FV support and referral within group time.

Discussion from previous quarter:

- In the previous quarter it was identified that the largest group outside of those born in Australia were from Iran. This trend has continued this quarter with high representation from Iran and Iraq. Iranians continue to present most frequently when looking at the past 12 months as a whole. This continuing trend is likely explained by the implementation of an Our Watch funded violence prevention project specifically working with the Iranian community. This project builds on the ongoing work of the Whittlesea CALD Communities FV Project and of the Farsi-speaking Salvation Army Crossroads FV Worker out posted at WCC.

FAMILY VIOLENCE DATA COLLECTION

DATE:_____ **COMPLETED BY:**_____ **SERVICE ENTRY POINT:** _____

FRC CLIENT? Yes ☐ No ☐

AGE GROUP: ☐ 0-16 ☐ 17-25 ☐ 26-40 ☐ 41-55 ☐ 56+			**SUBURB:** **GENDER:** Male ☐ Female ☐ **NO OF DEPENDANTS:**
COB: Australia ☐ **OTHER:**	**ATSI:** ☐	**YOA:**	**RESIDENCY STATUS:** Citizen ☐ PR ☐
LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME:			**INTERPRETER REQUIRED?:** ☐ Yes ☐ No

VISA:

☐ Refugee ☐ Family Stream Other: _____

☐ Spouse ☐ Child /young person N/A ☐

☐ Skilled ☐ International Student

PERPETRATOR ☐ **VICTIM** ☐

IS THIS THE FIRST INCIDENCE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE? ☐ Yes ☐ No

HAS CLIENT PREVIOUSLY SOUGHT SUPPORT FROM ANY OTHER AGENCY? ☐ Yes ☐ No

HAS CLIENT CONTACTED POLICE? ☐ **APPLIED FOR INTERVENTION ORDER?** ☐

SUBSTANCE ABUSE ☐ **PROBLEM GAMBLING** ☐ **TECHNOLOGY USED FOR STALKING/HARRASSMENT** ☐

FINANCIAL SITUATION:	**SUPPORT BEING SOUGHT:**	**ENTRY POINT FOR ACCESS:**
☐ Wage ☐ Education Allowance ☐ Retired ☐ No means of support ☐ No means of support (2 year wait) ☐ No means of support (asylum seeker) ☐ Pension/Benefit	☐ Legal ☐ Financial ☐ Casework ☐ Emergency Relief ☐ Community Transport ☐ Access to FV Services ☐ Housing	☐ Referred by external agency Agency:_____ ☐ Referred internally ☐ Self referred **REFERRED TO:** FV Outreach Worker Berry Street Women's Legal Police Mary Anderson inTouch WDVCS Other:_____

TYPE OF ABUSE REPORTED:	**OTHER PARTY:**	**NATURE OF VIOLENCE:**
☐ Physical ☐ Sexual ☐ Emotional/Psychological ☐ Economic/Financial ☐ Verbal ☐ Elder Have children witnessed violence? ☐	☐ Ex-Partner ☐ Partner ☐ Step Parent ☐ In-Law ☐ Extended Family ☐ Parent ☐ Sibling ☐ Child	☐ Violence occurred during r'ship ☐ Violence started after r'ship finished _____ ☐ Violence still occurring

Comments/case studies:

Evaluation of the
Whittlesea Community Connections

Housing Brokerage & Support Project

Whittlesea Community connections

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Acronyms

AIHW Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

COW City of Whittlesea

DHS Department of Human Services

HEF Housing Establishment Fund

J2SI Journey to Social Inclusion pilot program

MoU Memorandum of Understanding

HBSP Housing Brokerage and Support Project

NRAS National Rental Affordability Scheme

WCC Whittlesea Community Connections

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Contents

1 Introduction and service context 1

1.1 Rationale and origins of the model 1
1.2 Evaluation method 1
1.3 Structure of the report 2

2 Extending principles of microfinance to private rental support 3

2.1 Microfinance as a pathway to financial inclusion 3
2.2 A microfinance gap in private rental support? 4

3 Barriers to accessing the private rental sector 5

3.1 A shifting benchmark of what is affordable and secure? 5
3.2 Discrimination and selective sorting 6
3.3 The growing need for private rental support programs in the City of Whittlesea 6

4 The program model in practice 9

4.1 Numbers assisted and amount of brokerage provided 12
4.2 Approach to case management support 15

5 Client and stakeholder perspectives on program practices 15

5.1 Promising practices for rental accessibility and support 15
5.2 Client satisfaction with the quality of support 21
5.3 Lessons learned for private rental support programs 22

6 Client and stakeholder perspectives on service impact 26

6.1 Overcoming the reasons for seeking assistance 26
6.2 Longer-term housing stability 30

7 Conclusions and recommendations for future program development 34

7.1 Expansion of the brokerage capacity 34
7.2 Increased capacity for tenancy support outreach 35
7.3 Governance 35
7.4 Client capacity building beyond the loan 36
7.5 Strengthening collaborative relationships with real estate agents. 36
7.6 Financial incentives for landlords 36
7.7 Housing affordability 37
7.8 Assistance to sustain tenancies 37
7.9 Stronger links with housing providers 38

8 References 39

9 Appendices 41

List of tables

Table 1. Summary statistics on the amount of brokerage loans, 2013-2014 13
Table 2. Loan amount & repayment schedule, 2013-2014..... 13
Table 3. Median client satisfaction with the support process & knowledge of the housing market... 21
Table 4. Satisfaction scores for meeting housing needs and difficulties repaying loan 27
Table 5. Satisfaction with stability and coping with other life pressures 30

List of figures

Figure 1. Proportion of affordable private rental in Whittlesea, all properties 2000-2014 7
Figure 2. Proportion of affordable private rental in Whittlesea, 2 bedroom properties 2000-2014 7
Figure 3. Eligibility and assessment process 11
Figure 4. Main source of income of brokerage clients 14
Figure 5. Gender of brokerage clients 14
Figure 6. Family type of brokerage clients..... 14
Figure 7. Country of birth of brokerage clients..... 14

Executive summary

This report presents findings from the evaluation of the Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) pilot Housing Brokerage and Support Project (HBSP). The evaluation of the pilot seeks to document the emerging promising practices and the lessons learned by drawing on service activity data and qualitative interviews with clients and external stakeholders, a staff focus group, and case study vignettes. The evaluation also reviews the existing practice evidence base and demand for private rental support to determine how the model can be further developed into the future.

WCC implemented the HBSP in 2013 to trial an innovative response to the increasing number of clients presenting to the service with experience of long-term homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. Part of the motivation for developing a local response involved an appreciation of the difficulties faced by clients of WCC in accessing timely housing support and assistance from an overstretched housing support sector. The overall goal of the project was to assist low income households to gain access to and stabilise their private rental housing through the provision of brokerage no interest loans matched with case management support.

The HBSP combines elements of microfinance with a model of private rental support. Microfinance provides an alternative to pay day lending and other high risk sources of credit and has demonstrated promising outcomes in assisting households towards greater financial inclusion. Private rental support programs seek to overcome the many barriers that low income households face in gaining access to the private rental sector. The existing evidence suggests that housing outcomes tend to be superior when households can be supported to remain in and transition from one rental property to another and avoid entering the homelessness service system where housing needs become more difficult and costly to resolve (AHIW 2013).

As the proportion of affordable rental stock declines relative to demand, private rental support programs are becoming a vital element in the package of housing assistance for low income households. Demographic indicators for the City of Whittlesea suggest that demand for private rental support programs will continue to grow. The low proportion of social housing stock in the area means that households have little choice but to rent in the private rental sector. The absence of more affordable one to two bedroom properties in the COW area exacerbates the affordability problem.

The scope of the HBSP was modest at the outset to allow WCC to trial its implementation without significant risk to the funds invested or to the clients in receipt of brokerage loans. From January 2013 to October 2014, a total of 136 clients received housing information and referral whilst a total of $17,925.30 has been loaned to 18 individuals.

The main client groups in receipt of brokerage loans:

- Are female, lone persons or lone parents, and new arrivals to Australia.
- Are all in receipt of Centrelink income support.
- Typically repay $20-50 per fortnight for 12 months.
- Have an average of 8 contacts of case management support.

Key findings on the promising practices within the program that contributed to increased private rental accessibility and support included:

- An integrated point of access through the co-location of the program within the broader range of services offered at WCC.
- A flexible and collaborative approach to loan management that can be matched with existing resources to provide the exact amount needed to gain entry into the private rental market.
- Case management support that provides advocacy and skills building to negotiate the private rental sector, including a flexible and solution focused approach to assessment to help households become loan ready even if they are not eligible upon first assessment.

The key findings on the lessons learned as the pilot project has been implemented include:

- Building relationships with real estate agents is critical to accessing private rental properties.
- Effective relationships between agencies and real estate agents require ongoing commitment on both sides.
- Housing brokerage can foster a sense of dignity, self-respect, self-sufficiency and giving back to help others.
- Not everyone is suitable for a brokerage loan and the way it is administered needs to be managed carefully with clear policy and procedures in place.

The program has been effective in:

- Overcoming the reasons for seeking support and assisting clients 'into the door' of a private rental property.
- Stabilising housing, particularly when higher needs clients have continued to be linked into other sources of ongoing support.
- Scheduling repayments so that borrowers can manage the loan repayments.
- Helping clients to rebuild new lives and cope better with financial and day to day stresses.

The program has been less effective in:

- Being able to overcome the longer-term difficulties of affordability of private rental for those remaining on income support payments.

Recommendations

There is clear support across all consulted on the merits of the HBSP and unanimous support for the model to continue to be expanded to meet the pressing demand for housing assistance in the Whittlesea and surrounding area. Given the evidence of strong, positive outcomes currently being achieved, it is recommended that WCC:

1. **Scale-up** the project by seeking an additional mix of **public and private funds** to expand the capacity of the program to reach a greater number of low-income households within the specified target group in need of assistance.
2. Undertake a **needs assessment** and **service mapping** of the demand for private rental assistance in the Whittlesea area in planning to expand its housing provision focus.
3. Seek **recurrent funding** for the expansion of the existing case management role to **enable greater capacity** for housing related outreach and support.
4. Cost an administration or **'loan manager'** component into the funding model when seeking additional funds. The loan manager, as part of a joint assessment process, would have responsibility for following up defaults and ensuring that clients are managing the repayments without undue hardship.
5. Explore options for **strengthening and partnering** a 'financial' and 'rental' literacy training program to be delivered as an individual and/or grouped based learning module in different languages. The modules should result in a certificate upon completion that forms part of a rental reference.
6. Continue to cultivate **collaborative** partnerships with **local** real estate agents by promoting the capacities of low income households and how the program assists in building their 'rental readiness'. The scope for further formalising two way referral protocols should continue to be explored.
7. **Explore** the viability of subsidising rental insurance premiums for landlords as a last resort practice for tenants that do not have a rental history or have a poor rental history with several unsuccessful applications.

8 Continue to **be proactive** in raising the needs of low income households through ongoing coordination and **engagement** in local and regional forums for affordable housing and contributing to **policy reviews** based on the lessons learned from the Housing Brokerage and Support Project.

9 Undertake **periodic reviews** and follow up with tenants as a condition of the loan agreement. This includes seeking consent to liaise with real estate agents to determine whether any rental payment difficulties have occurred and how rental and loan repayments can be renegotiated.

10 Explore options to develop MoUs for referral protocols with community housing providers for those who have been assisted into a private rental property but who will need to be relocated to a **longer-term affordable housing** arrangement.

1 Introduction and service context

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) provides a range of programs and services to help overcome disadvantage and increase community participation within the City of Whittlesea. In 2013, WCC implemented a Housing Brokerage and Support Project (HBSP) to respond to the increasing number of clients presenting to WCC with experience of recurrent, long-term homelessness or who were at risk of homelessness. The overall goal of the project was to assist low income households to gain access to and stabilise their private rental housing through the provision of brokerage loans matched with case management support.

The project was funded by a combined seeding grant from four philanthropic funders: Jack Brockhoff Foundation ($12,000), Mercy Foundation ($10,000), Sidney Myer Fund ($10,000) and the Ian Potter Fund ($34,000). Additional in kind support for the project was provided by integrating a support worker position into the existing emergency relief program. The initial project was implemented on a small scale, aiming to provide assistance to no more than 20 households over a two year period in order to trial the model prior to wider implementation. This report presents the findings from the evaluation of the pilot program, with a particular focus on documenting the emerging promising practices, the lessons learned and how the model can be further developed into the future.

1.1 Rationale and origins of the model

The need for a targeted private rental brokerage program came from the high numbers of clients presenting to WCC's emergency relief program with a housing related crisis. The amount of financial support that people required to assist them out of this crisis was beyond the typical amounts available per person within WCC's emergency relief program. Many clients accessing WCC were experiencing long wait times to receive any financial and housing related assistance from services in the area and once referred to these services would experience a conveyor-belt of further referrals, often ending-up being referred back to WCC. The critical issue that clients faced was being able to raise the full upfront rental costs that would allow them to secure a private rental property in an increasingly competitive market environment.

1.2 Evaluation method

The main source of data to inform the evaluation was qualitative in nature drawn from client and external stakeholder interviews and a staff focus group. The aim of the client interviews was to elicit qualitative accounts of their experience of the support process and the difference the program has made to their housing circumstances and to other aspects of their lives. A total of eight clients or 44% of the 18 clients provided with a brokerage loan were interviewed. The semi-structured client interviews were undertaken at WCC by the author and were between ½ and 1 hour in duration (see attached interview schedule in appendix 1). The translating phone service was used for two interviewees with English as a second language who required an interpreter. RMIT University ethics approval was sought and granted prior to commencing the interviews. Clients were initially invited to participate in an interview via their case worker through distributing a prepared background statement. Informed consent was sought by the interviewer prior to commencing interviews (see attached in appendix 1). The interviews were not tape recorded.

An equal number of four females and four males were interviewed. The age range of clients interviewed was 28-50 years old, with the largest proportion being in their 30s. Three interviewees were lone parents and 1 was a couple with children. A further three lived in a shared or couple household, and 1 was living in a single household. The main source of income was from Centrelink payments for a Disability Support Pension (3), Parenting Payment (2) and Newstart Allowance (1). A further two reported that they were currently self-employed. The household income of those interviewed was very low, with the majority earning below $35,000 before tax. Fortnightly income reported to range from $500 for Newstart up to $1800 for parenting payment for a large family. The country of birth of interviewees included Australia (3), Iran (3), Iraq (1), and Kuwait (1).

External stakeholder interviews were undertaken with a project funding agency, a real estate representative and a housing service provider in the Whittlesea area. External stakeholder interviews were undertaken over the phone generating an in-depth discussion of up to an hour. The interviews focused on the broad issues encountered in the private rental sector in the Whittlesea area and ideas for further development

of the program model. A staff focus group with team leaders, case management and other support staff at WCC was also undertaken to provide a detailed discussion on the implementation of the project, the key needs identified through service contact and also suggestions for further model development. The qualitative data were supplemented with service activity information collected by the service and client case studies provided by the support team. A brief review and synthesis of the existing evidence based literature on microfinance and private rental support programs was also undertaken.

1.3 Structure of the report

Following from this introduction the report will review the emerging evidence base of microfinance as a low risk alternative to pay day lending and its application within the broader package of private rental assistance. Next the key concerns impacting upon private rental access within the City of Whittlesea will be outlined. The focus in sections 4 through to 6 then moves to documenting the program model in practice and the findings on its strengths, lessons learned and the service impact at the time of the evaluation. The report concludes with a discussion of the directions and recommendations for the future development of the program model.

2 Extending principles of microfinance to private rental support

The WCC Housing Brokerage model brings together elements from microfinance and Private Rental Support Programs with flexible brokerage funds matched with support to assist with access to the private rental market and to help sustain tenancies. This section briefly reviews the emerging evidence base on both combined elements. There is limited peer reviewed literature on the effectiveness of microfinance and private rental support programs, with much of the evidence base confined to practice reports.

2.1 Microfinance as a pathway to financial inclusion

Microfinance is an alternative source of credit for low income households to assist with the purchase of essential household items and with the transition out of poverty through the funding of self-enterprise. While various models of microfinance have evolved to reflect local needs and conditions, the main distinction of microfinance from mainstream and fringe finance is the provision of loans for small sums of money with very low to zero interest.

Microfinance loans are typically less than $1500 and can be repaid over a long period of time, often up to 12-18 months. No interest loans are often referred to as “circular community credit” because the money repaid is then used to provide finance for new households in need with the cycle continuing (Centre for Social Impact, 2014; Banks et al.,2012).

Microfinance programs in Australia, particularly the Good Shepherd model, have developed as a socially and financially responsible alternative to ‘pay day’ or ‘predatory’ loans (Banks et al., 2014). Pay day loans are characterised by small amounts of less than $1000 that are to be repaid in a short period of time, often the next pay period. The loans generally carry excessively high interest rates with additional penalties or fees imposed if payments are late (Banks et al., 2012). In the absence of access to or a lack of awareness of microfinance models, many low income households turn to pay day loans to meet urgent household expenses including the need to secure access to rental housing and/or prevent its loss (Connolly et al., 2011, Banks et al.,2012; Lee 2014). The combination of high interest rates, strict repayment criteria and deceitful lending practices among some pay day lenders can contribute to a cycle of unsustainable debt and extreme hardship for low income households taking on the loans (Banks et al.,2014; Lee 2014). However despite the risks, low income households accessing crisis support services reported that they would continue to access pay day lenders as they provide a quick solution to urgent financial needs (Lee 2014).

Although the evidence base on microfinance is still emerging, there is some indication of its effectiveness as a viable alternative to pay day and other high risk loans.

The broader microfinance literature reviewed suggest that, for the most part, households are able to manage their repayments provided the loan is flexible, well governed, and that they are based on no to low interest. The positive impact of microfinance is greatest when it is combined with other forms of assistance and education that aim to build financial literacy, provides practical and emotional support (Mouy 2010; Brackertz, 2012; Becchettia & Conzoa 2013; Centre Social impact 2014).

Findings from a recent evaluation of the Good Shepherd low interest and no interest programs confirm earlier research on the benefits of microfinance programs. Specifically, 82% of the 710 surveyed who were in receipt of no interest loans had reported improvements in social and economic outcomes. Moreover, 42 percent of clients reported that they stopped or reduced their use of pay day loans. The evaluation also identified significant unmet demand for microfinance relative to the size of low income households who require credit (Centre for Social Impact, 2014).

Whilst the growth of microfinance in Australia has enabled low income households to access credit with lowered financial risks, eligibility tends to be limited to the purchase or maintenance of household items, with the main reason for credit being for car repairs followed by the purchase of whitegoods (Centre for Social Impact, 2013; 2014). The loans do not typically extend to direct housing related assistance, although this may have unintended benefits by freeing up income that can be redirected towards housing needs. Moreover, loans administered through existing microfinance models with major financial institutions are not well suited to the more rapid approval process

that is often required to secure a rental property when one becomes available. This suggests that there is scope for the expansion of locally based and administered models with the flexibility to respond quickly to housing crisis and or the more rapid transition to a new property.

2.2 A microfinance gap in private rental support?

The application of microfinance lending principles to housing assistance is gaining some prevalence, although there are still only a few examples and even fewer formalised evaluations of outcomes. The most commonly applied housing related microfinance has been applied in developing countries to fund small incremental improvements for self-built dwellings. In Australia, the recent growth of mortgage relief programs is a noted example. In the mortgage relief program no interest loans, funded via state housing authorities, are available to home owners to prevent the loss of home ownership for those experiencing temporary hardship (AHIW 2014). Mortgage relief loans are governed by strict eligibility criterion that is capped according to house value amounts. Although there have been limited formal evaluations on the longer-term effectiveness of mortgage relief programs they do illustrate the role of microfinance as a vehicle for assisting low income households to resolve a housing related crisis.

There are very few examples where microfinance specifically targets private rental housing access, particularly for the full amount of rent in advance. While the private rental Bond Loan Assistance Scheme has many elements of microfinance, it differs in that the amount borrowed does not need to be repaid by the recipient unless the bond, or part of it, is not returned from the landlord. The loans cannot be used for rent in advance.

The current suite of private rental assistance programs administered through state housing offices and other locally based organisations often include flexible or brokerage funds to assist with private rental access and to sustaining the tenancy (see for example AHIW 2014). Private rental assistance programs are often delivered with a package of support that varies in intensity depending on target groups and focus of the program. The brokerage funding is usually provided as a one off payment that does not need to be repaid, although the amounts are often capped on an individual basis. The amounts are typically below $1000 (AHIW, 2014), although there are programs such as the Homeground Youth Private Rental Access Program, that provided a larger sum for rental establishment costs for young people aged 18-25 years. In Victoria, the main form of government funded brokerage private rental support is provided through the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF). HEF is tied to a strict eligibility criteria with the maximum amount that can be received capped and assistance can only be accessed once every 12 months (DHS 2014a).

While the benefits of brokerage funding have not been adequately investigated over time, the use of flexible funds to assist with both access to and in sustaining tenancies are a vital element in the early intervention response to homelessness. Housing outcomes tend to be superior when households can be supported to remain in and transition from one rental property to another and avoid entering the homelessness service system where housing needs become more difficult and costly to resolve (AHIW 2013). An earlier review undertaken by Jacobs et al (2007) identified both positive and limiting aspects of private rental support programs in assisting lower income renting households. Private rental support programs were found to provide much needed short-term relief in helping households to gain access to housing and in managing arrears but did little to alleviate longer-term affordability concerns.

More recent intensive supportive housing models, including the Mental Illness Fellowship Doorway Housing and Support Project, where vulnerable households are rehoused in the private rental market and provided with rental subsidies for the duration of support face similar challenges. Although significant gains are made whilst clients are engaged in the program, once rental subsidies are withdrawn the sustainability of private rental tenancies becomes more difficult with some clients reporting the need to relocate to more affordable housing (Nous Group 2014). The question of whether providing direct access to long-term affordable housing at the outset, as in the Journey to Social Inclusion model (J2SI), is more effective than private rental support is yet to be fully determined (Johnson et al., 2014, Parkinson 2014). However, for most households the private rental market will be the most direct and timely route into housing and it is critical that there is sufficient assistance available to prevent homelessness and allow households to move with ease from one property to the next

3 Barriers to accessing the private rental sector

The private rental sector has become a long-term, if not permanent, housing option for increasing numbers of low income households (Stone et al., 2013). The long-run decline in affordability at the bottom end of the private rental sector in Australian cities and some regional areas is well established. Despite the growth of rental properties over the past decade there remains a critical national shortage of some 187,000 dwellings in 2011 (up from 138,000 in 2006) that is affordable to those in the lowest 20 percent of the income distribution (Hulse et al., 2014, p.29). Increasing reliance on the private rental sector to house low income households indicates that a range of private rental support programs will be needed to not only bridge the affordability access gap but to also overcome the selective sorting practices that can often place low income households at the 'bottom of the application pile' (Short et al., 2008; Wallis Consulting Group 2008).

Consultations with clients, external stakeholders and staff in the focus group reinforced the difficulties that low income households faced in the initial stages of gaining entry to the private rental sector. This section focuses on the key themes in relation to the difficulties that low income households were reported to experience in obtaining rental properties in the Whittlesea area. The provision of financial support was considered only part of the solution in assisting these households to overcome constraints to access and increase their competitiveness alongside other prospective tenants.

3.1 A shifting benchmark of what is affordable and secure?

Service providers and real estate stakeholders were candid about the difficulties faced by some low income households in securing a rental property to live in and highlighted how both real estate and welfare agencies have attempted to respond to this changing market context. One significant development reported was that real estate agents have had to adjust the affordability threshold for lower income households from the traditional cut off of 30 percent of income up to 45 percent. Although adjusting the affordability threshold can mean that tenants who might not have been considered eligible for a property previously would now be eligible, it reveals the state of the housing market for low income households where income levels have not kept pace with rental price increases.

> **'The critical thing we need to decide as a real estate agent is whether the tenant can afford to pay the rent. We used to base this on a 30% rule but now we have generally increased that amount to 45%. It has become more difficult for some of the low income renters…..What a lot of people are now trying to do is to share with their brother, sister or pool the rent- we have seen that happening a lot more' [External stakeholder].**

The more widespread use of month by month leasing following the initial twelve month leasing agreement was considered problematic for many low income and vulnerable tenants. There was a view that some landlords are finding ways to 'get around the existing tenancy legislation' through the month by month lease agreement. While month by month renting can provide flexibility for both tenants and landlords, it can pose a significant threat to longer-term security as it may be subject to misuse, as reflected by one stakeholder

> **We are seeing more tenancies with the 12 month lease ending and then going onto a monthly agreement where it is easier to evict the tenant. The security of tenure is becoming increasingly precarious despite there being protection. We have found many practices that place the tenancies at risk for low income tenants. Landlords have evicted clients on the basis that they would like to renovate the property or to move into the property only to see it advertised the next week at a higher rent [External stakeholder].**

3.2 Discrimination and selective sorting

All stakeholders reported the ongoing challenge of how best to present low income households as a suitable tenant. It was reported to be particularly difficult for the tenant to compete with other households when there is no rental history, particularly young people, women escaping domestic violence and new arrivals. Whilst it was reported that some low income households are able to secure a property quickly, others will have to complete up to 10-15 applications before their application is approved.

> **Some real estate agents have good will and intentions but it is ultimately the landlord's decision. It is ultimately a landlords market. The landlord does not want to take the risk on low income tenants when there are plenty of others to choose from. So while the brokerage program can offer financial assistance the biggest obstacle to overcome is access [External stakeholder].**

The real estate agent has a significant say in who accesses private rental by assessing, selecting and recommending prospective tenants to the landlord. The landlord does not have time to read through multiple applications so the recommendations of agents were reported to matter.

> **In reality it is the agent who will recommend somebody – they are the filter in the first instance. The real estate office does not want someone who is going to cause problems for them or the property. They do not want to recommend someone to the landlord who is not going to be a good tenant or look after the property because the landlord will hold the agent responsible for recommending the wrong person [External stakeholder].**

In the first stage of assessment the real estate agent has to be satisfied that the tenant is able to pay for the property. The source of income does not matter, including being in receipt of income support, as this is still considered an income and it is stable. Centrepay has been used to great success for lower income households and most tenants were reported to be very supportive of their rent to be directly debited so they do not get into arrears. However, it was reported that there are a small proportion of landlords who refuse to rent their house to those who receive income support benefits. Lower income tenants without good rental histories were considered by real estate agents to have a better chance of accessing an older property that is "a bit run down that nobody wants to rent".

3.3 The growing need for private rental support programs in the City of Whittlesea

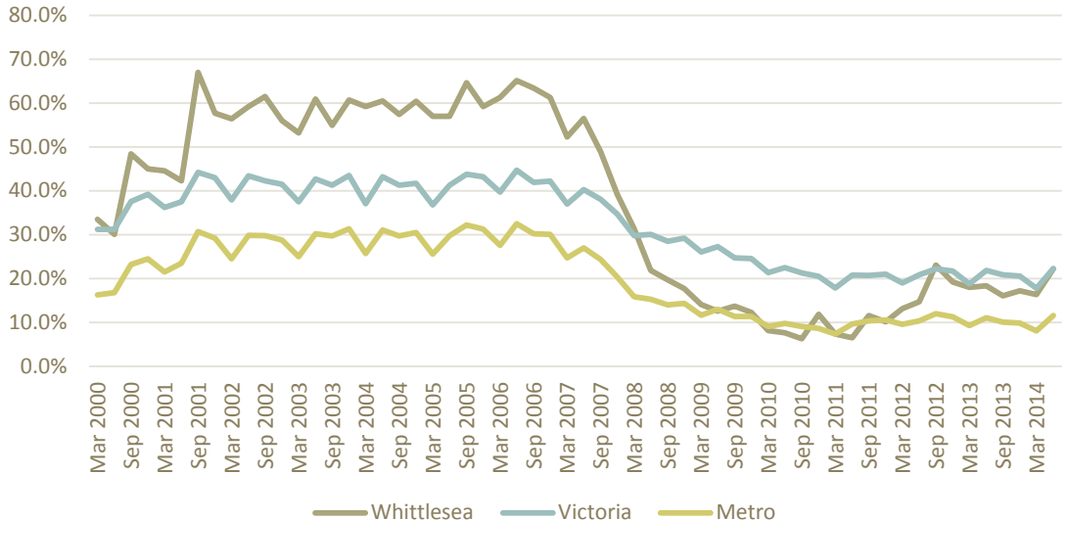
The City of Whittlesea encompasses one of Melbourne's largest 'growth corridors' undergoing significant demographic change. Between 2006 and 2011 Census periods the shares of young families and households on low to moderate incomes and in need of Centrelink assistance payments continued to grow. At the last 2011 Census, around a third (34%) of residents were born overseas and the cultural mix remains dynamic as new groups settle in the area (Profile id, 2014).

The City of Whittlesea Social and Affordable Housing Policy & Strategy 2012-2016 report prepared by Kliger et al 2012 provides a detailed analysis of the affordability trends in the city Whittlesea. Two critical factors increasing demand for affordable private rental in the area is the low proportion of social housing and the 'mismatch' in the dwelling stock and household size. Despite high concentrations of low income households only 1.5% of housing stock in the area is social housing. Whilst community housing has grown with new investment through the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS), the share of properties constructed in the area is small (Kliger et al., 2012). Recent 2011 Census data indicate that most of the dwellings in the area are typically single detached three to four bedroom houses. The proportion housed in more affordable 1-2 bedroom dwellings was 8.3% compared with 26.3% for Greater Melbourne (Profile.id, 2014).

The overall low proportion of social housing, including public and community housing, means that the private rental market is the only 'tenure of choice' for many low income households. However, there has been a long run decline in the

number of affordable rental dwellings. Figures 1 and 2 based on the Victorian rental report (DHS 2014b) data show the proportion of rental stock considered affordable from March 2000 to March 2014 based on 30% affordability threshold measure. For most of 2000 up to 2008 more than half of the available dwellings fell within an affordable threshold. Following 2008 there was a sharp decline where the proportion of affordable rental housing fell below the Victorian average. There has been some improvement for all dwellings in the last two years increasing from 10% in 2011 to just below 20% in 2014. However, this upward trend as not been matched for two bedroom dwellings where there proportion considered affordable sits below 5% of dwellings.

Figure 1. Proportion of affordable private rental in Whittlesea, all properties 2000-2014



Source: DHS Victorian Rental Report, 2014

Figure 2. Proportion of affordable private rental in Whittlesea, 2 bedroom properties 2000-2014

Source: DHS Victorian Rental Report, 2014

The housing affordability trends for the City of Whittlesea combined with the low proportion of public rental stock in the area indicates the increasing importance that private rental support programs will assume for low income households into the future. Staff and external providers consulted both reinforced the significant current service assistance gaps for individuals and households living in the Whittlesea and northern suburban surrounding areas. Existing case loads of government funded private rental support programs were reported to be limited in scope. Those who are able to be provided with housing assistance funds were considered to be 'just the tip' of the need and many more with high needs have to be turned away.

> **We cannot meet the full demand for services. Moreover, it is much easier to house families and or couples than single people. There really are no private rental properties that a single person can access at an affordable rate – there is nowhere to house this group [External stakeholder].**

The quality and size of the housing stock in the Whittlesea area was also considered highly problematic from an affordability perspective, particularly for single person households given the limited number of one bedroom properties available. Most of the properties are 2 to 3 bedrooms making them more expensive to rent for a single person who is not able to share. Many of the houses that low income households can afford and are offered will be in poor condition, with some requiring significant maintenance**.**

> **The critical issue is with the maintenance of the properties. The houses require quite a lot of maintenance and are often in poor quality – drafts coming in which cost a lot to heat running up high utility bills [Staff focus group].**

The reported experiences of clients seeking help from housing agencies in the area confirmed this perspective. All clients discussed the difficulties they faced in accessing the private rental market and had attempted to seek support from a number of services in the area. The reasons clients interviewed sought assistance was reported to relate to the inadequacy of their existing dwelling either in quality or affordability, relationship breakdowns and needing to flee from family violence, being a new arrival in Australia with limited support networks and understanding of the private rental market, and to cater for a growing family. For some clients, it was the first time they had experienced difficulties in being able to access private rental properties whilst for others their experience of housing insecurity and homelessness has been more enduring. Regardless of the reasons for seeking support and their past rental histories, all found it difficult to move to a new property on a limited income without any savings to pay for the rent in advance, particularly when still paying for an existing rental property and when they had no other sources of financial or family support.

> **Just raising enough money to move when you are on a low income is the most difficult thing [Client interview].**

> **I was sharing with other people before coming to the service. I have always been able to get into a rental property before this [Client interview].**

> **The difficulties for me began in 2010 – I had to move out of the previous property. Once you fall out it is hard to get back in again [Client interview].**

> **I have had a long-term struggle with housing – I've been homeless and in that space for a number of years [Client interview].**

4 The program model in practice

The WCC Housing Brokerage and Support program includes housing information and referral offered to any client presenting for housing assistance and a more targeted brokerage support program offered to a smaller number of targeted clients assessed as being in need of direct financial assistance. The section to follow examines the practices within the WCC housing and support program to overcome the barriers to accessing a private rental property by implementing the following elements:

Governance

- Establishment of a working group of internal WCC staff from legal, settlement and client services teams.
- Establishment of collaborative working relationships and oversight from local estate agents.
- Development of policy and procedures for flexible loan management.

Individual brokerage and support

- Provision of interest free brokerage loan mechanism to help leverage clients into the private rental market combined with one-on-one support to resolve or stabilize other complex issues influencing their ability to sustain the tenancy.

Individual housing & advocacy support

- Individually tailored support and casework related to housing needs support including liaison with real estate agents, providing information about support available, and completion of forms.

Private rental sector education and advocacy

- Informing local community groups and agencies about access to the private rental market and training for real estate agents.

The broad aims of the service are to:

- Increase access to the private rental market for low income earners and the socially disadvantaged and thus reduce homelessness.
- Increase the capacity of clients to sustain private rental accommodation.
- Increase access to community supports to resolve complex issues which may impact on housing.
- Increase access to social and specialist housing for clients unable to afford private rental.

The specific service objectives are to:

- Provide an interest free housing brokerage loan to leverage clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness into the private rental market.
- Provide support and assistance to clients navigating the private rental application process.
- Provide support and assistance to clients to resolve complex issues which may impact on their ability to sustain private rental accommodation.
- Provide advocacy support to clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and are unable to financially sustain private rental accommodation.

The key target groups for brokerage and support include individuals and households who are:

- New arrivals to Australia and require settlement support and assistance in order to negotiate the Australian private rental sector.
- Women and children escaping family violence and or requiring post separation assistance to gain entry into a rental property and may or may not have a record of a lease in their own name.
- Families and individuals who have a history of housing instability and/or residing in boarding houses where the housing is inadequate and or whom are at imminent risk of homelessness.

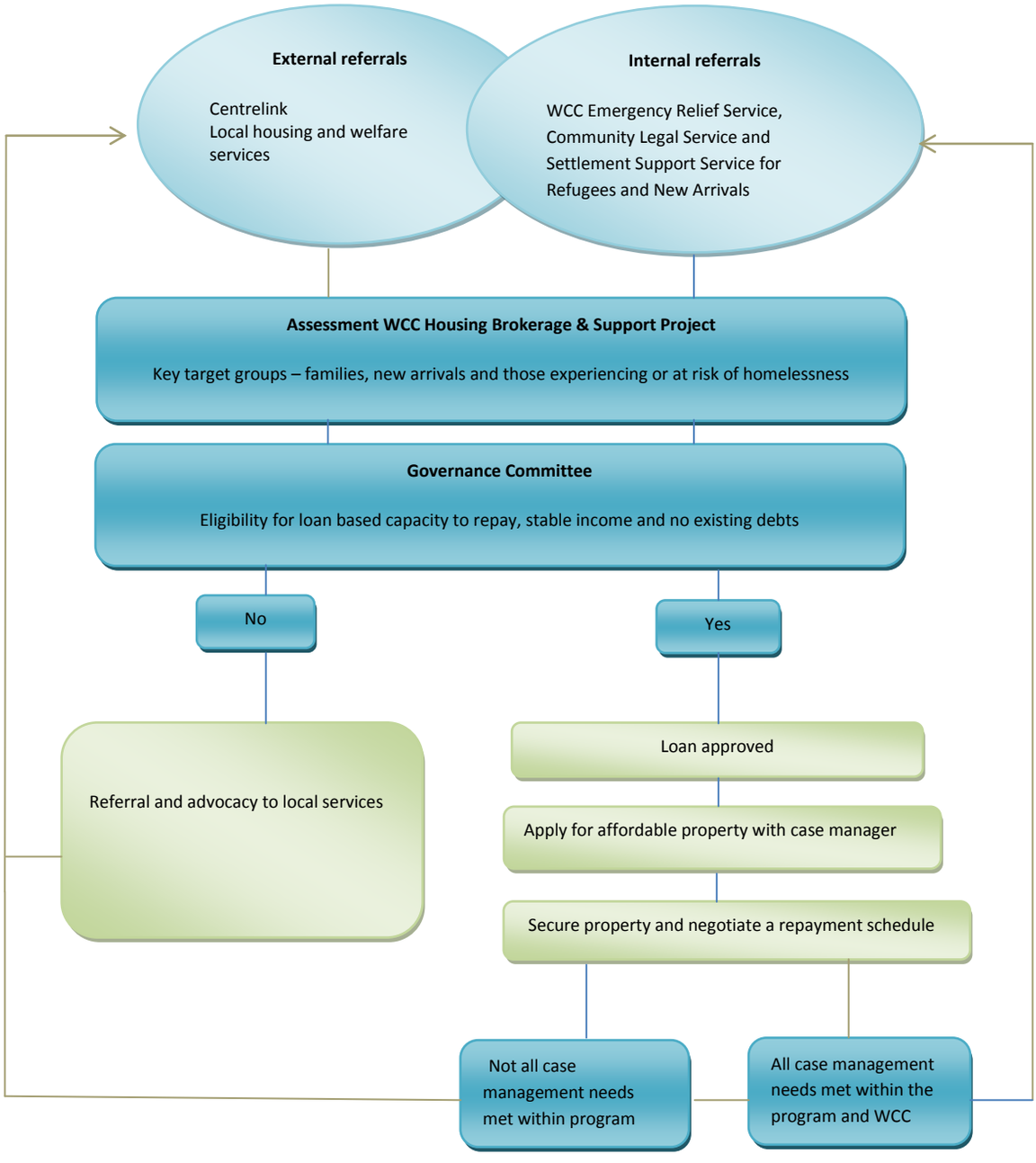
Eligibility and assessment process

A summary of the eligibility and assessment process and support for the program is shown in Figure 3. Referrals for the program are accepted from across the range of services at WCC and from other locally based organisations. Following

referral, each client presenting is assessed for their housing needs. Clients are then assigned to housing information and referral support or brokerage and case management support. Those most in need of financial brokerage support are then further assessed for their capacity to rent privately and whether they would be able to meet the repayments of a loan. The assessment process establishes whether the client has existing debts, what other options might be available to them and how much rent they will be paying for their property. Assessment also takes into account their capacity to sustain long-term rental and their previous rental history. Eligibility for a brokerage loan is determined on the criteria that the client's:

- Income is high enough to sustain rental payments and can be one or a combination of wages or Centrelink income.
- Is able to sustain private rental once the loan from WCC is paid back and support has been withdrawn.
- Is able to sustain private rental with minimal supports.
- Wishes to establish or maintain private rental as a long-term housing option.
- Is currently residing in, or at risk of residing in rooming house accommodation.
- Is residing in or have significant links to the Whittlesea municipality.

Figure 3. Eligibility and assessment process



If eligible, participant's housing and support needs, including their use of existing services is further assessed to develop individualised case management plans. Individuals who are not eligible for loans following assessment are provided with short-term case management support for housing information and referral, typically for one to two service contacts although clients can reengage with their case manager as housing needs arise. Clients are also provided with support on how to prioritise existing debts and become 'loan ready' and then return to the service to be reassessed.

Clients supported through the brokerage program are assisted in their search for affordable properties and with their rental applications. Once the client has located a suitable property and their application is approved, WCC directly pays the real estate agent. The amount borrowed typically covers rent in advance for one month although it can be used to cover other housing related expenses.

WCC have established policies and procedures for managing the processes of loan repayments and defaults. Following informed consent on the policies on the borrower responsibilities of the loan, the client then negotiates with WCC a fortnightly/monthly repayment schedule that they can afford. Participants then sign an agreement stating that they understand the conditions of the loan and the amount to be repaid. The repayments are paid to WCC through Centrepay or a direct debit arrangement. The loan repayment contract and schedule can be renegotiated to ensure that the client does not experience undue hardship in the event of unexpected expenses or if their circumstances change.

From January 2013 to October 2014, 136 clients received housing related information and referral support from the program. A further 18 clients received a brokerage loan combined with case management support. Initially, WCC planned to provide up to three months of financial assistance with rent in advance as a way of helping low income households to secure the property and be attractive to potential landlords. However, this was not viable.

The loan repayments made by clients each fortnight ensures that a proportion of the funds are able to be replenished over time thereby increasing the overall efficiency of the funds invested. Tables 1 and 2 summarise the amounts of funds borrowed, repayment schedule, and whether the loan has been repaid. A total of $17,925.30 has been paid out for brokerage loans at the time of writing. The amounts of the loan range from $286.50 to $2434, corresponding to a respective average and median amount of $995 and $1162.50 per person. The average amount borrowed in the first year ($1133) was higher than in the second year ($824).

The repayment schedule negotiated with clients ranged from $10 to $450[1] a fortnight depending on their capacity to pay and how quickly they wanted to repay the loan. However, the majority of clients opted to repay between $20-50 a fortnight over an extended period of time, usually for a 12 month period. The majority of clients receiving loans are in receipt of Centrelink income support. All clients have been able to meet the repayments, with the exception of one client who did not engage with the service following receipt of the loan. Five clients have repaid their loans, while two are close to repaying the final amount.

4.1 Numbers assisted and amount of brokerage provided

Summary findings:

- **Between 2013 and 2014 a total of $17,925.30 has been lent to 18 individuals.**
- **The main client groups are female, lone persons or lone parents, recent arrivals.**
- **All are in receipt of Centrelink income support .**
- **The majority repay $20-50 per fortnight over a 12 month period.**

[1] $450 payment was for the first fortnight only and then altered for subsequent repayments

Table 1. Summary statistics on the amount of brokerage loans, 2013-2014

	Case work clients	Emergency relief	Settlement clients	First year	Second year	All
Average amount	1101.7	1186.5	833.5	1133.1	824.3	995.9
Median amount	1112	1280	463.3	1302	900.5	1162.5
Range	459	691	2147.5	2147.5	1056.5	2147.5
Minimum	867	656	286.5	286.5	286.5	286.5
Maximum	1326	1347	2434	2434	1343	2434
Total amount	3305	7119	7501.3	11330.8	6594.5	17925.3
Total Number	3	6	9	10	8	18

Table 2. Loan amount & repayment schedule, 2013-2014

Referred from	Amount of loan	Repaid all of the loan	date loan given/instalment amount
Casework	867.00	Yes	$100 starting 23/4/13
Settlement	2,434.00	No	$450 starting 30/5/13[2]
Settlement	463.30	Yes	$100 starting 5/7/13
Emergency Relief	656.00	Yes	$100 starting 21/6/13
Casework	1,326.00	No	$50 starting 2/12/13
Emergency Relief	1,304.00	No	$50 starting 5/12/13
Settlement	1,347.00	No	$50 starting 23/9/14
Emergency Relief	1,347.00	Yes	$30 starting 17/9/13
Settlement	1,300.00	Close	$50 starting 17/9/13
Emergency Relief	1,213.00	No	$50 starting 13/2/14
Emergency Relief	1,343.00	No	$50 starting 21/5/14
Casework	1,112.00	No	$20 starting 1/5/14
Settlement	286.50	Yes	$10 starting 21/5/14
Settlement	286.50	Close	$10 starting 20/8/13
Settlement	347.50	No	$20 starting 19/6/14
Settlement	347.50	No	$20 starting 20/6/14
Emergency Relief	1,256.00	No	$50 starting 16/7/14
Settlement	689.00	No	$20 starting 24/6/14

[2] $450 payment was for the first fortnight only and then altered for subsequent repayments

Figures 4 to 7 present the demographic characteristics of clients receiving brokerage loans. As shown, Centrelink income support was the main source of income for all recipients with the largest number receiving Newstart benefits. It should be noted that the majority of Newstart recipients were living in shared accommodation. There was a slightly higher proportion of females (56%) compared with males (44%) receiving loans. Most clients were single (50%) or lone parents (33%). More than half of the clients were new arrivals with those born in Iran (39%) the largest culturally diverse group in receipt of a loan and support.

Figure 4. Main source of income of brokerage clients

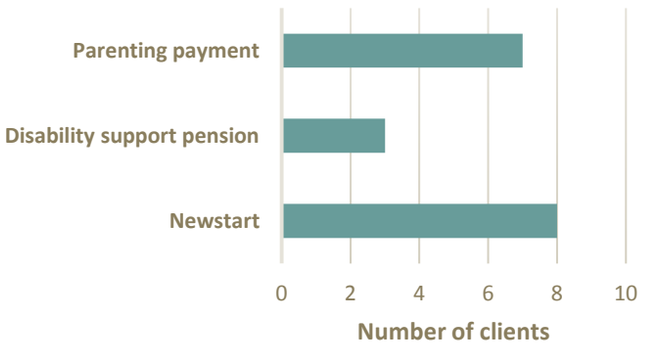


Figure 5. Gender of brokerage clients

Figure 6. Family type of brokerage clients

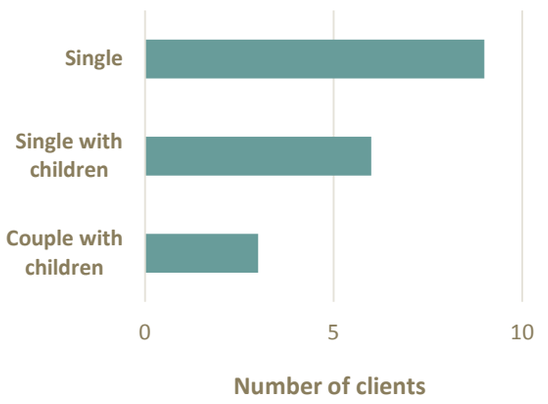
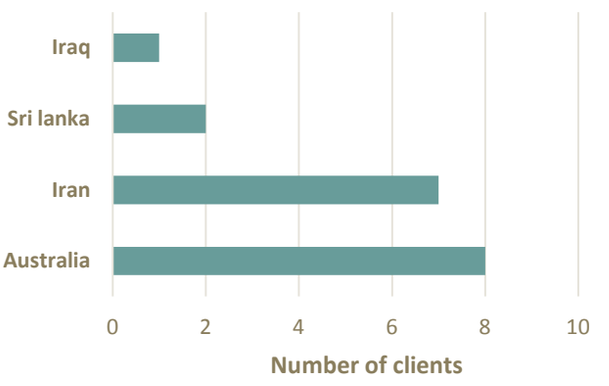


Figure 7. Country of birth of brokerage clients



4.2 Approach to case management support

Case management support within the program is embedded into an existing support role within the WCC Emergency Relief program. The case management support provided is centre based by appointment or clients can be followed up by phone. Outreach can occur occasionally. It was anticipated that the program would be able to provide outreach in the initial service development phase but there was not sufficient funding to do this.

Clients receiving brokerage funding are required to engage with the support worker for a minimum of 6 sessions in the first three months to help address needs relating to their past experiences with housing and to ensure that they are linked into more ongoing supports if required. If the client does not engage in case management, attempts are made by the worker to contact them via phone and in writing. The case is then closed until they reengage with the service. The average number of contacts per person was 8. The highest number of contacts was 24.

The approach to case management support is strengths based. A strengths based approach seeks to build on the current capacities that clients already possess in accessing and in sustaining their tenancies. As such, the support required to access a private rental property will vary across clients. The support process focuses on the immediate practical needs and advocacy required to access a rental property. Emotional support and referral to specialist agencies is also provided to help stabilise housing and sustain the tenancy. Some clients were reported to need help with locating a property, others require support to assist with ending their lease and moving out, whilst others require additional assistance in managing money and understanding their responsibilities as a tenant. Clients are able to be supported on a needs basis throughout the duration of the loan repayment period and can reconnect with the service at any time.

5 Client and stakeholder perspectives on program practices

A core goal of the WCC Housing Brokerage program, as with many other private rental support programs, is to minimise the market-based barriers to private rental access for low income households and those with additional barriers. This section documents the reported strengths of the brokerage model, client satisfaction with the quality of services provided as well as the key lessons learned as the program was implemented. The findings from the interviews are supplemented with a selection of case studies provided by support workers.

5.1 Promising practices for rental accessibility and support

Key findings on the promising practices within the program that contributed to increased private rental accessibility and support included:

- **An integrated point of access through the co-location of the program within the broader range of services offered at WCC.**
- **A flexible and collaborative approach to loan management that can be matched with existing resources to provide the exact amount needed to gain entry into the private rental market.**
- **Case management support that provides advocacy and skills building to negotiate the private rental sector, including a flexible and solution focused approach to assessment to help households become loan ready even if they are not eligible upon first assessment.**

5.1.1 Co-location and integrated access

The co-location of the Housing Brokerage support program within the broader range of community services offered at WCC was considered a key strength of the model in terms of its overall accessibility. The majority of clients interviewed reported that they were already engaged with other services offered at WCC at the time their housing problems emerged. Given their existing relationship with the service, clients reported that they were able to be quickly linked into the private rental program and assessed for their eligibility for a loan.

Settlement clients often found out about the program through their involvement in English classes facilitated and organised by WCC. Settlement clients generally accessed the HBSP for both financial assistance and help in navigating their way around the private rental sector. Another client reported finding out about the program after reading a news article on a former client that had been assisted by the program. Clients who accessed the service with histories of homelessness or longer-term housing insecurity were typically engaged with a number of other housing and welfare services in the area and have relied on the housing service system for ongoing support over a long period of time in order to meet their day to day and ongoing support needs. Clients with experience of longer-term housing instability were typically referred to the program via other support services. Individuals with highly complex needs continued to be supported through a range of programs, including WCC after receipt of their brokerage loan.

> **I was initially receiving support from [another service] but they were not really able to help with my housing and I was transitioned to WCC [Client interview].**

> **I have been coming to WCC for a long time using different programs including their English classes. I was already connected to the service [Client interview].**

5.1.2 Flexible and collaborative approach to loan management

A common theme amongst clients with respect to the reasons for seeking assistance was the difficulty they experienced in raising money for a new property whilst still paying rent and existing bills for the housing they were living in or recently moved out of. A critical strength of the model, and where it was considered to be filling existing service gaps in private rental support programs, is the flexibility to provide the amount that is needed to secure the property. Although the amount is limited to the total pool of funds that is available and only a small number of clients can be assisted in a given year. Being able to adjust repayments as circumstances changed, either as a result of unexpected events that impacted upon cash flow or whether circumstances improved from gaining employment was a further strength of the model.

All clients interviewed received a brokerage loan to assist with the shortfall in savings but the amounts of housing assistance required varied. Some clients were in need of the full amount of rent in advance for a month whilst others reported accessing a number of services to try to 'package together' enough money. Whilst some clients reported being able to access existing government provided Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) money, the amount was not enough to meet the full month of rent in advance that is required to secure the property. Some clients reported accessing HEF brokerage money for two weeks rent in advance and then make up the difference for the remaining two weeks with a brokerage loan from WCC.

> **I contacted other housing services – we got some funds from them two weeks rent HEF money. I have been using services for a long time – have been homeless. With WCC you know the money is guaranteed and there are no delays. There are a few other services but they are not in the zone so I was not able to access this support [Client interview].**

> **I received some HEF funding from another service but it was not enough to meet the full months rent so I combined the HEF money with the loan. I am very happy with the service. I repay $20 coming out of my Centrelink pay. There are no problems [Client interview].**

The case study of Bill and Carol illustrates how the loan can be tailored to specific needs, both at the point of access and in repaying amounts owing when circumstances change.

Bill and Carol
8 contacts

Bill and Carol were referred from a WCC support worker for assistance with rent in advance. They had accessed a Bond loan through [support service] however they had no funding left for rent in advance. Following an assessment, a decision was made to assist with funds from the housing project for **rent in advance.** WCC assisted with **$**573 and Bill and Carol had savings of $600 to put towards the payment. They were also referred to material aid program services as they needed some help with general expenses. Both clients have been paying their repayments as agreed. Bill visited WCC some time later to advise that he **secured full time employment** and that he wanted to pay the loan off through a bank transfer and this was arranged. During this period his English had **improved significantly**

5.2 Combining financial assistance with case management support

There was a clear theme from all consulted that the combination of tangible practical assistance in the form of a loan combined with private rental advocacy and support was considered a core strength of the model. Moreover, providing a flexible response within the broad parameters of the eligibility criteria and working collaboratively with the client in a way that helps them to position themselves as being 'loan ready' has been a critical success factor in assisting clients to resolve their housing needs.

> **People are not just given the money but provided with assistance through the whole tenancy process and are able to negotiate if things are difficult for them. Many people can turn to their family for a loan but the clients we see do not have anyone else that they can rely on for housing related support. We can offer support to those who are able to rent and need a hand to make it in the private rental market [Staff focus group].**

> **It is a very valuable program more than 100 people are supported with information and advice and a smaller number are supported with a loan. They are provided with good support to help them to manage the loan [External stakeholder].**

All clients agreed that rapid access to brokerage funds was the most helpful aspect of the service in being able to resolve their housing crisis. However, for some clients, having a case manager to 'walk them through' how the private rental sector works and how to best present themselves to prospective landlords was reported to be equally helpful. Clients also reported that providing references and liaising with real estate agents on their behalf was beneficial, particularly when they had previously submitted multiple applications without success. Having a number of different services at WCC that clients could be linked into, including opportunities to do volunteer work was also reported to be particularly helpful. Clients reported that the links between the housing and legal services at WCC allowed them to have the tenancy issues and financial needs met in the once place.

> **I had a case manager and would see her every two weeks. The program helped me through my separation with my husband. I am a single mum and have two children. I had some bond but not enough. The service helped me to find a property by looking on the internet websites, they helped me to get into to the property and helped me emotionally after separating from my husband. I have difficulty with English so the service helped me liaise with real estate agents. They also helped me to get my drivers licence [Client interview].**

> **I received case management support for housing. They have responded promptly to any other issues. Case management support helped with the utility bills and signing up the service to be able to receive a concession on my utility bills [Client interview].**

> **WCC did all of the organising for me. Whenever I had forms to complete I could bring it down to here and they would help. They helped to organise the bond and application process. They were excellent and they respond straight away [Client interview].**

> **I found about the program whilst attending English training. They helped with accommodation inspections and gave me information. This was at the time when I had to break the lease with the real estate agent. The service helped to resolve the matter out of court. WCC provided advice, legal support and then direct assistance with helping to secure a rental property. They provided financial support of $600 loan, and I was able to pay this back at what I could afford at the time. I received case management support for housing. I have been able to contact them whenever I needed help with utility bills. I still go the service for English support and courses [Client interview].**

Clients spoke positively about the amount and the quality of support they received relative to their needs. They discussed the various ways that they had been supported ranging from direct practical assistance in being taken through the steps of applying for their rental property through to more complex interventions including legal, crisis and emotional support. Assisting with the search for properties and liaison with real estate agents was considered particularly helpful, especially for those clients who are new arrivals to Australia. Both staff and clients confirmed that the support was timely and flexible, which was critical in ensuring that they did not miss out on the property when it became available.

The broader range of community programs provided by WCC also helped with engaging clients in a longer-term capacity once their initial housing crisis had been resolved. Moreover, the capacity for clients to reconnect with the service at any time they needed was considered highly beneficial and they valued the promptness of responses from the case manager when they did need to reengage.

> **They continue to link in and see how I'm going and whenever I need the service I can come in….. . WCC recently helped me to move by organising a truck [Client interview].**

> **I still access the support for different things and there have been many occasions where they have helped. I started with the housing program last December. I still have contact with the service from time to time [Client interview].**

The two case studies for Michael and Rashmi below illustrate the varied pathways in being assisted within the program and the flexibility of the model in helping them to find alternative rental accommodation as part of a planned process of transition from their existing housing into a new property. Michael was not initially eligible for brokerage support given his low Newstart income but identified a solution by finding house mates to share the rent with and upon returning to the program was able to be provided with assistance for the Bond loan. Rashmi accessed the program to help her move out of an existing property where her rent was very high and whilst she was not initially eligible for a loan the assessment helped her to prioritise her existing debts and prepare a budget. When she had resolved her current debts Rashmi was able to be provided with a loan and assisted into a new property that was more affordable.

Michael
7 contacts

Michael was referred by a previous housing client. Michael was living with his brother-in-law at the time and wanted to **find his own place**. Michael's income is from a Newstart allowance and he found it difficult to afford a property on his own and sharing with others would be his only option. WCC provided assistance in helping Michael to look for properties and provided him with details of inspections coming up. Michael was able to find three of his friends who wanted to share a rental property, which meant his rent would be reduced and he could manage a **small loan**. Once Michael located a property WCC assisted him with the application form as well as a bond loan application. Only two of the friends wanted to apply for the bond loan, resulting in their application for a bond only successful for part of the amount and short $463.30. WCC were able to assist with this amount. Along with the housing caseworker Michael was referred to the settlement team for support as well as the immigration worker for applying for sponsorship for his family back home. Michael has since **paid off the loan**

Rashmi
6 contacts

Rashmi presented to WCC as she was seeking a cheaper rental property as she was currently paying $1738 a month. Rashmi is also dealing with **depression** and receiving support from a GP who was organising a referral to a psychologist. Rashmi is currently paying $500 per fortnight towards debt-cash convertors loan which she took out to pay Christmas expenses. Rashmi was not in a rush to move out however felt the landlord would sell the house soon and then she will need to leave. Rashmi wanted a smaller more **affordable property**. She was keen to pay her debt off before seeking alternate rental accommodation. Two months later Rashmi was in a better financial and emotional position and ready to seek another rental property. Rashmi was able to secure a property and was provided with the **loan for rent in advance**

5.3 Client satisfaction with the quality of support

Key findings for client satisfaction:

- **Clients were highly satisfied with all aspects of the support process.**
- **The program provided a high quality response to housing assistance needs that clients considered professional and timely.**

In assessing satisfaction with the program clients, were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the process of support against the statements listed in table 3. Satisfaction for each indicator was measured on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 equals strongly disagree and 10 equals strongly agree. The table shows the median satisfaction scores for each statement. Clients rated their experience of the support process and capacity of the program to resolve their needs very highly. The first four statements in the table have a median score of 10 indicating that those who were interviewed were extremely positive about their experiences. It should be noted that this is a small sample and clients who agreed to be interviewed could be those most highly engaged with the service and therefore more likely to rate their experience positively. There was slightly more variation in the responses to the last two statements "The support staff are knowledgeable about the services in the local area" and "the support staff have an in-depth knowledge of private rental housing in the area", although the respective median scores of 8.5 and 9 are still very high.

Table 3. Median client satisfaction with the support process & knowledge of the housing market[1]

	Median score
Generally speaking I am satisfied with the support I have received	10
The support staff are always polite and respectful	10
The support staff respond quickly to my housing needs	10
The amount of support provided is enough to meet my current housing needs	10
The support staff are knowledgeable about the services in the local area	8.5
The support staff have an in-depth knowledge of private rental housing in the area	9

1. The median refers to middle score of the distribution of responses.

Qualitative responses associated with each statement indicated that clients generally received the right amount of support 'they needed at the time' of their housing crisis. Many commented on the timeliness of this support as being the most critical aspect of their satisfaction, particularly given the urgency of their housing needs. Being able to call upon the service at any time needed was also highly valued.

> **I'm very happy with the support that I received. If I have a problem they are able to help with information. Everything is here for me in the one service. I come here for everything I need. The case management support that I have received has been the most helpful aspect of the program [Client interview].**

> **They made the process smoother. It felt good to have the support and that there was someone to talk to was a help in itself. The main source of support was financial. Every time I found a place I could ring [case manager] and she would provide a reference [Client interview].**

> **When I have a need or a problem they are very supportive – they respond very quickly if I need them – if I called at 9.00 am they will return my call by 9.30 [Client interview].**

I received what I needed at the time. The fact that they fixed my problem which was to raise enough money for the rent in advance [Client interview].

They responded very quickly to my situation – I didn't have to wait long for the finance it was sorted very quickly [Client interview].

The staff manner was reported to be very professional and respectful. Clients felt they were treated with respect and not judged for their situation. Generally, clients felt that the staff were knowledgeable about the services in the local area. However, staff who had been employed at the services for longer periods of time were generally considered to be more knowledgeable of what is available. There was a view that staff assumed that the clients already knew how to negotiate their way around and undertake day to day activities within the community and this was not always the case, particularly for recent arrivals to Australia.

The support staff are so understanding and you do not feel judged they treat you with respect and they are polite and they never look down on you – they try to make you smile – delightful [Client interview].

Clients felt staff had very good knowledge of the housing issues faced in the area and had developed positive relationships with real estate agents in order to help them. There was a view that staff could be more active in locating affordable private rental properties in the area. Clients were also mindful of the constraints of the program in being able to help them to secure suitable properties. While staff were able to provide finance quickly some clients reported experiencing significant delays in being able to locate suitable housing and also have their application for the property approved, experiencing several rejections before they were given a place to rent.

Because it is private rental they don't fully know what is available but they have a good knowledge of the problems faced [Client interview].

[Support worker] knows how hard it is to find rental housing in the area – she knows a few real estate agents and which ones are less likely to discriminate – the ones that are best to go to and the ones that will accept DSP – those who will give people a chance of success in their applications [Client interview].

The service provided a quick response but they can't always provide quick housing. I am currently on a waiting list for an Office of Housing property and they said that I will need to wait a year. They helped with my application [Client interview].

They are as quick as they can be but they are limited by what is available in the market [Client interview].

5.4 Lessons learned for private rental support programs

The key findings on the lessons learned as the pilot project has been implemented include:

- Building relationships with real estate agents is critical to access private rental properties.
- Effective relationships between agencies and real estate agents require ongoing commitment on both sides.
- Housing brokerage can foster a sense of self-sufficiency and giving back to help others.
- Not everyone is suitable for a brokerage loan and the way it is administered needs to be managed carefully with clear policy and procedures in place.

5.4.1 Effective partnerships with real estate agents require two-way commitment

A key focus of the WCC program has been to establish working relationships with real estate agents through representatives on the program Advisory Group, developing a select group of

agents to refer to, and providing advocacy on behalf of clients. It is clear from all consulted that the program has been successful in building more effective collaboration with real estate agents and this has been central in being able to gain the necessary leverage to access properties. All groups consulted considered the cultivation of strong relationships with real estate agents as being central to overcoming the barriers to private rental access and to also addressing tenancy issues early on before they become unmanageable. All clients reported that the two way relationship between the service and real estate agents have been critical in assisting them to secure their properties.

> **It is really important to not focus on the negative but to present the client in the best possible way – usually providing advice to the client on how to deal with the real estate agent and how best to present themselves in their application. We try to emphasise that a Centrelink payment is a stable income [Staff focus group].**

> **I think it is good that the real estate agents have come on board. It is critical to continue to break down the stigma of low income groups and the program has made some important in-roads in that area through the advocacy component of the program. The program has been able to provide a buffer between the corporate real estate agent and the clients and this represents a win-win approach [External stakeholder].**

The manner in which a service presents a potential tenant was considered important by both staff and external stakeholders in being able to break down some of the stigma that can accompany having a low income. Both internal and external stakeholders reported that good advocacy to real estate agents, and ultimately landlords, involves assisting individuals and households to present themselves as an 'attractive tenant'. Making sure the tenant is presented in the best possible way by paying attention to how they dress and appear when they walk into the real estate agency was reported to be a critical first step in the application process. The real estate agent will short-list the applications for the landlord's review and first impressions to real estate agents were reported to matter as

> **…the character of the tenant is decided upon based on an initial gut feel or impression. It is not enough for low income tenants to have a reference, the tenant needs to be made more attractive to the prospective landlord. They have to feel that they and the property will not be put at risk by giving someone a go [External stakeholder].**

However, it was reported that effective relationships take time to cultivate and to sustain in the longer-term and that this is an area requiring further two-way development. From the perspective of the real estate agent it was reported that services need to have clear communication about the types of clients that they work with – who they target and make assurances that those who are referred to the agent have been thoroughly assessed for their capacity to pay and their prior history of renting.

> **It would be good to have stronger relationships with real estate agents that was a two way process – they would inform us of when properties become available [Staff focus group]**

> **We [Real estate agents] should really be doing more liaison and referring to community agencies when the tenant gets in trouble with their rents. I think the issue is that people don't know what is available to help them and some people may feel embarrassed about approaching others for help – a sense of shame in asking for a hand out [External stakeholder].**

A further issue raised was how individuals with English as a second language can be better served by real estate agents in the area. Whittlesea is a culturally diverse area with many new arrivals with limited English skills. Staff reported that the need for the use of interpreting services within real estate agencies is high and should be used more frequently so that new arrival tenants understand how to negotiate access to the private rental market, their rights and responsibilities.

5.4.2 Fostering a sense of self-sufficiency and giving back

The notion of 'circular credit' models of finance is that the money invested can be reused to continue to support others. Actively promoting this aspect of the loan appeared to be effective in tapping into clients' altruistic motivations for repaying the loan. Clients, staff and external stakeholders consulted all acknowledged that loans can be beneficial in helping to promote self-sufficiency; a finding that is consistent within the broader microfinance literature discussed in section 2. All clients interviewed were supportive of the principles of borrowing and to some degree receiving a loan was reported to help them to maintain a sense of pride, rather than feeling like a 'charity case'. Moreover, clients reported having satisfaction in knowing that as they repay their loan someone else can benefit.

> **I wanted to pay it off as quick as possible so someone else could get the help [Client interview]**

> **I have been happy to pay back the loan. I think it is good because you can keep accessing financial support once you have paid back the loan – it is not a once off thing. You can keep coming back to the service. Here is really good – I am very happy to come here [Client interview].**

> **The program is good I am happy to pay back the loan because it means you are able to give back and someone else can then be helped and keep building the funds [Client interview].**

The critical lesson learned for the program and private rental support models in general is that clients are supportive of being part of the solution to their housing assistance needs when they have the capacity to do so.

5.4.3 Not everyone is suitable for a brokerage loan

The importance of identifying who the brokerage loans program is most suitable for and what the implications are for those unable to be assisted is critical in determining the future viability of microfinance models applied to the provision of private rental support. The key lessons learned for the program has been the need for an 'open door approach' where the initial assessment provides sufficient guidance to help stabilise a client's situation before taking on the responsibility of the loan. However, there will be a proportion of clients who will not be suitable for a loan nor will they be prepared to pay it back. The granting of a loan needs to be carefully assessed for suitability and monitored over time to ensure that the tenant does not face additional hardship from adding to an already stretched budget. It is also critical that it is only one part of a package of private rental and social housing assistance. As reflected by one stakeholder

> **This model is not suitable for everybody as people have to be able to pay back a loan and therefore it needs to be very well targeted based on strict criteria. It is very tricky to decide who gets the funding. It does need to operate within a business framework to some extent as the money has to come back to ensure that others can continue to be assisted. This type of program needs to sit alongside socially funded housing as it can only target those who can and are prepared to repay. It is critical that there continue to be a range of housing options [External stakeholder].**

The initial evidence from both the service activity data and consultation feedback is that WCC have managed the allocation process well. As the program progressed, clear policies and procedures have been implemented and refined based on the lessons learned on how to best assess for suitability for a loan. For instance, it was established that the program cannot provide financial assistance to single persons in receipt of Newstart or households with unstable incomes or where income or cash flow might vary from week to week unless they are able to share a proportion of the housing costs with someone else. Both WCC staff and external stakeholders expressed concern that single people on Newstart are increasingly forced out of the private rental sector and are not being adequately 'picked up' in the broader service system response.

A further lesson learned within the program is that it is critical that the client can be located and

followed up if payments are not being made. The longer-term viability of microfinance programs rests on the capacity of borrowers to repay the loans. However, it is recognised within the program that there will be a proportion of the funds that will not be repaid and clear procedures need to be established for how funds are to be recovered and in what instances loans can be 'written off'. The use of Centrelink direct debit provides some assurance of the longer-term viability and has been effective for minimising defaults. However, given the social objectives of the program, repayment also needs to be balanced against the prevention of additional hardship and pending homelessness.

While the service data presented in section 4 indicated that most clients were keeping up with their repayment schedule or had managed to repay their loan, the case study of Sue below shows that despite the efforts of staff, not all clients are prepared to engage in the support process and honour their repayment commitments. The case study indicates the critical importance of the initial assessment process in determining eligibility and being able to continue to locate clients over time.

Sue
11 contacts

Sue had been issued a **notice to vacate** her property when she presented to our service. She had been accepted into another property however did not have the funds for rent in advance. She was receiving Centrelink benefits and was also self-employed as a beautician and although was not currently working had been offered a job by a friend that she could begin in a few months time.

Sue was not eligible for a bond loan due to being self-employed and not completing her tax return last year. She had also tried to access other housing services for assistance with the rent in advance and was unsuccessful. She paid the bond with her savings and then was left with no options for her rent in advance which was $867. Following an assessment, it was decided that Sue would be assisted by WCC given her **imminent risk of homelessness**. Despite initial engagement, Sue did not make the first scheduled payment. Contact was difficult to make with Sue and on the occasion that contact was successful she advised that she was going through a stressful time and not managing well. Even though we offered support, including outreach, this was not successful and no further contact was made with Sue and no payments of the loan have been made.

6 Client and stakeholder perspectives on service impact

The program has been effective in:

- **Overcoming the reasons for seeking support and assisting clients 'into the door' of a private rental property.**
- **Stabilising housing, particularly when higher needs clients have continued to be linked into other sources of ongoing support.**
- **Scheduling repayments so that borrowers can manage the loan repayments.**
- **Helping clients to rebuild new lives and cope better with financial and day to day stresses.**

The program has been less effective in:

- **Being able to overcome the longer-term structural and systemic difficulties of affordability of private rental for those remaining on income support payments.**

The core aim of the program is to assist clients into the private rental market who would otherwise be excluded from access because of financial and other reasons and therefore would be at high risk of experiencing homelessness. Staff, stakeholders and clients interviewed were asked to comment on the aspects of the program they felt were most effective and least effective in meeting this core aim. The general perception amongst those consulted was that brokerage loans for private rental access do increase the desirability of the tenant to a prospective agent and landlord.

The small scale nature of the program means that the outcomes from the brokerage model are formative at this stage of service development. Nonetheless, the overall findings suggest that the program has been effective in securing housing and that the upfront financial support provided to clients has been vital in this process. The program has met this primary outcome with minimal initial financial outlays and devised a model that can be self-generating beyond the life of the upfront investment. This contains the success of the model and the ongoing appeal for its expansion. While the longer-term effectiveness of sustaining tenancies from the model still needs to be monitored, being able to house clients relatively quickly given the restricted options available within the social housing sector is a promising outcome.

> **It is a small program and it is good that it started out that way to trial whether it would work and be able to modify the practices without significant risks or large investment of funds. It has used a relatively small amount of funds but does have a longer term ripple effect to the individuals, families and communities in preventing homelessness and can continue on after the initial grant. The numbers do need to grow to be able to help more people. The program should continue to keep going as it is filling an important need – helping people raise the bond and get in the door [External stakeholder].**

6.1 Overcoming the reasons for seeking assistance

In assessing whether the program was effective in overcoming the reasons for seeking assistance clients were asked to respond to a series of statements and then provide open ended responses to elaborate on the reasons for their rating. Three statements relating to the adequacy of the loan and whether they had any difficulties meeting their repayment schedule appear in table 4. Each indicator was measured on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 equals strongly disagree and 10 equals strongly agree. The table shows the median satisfaction scores for each statement. As shown, the responses from clients were very high with a median of 10 for the positive statements of 'the amount of brokerage has been enough to meet my needs' and 'I have no difficulties meeting the repayments' and 0 for the negative statement 'having a loan to repay makes it difficult for me to pay for other things that I need'.

Table 4. Satisfaction scores for meeting housing needs and difficulties repaying loan

	Median score
The amount of brokerage (loan amount) has been enough to meet my housing needs	10
I have no difficulties in meeting the repayments of the loan	10
Having a loan to repay makes it difficult for me to pay for other things that I need	0

All reported that the amount of brokerage they received was enough to help them to gain access to their private rental property and the fact that is was negotiated quickly meant there were no delays when their application for a property was approved. Clients viewed the brokerage role of the program as a 'kick start' or a 'door into' the private rental sector that would have otherwise been closed to them in the absence of other supports to turn to.

> **No one has helped me in the way that this program has. The program helped to set up our family in Australia. We did not have any rental history and this is very important to have for our future housing. The program needs to be expanded so that more people can benefit from it [Client interview].**

> **The program has given me and my family a good start in this country. I would not be where I am without their help and support [Client interview].**

> **The program gave me the kick start – to be able to live in Australia with a level of knowledge of how the housing market works so that I could start leading a life [Client interview].**

> **I borrowed around 600. I agreed to pay back $50 a week because I wanted to pay the loan off quickly. I knew that it would be missing from my income every fortnight so I budgeted around it. I paid it in 6 fortnights. There is no other funding like this available where you don't have to pay interest – it was a life line at the time and it got us in the door of our property [Client interview].**

> **Having the full month rent has made the biggest difference because I was able to get in the door [Client interview].**

For the majority of clients, the amount and intensity of the practical and emotional support provided by the brokerage program and broader range of services offered at WCC was considered sufficient to meet all their needs. This suggests that for many clients financial assistance and short-term case management is adequate to stabilise their housing. The question remains as to how far the program should extend support to address other needs such as employment and where other support services can step in. Some clients whose needs were more intensive, including those with ongoing counselling and clinical conditions, continued to receive support through existing providers and engaged WCC for practical support around housing access.

> **The WCC services meet all my needs. Whenever there was a need they have always responded [Client interview].**

> **I get most of my mental health needs met by my case worker at [another service] who I see for an ongoing mental health issue. WCC supported me in the initial stages with references and advocacy with the real estate agent and that is what I needed at the time [Client interview].**

A critical aspect to consider in the delivery of service models based on the provision of a loan is whether individuals and households are able to meet the repayments without being exposed to additional hardship. There were no reported difficulties in meeting the loan repayments among those interviewed. Whilst clients reported having

to make some sacrifices to exist on a reduced income, all reported that they were able to continue to meet their basic needs. Some clients reported choosing to pay off larger amounts of their loans to repay it quickly while others preferred smaller repayments stretched over a year or longer. Allowing clients to have flexibility with their repayment schedule and to pay the loan off over an extended period was critical in ensuring that payments were manageable.

> **I borrowed $1300 to help me with the rent in advance. I am paying back $50 a fortnight and I can manage that [Client interview].**

> **I did not have any difficulty repaying the loan, particularly as they were flexible in how it was paid back. If I could only pay a small amount because of other expenses that was ok [Client interview].**

> **The repayment of $20 per fortnight I was able to manage on income support [Client interview].**

The capacity of the program to tailor the intensity of support according to presenting needs has been critical in helping clients to overcome the main reasons for seeking assistance. The case studies of Majid and his mother and Mary below provide an example of more intensive and shorter-term intervention that were matched to client's needs. The foot into the private rental door provided the stability for Majid to obtain paid work. For Mary, it meant that she was able to find her own accommodation that was safe and maintain her own independence in this process. Both clients had no difficulties repaying the loan and are doing well in their current rental properties.

Majid and his mother
24 contacts

Majid and his mother came to Australia seeking asylum. After a period of time in detention they were granted permanent residency and moved in with a family member. However, this accommodation was only a **temporary option** as the house was overcrowded. When Majid presented to WCC he was keen to secure a rental property and while they both relied on Newstart allowance, after developing a budget they were able to establish that they could afford a rental property at $280 a week. They faced some **barriers** in being accepted for a property and they had made a few applications that were rejected. They had **no rental history**, relied on Centrelink as their source of income and were not proficient in English. After an assessment was conducted it was determined that Majid and his mother were suitable for the HBSP and with some casework support they would be able to **sustain a tenancy**.

Tenant's rights and responsibilities were explained to Majid and his mother and also some do's and don'ts when lodging applications for rental properties. This information proved to be useful as shortly after they **secured a rental property**. Rent for two months in advance was provided and the arrangement was made for Majid and his mother to pay the loan back in fortnightly installments. The caseworker provided **regular support** along with his youth worker at WCC which enabled Majid and his mother to be linked into other support and resources. As they were newly arrived they had no washing machine, fridge or sofa. Through the caseworker's links with other agencies Majid was able to receive a donation of a fridge and a sofa so he didn't have to obtain a loan for these items or spend a large amount of their income on this. During the beginning of the tenancy there were some problems with the property and the caseworker assisted Majid in advocating to the real estate agent for the repairs. Majid has now **paid off the loan and also has secured full-time employment** which he is enjoying.

[redacted]
7 contacts

[redacted] was referred from a WCC emergency relief assessor as she was **distressed** during her interview about her housing situation. She was **experiencing FV** from her brother and seeking **alternative accommodation**. She was suffering with depression due to the stress. While her options around an intervention order and refuge were discussed, [redacted] had experienced this in the past and did not want to go down that path again and she preferred to seek alternative private rental accommodation. Information about the HBSP was given and an assessment made. [redacted] was confident in applying for properties on her own and would return to the agency when she secured a property. Not long after the client was **accepted into a property** and needing help with a bond and rent in advance. Information and support on applying for a bond loan and NEH for 2 weeks rent in advance. [redacted] was successful and granted the bond and two weeks rent however was still short two weeks rent in advance. WCC was able to assist with the loan. She required minimal casework support and was committed to paying off the loan as soon as possible. [redacted] stated that she felt **self-reliant** knowing that it was a loan and once she paid it that we could help someone else [redacted] has since **paid off her loan** and is residing in the same property.

6.2 Longer-term housing stability

Clients were asked to comment on the impact of the program on their longer-term housing stability and whether it has helped them to cope better with other pressures in their lives. Table 5 shows the median scores from a series of statements where clients were asked to rate the impact of the service on a scale of 0 to 10 where zero equals strongly disagree and 10 equals strongly agree. As shown, clients generally agreed strongly that their rental housing is more stable than when they first contacted the service and that they were better able to cope with other pressures in their live because of this stability. However, they felt that the program had limited impact on whether they can pay their rent on time, can afford a rental property or are living in an area that they want to live in.

Table 5. Satisfaction with stability and coping with other life pressures

Because of the program……	Median score
My rental housing is more stable than it was when I first contacted the service	9.5
I am better able to cope with other pressures in my life	8.5
I can pay my rent on time	2
I can now afford a rental property	5
I am living in an area that I want to live in	5

The open ended responses from clients provide further insight into the difference the program has made for their own lives and their families. Clients spoke of the benefits of what flowed on from having more stable housing, including helping them to build a new sense of place allowing them to 'get on with their lives' and overcome feelings of isolation. For new arrivals the program was reported to provide the opportunity to build their lives in a new country with a greater sense of security.

> **The program is very important to me because I struggle with my English it makes it hard to talk with other people in the neighbourhood and those at school. This makes me quite shy. The support from the program has had the most impact because of my isolation due to English as a second language. Having somewhere to go and be heard is good [Client interview].**

Clients reported that the stability of their new housing situation and the broader support provided by the program, including learning how to manage their money, has allowed them to cope better with other pressures that arise. Those with experience of long-term homelessness reflected on how the program has allowed them to find a sense of peace and start to build a home. Others reported that being able to choose their housing in an area that they wanted to live in meant that they could remain close to their existing supports.

> **At the start the stress was very high because we couldn't get enough money to pay the upfront amount. I still have the stress and day to day pressures of living on a low income but it is not as bad because of the stability in the housing. I'm still in the same house and it is the best house that I have had for a very long time. After spending many years homeless and bouncing around I feel at peace here – this is where I would like to stay and make a home. I try my best to make sure everything is up to date [Client interview].**

> **I wanted to still live in the area – it is close to my support networks which is important for my stability at the moment [Client interview].**

Others talked about the importance that having a rental property meant for keeping their family together or being able move their family to a safer place to live for those who were fleeing family violence. The case studies of Tom, Sally and her cousin illustrate the difference the program has made for them in being able to rebuild their families. After securing an NRAS property combined with brokerage support, Tom is now able to have his children come and stay in their own room and because he was able to secure an affordable property he can also afford to take them out. As a consequence his mental health has improved significantly and he is starting to return to work one day a week.

Tom
11 contacts

Tom was referred from [Service] for support with housing. He was in between places and wanted to have a stable home for his two children. After an assessment Tom was considered financially suitable for the housing project. His mental health was being supported by his [Service] worker however his insecure housing was impacting on his mental health. WCC assisted Tom with support letters for his applications for private rental. In the process of seeking private rental, Tom's situation changed. His access to his children had been limited to only having access every second weekend. His income also changed and he was no longer receiving family tax benefit. His urgency for housing was also critical as he only had a month left in his current accommodation. WCC referred Tom to the local real estate agents in Thomastown but this was not successful as he was seeking very affordable rental of $250 a week. Finally Tom was able to secure a NRAS rental and was assisted with our housing loan. Tom is on track with repayments and travelling better with his mental health.

[redacted] and her cousin
19 contacts, 4 contacts

[redacted] was a long-term client of the agency and first presented in early 2013. She experienced family violence and fled from her husband with her children and continued to receive casework support from WCC during this time. [redacted] had a cousin living in the area who assisted with navigating the service system and also emotional support. To reduce the costs of her housing [redacted] decided to move into a rental property with her cousin. Both needed assistance with rent in advance. They also had some difficulties applying for a bond loan and WCC provided advocacy on their behalf and a bond loan was granted. [redacted] continued to engage with the broader programs at WCC including English classes. [redacted] no longer requires an interpreter as her English has improved significantly, as well as her written English and she is much more settled and content with life. Both [redacted] and her cousin are on track with repayments.

The provision of microfinance, as discussed in section 2, can be a more suitable alternative to risky borrowing from payday lenders or informal sources where the financial and personal costs can be high. The case study below illustrates the significant stress that can arise when having to borrow money from other more risky sources, including personal associates. In this instance, the brokerage funds and other resources through the youth connections program were able to be used to clear their existing debt that was proving to be highly detrimental to the family's wellbeing.

Hassan
3 contacts

Hassan was referred from the WCC settlement team for brokerage support around housing. He has a **family with three children**. At the time he needed to move into a rental property he borrowed money for bond as he did not know about a bond loan through the Office of Housing. Hassan presented to WCC **under intense pressure** as the person they borrowed from wanted the money paid back and Hassan felt indebted to him. In addition the person who they borrowed the money from has an interest in his younger daughter and he felt that she cannot tell him to leave as they are in debt to him.

While this particular situation did not fit the usual eligibility criteria for the loan, as Hassan and his family were already in a property, it was decided that assistance from the housing program could be provided with approval from the team leader. Assistance of $1347 was given to the real estate agent in the form of a rent payment. Hassan agreed to repay $30 a fortnight, which **he could afford**. Hassan's daughter was also being supported by WCC's Youth Connections worker and was able to secure funds from another philanthropic organisation leaving only $400 for Hassan to pay. Hassan has since **paid off the loan** and the family's **financial stress has decreased.**

A key objective of the program is to ensure that the housing clients enter into is affordable. However, staff commented in the focus group that they are ultimately limited to what housing stock is available in the area. Although clients were able to continue to live in the area where they had existing support networks they were still limited to what properties were available. Generally clients reported that the program has not made it easier for them to pay their rent on time and this was something that was considered to ultimately be up to them to manage on their own.

While clients believed that the brokerage support they received was enough to meet their immediate needs, the program was not ultimately able to help with the ongoing payment of private rental housing, which for some continued to be a struggle. All reported paying over 30% of their income on rent with four paying 50% or more. One client reported falling behind in her rent from 'time to time' but that she was able to manage this more effectively by contacting the real estate agent. Two clients reported having to move from the property they had been assisted into although this was for personal reasons.

It is once off financial support. The property is still unaffordable. However, they have given me a lot of information and advice on how to deal with the property [Client interview].

It is because I'm in a NRAS property that I can afford to pay for housing. But WCC helped me to get into to this housing with the upfront rent. The rate of rent is reduced so that makes it a lot easier. The property is at a reduced rate I pay $257 for a new home so it is pretty good. The OoH waiting list is not quick enough [Client interview].

It would be good if they were able to provide more support after you get the property because you are still going to run into times when there is not enough money to pay the rent and there is a need for additional support [Client interview].

It is clear that the program has been effective in opening the door to private rental housing for those assisted. However, it is likely that affordability problems will persist for many who are unable to move into secure and good paying jobs despite gaining access to the cheapest rental properties available.

7 Conclusions and recommendations for future program development

The emerging evidence suggests that there is a growing demand and a role for microfinance across the spectrum of households needs. The benefits are generally positive and superior to those from fringe lenders that low income households are forced to rely on when they have no other alternative and where government funded programs are limited. As governments look towards new ways of delivering housing assistance through public-private partnerships, it is likely that models of microfinance will have potential appeal. There is however limited understanding of the effectiveness of microfinance in the broader housing context. This evaluation goes some way to building an emerging evidence base that can inform the further development of models in the future.

Although limited in scope, the brokerage program has been effective in leveraging more rapid access to private rental properties for those assisted. The modest size of the program has allowed WCC to trial its implementation without significant risk to the funds invested or to the clients in receipt of brokerage loans. Section 2 reinforced the growing importance of the private rental sector as the main housing option for low income households now and into the future. It is critical that private rental support programs can mitigate the market risks of gaining access to rental properties and to sustaining tenancies over time. The provision of upfront assistance to remain in the private rental market is an effective means of preventing homelessness and its associated social and economic costs to society.

There was a strong view amongst those consulted that the program must continue to target individuals and households who have the capacity to repay. The three groups targeted for loans were considered suitable and should remain the focus of the program as it moves to the next stage of development. Generally, clients felt very satisfied with the amount of assistance they received and the service's main impact has been to 'open the door' to private rental housing as well as creating a greater sense of stability. Nonetheless, affordability problems remain a persistent concern for the majority of tenants in their properties, requiring them to be disciplined in their budgeting and making sacrifices in order to get by each week.

The initial brokerage program was implemented cautiously as a small scale pilot with the intention of expanding it further following the implementation phase and evaluation of the pilot. Staff, stakeholders and clients were asked to comment on whether the model should and could be further developed following this initial pilot period. There is clear support across all consulted on the merits of the brokerage program and strong support for the model to continue to be expanded to meet the pressing demand for housing assistance in the Whittlesea and surrounding area.

This final section documents the suggestions and recommendations for how the model can be further developed in practice. The recommendations provided extend to those that can be addressed by WCC within the scope of the program.

7.1 Expansion of the brokerage capacity

The initial capital investment of $12,000 has provided housing brokerage assistance for 18 clients. Both internal and external stakeholders believed it was necessary to seek additional funding from a mix of government and private philanthropic funders for the program to expand. It was not articulated how large the program could grow. However, growth needs to be manageable within the capacity and resources of WCC. Staff identified that the program would need at least an additional $25,000-$30,000 in brokerage funding to meet existing demand, which could continue to be replenished as clients pay back the loan. There was also a view that the brokerage funding could be better tied to HEF money for financing different aspects of the resettlement process. With additional funding there was a suggestion that funds could be directed to shared or matched commitment to the purchasing of essential items where the client pays a certain amount and the services match the amount. Step down models for rent assistance were also suggested where the service commences to pay 75% at the initial housing stage, then moves down to 50% and then 10% and then the client moves to independent payment.

Recommendation 1: Scale-up the project by seeking an additional mix of public and private funds to expand the capacity of the program to reach a greater number of low-income households within the specified target group in need of assistance.

Preliminary evidence indicates that the demand for private rental assistance currently outstrips supply. A full needs assessment was beyond the scope of this initial formative evaluation. However, in developing a comprehensive area based approach to private rental support a more detailed analysis of the scope and potential size of the target group and the roles of different providers needs to be undertaken as part of a localised strategy for early intervention and homelessness prevention in the Whittlesea area, including what service gaps WCC will prioritise to address in the future.

Recommendation 2: Undertake a needs assessment and service mapping of the demand for private rental assistance in the Whittlesea area in planning to expand its housing provision focus.

7.2 Increased capacity for tenancy support outreach

The existing support role was identified as providing essential advocacy and support. However, given the small amount of funding the capacity for support, at .6 FTE, was primarily limited to an office based position. Both internal and external stakeholders and as well as clients consulted revealed the importance of having a dedicated outreach worker who could be proactive in helping clients to access and inspect properties, particularly for those who do not have access to transport. This added capacity within the existing support role would help to facilitate faster access to properties as they become available.

> **There is a need for programs to help tenants inspect properties. Clients without a car have difficulty finding a property because by the time they get out there to inspect the property is gone. Recent arrivals are particularly disadvantaged in this respect [External stakeholder].**

It was also reported that there needs to be more thorough assessment of new arrivals' understanding of how to navigate their way around and to better understand the subjective experience of being a new Australian. There is a need for further assistance in providing integration into the community and someone who could be actively involved in doing this outside a centre based approach.

> **There is a lot of information that is needed to familiarise yourself with how things work in Australian way of life and the support is not really adequate enough for this. There are some assumptions that you already have some understanding. It doesn't fully meet the needs and you have to try to piece it all together [Client interview].**

Recommendation 3: Seek recurrent funding for the expansion of the existing case management role to enable greater capacity for housing related outreach and support.

7.3 Governance

The governance arrangements of the initial program have worked well on a small scale. However, as the program expands governance of the loan and support functions and how they sit together will need to be further developed. With growth, the separation of roles from the loan management and support functions will become increasingly important. The assessment procedures will need to be further formalised with dedicated administrators to manage the loans and funds. Drawing on the governance structures of larger models of microfinance management will be particularly informative to this end. However, it is critical that the case management and loan functions remain collaborative in practice to ensure that the social objectives of the program are maintained.

> **In expanding the model the critical thing to think about is governance and the separation of the support advocacy role with the loan officer role, which essentially should be an administration role [External stakeholder].**

Recommendation 4: Cost an administration or 'loan manager' component into the funding model when seeking additional funds. The loan manager, as part of a joint assessment process, would have responsibility for following up defaults and ensuring that clients are managing the repayments without undue hardship.

7.4 Client capacity building beyond the loan

The program model recognises the need for brokerage to be matched with additional skills building support. However, there was a view by stakeholders consulted that with additional resources the scope of the model could be extended to a more formalised skills building program whereby clients complete a series of information sessions as a condition of the loan.

> **Building in the financial literacy aspect like other microfinance programs would help to further develop the program. This program is somewhat distinct from other microfinance models because the support is typically once off. When people get microfinance they often come back for a fridge and then something else [External stakeholder].**

Currently capacity building occurs on a one to one basis. As the program expands more formalised structures could be put into place based on a comprehensive program that provides money management and presentation skills, budgeting and how to maintain a good rental history. There was a view that tenants that are able to demonstrate a stable rental history will be viewed more favourably and that in the absence of this history the prospective tenant will need to have some additional evidence to indicate that they can manage a rental property. It was suggested that participation in a formalised program can be presented to the real estate as a further guarantee of the client's capacity to manage the property.

Recommendation 5: Explore options for strengthening and partnering with a 'financial' and 'rental' literacy training program to be delivered as an individual and/or grouped based learning module in different languages. The modules should result in a certificate upon completion that forms part of a rental reference.

7.5 Strengthening collaborative relationships with real estate agents

Having dedicated people in the real estate agency who are prepared to collaborate with services makes a difference for low income households. WCC have made significant gains in their work with real estate agents, particularly in how best to help tenants to prepare and present themselves. Further service development needs to occur on how to present the tenant beyond the provision of written references. Despite goodwill on both sides, differences in respective interests can impede effective collaboration and there was a view across all consulted, including clients, that the links between real estate agents and services providing housing assistance need to be further strengthened. As well as helping to facilitate access, better links with real estate agents could help to raise issues with rental arrears or other difficulties as they arise. Real Estate agents could provide a first port of call where they alert tenants to the potential support that could be available to them.

Recommendation 6: Continue to cultivate collaborative partnerships with local real estate agents by promoting the capacities of low income households and how the program assists in building their 'rental readiness'. The scope for further formalising two way referral protocols should continue to be explored.

7.6 Financial incentives for landlords

Landlords were reported to respond most effectively to financial incentives that are able to reduce the perceived risks of renting to lower income households. It was suggested that one potential means of providing a financial incentive could be that the referring support service offers to pay 12 months of the insurance premium for the landlord, which is around $300. As the insurance premium currently protects the landlord against rental arrears and damage to the property this would provide a direct incentive or leverage

into the property by providing some peace of mind to the landlord. For those who are unable to obtain bond assistance, deposit bonds through an insurance company guarantee were reported to be an alternative means of raising amounts needed. The bond is then paid off by the tenant but the insurance company provides the upfront guarantee. However, the amount of the bond to be paid back would be higher than the upfront bond due to additional interest.

A further incentive based program suggested that may help to facilitate greater accessibility was the establishment of a private rental maintenance program. In the program the tenant, or a program on behalf of the tenant would offer to paint the house or fix up the garden in exchange for rent. This could be a joint program across a number of agencies, which could also provide the opportunity for employment based work experience. Being able to offer the landlord something in terms of tangible maintenance can improve the property for the tenant and also provide some leverage in getting in the door. This was reported to provide a selling point beyond a reference. It also could provide direct employment experience for those looking for work if established as a form of social enterprise.

Recommendation 7: Explore the viability of subsidising rental insurance premiums for landlords as a last resort practice for tenants that do not have a rental history or have a poor rental history with several unsuccessful applications.

7.7 Housing affordability

Both internal and external stakeholders discussed the structural affordability and security concerns that extend beyond the capacity of the program to address but were considered important to note as part of a broader response in the provision of adequate housing for all. The magnitude of the housing affordability problem in the Whittlesea and surrounding areas extends beyond the capacity of any one program to address. The supply of affordable housing remains the subject of a Senate Inquiry[3] and needs to be fully resourced through national strategic effort.

[3] See www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Economics/Affordable_housing_2013

There was critical concern for single people who are unable to be adequately assisted in the private rental market and who are most vulnerable to the experience of homelessness. The inability of tenancy laws to provide adequate security of tenure, particularly for families, remains an ongoing issue in need of reform. Services on the ground have a key advocacy role in ensuring that the specific needs of low income households, particularly those who are 'falling through the gaps', continue to inform broader program and policy development. Establishment and maintenance of ongoing housing networks provides a key forum for advancing the concerns emerging in the private rental sector at the local level.

> **Single people are now effectively locked out of the private rental market. They cannot afford to pay 55% rent and the real estate agent and the landlord look at the income and determine that it is too much of a risk. The doors are locked for this group [External stakeholder].**

Recommendation 8: Continue to be proactive in raising the needs of low income households through ongoing coordination and engagement in local and regional forums for affordable housing and contributing to policy reviews based on the lessons learned from the Housing Brokerage and Support Project.

7.8 Assistance to sustain tenancies

The capacity and primary focus of the project has been to facilitate rental access. However, the extent to which the brokerage program moves beyond access to a more proactive role in sustaining tenancies was raised by both clients and stakeholders. Most low income households were considered to be able to manage their rental properties and not get behind in their rent. However, a small number do continue to struggle and find it hard to catch up. The more widespread use of Centrepay by real estate agents for those in receipt of income support was considered critical in assisting with both access and in sustaining the tenancies for those most vulnerable. Whilst direct debiting can be extended to low income working households it is not widely used in the real estate agents as yet and this remains a gap.

There was a strong view that brokerage loan funds should not be used to assist clients out of arrears if they fell behind as this would add to financial pressures. Although there was recognition that additional support may be needed for clients who experience setbacks, particularly to avoid the necessity of accessing pay day lenders. How clients are managing their housing needs ongoing monitoring. The flexible repayment system was considered beneficial as it has allowed clients to 'juggle' competing expenses.

> **Being able to help out with the rent in a more ongoing way – it is a one off thing but the rent difficulties can still persist – there needs to be something else when you come up short [Client interview]**

> **I don't think that they should provide a loan to assist with arrears that could make it quite tricky. Although the pay day lending and loan sharks are a real problem [External stakeholder].**

Recommendation 9: Undertake periodic reviews and follow up with tenants as a condition of the loan agreement. This includes seeking consent to liaise with real estate agents to determine whether any difficulties with rental payments have occurred and how rental and loan repayments can be renegotiated.

7.9 Stronger links with housing providers

The Community Housing Sector is expected to experience ongoing growth to become an important alternative for affordable housing into the future. Staff, external providers and clients recognised the important role of community housing, although at the same time recognising that the options can be limited and there are often time delays in gaining access and long waiting lists. Nonetheless, as the program expands there will be a need to develop stronger collaborative partnerships with local community housing and NRAS providers in the area as an alternative housing option or to provide a pathway from private rental into community housing if the property becomes unaffordable. Brokerage funding can be used to house clients quickly in the private rental sector and once housed clients can be further assessed to determine whether community housing would be more suitable in the longer-term and be supported whilst on a waiting list.

Recommendation 10: Explore options to develop MoUs for referral protocols with community housing providers for those who have been assisted into a private rental property but who will need to be relocated to a longer-term affordable housing arrangement.

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9 Appendices

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RMIT UNIVERSITY

Title: Review of the WCC Housing Brokerage & Support Project

[redacted]

Dear .....You have been invited to participate in an interview to give feedback on your experience of the Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) Housing Brokerage and Support Project. To make sure the interviews are completely confidential and anonymous WCC have funded me, Dr Sharon Parkinson from RMIT University to conduct the interviews on their behalf. Participating in an interview is completely up to you. It will not affect the support you receive from WCC in any way if you do not want to be interviewed. If you agree, the interview should take about 30-45 minutes of your time. You will be paid $25 to cover your travel costs and time. In the interview I will ask you questions on the:

- Type of support you have received
- Whether the program has helped you
- Your experience with finding a house in the private rental market
- How the program can be improved
- Personal background details such age, family type, employment, income

Answering some personal questions may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that you are not comfortable talking about. You can ask your own questions and/or stop participating at any stage and this will not affect you in any way. If you would like to talk to a support worker at WCC after talking about some of your experiences this can be arranged for you.

I will write down your answers to the questions for my own records. The notes will be typed up and your name will not appear on these notes. The notes will be stored in secure password file on my computer at RMIT. Your responses will be strictly confidential and will not be reported back to WCC in a way that identifies what you have said. Your interview notes will be made available to you on request. The answers that you give will not affect the services that you receive in any way. Any information that you provide can be disclosed only if (1) it is to protect you or others from harm, (2) if specifically required or allowed by law, or (3) you provide the researchers with written permission.

Your answers to the questions will help to improve the Housing Brokerage and Support Project. I will also interview up to 10 people in the program. Your answers to the questions will be anonymous and put together with others who I will speak to in the program so that I can identify common experiences and suggestions. The combined answers will appear in a final report. WCC will use this report to further improve their Housing Brokerage and Support Program. Your anonymous responses may also be used as part of new research on private rental support programs and appear in other publications. You will be able to access all publications from the research by contacting WCC and/or me directly if you would like a copy.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sharon Parkinson

If you would like to contact a support worker after the interview at WCC please contact Ben Rogers at WCC. If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au

CONSENT FORM

I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the information sheet

1. I agree to participate in the research project as described

2. I agree to be interviewed

3. I acknowledge that:

   (a) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).

   (b) The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.

   (c) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

   (d) The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to Whittlesea Community Connections. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

(Signature)

Whittlesea Community Connections Housing Brokerage & Support Project
Client Interview Schedule

This interview will have five main sections. In the first section we will start by talking about the private rental support you have received. In the next section I will ask you questions about your experiences in the private rental market. We will then talk about what difference the private rental support program has made for you. In part four we will talk about what you think would make the program better. In the final section I will collect some background details. This background will help to identify different needs for support according to age, family type, income and so on. Please let me know at any stage if you would like to stop or are not comfortable with the questions. Just to remind you all your answers will be strictly confidential.

Lets start with the support you have received to access and remain in private rental

Section 1: Private rental housing support received

1. What type of practical and financial support have you received from Whittlesea Community Connections to assist with accessing and staying in your private rental housing?

a. Brokerage/how much/ loan repayment schedule

_____
_____
_____

b. Practical/emotional support from social worker/ what type of support and how often

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. When did this support first commence?/how long/is it still going?

_____
_____

3. How did you find out about the program?

_____
_____

4. Did you contact any other services at the time? Please specify

_____
_____
_____

a what other types of services are you currently using

☐ Housing support ☐ Welfare services – i.e. Salvation Army ☐ Drop in services

☐ Employment assistance ☐Counselling ☐Family support ☐ Mental health ☐ Aged care

Specify

_____
_____

5. Do you have other ongoing support workers/therapists?

_____
_____

6. Satisfaction with support

I'm going to read out some statements about the program. Tell me whether you agree or disagree with these statements on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 equals strongly disagree and 10 equals strongly agree. You can also provide some additional comments if you want to

a. Generally speaking I am satisfied with the support I have received…

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

b The support staff are always polite and respectful….

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

c. The support staff respond quickly to my housing needs …

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

d. The amount of support provided is enough to meet my current housing needs ….

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

e. The support staff are knowledgeable about the services in the local area…..

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

f. The support staff have an in-depth knowledge of private rental housing in the area….

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

g. The amount of brokerage (loan amount) has been enough to meet my housing needs…

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

h. I have no difficulties in meeting the repayments of the loan…

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

j. Having a loan to repay makes it difficult for me to pay for other things that I need…

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

Moving onto to talk about your housing experiences …….

Section 2: Housing market experiences

7. Are you still in the same housing since first accessing WCC? Have you had to move/ how many times?

_____
_____
_____

a. If so is this housing suitable for your needs?

_____
_____
_____

8. About how much of your income is spent on rent? _____Can you afford to pay that amount of rent?_____

9. Have you had any prior difficulties with finding a place to rent/ stay in?

- Affordability/ location/ trouble with real estate agents landlords/public housing / homelessness

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

10. When did difficulties with your housing first begin? What was the main trigger?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Lets now think about whether the program has made a difference for you……

Section 3: Impact of the support

11. In what way do you think the service has helped you most?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

I'm going to read out some statements about the program. Tell me whether you agree or disagree with these statements on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 equals strongly disagree and 10 equals strongly agree. You can also provide some additional comments if you want to

a. Because of the program I can now afford a rental property….

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

b. Because of the program my rental housing is more stable than it was when I first contacted the service…

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

c. Because of the program I can pay my rent on time….

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

d. Because of the program I am living in an area that I want to live in….

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

e. Because of the program I am better able to cope with other pressures in my life…

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10
Disagree Strongly *Neutral* *Agree Strongly*

_____
_____
_____

12. What has made the biggest difference/ Least difference for your housing/ other life areas?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

13. Did the program help to overcome the reasons for seeking assistance?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 4: Program improvement

14. How can the program be improved/extended to better meet your needs?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

15. Are there any parts of the service that you are not happy with?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 5: Demographics

Age: _____ Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

What type household do you live in?

☐ Single ☐ Couple ☐ Single parent ☐ Couple with children ☐ Other (specify) _____

What is your main source of income?

☐ Paid employment ☐ New Start Allowance (NSA) ☐ (DSP)
☐ Parenting Payment – Single (PPs) ☐ Parenting Payment – Partnered (PPp)
☐ Other____

If employed is this on a……..

☐ Casual ☐ Fixed term contract
☐ Permanent ☐ Other (specify)_____

What is your approximate household income for the year (Gross before tax)

☐ Less than $10,000 ☐ $10,000 – 14,999 ☐ $15,000- 19,999 ☐ $20,000-24,999
☐ $25,000-29,999 ☐ $30,000-34,999 ☐ $35,000-39,999 ☐ $40,000-44,999
☐ $45,000-49,999 ☐ $50,000,-54,999 ☐ $55,000-59,999 ☐ $60,000+

What is your country of birth?

☐ Australia ☐ Other (specify)_____