

# Royal Commission into Family Violence

## Submission

### Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee

*Prepared by Kerry Hamer - Gippsland's Regional Integrated Coordinator  
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### *Agencies of Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee*

#### *FULL MEMBERS:*

*Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service  
Anglicare Victoria  
Bass Coast Community Health Service (BCCHS)  
Community Housing Ltd (CHL)  
Family Mediation Centre  
Gippsland Centre for Sexual Assault (GCASA)  
Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative Ltd (GEGAC)  
Gippsland Lakes Community Health (GLCH)  
Gippsland Women's Health (GWH)  
Victoria Police (VicPol)  
Latrobe Community Health Service (LCHS)  
Orana Gunyah  
Quantum Support Services (QSS)  
Relationships Australia – Victoria/Gippsland Early Intervention Services (GEIS)  
SalvoCare Eastern  
Uniting Care Gippsland  
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care (VACCA)  
West Gippsland Health Care Group (WGHG)  
Windermere  
Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service*

#### *ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:*

*Prevention of Men's Violence against Women (PMVAW)  
Department of Justice – Gippsland  
DHHS – Child Protection Services Southern Division, Inner & Outer Gippsland  
DHHS – Indigenous Family Violence – South Division  
DHHS – Local Connections, Inner & Outer Gippsland  
Gippsland Homelessness Network  
SHS (SAAP) Children's Resource Worker (UnitingCare)  
Federation University*

The committee is made up of a diverse range of agencies as such not all agencies may be in agreement with all recommendations made in this submission.

Some agencies will be making their own submission to the royal commission outlining their specific thoughts on the issues.

## **Governance - Best Practice**

The Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Strategy had a number of principles underpinning the family violence governance policy and practice in Victoria. These principles were supported and well documented in the *Guiding Integrated Family Violence Service Reform 2006 -2009 document* that included;

- **A Shared Vision** – The development, or confirmation, of a shared vision and principles ensured that all stakeholders understood what the reforms meant for them in their everyday work. The establishment of coherent philosophical approaches that contribute to the development of a service system in which the various components complement one another, rather than being a collection of disjointed service elements.
- **A Systems Approach** – The establishment of clear and consistent referral pathways is one of the central threads of the reform process. Given the intent of the family violence reforms to achieve system integration, a clear priority for regional and area – based services, is the clarification of referral pathways and development of referral protocols to facilitate the transition of women, children and men through the system. Building an integrated system is critically dependent on policy, legislation, guidelines and practice across the service system agreeing on what it means, how to implement it and who was responsible for what, to achieve safety and accountability outcomes. The specialist family violence sector has a role to maintain a critical watch over the system, to monitor its gaps, themes and challenges and to push for continuous improvement.
- **A Partnership approach** – All agencies involved in the provision of integrated services to women and children affected by violence and men who use violence, including community services, police and justice are required to work together to provide coordinated responses at a local level through participation on the Regional Integration Steering Committee and with the leadership roles of the Chair and the Regional Integration Coordinator.
- **Clear roles and responsibilities** –Communication and engagement mechanisms are important at each level (local, sub regional, regional and state wide) providing opportunities to plan, prioritise, share information and review progress. The aim of these structures is to; manage the implementation of family violence reforms and achieve consistent responses across Victoria, encourage the participation of key stakeholders, develop clear links between regional coordination and state wide coordination structures, provide mechanisms for decision making and information sharing at each level.
- **Evidence and expertise** – Family violence is fundamentally a gendered issue – being a woman is the single greatest risk factor for experiencing family violence. Decisions about how to improve the safety of women and children in Victoria must draw on evidence and intent to improve consistency and strength of responses when they experience family violence. The role of specialist family violence expertise in knowing “what works” is critical as well as management of risk for consistency of practice and progress.

A **whole of government approach** was embedded, supporting a clear communication strategy. The structure incorporated state wide leadership and collaboration which had explicit two – way consultation with a regional governance structure. The pathway for consultation and direction was open and transparent.

The whole of government approach was demonstrated by five **Ministers** representing the portfolios of Police and emergency services, Attorney General; Community Services, Housing and Local Government; Aboriginal Affairs; Children; and Women. Supporting the Minister’s group was a **Family Violence Interdepartmental Committee**, co – chaired by the then Department of Community Development and Planning (DPCD) and Victoria Police, which was in turn supported by a Family Violence Coordination Unit (within the Office of Women’s Policy, DPCD) , with a mandate to drive integration. These structures also formally linked to the governance and advisory structures for the **Indigenous ten year plan**.

A critical aspect of the family violence reform was the collective effort by government and community sector leaders participating in the **Family Violence State wide Advisory Committee** to identify emerging barriers, gaps, challenges and opportunities, provide advice about key reform priorities, and advise on how whole of government projects/ initiatives impact on family violence services funded by the then Department of Human Services (DHS). There was also

a **Prevention State wide Advisory Committee** and the **Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum**. These Advisory Committees and Forum became a key source of advice to the Victorian Government to shape, drive and evaluate the family violence reform program.

At a regional level, the Family Violence Regional Integrated Steering Committees brought together local representatives of the family violence specific services and key stakeholders, such as women's and men's family violence services, Child and family services, women's health services, police, Corrections, court services, Aboriginal services, community legal services, homelessness services, youth services, Child Protection, disability, CALD services and local government to drive integration and oversee the reform process to achieve safety, accountability and choice. Each Family Violence Regional Integrated Steering Committee was, and continues to be overseen by a **Regional Integration Chair** and supported by a **Family Violence Regional Integration Co-ordinator**. These roles provide critical leadership to support continued development of the integrated system on the ground and to advise of regional perspectives and provide experience in implementation.

**Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups** have a leadership role in implementing community led responses that educate, prevent, reduce and respond to family violence in Indigenous Communities. The Regional Integration Coordinator, through the Family Violence Regional Integration Steering Committee and the Aboriginal Regional Coordinator, through the Family Violence Regional Action Groups, work in collaboration where appropriate to progress projects and initiatives to support responses to family violence in Indigenous communities.

The updated *Regional Family Violence Integration Governance Model document - 2013*, has provided family violence services and key stakeholders with a best practice framework identifying the purpose and direction of which to coordinate and integrate local and regional responses to family violence.

### **Loss of Momentum**

With the appointment of the Coalition Government in 2010, there was a substantial loss of direction and drive towards family violence reform including the lack of consultation from the state to the Family Violence Regional Integrated Committees. With the release of *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and their Children 2012 - 2015* there was a loss of the previous family violence service reform vision and focus to support women's and children's safety and to hold men who are perpetrators accountable. The pathway for consultation was no longer open and transparent and the lines of communication became blurred. Consequently there have been several regional initiatives developed without consideration of family violence from a policy or practice level at a state wide level.

### **Recommendation**

- That there is a return to a whole of government approach with an open and transparent two way collaborative and consultative pathway from state to Family Violence Regional Integration Steering Committees.
- That there is a mechanism put in place supported by legislation that doesn't allow the Family Violence Reform to be dismantled each time there is a new government in place.

### **Regional Integration Committee**

#### **Structure, Purpose and Function of Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee.**

The purpose of the Regional Integration Committee is to identify and prioritise local regional issues within the state-wide reform framework and develop an agreed Strategic Plan (as defined in "*Guiding Integrated Family Violence Service Reform 2006 – 2009*") focusing on and leading regional work to achieve its priorities to drive greater integration of family violence services.

Regional integration Committees should ensure strategic planning is grounded in practice reality through an appropriate balance in committee membership (i.e. the representation of all funded family violence service providers and other key service and sector representation).

Structures should also have the capacity to focus on specific components of committee business, including strategic planning, identifying and addressing operational service system issues and supporting and promoting coordinated practice.

The Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee receives \$70,000 a year brokerage to assist with integrated family violence projects for the region.

### **Chair**

#### **The key responsibilities of the Chair are;**

- To provide regional leadership on state-wide family violence priorities, identifying and prioritising regional strategic goals and focusing the work of the Committee on achieving these goals.
- To harness the leadership strengths and knowledge of committee members, drawing on their knowledge of regional systems, relationships and processes.
- To plan and chair the Regional Committee meetings for Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee.
- To lead the Regional Integration Committee in identifying the most significant regional issues to be addressed and the ways an integrated partnership approach can have greatest impact. To ensure the Regional Integration Committee is developing and implementing its regional strategic plan in line with and informed by state-wide priorities and reform objectives.
- To ensure regular review of progress is made against the Committee's Strategic Plan and oversee any required adjustment.
- To ensure the Regional Integration Committee's accountabilities are met through reporting on the progress of Regional Integration Committee Strategic Plan at regional and state-wide levels.

### **Regional Integration Coordinator**

- The role of the Regional Integration Coordinator (RIC) is one of strategic leadership in steering integration initiatives and activities that support the achievement of the Regional Integration Committee priorities as set out in the Strategic Plan.
- The RIC plays a key role in promoting a shared understanding and context across key sectors in relation to family violence and in coordinating an integrated system response to family violence. This involves identifying (in association with the Regional Integration Steering Committee) training and development gaps and methods of addressing these. The RIC also serves as a regional coordination point for relevant state-wide initiatives and will inform the Regional Integration Committee of state-wide policy and principles, so that regional strategic outcomes are consistent with state-wide priorities.
- The RIC will act as a conduit for communication and information flow within the regional/subregional partnerships, as well as with other key service sectors and the peak bodies, (DV VIC and No To Violence) and represent the Regional Integration Committee at forums and with other key sectors as nominated by the Regional Integration Committee. The RIC will work collaboratively and in association with other key sectors to create shared ownership of joint initiatives around Strategic Plan priorities.

### **Individual Committee members**

Individual Committee members have a responsibility to:

- Contribute knowledge and expertise about their service/sector and any specific issues experienced by that sector.
- Provide relevant organisational data in support of the Committee's strategic planning process. Inform approaches to improving service systems responses
- Advise on practice and operational issues impacting on services
- Identify opportunities for addressing emerging issues and trends
- Inform approaches to improving service system responses
- Implement relevant actions in the strategic plan.
- Commit to attendance at the Regional integration Committee

### **Some of the Achievements of the Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee**

- Regional CRAF Level 2 & 3 training sessions for practitioner's coordinated by the Regional Integration Coordinator and program support officer.
- CRAF level 1 "Identifying family violence" sessions provided by family violence service sector and key stakeholders such as Child Protection and Police in a panel delivery. Sessions coordinated by Regional Integration Coordinator and program support officer for groups such as; Local Laws officers from Local Government, Monash University Medical Students; Central Gippsland Health Service and Latrobe Regional Health Nurses and Doctors; Mental Health Network; CWA and Midwifery course.
- Attendance by Regional Integration Coordinator and Chair at the Department of Justice Reference Groups for Inner and Outer Gippsland.
- Attendance by Regional Integration Coordinator at Justice meeting relating to Bairnsdale Koori Family Violence Police Protocols.
- Funding by the Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee to support Gippsland Men's Behaviour Change facilitators to attend Swinburne training through payment of accommodation costs and travel.
- "Working with Men who use Family Violence" Training organised to be brought to the region by Regional Integration Coordinator and program support officer. Presented by Rodney Vlais
- MBC Regional Meetings – facilitated by Rodney Vlais "No To Violence", attended by Regional MBC facilitators, partner contact workers and Corrections have attended.
- Funding provided by Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee to cover costs of training brought from Melbourne delivered by DVRCV and for several CRAF Level 2 & 3 training when none was being delivered in the region.
- Funding provided by Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee for an "Inspirational Women's" group and a therapeutic play group for children in early primary school who have experienced family violence.
- Funding provided by Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee to support a .6 EFT program worker for two years to trial the B safe monitor alarm for those women and children who are at risk and fearful of having their Intervention Order breached.

### **Recommendation**

- To keep the model of the Regional Integration Steering Committees in place and continue with the present funding arrangement so that regional priorities can be identified and activated.

### **Standards, Codes of Practice and Protocols**

Having very clear “best practice” guidelines to follow when workers are dealing with family violence victims and perpetrators is important for consistency of response across the state and is a good reference point for new workers. Unfortunately most are out of date with no funding for them to be upgraded.

- Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children – written by Domestic Violence Victoria - published in 2006.
- Men’s Behaviour Change Group Work – A Manual for Quality Practice – written by No to Violence – published in 2006.
- Practice Guidelines: Women and Children’s family violence counselling and support programs – published in 2008.
- Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework and Practice Guides 1-3 second edition published 2012. (CRAF). There is a need for this training to be delivered regularly in the regions and the framework needs to be reviewed and updated.

In 2011, KPMG were commissioned to conduct seven workshops in Melbourne, each workshop building on the previous one, involving all key family violence stakeholders with the outcome being to produce an integrated family violence system strengthening Risk Management Practice Guidelines Manual. KPMG conducted these workshops with the majority of participants eagerly awaiting this manual. Unfortunately with the change of Government at the time, the manual never was released. The idea of such a manual is appealing and would give direction and clarity about roles and responsibilities of how services should come together to respond to a family violence victim or to work with a perpetrator. It would also outline and define each services role in the process, for example is it a crisis, post crisis or early intervention response? Is the woman and /or children in a high risk situation?

### **Recommendation**

- To upgrade all appropriate Standards, Codes of Practice and Protocols relating to family violence and provide regular Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF) training across the state for Levels 2 and 3.

### **Acknowledgements**

‘Guiding Integrated Family Violence Service Reform 2006-2009’ by Department of Human Services

‘Regional Family Violence Integration Governance Model document – 2013’ by Department of Human Services

‘Considerations for Governance of Family Violence in Victoria’ by Domestic Violence Victoria

## **Integrated Service System**

### **Workload/Workers**

- Family Violence Services are in crisis due to the increased complexity of the presenting cases, as well as enhanced numbers seeking assistance or requiring follow up which puts most services well over their funded targets with a lack of staff to meet the demand. Some targets have not changed for 5 years (e.g. Men's Behaviour Change Program at Latrobe Community Health Service where the Annual target is 120 for group sessions with 2200 Year to Date at intake).
- Issue of burnout of existing workers trying to cope with work load and family violence issues. Often these workers leave the sector taking with them experience, training that has been invested in them (such as CRAF and/or twelve months study re No To Violence standards and 100 hours of co facilitation of a Men's Behaviour Change group) and expertise in such specialised areas. In rural areas it is hard to find replacements.
- In some areas, particularly rural, supervision for Men's Behaviour Change Program facilitators is difficult due to a lack of qualified people. Trainee facilitators need to co facilitate with qualified facilitators for 100hrs to complete their training. In some cases in Gippsland trainee facilitators have travelled a number of hours to co facilitate a program in another sub region and travel back again so they can receive the proper supervision.
- The need for resources to develop a better Triage system for the region.
- The increased number of L17 faxback reports from police is limiting services ability to provide the required sustained support for women & children experiencing family violence. As a direct consequence of this demand services are providing a triage response. This has a detrimental impact on family violence workers who are already faced with a moral dilemma to support women and children experiencing family violence. Workers are feeling overwhelmed and feeling the pressure of delivering less than an optimal service response for families at risk.
- Inconsistent L17 referral pathway across the State, from Police to Child First and Child Protection. Since receiving L17's in 2014 Child FIRST Latrobe Baw Baw have gone into Restricted Intake on 2 occasions being unable to cope with the demand to address referrals at the intake stage of referral and assessment. In addition to this very few of these cases have turned into substantive service episodes provided by Family Services in spite of a significant amount of time invested by Child FIRST to register, record, attempt to engage these families and to assess risk to children and young people.

### **Recommendation**

- To increase funding to provide appropriate staffing levels to meet demand.
- To increase funding to provide the appropriate staffing levels to meet the demand arising from police referrals for crisis response and longer term case management.

### **Police and Police Family Violence Units**

- Positive response to having three Family Violence Police Units in the Gippsland area, however there are inconsistencies in resources available to these units (e.g. office space, access to vehicles, staff numbers and length of time Police are in these positions varies across Units).
- It is generally agreed by workers that there can be an inconsistency with Police response when dealing with family violence. But in the areas where there is an established Police Family Violence Unit an informed, consistent and appropriate response is gained from Police. With that in mind Gippsland would like to establish at least two more units in the region, one in Warragul (Baw Baw) and one in Wonthaggi (Bass Coast).
- In two out of the three Police family violence Units (Sale and Bairnsdale), 12 month appointments are offered, then a complete roll over of staff occurs. This is not considered long enough as all knowledge, expertise and development of relationships, particularly in the Aboriginal sector is lost. The Morwell model works much

better where staff are retained. Most workers agree that these positions should be gazetted positions so that the Police who really want to be in these roles will apply.

- Lack of Resources, particularly in rural areas - A client recently advised a family violence counsellor of a conversation with local police officer re Breach of Intervention Order. Apart from telling her that there would be half a day of paper work to complete, he also told her that there was only one Divisional Van at the station and it would be out of commission if an officer had to drive from Phillip Island to Reservoir to interview the perpetrator. If this is the process then it is an issue that police should be able to address.
- Procedures - Often the officer handling a case is on night duty or leave and no-one else at the station appears to be able to assist.
- Police Eastern Region Division 5 & 6 has only one Police Advisor to cover the whole of the region. This role has proved to be both effective and efficient in achieving results but mainly operates in Division 5. A positive move would be to employ another Police Advisor to distribute the role more evenly.

#### **Recommendation**

- That the resources provided for Police Family Violence Units are consistent and meet the demand required and
- That Police Family Violence Unit positions become gazetted roles with an additional Police Advisor employed to cover Eastern Region Division 6.

#### **Gippsland Changing Family Futures**

Under the Changing Family Futures Initiative, Child Protection and Victoria Police are co-located at three sites, based with the Police Family Violence Units at Morwell, Bairnsdale and Sale. This enables the collection and exchange of key intelligence, data and practice tools to facilitate joint planning and action focused on recidivist cases, assist in the timely and coordinated mobilisation of the teams and promote cross sector practice and skills exchange. This has been seen as a positive pilot.

- There has been a huge increase in workload and a decrease in funded operational staff.
- The information sharing with police is working well however the change of police staff in the Family Violence Police Units is too often to offer consistency
- The model is good, however with the huge caseloads and increased complexity of the cases it can be difficult to work within that model.
- Lack of appropriate specialised services in Gippsland to refer to.
- Secondary consults are not occurring due to overworked practitioners

#### **Recommendation**

- To continue to develop the model and collect data. The Evaluation is due to be released soon by Department of Health and Human Services. It has been noted that a number of women are now protecting their children by reporting family violence sooner instead of not taking action at all.

#### **Court system/Legal system**

- Family Court doesn't appear to be 'marrying' or aligning with the magistrate court re issued Intervention orders. Examples of this may include threats to kill made by the perpetrator towards his partner, or considering the mental health of the perpetrator –women are concerned the children won't come home from mandated visits with the father.
- Inconsistencies in legal services. E.g. differences between female and male applications for intervention orders.



- Need Specialist Family Violence Courts with specialist Magistrates who will deal with the same case if they present again, will know the services and give priority to Family Violence hearings. Morwell as a headquarters court, needs to be considered as a Specialist Family Violence Court. (Latrobe is the third highest Local Government Area in the State receiving police callouts in 2013/2014).
- Independent Children's Lawyer and Court Consultants – Are they trained to work with children? How do they expect children to 'open up' to a stranger, particularly if they are traumatised?  
I am advised by clients that these people do not spend enough time with children to put them at ease or build rapport. (*FV counsellor*).
- Family Court - Coroner in Adelaide in a Child Protection case recently opined that the pendulum had swung too far to parent's rights over safety of children. I think this is true of the Family Court (*FV counsellor*)
- Legal Aid - needs to be a priority for victims rather than 'first in best dressed'.
- National Integration of court system – True Example - Client's child registered in Queensland with father's surname. A very unusual family name – only about 6 in Australia. Father refused to sign papers to allow change of surname.  
Client has approached courts in Victoria to gain permission without father's consent but has been advised that because birth registered in Queensland she will have to apply to court in Queensland.  
Apparently this cannot be done via an intermediary, she has been advised that she must attend herself. She cannot afford to do this and does not feel safe returning to Queensland.  
Client requested school enrol child in her family name but school advised by Education Department that this could not occur.  
Client and child fled Queensland via the refuge system and had to move several times due to serious violence and abduction, lives at an undisclosed address and does not feel that her child is safe with such an unusual surname. This is not the only time I have heard of this difficulty and suggest that it could and should be addressed. (*FV counsellor*).
- Magistrates Court - Duty lawyers are not available every week in some of the rural courts e.g. Wonthaggi.
- Family Violence needs to be given priority on 'court days' instead of drink driving offences for example, being seen to first, which seems to be happening regularly at the smaller rural courts. Sometimes the FV cases are postponed up to a few weeks, if the court 'runs out of time'. It has been addressed a number of times but eventually reverts back.
- Make the courts safer for women and more 'user friendly'. It can be extremely uncomfortable and at times unsafe, for women waiting for a number of hours, with their young children for their family violence application to be heard with the perpetrator sitting only a few seats away because there isn't a separate room available. It has been suggested to use the video conferencing facilities off site but this appears to be an unusual request that is often met with reluctance and annoyance. It is very rarely utilised as an option in rural areas.
- Gazetted Courts – A number of workers felt that Men's Behaviour Change should be a mandated program as this supports the crime aspect of family violence.
- An interconnected system – e.g. if perpetrators are mandated to attend a Men's Behaviour Change program the funding needs to be connected to that to cover the increased costs. (Funding is then based on demand).
- More Duty Solicitors at the courts

### **Recommendations**

- That the Family Law Court and the Magistrate Court align re. the risk management of women and children experiencing family violence and who are issued intervention orders.
- That Morwell becomes a specialist family violence court with options readily available for all courts to utilise video link up for family violence cases if the woman and /or her children don't feel safe in the court.

- To develop a national integration of the court system to ensure that women and their children aren't put at increased risk by the court system.
- That men are mandated by the court to attend Men's Behaviour Change Programs thus reducing the number of phone calls and follow up that Men's Behaviour Change staff have to do when referral is made only through an L 17 process.

### Services for Perpetrators

- In Gippsland there is no parenting education available specifically for men who perpetrate violence to women and /or their children. Men often still want to see their children after separating from their partner due to family violence. Men's Behaviour Change facilitator's often say that the light bulb moment for many men is when they realise how much family violence affects their children. A parenting course has been developed by Anglicare Victoria for men who have completed a Men's Behaviour Change Program and then wish to do a parenting course – 'Dad's Putting Kids First'. This program has two facilitators, one a trained Men's Behaviour Change facilitator plus a trained Parenting facilitator. It has been operating for several years and has been evaluated. The program was run at Lilydale, Victoria. Anglicare has agreed to allow Gippsland to utilise the program if funding was made available. This is an essential preventative strategy for future Family Violence.
- The need for consistency of framework for Men's Behaviour Change Program's and corresponding funding across the state is important. At present men can attend a Men's Behaviour Change Program in one area of the state for 12 weeks and in another area it could be for 20 to 26 weeks. If magistrate's are recommending that a man attends a Men's Behaviour Change program then it would be important that the program runs for the same length of time and has the same content for each of the weeks that it's operating, instead of the variety that is occurring at present across the state.
- There is an increase in male, female and Aboriginal perpetrators under the age of 18 years. It has been noted at a number of Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee meetings, that this is a significant gap in our system as there are no services or funding to address this issue. It is felt by members if these young people could be identified early (possibly through Police and the Courts) and then referred onto a state wide evidence based program, that this may halt the progression of adolescents becoming adult perpetrators of family violence.
- Lack of funding for Partner Contact workers to ensure that women and children are safe, while the perpetrators of the violence are attending the Men's Behaviour Change Program.
- Inability to meet demand for Men's Behaviour Change Programs in Gippsland. Getting men assessed and engaging them in services requires an increase in trained staff. Waiting lists/timing is an issue– capturing the man when he is ready/receptive to Men's Behaviour Change Programs. Men can be on waiting lists without contact for weeks, in some areas for months. Questions asked about men on wait lists - are the men continuing to perpetrate violence? Are the women and children safe? Who assesses the level of danger and risk to the women and children? What is the incidence of the number of breaches of IVO's, and incidence of recidivism? Often by the time the men are able to attend the program, they feel that the original issue is no longer relevant and therefore don't feel motivated to attend programs.
- All Courts mandating attendance of men perpetrating family violence, into Men's Behaviour Change Programs with allocated funding to these orders. However engagement of men is an issue where men are mandated but take no responsibility for their violence.
- In Gippsland a number of Men's Behaviour Change Program's usually run during the day – this raises issues for attendance if the man works. Night sessions raise safety issues for the workers, and transport issues for the men in rural areas.
- 'Choices Program' and 'Strong Men, Strong Communities' (Aboriginal Men's Programs) – need to promote a greater awareness of the program within the community, timing, the men are institutionalised – they see going to prison as not a bad option. Mandated attendance into the program would be a good thing – it would help with facilitating a good program.

- Funding – some programs in Melbourne charge the men to attend. This could be a way to access some funds for the program. It would need to be on a scaled system. Also additional funding required to train more staff to work with perpetrators, according to No To Violence standards. Connecting funding to referrals from Child Protection, Courts and Corrections. The need to have more Men’s Behaviour Change Programs in the rural areas without gaps of months in between and availability of workers to conduct one to one sessions to prepare some men for group work.
- Evaluation of Men’s Behaviour Change Program – what is the best way to measure effectiveness of the program? Long term desistance from violence and change of attitudes (eg. Project Mirabal [http://media.wix.com/ugd/56111a\\_ffb7ed62ed8d4fb99e1e0193a5f20283.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/56111a_ffb7ed62ed8d4fb99e1e0193a5f20283.pdf) )
- Stronger links need to be made between MBCP, AOD, Mental Health agencies and GCASA.

### **Recommendations**

- To obtain funding to conduct “Dad’s Putting Kid’s First” as a pilot parenting program for Men who have perpetrated violence to their partners with their children present.
- To increase the number of trained staff to run Men’s Behaviour Change Programs on a consistent ongoing basis and ensure that the framework is uniform across the state.
- That men are mandated by the Court to attend Men’s Behaviour Change Programs.
- That resources are provided to meet the demand for programs and that partner contact workers are employed to work with the women to ensure they are safe while men are attending the programs.
- To implement evidence based therapeutic programs for those under 18 who are being identified as perpetrators of violence.
- To increase funding for Men’s Behaviour Change services to enable services to provide a therapeutic response for men requiring one-on-one services and group work.

### **Lack of Crisis Housing/Accommodation**

- Lack of access to crisis housing for short and long term stays especially in rural areas. The need to use alternative dwellings such as caravan parks or rooming houses, which can become a safety issue. Sometimes it’s the only place within reasonable proximity to the former home for women, that is offering emergency accommodation, but the perpetrator may also be using it.
- Increased number of rooming housing springing up in Gippsland in answer to the closure of the caravan parks. Again presenting a safety issue for women and their children. The need to monitor and ensure the rooming houses are meeting standards.
- Lack of access to housing means that when an influx of holiday makers comes to Gippsland, some women who are in short or long term private rental have to move as landowners can charge higher prices.
- Moving women and children out of the area to refuges produces other issues around transport, change of schools for the children and taking the women away from their support. The Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee has decided to establish a Bsafe program for women and children who are experiencing family violence and have an intervention order (IVO) that excludes the perpetrator from the victim’s premise and is at risk of the IVO being breached. Bsafe is a personal alarm system and risk management option that enables women and children to remain in their own homes and communities. The Gippsland model is based on the Hume project which has been evaluated twice.
- Lack of emergency housing for Aboriginal men and adolescent perpetrators, especially if they are violent.
- Increased need for men’s case management to address homelessness, and to link/refer into support programs e.g. mental health, drug and alcohol programs. Brokerage needs to be attached to the case management position to assist particularly with homelessness – often if there is a place for the man to stay it reduces

breaching intervention orders. The case management also engages the man and he is more likely to attend Men's Behaviour Change Programs.

### **Recommendations**

- To increase housing stock for short and long term stays in Gippsland for both women and their children and provide some accommodation for men - maybe tie accommodation into a package for men who attend Men's Behaviour Change Programs.
- To support the Bsafe program as it enables women and their children who are at risk of having their intervention order being breached, to remain safely in their homes.

### **Children's Services**

- Resources are limited for obtaining a service through one of the established family violence counselling positions as each position is funded for only .3 EFT or .4 EFT, with no backfill being able to be provided if a counsellor goes on sick leave, holidays or maternity leave.
- There is difficulty finding suitably qualified counsellors, who are experienced working with children, for such short periods of time each week. Wait lists are long.
- If women or children are referred through their General Practitioner on a mental health plan, it has been found that a large number of psychologists in Gippsland don't have any training about family violence therefore don't understand the issues and recommend couples attend therapy and family mediation together, which could place the woman and her children at greater risk. The majority haven't been trained in the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF).
- The Child Protection system appears to be driven by the notion that child access is a 'right' even if children and mothers continue to be traumatised and at risk.
- Extremely limited programs or group work to refer children who have been exposed to family violence. Lack of resources especially in rural areas.

### **Recommendations**

- To provide basic family violence training for health professionals (incl. Aboriginal health) e.g. counsellors, psychologists, physiotherapist, early year providers, and police. A possible sustainable solution would be to incorporate family violence training permanently into the curriculum of health services and police training.
- To increase the workload of family violence counsellors in rural areas from .3 or .4 EFT to full time to meet the demand.
- To provide therapeutic evidence based group programs for children who have been exposed to family violence.

### **Women and Children living in poverty**

- Difficulties for women on 'New Start' living in poverty – Centrelink payments are slow to be adjusted. If these systems were linked the payments could be adjusted more quickly.
- Women and children living in poverty due to males not paying Child Support. If Child Support and Centrelink were linked adjustments could be made more quickly.
- It was suggested that some control could be placed on the father's access to the children if they are violent or withholding child support (not in agreement with this as a group).

### **Recommendations**

- To link Government Centrelink payments such as New Start and/ or Child Support to adjust payments quickly and reduce the time that women are without necessary funding.

**Information sharing**

- Information sharing nationally. The establishment of a national perpetrator's list.
- Lack of protocols and guidelines for information sharing and referring to the specialist family violence services

**Recommendations**

- To establish a national perpetrator's data base, with a unique identifier for tracking. It's a known fact that perpetrator's move on to another likely victim after leaving a previous one.

**Pet Abuse**

- Further funding for Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework education (CRAF) to recognise that women's attachment to their animals can be a barrier to them leaving an abusive relationship.
- Need emergency animal refuges or refuges that co-locate families with their pets – allowing for larger animals in rural and regional areas.
- Family violence protocols for local laws officers and training to identify family violence is needed.
- Awareness programs and resources to vets about the prevalence of family violence and the link to pet abuse – including training to recognise injuries and fractures that have been inflicted on the animal through abuse.

**Recommendations**

- To provide Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework – Level 1 to vets, local laws officers etc. to highlight the link between family violence and pet abuse.
- To provide regional funding to research and map availability of premises and develop protocols for emergency housing of animals related to family violence.

**Natural Disaster**

- Training of emergency relief workers should include recognising and identifying family violence.
- Emergency relief – Consideration of gender issues and the importance of providing safe space for women and children within relief shelters. Also for ensuring the readiness of family violence services i.e. the increased risks for women and children after a natural disaster.
- Ensuring State policies for post natural disaster include engaging with women's groups and provision of family violence services and refuges.
- Require funding for disaster recovery assistance for women and children in crisis.
- Need to review procedures/emergency response plans/manuals in hind sight of the disaster.
- Community education and conferences to enable sharing of information and resources, as well as learning from other countries experiences
- Recognition of hyper masculinity as a risk factor for family violence in SES, CFA and Emergency workers at times of natural disasters.

**Recommendations**

- To provide Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework CRAF – Level 1 "Identifying family violence" training for all emergency relief workers and ensure procedures, response plans and policies are developed accordingly.

**Non-permanent residents**

- Need for further education and resources for newly arrived immigrants – outlining their rights, Australian laws around family violence, healthy relationships and agencies available to help.
- Further funding for agencies to support non-permanent residents through visa/permanent residency applications, safe housing options and income support. This needs to be funded long enough to ensure the woman (and children) are resettled and safe.
- Education of agencies on cultural competency, immigration laws and legal requirements – including understanding of the complexity of the woman’s fears of deportation, cultural shame etc.
- Need for female interpreters to be readily accessible

**Recommendations**

- To provide appropriate training and funding for all family violence workers, including those in the rural areas, about how to support non – permanent residents and / or their children, escaping family violence.
- To provide appropriate information to newly arrived immigrants about Australian laws and their rights.

**Interpreters**

- Not enough female interpreters when needed by family violence agencies, police, courts, etc.
- Need for education of family violence agencies in the correct use of interpreters – ensuring the interpreter is safe, confidential, and culturally competent
- Funding needed for producing and maintaining a national wide interpreter database, which is constantly updated and reviewed as safe to be used by women in family violence

**Recommendations**

- To develop of a set of standards and protocols that relate to best practice for interpreters and their use by agencies.

**Quantifying Family Violence services**

- To measure the extent of the effect of family violence in our communities and the effectiveness and capacity of family violence services while ensuring the safety of women and children is paramount to their function.

**Recommendations**

- Involving the Peak bodies of the family violence system in ascertaining the measures, statistics and data included in establishing the Victorian Family Violence Index

**Acknowledgements**

‘Baw Baw and Latrobe Family Violence Sub Regional Committee’

‘East Gippsland and Wellington Family Violence Sub Regional Committee’

‘South Gippsland and Bass Coast Sub Regional Committee’

‘Gippsland Men’s Behaviour Change Facilitators meeting, hosted by No to Violence’

‘Project Mirabel’ [http://media.wix.com/ugd/56111a\\_ffb7ed62ed8d4fb99e1e0193a5f20283.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/56111a_ffb7ed62ed8d4fb99e1e0193a5f20283.pdf)