

Submission to Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

Domestic, family and sexual violence Issues paper July 2024

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Submission in response Issues Paper July 2024 (Response to Recovery and Healing)

The Commission commenced on 1 July 2024. The Commission has been asked to inquire into 5 areas, aligned with the [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032\(external site\)](#) Prevention, Early Intervention, Response, Recovery and healing, Coordination.

An Issues paper was released in July 2024 calling on submissions in response to questions about Prevention, Early Intervention, Response and Recovery and healing.

This submission responds to the call for submissions responding to questions about Recovery and healing.

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This submission is public, it is not confidential.

Geraldine Bilston

Geraldine is a victim-survivor of intimate partner violence and has shared her experiences across several media outlets.

In 2021 she completed her Graduate Certificate in Family Violence and is currently undertaking a Master of Politics and Policy.

Geraldine was previously Deputy Chair of the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council and is a current board member of Kara Family Violence Service. In 2022 Geraldine received an Australia Day Local Champion Award for her dedication to preventing family violence in the Mornington Peninsula region.

She is passionate about seeing the use of lived expertise in family violence work progress.

In 2022-2023 Geraldine led a lived experience project exploring the needs of victim survivors to support recovery and healing, <https://survivorledresources.com/>

Acknowledgement

This submission was written on on land of the Bunurong people of the South-Eastern Kulin Nation.

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land. I acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past and present.

We must always remember that this land is, was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

Introduction

In May 2022, the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Family Violence Partnership's Family Violence Therapeutic Working Group (Therapeutic Working Group) took a significant step forward in their commitment to addressing the needs of victim-survivors. This milestone was marked by a pivotal consultation where survivor advocates and the Therapeutic Working Group convened to explore the themes of 'therapeutic care' and 'healing and recovery.'

This consultation represented an opportunity for a collaborative exploration, where the voices of those who have been impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence were heard by dedicated professionals. At the core of this consultation was the commitment of the Therapeutic Working Group to be truly client-centred. It was in line with this commitment that the Therapeutic Working Group funded and supported the development of resources completely led and developed by victim-survivors themselves. These resources aim to enhance the support given to organisations, practitioners and clients as they navigate the journey through therapeutic care.

It has been an immense privilege to have the opportunity to lead this work. Often in these spaces I am asked to work as either a victim-survivor, or as a professional. This work was a special invitation to embrace the duality of who I am – a capable professional but also a survivor with insights of the service system and of client's needs. I consider the autonomy provided by our funders to develop a wholly survivor-led initiative to be a groundbreaking endeavor and an example of supporting lived experience leadership.

I have been inspired by the determination of the 14 victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence that I have had the privilege to work with. Their desire to create opportunities for others affected by domestic, family, and sexual violence not only to survive, but to thrive, is nothing short of remarkable.

The ultimate aim of this work is to offer insights and resources that will enable us to better meet the needs of the individuals we are dedicated to serving. It is the sincere hope of all victim-survivors involved in this project that this work will act as a source of guidance and a catalyst for change.

In solidarity with the enduring spirit of survivors and with a shared commitment to a more responsive sector,

Geraldine Bilston

<https://survivorledresources.com/>

Key Points:

- **Resources Overview:** This project offers insights and tools for organisations, practitioners, and clients in therapeutic care. The project encompasses a 5-minute animated video, along with three downloadable/printable resources covering systemic barriers to healing and recovery, principles guiding client-centered therapeutic care, and a practitioner guide to therapeutic care.
- **Survivor-Led Project:** This is a unique initiative in that it is entirely led by survivors. This project was funded to give autonomy to individuals with lived experience, trusting in their leadership throughout the process.

Process:

- **Timeline:** The work began with a group consultation in May 2022, and was revisited and finalised in October this year through a series of workshops with victim-survivors: three in-person and two online. The resources have since been reviewed and endorsed by sector professionals and practitioners.
- **Collaboration:** I had the privilege of working with 14 incredible victim-survivors, each bringing contemporary experiences with the service system, including receiving therapeutic care and an interest in creating stronger outcomes around healing and recovery.

Where to Find the Resources: <https://survivorledresources.com/>

Question 13. Acknowledging that every victim-survivor will have different needs depending on their personal circumstances, are there universal needs that will arise for all victim-survivors?

Please see attachment 1 which outlines the systemic barriers and needs that victim-survivors involved in this project have identified.

14. What are the best practice approaches to supporting a victim-survivor to recover from trauma and the mental, physical, emotional and economic impacts of violence?

Please see attachment 2 which outlines the principles to providing client-centred therapeutic care.

15. Taking into account your response to question 14, what best practice approaches are already in place in the domestic, family and sexual violence systems in South Australia?

Please see attachment 3 which provides a practitioner resource for intake and assessment of clients receiving therapeutic care, developed by victim survivors involved in this project.

Attachment 1

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS



Victim-survivors of domestic, family, and sexual violence have identified the following systemic barriers to their healing and recovery.

Organisations should proactively engage in advocacy efforts to address these obstacles and strive for systemic reforms that promote the healing and recovery of victim-survivors.

Lack of Legal Support and Aid

Insufficient legal representation within family law, civil and criminal courts.

Victim-survivors are subjected to complex, intimidating, expensive and re-traumatising legal procedures and processes.

Economic Independence and Security

Limited access to resources for financial empowerment.



Crisis Accommodation and Long-Term Housing

Scarcity of safe and affordable housing options.

Inadequate crisis accommodation facilities as well as long term housing options.



Perpetrator Accountability

Lack of effective measures to hold perpetrators accountable. Minimal legal consequences for the people that abuse us.

Lack of Education & Awareness

Limited awareness of the long term physical and psychological impacts of violence and abuse that we live with.

Deficiencies in understanding domestic, family and sexual violence including within the community, service providers, and particularly through the criminal justice system, legal practitioners and police.

Forced Ongoing Contact with Perpetrators

Inability to protect victim-survivors from ongoing contact by litigious perpetrators and through post separation abuse.

Forced ongoing contact including through shared care arrangements for our children.

Understanding Intersectionality

Insufficient consideration and response to the unique challenges faced by victim-survivors who face additional layers of discrimination and disadvantage.

Waitlists for service provisions

Inadequately funded & resourced service system, resulting in extended wait times for the support we need.

Children & Young People

Inadequate recognition & response for children and young people affected by violence and abuse, including forced parental consent processes to receive therapeutic care.

Absence of specialised support for young victim-survivors.

Rigid services and systems

Services & systems that struggle to accommodate individual needs & diverse circumstances, including victim-survivors who choose not to leave abusive relationships or where a child is the person using violence.

Attachment 2

PRINCIPLES

TO GUIDE CLIENT-CENTRED THERAPEUTIC CARE

Practitioners adopt a trauma-informed approach, with an understanding of the impact of domestic, family & sexual violence on victim-survivors' lives and tailor the care according to their client's needs.



Physical and psychological **SAFETY** is foundational for rebuilding security and fostering healing

Addressing Systemic Barriers

Prioritise the recognition and understanding of systemic barriers that victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence may face in their healing journey.

Organisations advocate to actively address these barriers and work towards systemic changes that support victim-survivors' healing and recovery.

Promote Group Work & Connection

Facilitating group sessions and enabling peer support allows survivors to share experiences, learn from one another, and support each other which can promote healing.



Non-linear journey

Practitioners emphasise that recovery and healing are not linear processes but rather a journey with ups and downs.

Practitioners adopt a flexible and adaptive approach that allows victim-survivors to progress at their own pace.



Progress Tracking & Contextual Understanding

Practitioners provide tracking of progress with victim-survivors without setting rigid goals

Victim-survivors are provided with context and education to help them understand their progress and healing journey.

Explaining the dynamics of trauma and its physical and psychological impact can empower survivors with knowledge and self-awareness.

Strengths-based approach



Promote a strengths-based perspective, focusing on and building upon the victim-survivor's existing strengths and resilience. Practitioners foster a sense of empowerment and self-determination in victim-survivors, helping them recognise their own abilities and resources.

COLLABORATIVE CARE

Collaboration between victim-survivors and practitioners in the therapeutic process is prioritised. Victim-survivors are involved in decision-making and treatment planning, ensuring their voices are heard and respected.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CARE

Provide culturally responsive care that respects, understands and values the diverse backgrounds and experiences of victim-survivors.

Practitioners are aware of cultural norms, beliefs, and practices that may influence the healing journey and adapt the approach accordingly.



ONGOING SUPPORT

The importance of ongoing support for victim-survivors beyond therapeutic sessions is understood. Victim-survivors are connected with additional resources and support networks that can aid in their healing and recovery.

Attachment 3

PRACTITIONER RESOURCE

CLIENT-CENTRED
THERAPEUTIC CARE



This resource has been created by victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. It is intended to support the provision of client-centred therapeutic care.

ASSESSMENT & INTAKE FOR THERAPEUTIC CARE

Assessing readiness for therapeutic care requires professional judgment, including an understanding of crisis response that is placed alongside a desire to meet client's therapeutic needs.

Explore a range of care options based on the client's unique circumstances, including both 1:1 care and group work. It's important to note that certain situations may necessitate the privacy and safety of 1:1 care, while others may benefit from group interventions, brief care options, or longer term therapeutic care.

Clients can receive case management and therapeutic care concurrently, but will require careful space setup and expectation management.

The Planning Together page should support conversations between case managers and client's about readiness to be referred into therapeutic care, and the appropriate type of care.

SETTING UP THE SPACE

Set client expectations during intake to therapeutic care. The 'Rebuilding Together' page should help to understand your client, their goals, and your support role.

It will be important for you to communicate which parts of their journey you can support, which parts will need to be addressed through case management, and which parts exist within systemic barriers outside of your control. The systemic barriers resource may be helpful with understanding broader issues together.

Building trust is foundational for relational, trauma informed care.

Establishing trust in therapeutic care with a victim-survivor requires a recognition that their trust in the world and other people has been broken. Creating a safe space through genuine empathy, compassion and active listening supports the reconstruction of security and can strengthen your therapeutic relationship.

RECEIVING CARE

The 'Rebuilding Together' page is intended to support setting expectations as well as tracking progress while receiving care and can be revisited during sessions together.

The Principles resource also provides guidance on providing client-centred therapeutic care.

PLANNING TOGETHER



This resource has been designed by victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. It is intended to be used by client's already receiving case management and where they may have a need or interest in receiving therapeutic care. This form can be completed with their case manager and taken with them to therapeutic care.

When it comes to rebuilding, healing and recovery, the areas where I feel I need the most support are....

Here, you can think about the aspects of your life and well-being where you think some support could make the most difference, such as managing stress, understanding trauma, connecting with other victim-survivors, rebuilding your self-esteem, or something else entirely.

When I think about receiving therapeutic support and care, I really hope for...

Thinking about your own hopes and aspirations. Consider sharing what you really want to achieve, experience, or change through receiving therapeutic care.

When I think about receiving therapeutic support and care, I worry about....

Take a moment to share any worries or concerns you may have about receiving therapeutic support. It could be related to the process, your personal feelings, or anything else on your mind.

There are things I want someone supporting me to know and they are...

In this space, you may want to share any important things you wish someone supporting you in therapeutic care to understand or be aware of. These could be your experiences, concerns, values, or any personal insights you want to communicate.

REBUILDING TOGETHER



This resource has been designed by victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. It is intended to be used by client's receiving therapeutic care, with their practitioner. Revisiting this resource at sessions may be helpful for tracking progress and supporting healing.

What I wish for my future and our time together is...

Take a moment to envision your future and the journey we'll take together. Share your aspirations, dreams, and any specific goals you have for your future and for the time we'll spend working together in the healing and recovery process.

What I want support for during our sessions...

You can use this space to think about particular things you want to work on, like dealing with guilt and shame, controlling your emotions, knowing yourself better, boosting your self-confidence, or something else entirely.

Something I learned today is...

Something I am most proud of since our last session is...

Something I would like to work on before our next session is...

Hope doesn't come from denying our past but acknowledging it and working through it. Our strength comes not because of what happened to us but in spite of it.

Quote - Victim-Survivor