

Hutt St Centre is a place of connection and support, where people facing homelessness are empowered to rebuild their lives, rediscover their identities and reconnect with others.

We walk alongside people on their journey toward homefulness—a word we use to describe the feeling of safety, control and confidence that comes with having a place to call home. When people walk through our doors we help fulfil their immediate needs, like a shower, a meal, and a charged phone, while our 20+ visiting services provide support ranging from medical check-ups to financial counselling. And with a focus on the future, we connect people with housing, education and employment opportunities to build the skills and confidence to change their circumstances for good.

Our submission responds to some, but not all, of the questions posed by the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence.

We acknowledge that Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence impacts the diversity of relationships and family dynamics, including within the trans community, the same sex attracted community and the broader context of family. In this submission our position is that Family and Domestic Violence *is* a gendered topic. By this we mean that the vast majority of violence directed to partners and families is at the hands of male perpetrators – as Margaret Atwood stated: *“Men are afraid that women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them.”* Reflecting upon the tragic deaths of 6 South Australians towards the end of last year: these were all women, no man was killed in an act of family and domestic violence. Throughout this submission Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence will *not* be abbreviated to reiterate that this violence has a name, and needs to be stopped.

Within Hutt St Centre and our clients, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence is an everyday reality:

One quarter of the women who access Hutt St Centre identify as being at real risk of being harmed by a partner, a parent, a relative or a friend.

Slightly over half the women who access Hutt St Centre have experienced violence, including controlling behaviours, in the past six months.

Research and census data demonstrates beyond any doubt that there are strong links between Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence and homelessness, specifically for woman fleeing abusive and violent settings.¹ Additionally, for young people accessing specialised homelessness services, the primary antecedent is an experience of family violence.² Further, within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, research suggests a significant under-reporting of Family and Domestic

¹ Seivwright, A., Lester, L., Fairthorne, J., Vallesi, S., Callis, Z., Flatau, P. (2021). The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness: Ending Homelessness in Western Australia 2021. Version 2.0 August 2021. Perth: The University of Western Australia, Centre for Social Impact.

² Kolovos, B. (2024). Family violence and childhoods lost: census shows ‘horrifying’ plight of homeless youths in Melbourne. The Guardian. 7th August 2024. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/aug/07/family-violence-and-childhoods-lost-census-shows-horrifying-plight-of-homeless-youths-in-melbourne>

Violence, partly due to unreliable recording, the concept of shame associated with episodes of violence, and the potential contributing factor of intoxication.³

Often perpetrators of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence are known to statutory bodies (SAPOL, Dept. for Child Protection, the courts etc.), but the rates of reoffending either toward the same partner/family member or a new partner suggest that current interventions are not working.⁴

As a specialised homelessness service our current strategic plan states that:

Hutt St Centre will develop options for scoping **upgrades to our existing facilities and/or the acquisition of additional facilities** to accommodate the increased demand for our services. One of these new facilities might be a **dedicated wellbeing centre for women and children experiencing homelessness**, possibly in partnership with another homelessness service provider focused on that client demographic.

³ Bryant, C. & Willis, M. (2008). Risk factors in Indigenous violent victimisation. Technical and background paper series no. 30. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tbp/tbp30>

⁴ Hulme, S., Morgan, A., & Boxall, H. (2019). Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice. Domestic violence offenders, prior offending and reoffending in Australia. Australian Institute of Criminology. Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice. Available at: https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/ti580_domestic_violence_offenders_prior_offending.pdf

Prevention:

1. What causes domestic, family and sexual violence?

The reasons behind Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence are well known: power, toxic masculinity, misogyny and bullying, and within the context of the homelessness sector the direct consequence is the number of women, and women with children, accessing supports.

2. What works, or will work, to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence?

To address these systemic issues a whole of society approach is required, but one primarily targeting men's violence because this is the root cause of the vast majority of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. A multi-dimensional response is required directed at both the perpetrators of Family and Domestic Violence, and the victims/survivors of Family and Domestic Violence.

Men's behaviour change programs are one type of intervention, although their success in maintaining an enduring change in male behaviour is an evolving topic of research⁵. Anecdotally successes are seen, but these are dependent upon a number of criteria: voluntary or mandatory participation, community or institutionalised programs, the preparedness for change of the participant etc.

For women and children escaping Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence the critical need is safe accommodation away from the perpetrator. This accommodation needs to ensure children can access school, women can access supports, and is in a location that provides security and stability. Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence is often cyclical, and women need to be assured that supports will be available on the first and the twenty-first time when they escape a Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence situation.

Early Intervention:

4. What systems, including systems outside of government, receive information which may allow for the identification of individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence?

In the South Australian context, and within the specialised homelessness sector, an Alliance to address Family and Domestic Violence was created in 2021. This Alliance is made up of the following agencies:

Women's Safety Services SA (Lead)

Centacare Catholic Country

Centacare Catholic Family Services

Junction Australia

Nunga Mi:Minar Inc

The Salvation Army (SA)

Uniting Country SA

Yarredi Services

⁵ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). Evaluating behaviour change programs for men who use domestic and family violence (Research to policy and practice, 17/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

This State-wide Family and Domestic Violence Alliance works in close partnership with other homelessness Alliances, as well as all statutory bodies, to respond to Family and Domestic Violence. One observation is that the threshold to accessing this Alliance is quite rigorous, and the eligibility criteria are seen as quite restrictive. The SA Government's Homeless to Home (H2H) system provides a channel for multiple agencies to identify a woman at risk of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, although accessing in-depth case notes etc., is strictly limited. Further, since 2018 SA's Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) provides an avenue to explore a potential partner's Family and Domestic Violence history, with over 1,000 women having accessed the service⁶. The state Dept. for Human Services provides a number of valuable resources and professional development opportunities on the topic of Family and Domestic Violence, and the continuity of the Women's Information Service is a key aspect to raising awareness on Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence.

6. What interventions should be considered to manage the risk of a person who is identified as being at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence?

The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032⁷ identifies a number of interventions to manage risk in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence area, but within a homelessness service the critical aspects are safety planning. As an SHS Hutt St Centre has several tools to develop safety plans for women fleeing Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, which, tragically, we utilise several times a week.

⁶ Accessed on 16th August 2024 at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/how-some-people-could-soon-be-able-to-check-if-their-partner-has-a-history-of-domestic-violence/6xvsdb02o>

⁷Department of Social Services. (2022). National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 *Ending gender-based violence in one generation*.

Response:

7. What are the barriers to reporting domestic, family and sexual violence to police or seeking support from domestic, family and sexual violence services?

From a homelessness service perspective the barriers to reporting Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence often relate to safety and the reality of precarious housing. Within the communities of people experiencing rough sleeping, violence towards women is an everyday concern. For some women sharing a rough sleeping space with someone else could be a safety option, but Family and Domestic Violence doesn't only happen behind closed doors, and the additional stressors of homelessness may confound the situation further.

As a specialised homelessness service Hutt St Centre does provide a safe space for women to access, but demand often outstrips our ability to engage with women and families safely. We provide a family space, please see the images below, which was developed to create safe areas for women and families, but these areas are often in high demand.



8. What are the elements of a best practice crisis response which will meet the needs of: a. a victim-survivor? b. a victim-survivor who is a child? c. a perpetrator (acknowledging that one need is to hold a perpetrator to account for their use of violence)?

Belief and empathy are critical in responding to Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Each person impacted by Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence does require a different response, and identifying best practice is an evolving issue.

For women who are escaping Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence best practices include supported accommodation; safety planning, case management and access to treatment (as required). There are services in Victoria, the Sanctuary⁸ for example, that provide a range of interventions to address immediate and tertiary need.

For children the critical aspects of a response include: aiming to create a level of normalcy, i.e. schooling and play etc.; appropriate counselling, and for older children to be accommodated appropriately, this means a 15 year old boy needs to be safely accommodated at a women's shelter for example.

For male perpetrators of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence there are behaviour change programs that are available, but there is a need for consequential learning, and ensuring male perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. Over recent years male perpetrators of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence have been eulogised as “a good bloke” and “popular”⁹, but these men are criminals and, tragically, murderers. A societal response needs to use language that captures the intent behind their behaviours, not paint a picture of a man wronged.

⁸ **Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre**

⁹ Accessed on 16th August 2024: <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/damien-little-shot-himself-and-his-two-children-before-he-drove-off-port-lincoln-wharf-in-murdersuicide/news-story/e63e4227442d8ddb970cceb7db06cd1#:~:text=Koda%20Little%2C%204%2C%20and%20his,off%20Port%20Lincoln's%20main%20wharf.>

Recovery:

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?

During the current housing affordability and cost of living crisis, having the means to escape a Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence setting is critical but also beyond the means of many women. The recently announced Commonwealth Government financial assistance initiative (Leaving Violence Program) is much needed, but sustainable and safe accommodation is an ongoing requirement. It is a human right to have housing and safety. In South Australia there are examples where we as a civil society are creating options, the YWCA development on Hutt St for example, and also we here at Hutt St Centre have recognised the need to meet the needs of women escaping Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence and are committed to creating a dedicated wellbeing centre for women and children experiencing homelessness.

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?

An holistic approach to Family and Domestic Violence victims/survivors is critical. Interventions that meet the physical, psychological, and financial needs of women at a one stop shop go a long way to supporting women to escape Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Further, having SAPOL officers with the capacity to provide in-reach services to these women ensures their safety.

Hutt St Centre is committed to addressing Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence and your consideration of this submission from a homelessness service's perspective is appreciated. If require any additional information then please do not hesitate in contacting Hutt St Centre.