

Cross Borders Programs

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Submission to Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence in our community.

Dear Commissioner,

I am writing a submission due to my familiarity with aboriginal communities and domestic, family and sexual violence in remote communities, this is due to my Role as a Director of a family violence Program within remote communities.

The Cross Borders Indigenous Family Violence Program (CBIFVP) writes in response to the Issue Paper for South Australia's Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence ('the Royal Commission'):

Background – Cross Borders Indigenous Family Violence Program (CBIFVP)¹

The CBIFVP is a culturally informed program that addresses Indigenous family violence. The program is delivered over a three-week period, with participants completing 16 sessions over 15 program days. Participants receive approximately 45 hours of group involvement and additional individual sessions on an as needs basis, if required.

The program is spread across the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands and the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands, as well as select prison locations across Western Australia, South Australia, and the Northern Territory.

CBIFVP was established in 2008 and operated within the intent of the *Cross Borders Justice Scheme*. Its development included significant engagement with Anangu to ensure a program response that included relevant considerations of cultural and family dynamics, as well as the socio-economic circumstances of the communities in which programs are delivered.

CBIFVP explores the following areas:

- personal values and beliefs
- cultural context of violence
- intergenerational trauma
- the law and family violence
- recognising and responding appropriately to anger
- violence and substance abuse
- motivation to change.
- abuse of power
- positive relationships
- taking responsibility for ones' behaviours
- resolving conflict without violence

¹ Daniel Colson, Director, Cross Borders Indigenous Family Violence Program – presentation to the Department for Correctional Services, South Australia

Participants learn that domestic, family and sexual violence is not acceptable, and it is a crime. Their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour are challenged in a non-threatening manner. They are taught to take responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.

Known Facts²

- Family violence needs to be understood within broader contexts as both a cause and effect of social disadvantage and intergenerational trauma, poor parenting, and substance misuse. It remains a critical social policy issue, placing a huge burden on communities, especially women and children
- In common with other colonised people, the negative legacies of past government policies and historical events in Australia persist in the form of intergenerational effects on parenting, relationships, and substance use. Contemporary efforts addressing these consequences are likely to help prevent family violence

Indigenous Specific³

- An independent evaluation of the long-term, government-funded Cross Border Indigenous Family Violence Program in several communities and 3 jurisdictions used limited linked, criminal justice data. The evaluation found some reduction in reoffending and recidivism, and that the program had been cost effective, given the costs of imprisonment and health care for victims

Research in Australia as in other colonised societies has linked a collapse of traditional Indigenous institutions and roles to contemporary patterns of destructive behaviour, such as heavy alcohol consumption by a minority of Indigenous men and women. This in turn, is frequently associated with incidents of extreme interpersonal and intrapersonal violence and self-harm (Chandler & Lalonde 1998; Radford et al. 1991). Family violence therefore can be seen as both a cause and effect of social disadvantage and intergenerational trauma⁴

Royal Commission Terms of Reference – Prevention – Early Intervention – Response – Recovery and Healing

- a. How South Australia can facilitate widespread change in the underlying social drivers of domestic, family and sexual violence by addressing the attitudes and systems that drive all forms of domestic, family and sexual violence, and particularly violence against women and children, to stop it before it starts (**prevention**)
- b. How South Australia can improve effective early intervention through identification and support of individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence, and preventing the reoccurrence of such violence (**early intervention**)

² Extract from the *Family violence prevention programs in Indigenous community's* summary (produced by the Closing The Gap Clearing House, December 2016)

³ Daniel Colson, Director, Cross Borders Indigenous Family Violence Program – presentation to the Department for Correctional Services, South Australia



- c. How South Australia can ensure best practice response to domestic, family and sexual violence in South Australia through the provision of services and supports, such as crisis support, health services, police intervention and a trauma-informed justice system that will hold people who use violence to account, to intervene in and address existing violence, and support victim-survivors experiencing violence (**response**)
- d. How South Australia can embed an approach that supports recovery and healing within South Australia through reducing the risk of re-traumatisation, and supporting victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence (including children) to be safe and healthy to be able to recover from trauma and the physical, mental, emotional, and economic impacts of violence (**recovery and healing**)
- e. How government agencies, non-government organisations and communities can better integrate and coordinate efforts across the spectrum of prevention, early intervention, response and recovery, including through whole of system approaches and information and data sharing systems

What influences the high rates of violence in Aboriginal communities?

It is considered that some of the factors believed to contribute to the high rates of violence within Indigenous communities include marginalisation and dispossession, the loss of land and traditional culture, the breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal law, entrenched poverty, racism, and alcohol and drug abuse.

CBIVP Experiences

Throughout delivery of programs across both the APY Lands (South Australia) and the NPY Lands (Northern Territory and Western Australia), program facilitators consistently hear requests for an equivalent women's program.

Men often mention how women goad them into situations knowing the real potential for a breach of respective court orders and conditions. These situations can see both the perpetrator and victim-survivor complicit in these encounters; however, men report that their intimate partners deliberately place them in situations knowingly whereby a breach occurs. Additionally, it is often heard that women falsely claim the perpetrator has breached a condition of their court order which is generally believed by police and/or probation and parole officers/community corrections officers.

Whilst a vexed issue, this presents an opportunity to develop solutions to better manage these predicaments, producing fewer negative outcomes for the perpetrator where it can be demonstrated the victim-survivor's claims are fabricated and false.

Also a consistent but, less regular request, is for CBIFVP to consider the provision of a couples' program where perpetrator and victim-survivor have nil non-contact conditions; it would be essential to establish that both parties freely acknowledge their willingness to participate in a program of this kind.

Furthermore, CBIFVP officers often engage in discussions with community members and Elders concerning early intervention programs through two primary mechanisms:

1. An Anangu school program based on respectful relationships
2. A broader community program for members that is based on respectful relationships, including concepts such as *children see, children do*, types of violence, and positive responses to managing potentially violent situations



When discussing the normalisation of violence, community members often agree that it (violence) is a generationally learned-behaviour. Resources used in the delivery of Cross Borders programs highlight that substance abuse (viz. alcohol) increases violence, in its various forms, and it has been a 'usual' response to managing challenging situations i.e. inter-personal, familial and wider-community matters.

It is a CBIFVP view that opportunities exist to develop programs aimed at restoring respect in relationships, in particular, for:

- Elders and Tjukurpa (Law/Dreaming stories)
- Self
- Intimate partners
- Children
- Familial settings

Whilst CBIFVP content addresses the above, it is considered that a multi-agency approach to delivering consistent messages regarding 'respect' may further help promote these fundamental concepts.

Regarding the elements noted below, which are stated in the *Greeting* of the Terms of Reference, viz.,

e. the importance of workforce capacity in the sector

and,

i. that men and positive male role models can be an important part of solutions to reduce and prevent family, domestic and sexual violence

it is requested that the following is considered:

- Currently, CBIFVP experiences difficulty in recruiting Cultural Brokers, especially where the male has a history of perpetrating violence. This lived-experience, where they have acknowledged the grossly harmful impacts of violence against women and children (including male-on-male violence), but have chosen a lifestyle devoid of violence, precludes them from participating in the CBIFVP as a potentially positive male role model.
- It is considered helpful for those males perpetrating violence to see and hear from men who have successfully reformed their lifestyle from one of violence and hurt to a more peaceful, caring and positive one – without violence.
- Further, it is acknowledged that much investment into studies concerning domestic, family and sexual violence has occurred over many decades, many countries and in First Peoples' Nations. CBIFVP acknowledges that, whilst the rhetoric appears repetitious, it is important to ensure the consistent 'pleas' by agencies in the sector are *especially* heard.



Conclusion

The information proffered is not, by any means, intended to be an exhaustive or definitive response; rather, one which hopefully invites members of the Royal Commission to engage further with the Director and staff of the CBIFVP as a means to experience the machinations of this sector in a 'tactile' manner|

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