

**Submission to the South Australia's Royal Commission into Family and Domestic Violence:
On behalf of Fleurieu Families- An initiative of The City of Victor Harbor**

This submission is on behalf of the Fleurieu Families team which is a program operated by the City of Victor Harbor. Fleurieu Families also has funding from the Commonwealth Government (CaPS funding), South Australian Government through DHS (Strong Families, Strong Communities) and a contribution from Yankallila Council.

Fleurieu Families provides support to parents and families across the Fleurieu and has been operational for over 25 years. This support consists of Outreach Case Management supports, Circle of Security (8 week parenting education program), LoveBites- Respectful relationship workshops in high schools and partners with MIPAAC (local Aboriginal Co-op) to facilitate a Youth Nunga space providing cultural activities and community connection.

This submission is on behalf of Fleurieu Families and will be written by the Team Leader- Cory Wolverton from the perspective of a regional family support service, therefore will speak from the experience of the impact family violence has on children and women, speak from a regional perspective and will also speak from the unique position of being operated by local government. Further, as team leader for Fleurieu Families, Cory Wolverton was present during Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence and was employed within the Orange Door holding roles within the Male Family Violence and Child and Family teams. Therefore, this submission will also speak from the experience of someone that has been present for the changes in Victoria where there were positive changes and also further challenges.

Early Prevention and Education in schools

Family violence is a cultural and social choice that we make as a community. Men's Behaviour Change Programs can be great for men to reflect and change behaviour, however are reactive and for men that are already perpetrating violence. Cultural and social changes are best placed with children and young people.

Fleurieu Families have since October 2023 been providing Love Bites- Respectful Relationships workshops to all high schools over the Fleurieu including Goolwa high school, Mt Compass Area School, Yankalilla Area School, Investigator College, Encounter College, Victor Harbor High School and the Victor Harbor Flexible Learning Options campus. Students from year 10 to year 12 have completed the workshop, depending on the schools preferred age group. It is our assessment that this workshop fits best with year 10s. This workshop can be delivered by two facilitators per 25 students and is delivered in one day.

Love Bites is an evidence-based program delivered through NAPCAN which speaks to young people about what constitutes consent, education around family and domestic violence, gendered violence and stereotypes, sexual assault and how to be an active bystander. Currently Fleurieu Families only has capacity to deliver the senior program (year 10 to 12s), however would like to deliver the junior program also.

The following suggestions are proposed:

Love Bites- Respectful Relationships program to be rolled out state wide as prescribed part of the South Australian Education System. These workshops could be provided by family violence workers, child and family workers or youth workers.

Further support for a longitudinal study to have a better understanding if there is a cultural shift towards family violence due to the roll out of this program.

Information Sharing Legislation

Currently there is ineffective and misunderstood information sharing legislation for family violence that is a barrier to keep women and children safe. My understanding is that only police can share information relating to family violence risk and safety. This does not allow for real time collaboration from services and organisations to keep women and children safe and does not keep perpetrators accountable.

The following suggestions are proposed:

Information sharing legislation that allows both domestic violence organisations, child and family support and safety programs, corrections workers and Police to share information relevant to family violence risk and safety to services, health services, agencies and schools where information is deemed as necessary to share to ensure safety.

Information sharing legislation that allows services, agencies and schools to also share information relevant to family violence risk and safety to services, domestic violence organisations, child and family support programs, corrections workers and Police.

Upskill and training to all services listed above on how to properly use information sharing schemes where legislation allows them to share information where there is risk and safety relating to family violence.

There is always consideration of privacy for the victim survivors and children, however information sharing schemes that have formal allow for increased visibility of perpetrators and greatly contribute to victim survivor safety.

Further Training for Family Violence Workers to Have an Increased Child Lens

There is a need for an increased child lens for domestic violence workers. There has been an increased understanding over the past decade relating to the impact that family violence has on children, particularly the cumulative impact. However, there still needs to be a greater emphasis on where the child was during the incident, what the was child feeling, what is the impact on the child.

The following suggestions are proposed:

Further training for domestic violence workers to increase their understanding of children within family violence across South Australia where there is a consistent model of training provided that is free and easily accessible. There needs to be an increased child lens where the impact on the child is risk rated as well as the risk to the victim survivor.

One area of upskilling can take place in how we document and case note family violence incidences where children are present. Examples are; where was the child, how was the child feeling at that time, what impact did this/could this have on the child and upskilling in how to write detailed accounts of incidents. Detailed description and documenting the impact on the child allows a full understanding for child protection and police to make informed decisions, however practitioners need to be trained to ask these questions sensitively and with the safety of the children as the focus.

There needs to be more opportunity for women's family violence and child and family services to work together, in a collaborative approach. Collaboration allows for learning and building on skills from other disciplines.

Increased Training for Child and Family Practitioners to Have Greater Family Violence Lens

Child and Family practitioners need further training in family violence safety and risk assessment. Family violence is present in the majority of the cases that child and family workers work in. There needs to be uniformed and consistent training that is accessible to child and family practitioners.

The following suggestions are proposed:

As suggested above for family violence workers, child and family practitioners also need upskilling in understanding and evaluating risk and safety related to family violence. Further, child and family practitioners should feel confident in managing low to medium family violence cases that involve children. This upskilling and confidence in managing low to medium cases can be completed through training, but also through co-location of child and family practitioner and family violence workers. Co-location allows skills to transfer naturally where practitioners can be supported and guided in a way that is sustainable.

Male Perpetrator Focus

Currently, there is very limited perpetrator focus during and after a family violence incident. On the Fleurieu, there are no dedicated male family violence workers. Perpetrator work is left to the police, which is a reactive practice. Or, male family violence work is left to mental health practitioners and AOD services that do not have adequate training, capacity or the all the relevant information relating to risk and safety for the perpetrator.

After a family violence incident that police attend, a male family violence worker should be calling the respondent to discuss supports, strategies for managing behaviour and also to keep the perpetrator accountable for their behaviour. Keeping women and children safe is about understanding and knowing what the perpetrator is doing, how they are behaving and ensuring that they have the support they need to not offend in the future.

Police can not be expected to arrest a perpetrator, support the perpetrator and support the victim survivor. This places the police in a difficult situation and also there is a low chance of engagement from the perpetrator.

As a sector, we know what the victim survivor and children are going to do, they are going to do their best to keep themselves safe, the unknown is what the perpetrator will do, they are the variable and therefore there needs to be greater focus on them.

The following suggestions are proposed:

All areas across South Australia to have dedicated male family violence workers that are provided after every family violence incident. This worker can then call each respondent to provide support and to keep the person accountable. This male family violence worker would work closely with police, women's family violence workers, corrections and courts. For same sex couples where there is a family violence incident, a women's family violence worker can call to offer the same support.

Collaboration and Co-location of Services

Collaboration is the key factor in changing a system and one that does not come with a substantial funding increase. Currently on the Fleurieu, child and family support services (Noarlunga and Victor Harbor), domestic violence supports (Goolwa) and child protection (Mt Barker) work in silos. These services work relationally and not through formal channels or processes. These services should be working together, daily, to learn from each other, share information and through formal process and procedures.

The following suggestions are proposed:

Co-location of child and family safety and supports services and family violence services including women's and men's family violence workers. Further, Aboriginal services and police having the ability to locate.

It is understood that child protection may also not be able to locate all the time, however, the ability for a Community Based team or specific family violence child protection worker should operate and work out of the same location as the mentioned services. This allows increased communication, familiarity between services, increased understanding of each other's roles and most importantly the opportunity for practitioners to learn from each other.

Process Changes After Domestic Violence Incidents

Currently on the Fleurieu only the high-risk family violence cases are followed up through a fortnightly inter-agency meeting. Currently Fleurieu Families are not invited to these meetings, nor are Safer Families or Intensive Family Services (often run by NFPs). The only perpetrator focus from these meetings is provided by police. Over the Fleurieu the only follow up of Medium and Low risk cases are followed up by police. This is reactive work that only allows for crisis management. Further, the absence of a service that provides supports to children is absent.

The following suggestions are proposed:

All family violence incidents where police are present should have follow up by a male and female family violence worker. People in same sex relationships should also receive a call dependent on their gender identity. This includes low, medium and high risk family violence incidents.

Both the victim survivor and the perpetrator should have their own phone call from a practitioner. One practitioner should never call both as this is collusion.

After the phone call there should then be an evaluation of risk and an assessment made as to whether the practitioners can close, or if their needs to be followed up for more information from agencies such as police, child protection, courts, corrections or similar.

Increased training for Police including a Family Violence Sergeant Area Liaison for Ongoing Implementation of Training and Standards for Police

There needs to be increased training for police relating to family violence. Police do an amazing job given the capacity and training they currently have, however additional training in managing family violence incidents, reporting and working with support agencies needs improvement.

The following suggestions are proposed:

Increased training for police across the state including attending family violence incidences, taking statements from victims and supporting victims when applying for an IVO.

A specific position within police for each region should be made. A Family Violence Sergeant Area Liaison would work with police to ensure the ongoing implementation of standards for police. Further, can work with family violence and child and family workers to mediate between police when there is a disagreement or misunderstanding. A police officer that can mediate and work between police and the community is important for a sustained relationship and understanding of each other's roles.

Conclusion

This submission has set out a number of gaps, provided recommendations and has provided a perspective of a regional community program that works to support families and children.

If there could be only one change from the above suggestions, as it is understood that resources and money are always a challenge, it would be the co-location of family violence services and child and family safety and supports services. This would allow so many silos to be broken down, allow collaboration and be an amazing opportunity for learning.