

Response to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor's Call for Submissions: Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms – July 2020

Submission #006 – Individual Practitioner – Grampians Community Health

Q1. What are the major changes you have seen in the family violence service system since the Royal Commission into Family Violence made its final report and recommendations in 2016?

Reforms in and around the introduction of the FVIU's into most Victorian Police stations have been great. Having a specific unit monitoring high-risk incidents, AFM's and respondents has meant more understanding of the complexities and nuances of FV and risk leading to a more appropriate response from the officers dealing with complex and high-risk cases

Q2. How has the experience of accessing services and support changed since the Royal Commission for victim survivors, including children, and perpetrators of family violence?

We do not have an Orange door in our region so I have not seen dramatic changes from a service intake perspective. However, the changes to the previously named L17 process to the FVIR has meant that there is more information that can be extrapolated by FV workers when the report is entered into the portal and is triaged at intake

Q3. What are the most critical changes to the family violence service system that still need to occur?

The Family Court system is a shemuzzle. There are the three major court systems that many clients have to deal with the Magistrates court, the family court and the children's court, each with their own culture and language. I am describing this from the perspective of a worker who sees far more women than men engaging in the FV system as a victim/survivor.

The Magistrates court sees the perpetrator as being perpetrators and often also criminals, the children's court tends to put the onus on the victim/survivor, usually the mother, and blames her for not acting protectively. Many Child protection practitioners have very limited understanding of family violence and do not look at FV perpetration as a parenting choice but they do look at a woman decision, as an example, of fighting against an IVO as not acting protectively. When in fact it can be the victim/survivor acting protectively, knowing that to agree will agitate the perpetrator and put her and her children at greater risk. Then this same family meets the family court. The mother has been instructed by Child protection (CP) to keep the father away from the children and there has been an order put in place by CP saying that if she allows him contact with the children that she is breaching their order and the children could be removed from her but the family court says that he is a good enough father and the order from CP is overwritten as is the IVO from the magistrate's court and she is forced to allow a violent perpetrator to have access to the most important thing in her life. And often we, as practitioners, see these fathers using access to further perpetrate against the victim.

We desperately need more emergency housing in rural areas. We do not have access to rentals as there are few and far between. We have families with two working parents and references engaged in our homelessness service because of a lack of housing.

Lastly, DHHS has changed the guidelines without any consultation from services that previously have only worked with women. We are now expected to work with men and I believe that anyone experiencing FV needs to have the support necessary. However, the evidence is there that perpetrators pose as victims and we as a service in this situation do not have the training to be able

to manage this. The royal commission stated that there need to be FV services for men to access but not by taking away resources from women's services but that is exactly what is happening. We hit our targets within the first 6 months of this financial year and we were only working with women. We have not been provided with extra funding for workers, for training us how to work with men (it is not fair to men to try o carbon copy how we work with women over to men, they do not experience FV the same way and they do not deal with it the same way) brokerage for safety increases and FV crisis necessities or emergency housing.

These are the most critical issues from my perspective

Q4. Are there any parts of the family violence reforms that have not yet progressed enough and require more attention?

As above

Q5. Are there any improvements that could be made to the implementation approach of the family violence reforms?

No answer

Q6. What has been the biggest impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your organisation or sector? How have the services that your organisation or sector provides had to change?

Not being able to have face to face conversations with the clients. The situation that we are all in is a breeding ground for coercive control. There has been an increase in first time reports, sexual assaults and reports of historic sexual assaults.

It is hard to explain to the wider society that when coercive control in the context of FV exists in a relationship there is no consent.

Q7. Has the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted any strengths or weaknesses in the family violence service system?

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Q8. Are there any changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic that you think should be continued?

I think that it has highlighted the importance of perpetrator mapping in risk assessment and risk management.

Understanding the behaviours of the perpetrator both historically and currently, what they do, how they respond to the actions of the victim/survivor and to their own behaviour has been highlighted during COVID-19 and I will be advocating for it to remain a big part of the assessment in my team. it is a really important culture shift too, to begin looking at the perpetrator rather than the victim.

The ability to do training online has been wonderful as I live in rural Vic and it is a long drive to the city and takes up a lot of my week. I would like to think that more training and workshops might be able to be offered in this format after COVID.

Q9. The Monitor invites you to make any final general comments around the family violence service system reform.

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