

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

Submission #013 – Individual Practitioner – Charlotte Brewer Consulting

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?

It has become a closed shop that is not working as intended. There is an over emphasis on basic training including to those well educated, trained and experienced in the field. This is not working to assist those experiencing Family Violence or those who have survived it.

Although there are now specialist Courts, the justice system is still failing Family violence sufferers in the Courts: it is taking a long time to obtain an IVO; perpetrators of violence are obtaining access to children they have traumatised and are still going unpunished for breaches.

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?

The Family Violence sector has become a closed shop. prior to the Royal Commission as an experienced clinician (AMHSW) in private practice, I formerly received two to three referrals a week from GPs and Family violence agencies. They are still coming from GPs but only after lengthy waits for a 'closed shop' counsellor. Someone told me she had to wait two months to be "assessed" for counselling - and was then sent for that to a town an hour's drive away. This system is not helping.

It is also difficult to understand why Family Violence workers were not considered an essential service.

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

The system needs to be more flexible with Family Violence agencies engaging with their local area and making formal and informal arrangements with those who can provide therapy and other services to their clients, with client choice being paramount.

All cases involving access to children by perpetrators of Family violence need a specialist assessment by a highly skilled social worker or psychologist as to what level of access, if any, should be granted to the offending parent. This should include Child protection matters. No-one is educating the magistrates and judges on the impact of trauma on the developing mind.

The legislation governing Child protection needs to be amended to enable a swifter response by CPU to Family Violence and the power to apply for Intervention Orders so that the wrath of the offending parent is not directed towards the protective one.

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

Nothing further to add to the above.

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

As above.

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?

After a slight slowing in the first two weeks of lockdown, I have been as busy as ever and increasing. This includes referrals for victims of Family Violence, plus I frequently identify it. Many women do not realise before seeing me that that is what they are experiencing.

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

It's rigidity. It appears to be tightly controlled, which may have some advantages but also provides a lot of disadvantage, as sufferers feel they have moved from being controlled by a violent partner to being controlled by an organisation.

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

In relation to Family violence - no, apart from the fact that the FV Courts remained open.

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

I welcomed the Royal Commission but it seems although the letter of the reforms is slowly being rolled out, the spirit is not. Those who have survived Family Violence need to have their wishes heard and need much greater choice in service provision.