

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

**Submission #026 – Organisation – Y-Change Initiative Berry Street**

**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?**

We're focusing our answers on the following section - 'Looking forward'.

**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're focusing our answers on the following section - 'Looking forward'.

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

The voices of children and young people are still overwhelmingly missing from the family violence narrative.

As reflected in the Monitor's Call for Submissions, there was no request to hear specifically from young people with a lived experience. To us, this continues to reflect the inability of the family violence sector to include the voices of young people with a lived experience more broadly.

There is a need for the right support mechanisms to ensure people with a lived experience can be meaningfully partnered with in ways that are safe for them, that prevent re-traumatisation and ensure that they are able to build their professional capability with lived experience as a core knowledge base. The lens of victim survivors cannot be missing from the reforms and implementation. We'd like to draw attention to Domestic Violence Victoria and the University of Melbourne's co-produced Experts by Experience Framework that has been developed to enhance the ability of specialist family violence services to support opportunities for survivor advocates to influence policy development, service planning and practice.

The need to have lived experience as a valued source of expertise within the family violence service system, beyond the Victim Survivor's Advisory Group (VSAC) as a standalone. We're really proud to have representation on VSAC and believe it to be a fully worthwhile platform, and also feel that there must be more opportunities for groups like VSAC to exist and be supported across Victoria at a local level.

There is much more work that needs to be done in regard to the dismissing nature in the court system of how children are represented and supported when challenging parental and family figures and family violence dynamics.

To our knowledge, there are very few child and young people specific family violence services within Victoria. Other than targeted services such as the Gatehouse Centre, which addresses sexual assault, young people often find themselves in the homelessness service system due to a lack of specialised services that can address family violence. Children and young people need spaces and services that are co-designed with them. These services must be able to address issues that include abuse, violence, and neglect and that include a highly trained Peer Workforce to support young people who are needing to seek help.

The law needs to see children and young people as victims in their own right. Police should be able to seek verbal consent from children and young people without their guardian or parent present to ensure their voices are heard as part of family violence. This would – or course – need to be done respectfully, with accountability centred throughout the process and with a significant auditing and evaluation process built-in to ensure children and young people are not being harmed.

There is not enough accessible and targeted education for children and young people about family violence and where to get help. A lot of websites only reference intimate partner violence between teenagers or young people, not coming from parents, older figures, siblings or acknowledging dysfunctional family dynamics. We feel strongly that there needs to be more youth led and driven initiatives focused on family violence from young people's perspective. We'd like to draw attention to 'The Hidden Victors' campaign, 'TASH' the film, and the DVRCV 'What's okay at home?' website.

There are not enough services for young men and men, outside of a perpetrator specific focus and the initial Victims Support Agency concept. We understand the rates of violence against women are significant and, we also need to consider violence happening to and by those who are not being captured in mainstream services. We're missing the intersection of experiences. To our knowledge, there are not enough specialised approaches and services available for men who are victims of family and intimate partner violence. There needs to be a greater investment in co-designed and produced efforts in developing more targeted services in partnership with young men and men with a lived experience.

The victim-perpetrator dynamic is not always black and white. We also must acknowledge that people with disability and who live with mental illness can be perpetrators of violence and are not receiving the support they need as perpetrators of abuse, neglect and violence against children and young people because their behaviour is masked by other features. There needs to be more specialised training and support to help more marginalised communities, and family violence support workers, to understand how domination, power and control can take shape in different settings.

When police go out to respond to a family violence call-out or follow up with the family days later, they cannot speak to children or young people without parental consent. We strongly recommend that Police must receive specialised trauma-informed training as to how to respectfully engage with and respond to children and young people who are experienced all forms of violence.

Police must also be trained to better understand, support and respond to young people with disability and mental-ill health who are victims of family violence and abuse. There have been instances where young people with disability and who live with a mental illness are not asked for their side of the story, who are not believed, and where their disability or mental illness is blamed for behaviours without acknowledging the trauma of what they have also experienced.

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

We have a way to go to acknowledging and meaningfully responding to breaking the cycles of intergenerational trauma and violence in families. We need more diverse family violence specific advertising across the board. Traditionally, the messaging that is currently available to us focuses on men as the perpetrators of violence against women and leaves out more diverse representation, such as parents being abusive towards their children, siblings being abusive towards other siblings and LGBTIQ specific dynamics. These messages are also missing the lens of black, brown and indigenous representation and often depict white couples and white families. We need to go further

in highlighting that there is domination, power over and abuse happening between many different people in our society and we must all be able to see our experiences reflected in ways that make sense to us – especially children and young people who may not understand the situations they're living in.

We'd like to draw attention to the Transport Accident Commission Victoria's 'What kind of driver are you raising?' campaign, which we think powerfully illustrates the influence of parents behaviour on children and the impact it has on intergenerational family patterns. We also think the 'Family violence has no good days' video has a strong impact on illustrating the more subtle impacts of family violence on children and young people.

There is a lack of clear direction in the MARAM framework on the 'how to' of including children/young people's voices in risk assessment/safety planning and particular ways to engage and assess very young children.

The Orange Door Hubs – we know of isolated cases where the MARAM was being used to risk assess some groups of young people, but it was limited. As far as we're aware, the MARAM is not yet being used across the board with children and young people and so they are still being left behind and falling through the gaps at the assessment stage.

The MARAM also needs to take into account sibling perpetrators within families.

The MARAM needs to evolve beyond its current form and include a meaningful co-design process in partnership with children and young people, that seeks to capture the complexity of violence against children and young people and ensures that a range of risk factors are acknowledged, captured and that in-depth safety planning is carried out with each person.

We would like to draw attention to Family Safety Victoria's most recently produced MARAM video, which tells the story of how they are working together to manage and assess family violence risk and improve the lives of future generations of Victorians. This resource acknowledges the core principle that children and young people are recognised as victim survivors in their own right, to ensure their voices are heard. As we know, family violence risk assessments for children and young people should consider a range of unique risks, because every child and young person will experience family violence differently. As quoted by Family Safety Victoria, "by putting children and young people at the centre, professionals obtain a clear picture of the children they work with and can provide them with support early to assist them to recover from violence." (Reference: Family Safety Victoria, Family Violence Reform Newsletter – June 2020 Edition).

There's also been a lack of integration between family violence reforms and child mental health responses more broadly. There needs to be stronger intersecting points between service system wide reform efforts, including disability, family violence, institutional abuse, and mental health that focus specifically on children and young people. We need less silos and more opportunities to link up and share learnings and practice wisdom that work to evolve integrated responses to issues that are currently being approached in isolation of each other. This might look like an overarching advisory or governance body, which includes the representation of young advocates.

Organisations must be supported to better support young people. Community organisations are often facing significant financial restrictions and workload capacity to implementing more creative and meaningful ways of working with children and young people. Although co-design and co-production are considered best practice, we have a long way to go to making sure these approaches become standard practice. This will require further investment in targeted opportunities for quality

development and training and ensuring best practice frameworks and guidelines are created specifically in a family context. This will ensure design work is done ethically, respectfully and in ways that are meaningful both to the organisation and to children and young people.

In Victoria, there are many exciting initiatives that are working to ensure people with a lived experience become meaningful members of the community sector workforce. This has yet to take off in the same way within the family violence service system context. We need system navigators – young people who are trained up to become Peer Support workers in the family violence service system who can help support other young people doing it tough.

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

Policy and institutional reform efforts must invite and centre the voices of children and young people. We must be partnering with children and young people with a lived experience as standard practice as part of reform and implementation across all policy and service design and re-design initiatives.

We need to be speaking directly to children and young people in care, not just to their carers. Speaking to every child and young person as part of their care plan must become standard practice.

**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 applicable

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

There are not enough opportunities to intervene for children and young people because they're locked down in houses – child protection reports are going down. For many children and young people, they have nobody right now. We need to adjust our responses due to COVID-19, lockdown and physical distancing. Services need to rapidly change their responses to be going out to homes. We need to be speaking directly to children and young people in care, not just to their carers. Every child and young person must be spoken with directly as part of their care plan and this must become standard practice.

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

The higher rate of Centrelink must continue – helping people access supports they couldn't previously. There needs to be sufficient Centrelink support staff to meet increasing demand, including a specialised Centrelink branch for children and young people.

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

To enable a meaningful and safe process for young people with a lived experience to have their say in a process such as this one, more time must be granted - especially during a global health pandemic.

Please note, this response is being made on behalf of the Y-Change initiative at Berry Street. It is not Berry Street's formal organisational response. Y-Change will also be submitting a fuller version of this submission in the coming weeks to the Monitor.