

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

Submission #067 – Individual practitioner – enRICHed Pursuits

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?

No answer

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?

No answer

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

We need to acknowledge the importance of animals as family members.

Women and children are not the only victims. Sixty-two percent of Australian households include non-human animals: that's 3 in every 5 homes. So family animals frequently experience domestic violence. Animals may be the direct target of violence, they may be injured when they intervene to protect others or they may be used to leverage or threaten women and children, e.g. I will kick the dog, I will kill the cat, if you don't do what I want.

For women experiencing Domestic Violence, the family animals are a significant source of comfort, kindness and compassion; sometimes they are the only source. Children tell stories and secrets to family animals. The family animals are their friends; akin to siblings. When family animals are the victims of Domestic Violence, it has life-long impacts on women and children. In the UK, 1 in 3 women delay leaving or never leave because they cannot find an exit strategy that includes their animal family members.

We must do better for families; for all family members.

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

No answer

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?

No answer

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

Everyone is under stress; uncertainty, lost income, changed working habits. Many families are isolated in the family home and there is no respite from the source of violence or from the triggers and stressors. There is also no opportunity for the victims to escape to a secure, quiet place; either for some time out, or to contact friends, family or services for help. Many services reported a drop in

contact during COVID-19 isolation; not because there were fewer incidents, but because the constant presence of the perpetrator limited the opportunity to make contact.
We need better support; more ways to seek and receive help.

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

No answer

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

We need to address the causes of Domestic Violence and we should start with The Link between different forms of violence.

Violence begets violence. People who are violent towards animals are more likely to be violent towards people. There is a link between animal abuse, and other forms of violence, in particular Child Abuse, Elder Abuse and Domestic Violence [1]. Children exposed to Domestic Violence are more likely to abuse animals, and so the violent cycle continues.

We need to acknowledge the importance of animals as family members and aim to keep the animals and people together; because they need each other. We must develop government policies and services to support animals of domestic violence, e.g. refuges that welcome animals as well as people. We need to review certain laws that facilitate the animal abuse, e.g. Animals as property and Animal Registration.

1. Phillips A (2014) Understanding the Link between violence to animals and people: A guidebook for Criminal Justice Professionals. National District Attorneys Association: Alexandria
<https://ndaa.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Link-Monograph-2014-3.pdf> [accessed: 26Jun2019]