

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

Submission #104 – Individual practitioner – Heavy M.E.T.A.L Group

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?

Since the 2016 royal Commission I have become aware of the flourishing of Government funded services specialising in approaches to addressing the societal issue of Family Violence but with these organisations and some who hold themselves as 'Peak Bodies' of certain facets of administering the support, I have observed a less than holistic application and indeed use of these funds. A non-inclusive approach towards independent organisations.

Non referrals if the potential participant requires engagement earlier than waiting lists allow.

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?

I have been active in the area of a Men's Behavioural Change Programme for the past three years and witnessed the disproportionate consequences of the administration of the aforementioned 'Peak Bodies' and the lack of collaboration with these departments to be persuaded to be inclusive. Only men who have been ordered by the Courts to attend a Men's Behavioural Change Programme seem to be the focus, then distributed to a 'government funded' 20-week programme once they qualify individually for the appropriated sum of around \$4000.00.

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

Most of the funded programmes aren't flexible, there is a fixed attendance measure and a standardised tutorial approach as far as I understand it, and have long waiting lists? Behaviour change is an individual experience very much dependant on the complexity of the base from which the problems occur, and it needs an understanding of this and a holistic distribution of the help required. Everyone involved needs to be availed to help to increase the long-lasting success of the programme that becomes the foundation on which to build success.

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

My experience being involved with an independent organisation that has provided a 40 plus week programme for 15 Years with out Government Funding, holds participants who choose to be there driven by a recognition of the need to change and choose to continue beyond the 40 weeks, who's success is time and time again championed by the successful participants and members of their family of some of the thousands of men that have attended, stands testament to a more holistic understanding but yet is continually stifled by the so called experts for referrals, recommendation, recognition, inclusion with I'd have to say an underlying thread on 'Men can't change'.

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

I have been present at meetings with these 'Peak Bodies' and have been privy to excuses of exclusion in all facets such as: not government funded, not beholden to information sharing of participant information, non-accreditation (which as I understand it no measure of such actually exists but rather a misuse of the word; accredited). Yet we do not deny information nor are we offered access. We are one of the unique that attracts men, before their lives and that of their family come under the scrutiny of the Court system which in some cases can leave a stain a stigma that can support unfounded views of; the inability to change. Bearing in mind too that men who are mandated make up a small percentage of the number out there needing help.

Domestic Violence is a mental health problem that needs to be inclusive of all government approaches to fund its societal repair, a shift of attitude to reduce the problem from all who digress from a healthy relationship.

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?

As a facilitator at this independent organisation I have assisted with and experienced success in running programmes on ZOOM in all of our three Phases hold in excess of 50 men and 20 participants per class and completing an eleven-week term, whilst most other MBCP's have closed regardless of Government funding. Due to the ever-increasing waiting list needing attention, especially exacerbated by Covid-19, we have quietly received referrals from mandated sources and even Relationships Australia. Participants on Zoom from Queensland, Tasmania and country Victoria. Therefore, surely it could be considered that Heavy M.E.T.A.L. Group has valuable experience in this industry that could help other organisations to achieve more as it appears the ZOOM platform is not widely used?

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

I have heard other MBCP's which are government funded have struggled with holding or facilitating a programme during Covid-19 which has created a long waiting list for perpetrators to have access with placement in MBCP's, citing reasons such as how to deal with confidentiality and on line participation.

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

Co-Facilitating with a successful use of an on-line programme holding both mandated and volunteering participants with numbers up to mid twenties at times has brought some unexpected observations such as ownership and engagement, perhaps a side effect of all faces seen by other participants and 'no where to hide'.

Breaking into smaller groups has also shown a higher level of individual participation energizing a think tank process when drilling down on particular topics.

The ability to have participants from various parts of Australia join class has also proved successful this has now created a need to continue a hybrid form of both on-line and in class programmes.

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

Another aspect of the approach to Domestic Violence is the absence of a holistic approach across the board to a more inclusive and accepting view that the perpetration of abuse and violence in a relationship is somewhat more complex than the partner that abuses is perpetually corrupted. There certainly is no denying that no one should ever have to endure being the victim and as much support should be applied in this case and the perpetrator held accountable, however I have witnessed quite a number of perpetrators bewildered at how many categories constitute abuse or violence and unaware their application towards life from the previous generational and societal modelling is actually flawed. Their attendance to group coming from a volunteering base, (though perhaps encouraged in part), is to save the relationship yet engaging the partner into contact where; safety, progress, efficacy, application and truth can be established especially where separation is apparently not a consideration, has a limited success rate and seems to be stifled from the outset.

Family Violence and its consequences need to be part of education, inclusive of schools, sporting clubs and associations. The approach needs to break the barriers of cultural approaches, religious restrictions and outdated misogynies, patriarchal and matriarchal controls. Every human being needs to own and play a positive role to bring a healthy approach to change for family and all.