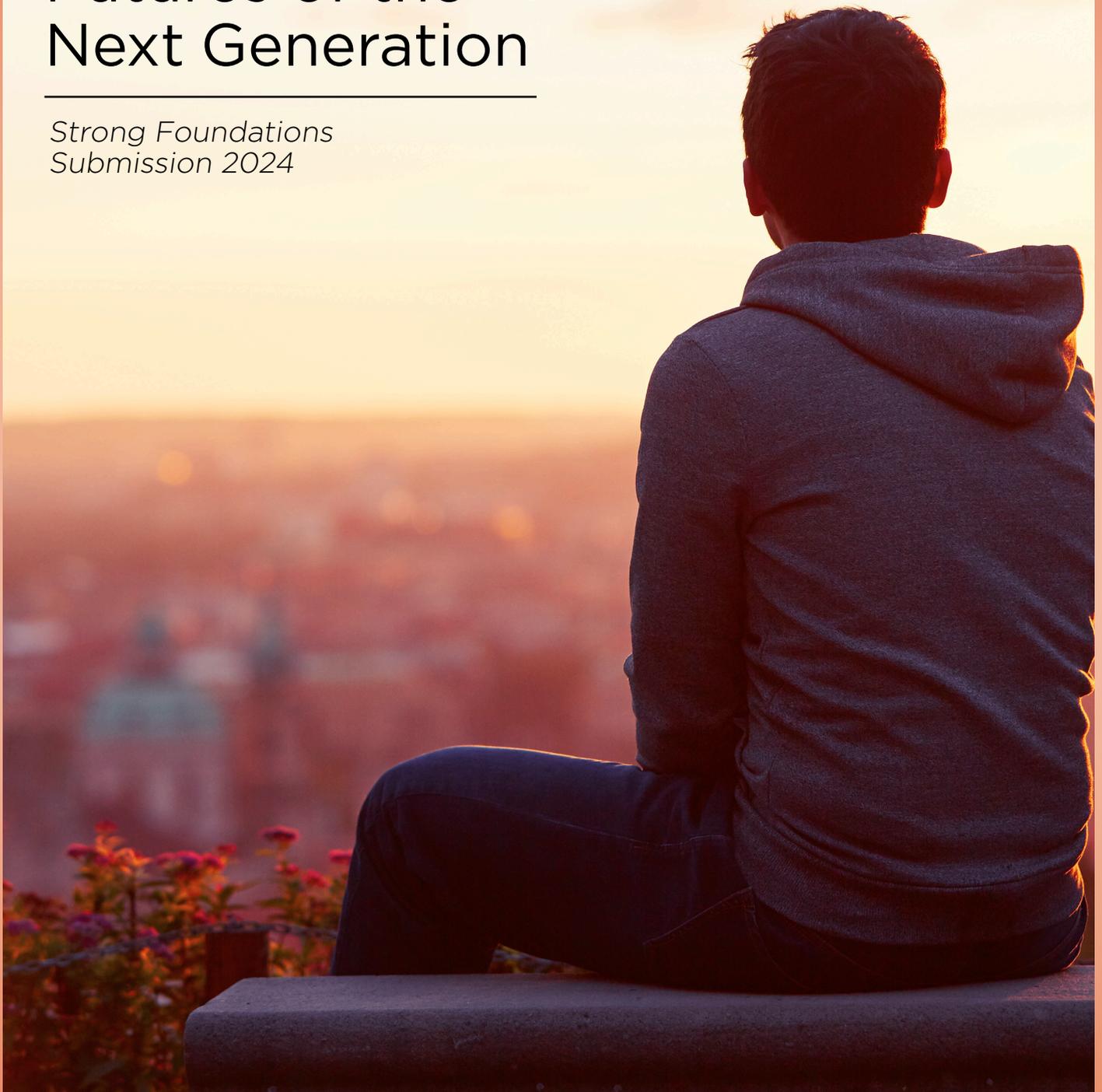


# Pave the Way:

## Investing in the Safety and Futures of the Next Generation

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*Strong Foundations  
Submission 2024*



## Acknowledgment of Country



Melbourne City Mission, Berry Street Y-Change, Centre for Innovative Justice and Youth Affairs Council Victoria acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work and note that this document was developed on the lands of the Bunurong, Wurundjeri and Woi Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the culture, dreams, and aspirations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are the true custodians of the land upon which we live and work.

We acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonisation, impacts which contribute to intergenerational trauma and associated rates of family violence experienced by Aboriginal communities. We recognise the structural discrimination and systemic racism which sees Aboriginal children removed from their families at disproportionate rates and Aboriginal communities disproportionately policed and incarcerated. These structural and systemic factors contribute significantly to the extent to which use of harmful behaviours of young people in Aboriginal communities is reported, where communities understandably fear punitive, rather than therapeutic, responses.

We pay our respects to the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures and recognise their unceded sovereignty.

## Contributors

This Submission would not have been possible without the contribution of several individuals: Shorna Moore, Elena Campbell, Conor Pall, Lucy Demant, Alice Fox and Shakira Branch. Importantly, we would like to acknowledge Conor Pall and the Y-Change Lived Experience consultants whose lived and living experience and collaboration have been integral to shaping and guiding this Submission.

The Submission also draws on the expertise of Melbourne City Mission, Centre for Innovative Justice, Youth Affairs Council Victoria and Berry Street's Y-Change Initiative's staff.

Most importantly, we would like to recognise the children and young people who have lost their lives to family violence, and those who continue to live with this experience every day.

## About MCM

Established in 1854, Melbourne City Mission (MCM) is one of Victoria's oldest, largest, and most diverse non-profit community service organisations. Today, the MCM Group, comprising MCM Services, Hester Hornbrook Academy, and MCM Housing work together to innovate change and create positive pathways for people in Victoria.

Through collaborative efforts, the MCM Group strives to empower and enable people, offering comprehensive support through more than 80 programs, including homelessness, housing, family violence, disability, mental health, early childhood and education, child and family services and home-based palliative care.

As the largest youth homelessness services provider in Victoria, family violence is a common thread that underpins much of our work. MCM provides a range of homelessness and family violence supports to young people, including:

- **Frontyard Youth Services** provides a range of integrated supports to around 2,500 young people aged 12 to 24 experiencing or at risk of homelessness each year, including support with housing, health, mental health, legal issues, Centrelink, employment and living skills. Frontyard operates the only state-wide specialist access point for young people aged 16-24 seeking to access the homelessness services system, including an 18 bed CBD-based crisis accommodation service supporting over 300 complex young people experiencing rough sleeping.
- Four youth refuge programs across the Northern and Western suburbs of Melbourne which provide short-term accommodation to over 600 young people each year.
- Youth Foyer Programs that provide intensive case management and fully furnished medium term accommodation to young people for up to 3 years.
- Early intervention programs across Victoria supporting over 594 young people to remain connected to family, school, and their community, and in housing each year.
- **Restart**, delivered in partnership with Centre for Multicultural Youth in the western suburbs of Melbourne, is a therapeutic program for young people 12 - 17 years who are using violence in the home. Restart work with the young person in a flexible and responsive way to promote change, support healing and strengthen family relationships.
- **Amplify**, a specialist family violence case management response for unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness across the western suburbs of Melbourne.

MCM are vocal advocates for dismantling barriers, addressing gaps, enhancing social justice, and fostering diversity and inclusion, ensuring equal opportunities for all, towards a more equitable future for everyone.

## About Y-Change

Berry Street's Y-Change initiative<sup>1</sup> is a social and systemic change platform for young people aged 18 to 30 with lived experiences of socioeconomic disadvantage. The team of Lived Experience Consultants work to challenge the thinking and practices of social systems through advocacy and leadership.

Y-Change champions the philosophy of co-production into the design of solutions to social issues. This unique methodology creates a cohort of young people, who deliver an uncommon, professional capability that brings to life the issues and solutions they face through their experiences. Working with young people, Y-Change transforms key decision-making through government initiatives, policy and advocacy campaigns and having access to those who can influence systemic change through inquiries and commissions.

Y-Change focuses on strengthening access to resources and skills to give young people pathways which support better outcomes, along with raising the voices and profile of young people experiencing systematic disadvantage to influence social change. Their model is entirely designed, informed, led and run by those with lived experience.

## About Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University

The Centre for Innovative Justice's (CIJ) objective is to develop, drive and expand the capacity of the justice system to meet and adapt to the needs of its diverse users. The CIJ meets this objective by conducting rigorous research which focuses on having impact – taking our research findings, many of which involve direct engagement with service users, and using them to develop innovative and workable solutions. We design all of our work to be useful both for those experiencing and for those implementing change.

Running through the areas of our research is recognition that access to justice is about more than just formal access to the courts or legal system redress. Interaction with justice system mechanisms can, for many people, cause significant further trauma and harm. For this interaction to function as a positive intervention instead, people need to be understood; to feel heard; and to experience the justice system as meaningful and fair. A well-functioning and sustainable justice system should therefore be about much more than activity and outputs – taking time and using diverse approaches to have constructive outcomes; driving down incarceration rates; and preventing further harm.

## About YACVic

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading policy advocate for young people aged 12–25 and the youth sector in Victoria. YACVic's vision is that young Victorians have their rights upheld and are valued as active participants in their communities. As a peak body, YACVic works closely with young Victorians, and the sector that supports them, to deliver effective advocacy, events, training, resources and support. YACVic's work is driven by their valuable members and their vision for a positive future for young Victorians.

YACVic Rural is YACVic's advocacy and development arm focused on rural and regional young people and the youth sector throughout Victoria, with a physical presence in the Great South Coast and Southern Mallee regions.

Youth Disability and Advocacy Service (YDAS) is Victoria's only advocacy service that works directly with disabled young people to achieve their human rights. Disabled young people aged 12–25 can access free individual advocacy services if they need advice or help. YDAS also does ongoing systemic advocacy work to improve policy around issues that are important to disabled young people.

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<sup>1</sup> Berry Street's Y-Change initiative [www.berrystreet.org.au/what-we-do/young-people/youth-engagement-y-change](http://www.berrystreet.org.au/what-we-do/young-people/youth-engagement-y-change)

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# Executive Summary

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the development of the **Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2024 – 2026 (Plan)** and commend the Victorian Government on prioritising the safety and agency of children and young people as a key focus. Ending family violence necessitates a transformational focus on delivering improved outcomes for the next generation.

This recognition is long overdue. For too long system responses and services have been designed and delivered with only the adult victim-survivors in mind, rendering responses to children and young people as solely the extension of their primary carer parent. Children and young people who have experienced family violence during childhood and/ or adolescence cannot continue to encounter a system that is ill-equipped to identify their risk, to respond to their disclosures, and to provide effective age-appropriate supports.

Children and young people affected by family violence require a service system that will meet their needs for protection, security and recovery regardless of whether they are accompanied by a help-seeking adult, navigating the service system on their own or under statutory care.

Importantly, the rights and needs of children and young people must be considered at each point of the Plan – from prevention through to the response and recovery domains – and will require significant resources to deliver upon the Plan’s commitment to children and young people.

While there are innovative and good pockets of practice emerging in Victoria, the gap in dedicated responses and resources for young people that have experienced family violence and/or enact harm in their relationships is widely recognised by the broad social and government services sectors across Victoria. While substantial investment in service responses to adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) has recently occurred, the wider family violence and community service sector still lacks an understanding of the issue, while urgent recommended legal reform has not occurred.

Important to note, this submission generally uses the term ‘young people’ or ‘young person’ throughout, which is intended to include children who have reached adolescence. Therefore, for the purposes of this submission, young people are defined as those aged between 12 to 24. This phase of life, between childhood and adulthood, is a critical time for acquiring the emotional and cognitive abilities for independence and for forming lifelong relationships. It is a time when identity and sense of self are changing, and when values are formed, and most importantly, is a time when the foundations for health and wellbeing are laid down, thus influencing not only their futures but also that of the next generation.<sup>2</sup>

This submission does not attempt to comment on all the systemic gaps and barriers experienced by young people affected by family violence. This submission focuses on some of the key future reforms needed to recognise young people in their own right – to respond to their unique safety, support and recovery needs and that understands and promotes their agency and rights. This is vital for young people navigating the service’s system alone.

This submission should also be read in conjunction with:

- [Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent Violence in the Home \(2020\)](#);
- [Amplify Report: Turning up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence \(2021\)](#);
- [Adolescents using Family Violence \(AFV\) MARAM Practice Guidance Project \(2022\)](#);
- [WRAP Around Families Experiencing AVITH \(2023\)](#)
- [I Believe You: Children and young people’s experiences of seeking help, securing help and navigating the family violence system \(2023\)](#) and
- [Missing Figures: The Role of Domestic and Family Violence in Youth Suicide - Current State of Knowledge Report \(2023\)](#).

We recognise the right to self-determination and the importance of community-led interventions that respond appropriately to family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities. We are not Aboriginal-led organisations, and hence not in a position to make determinations on behalf of community. We therefore provide endorsement of submissions made by Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations including the Koorie Youth Council, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Djirra.

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<sup>2</sup> Patton, G., Our future: a Lancet commission on adolescent health and wellbeing, The Lancet Commissions, Vol 387, Issue 10036, p2423-2478, June 11, 2016

# Recommendations

1. To achieve its goal in ending family violence, the Plan needs to adopt an intersectional approach. Family violence policy and programs for young people, particularly young people experiencing violence in the home, need to recognise the multiple drivers of the violence perpetrated against them, of which gender is one factor.
2. To provide young people with the information they need to understand family violence and support their safety, they need access to information and resources specific to their needs that are designed, developed and delivered with them and by them.
3. To provide developmentally and age-appropriate responses to young people affected by family violence, policy settings should consider the needs of young people 12-18 as distinct from those of children, and young people 18-24 as distinct from those of adults, to recognise their differing legal rights, developmental stage and service needs.
4. Where safe, and with the consent of the young person, support needs to be offered to their family or partner as part of a young person's safety planning.
5. To help address the power imbalance and engage young people as agents of change, peer support workers need to be considered as part of developing support options for young victim survivors of family violence. This will require the appropriate level of support and training for these peer workers.
6. To support young people in their own right, youth services and specialisation need to be included in holistic service integration within the Orange Door Network alongside family violence services, child protection and other family services. This requires the Orange Door Network to have a specific youth focus in addition to the child wellbeing roles.
7. To respond to the safety needs of unaccompanied young people experiencing family violence, the youth homelessness and family violence initiatives funded by the National Partnership Agreement need to extend beyond 2025 and be scaled across Victoria.
8. As part of the implementation of MARAM in schools to keep children and young people safe, the Victorian Government and the Department of Education need to consider and develop referral pathways with specialist services to support children and young people once they have elicited a disclosure of family violence. This could be supported through the Respectful Relationships program.
9. To respond to the safety needs of unaccompanied young people affected by family violence, the Victorian Government, youth services, family violence services and housing services need to come together to develop and fund short-term crisis accommodation options, particularly for young people 15-19, including implementation for young people using harm in the home. These options should be co-designed with an intersectional lens and responsive to the diverse needs of young people.
10. Legislative reform to the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) should require a court to consider a young person and others' safety when ordering them to be removed from the home in the context of Family Violence Intervention Order proceedings.
11. To enable access to accommodation for young victim survivors longer term, the areas of reform as outlined in the *2023 Victorian Youth Housing Framework* need to be prioritised. This also involves a dedicated housing target for unaccompanied young people built into social housing policy reform and investment.
12. To meet the recovery needs of young people affected by family violence, tailored, age-appropriate responses need to be developed and resourced, alongside the mainstream therapeutic interventions delivered across each region in Victoria. These programs need to be accessible to young people, regardless of whether they are accompanied by an adult victim-survivor, fall under the child protection system or are navigating the service system on their own.
13. To uphold the rights of young people affected by family violence, resources and practice guidance need to be developed and provided to services including Child Protection, Child and Family Services,

Specialist Family Violence Services and Housing Services that clarify the thresholds for rights and agency for young people including their right to access services and speak about their experience.

14. To address the inconsistencies in thresholds and approaches for FVIOs for young people, a review needs to be undertaken of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic). This needs to include the ability of legal responses to adequately assess the capacity of young people to understand and comply with civil protection orders, as per the recommendations of the PIPA project (2020).
15. To recognise the rights and agency of young people affected by family violence, legal services need to be provided with greater resources and capacity to work with young people affected by family violence, especially to enable their protection in a Family Violence Intervention Order matter. This should include increased funding for specialist youth legal services and integrated into the Orange Door Network.
16. To identify different types of behaviours and the experiences which sit behind a young person's use of family violence, significant capacity and capability building is needed across workforces, including intake and referral points which need to be capable of recognising families with different service needs and experiences.
17. To support young people who use violence to heal and change their behaviour, the Victorian Government needs to work with services and young people to develop a service model for responding to the use of intimate partner violence by young people.
18. To address the drivers of young people's use of violence against family members, assessment for AVITH needs to always include screening for the possibility of adult-perpetrated family violence, including current violence, to inform how any relevant intervention should proceed.
19. To adequately respond to needs and risk, police, legal and other service responses need to have access to information about risk across whole-of-family settings.
20. Continue to expand and appropriately resource evidence-based and trauma-informed AVITH-specific interventions that build capacity for whole-of-family approaches. This should include the capacity to leverage brokerage and clinical leadership to ensure that needs across the family structure are kept in view. It should also include capacity building to support services to manage the presence of ongoing adult perpetrated harm; to work with younger children; and to work with children with disability in collaboration with other appropriate supports. This will require services to develop capacity to build trust and engagement over longer-term periods of at least 12 to 18 months, given previous experiences of trauma or wider complexity.
21. Continue to expand and appropriately resource the development of strengths-based and community-led interventions that respond appropriately to AVITH in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. This similarly requires recognition of the extended timeframe over which practitioners must often work to establish and maintain trust with families from over policed or marginalised communities.
22. To start to address the gap in understanding the complexity of young people's use of harm, government should look at and engage properly with the AVITH Collaborative Practice Framework.
23. To mitigate the risk of criminalisation, law reform should enable legal responses to assess the capacity of young people to understand and comply with civil protection orders, as well as criminal justice processes. This requires urgent legislative reform, as per the recommendations of the PIPA project (2020).
24. Invest significant policy attention, inquiry and advocacy into the disproportionate rates of young people with disability<sup>3</sup> coming into contact with the family violence and justice system settings.
25. All Family Violence Intervention Order matters involving young people should be heard by a Children's Court Magistrate, even if done so online.

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<sup>3</sup> There are different preferences of disability communities and individuals regarding language. YACVic and YDAS' preference is to use identify-first language, being 'disabled young person'. Here is why? <https://www.yacvic.org.au/ydas/blog/disability-identity/>

26. Young people need to be linked with community service support and adequately resourced legal assistance as quickly as possible, so that the court mention date can be informed by the young person's engagement and history.
27. To strengthen how we measure impact and ensure young people do not fall through the service system gaps, research and evaluation, policy and practice reforms need to recognise the role of family violence in youth suicide to avoid histories of childhood trauma being masked by other presenting issues at the time of suicide, suicide attempts and suicidal ideation. This could include establishing a data set on children and young people's deaths in the context of family violence, with a view to evidencing the relationship between young people's experiences of family violence preceding youth suicide, suicide attempts and suicidal ideation.
28. To engage young people as agents of generational change, the Victorian Government needs to establish a young person's expert advisory group to support the implementation and monitoring of the Plan's commitments to children and young people.

# Focus On Children and Young People

## Prevalence and Impacts of Family Violence on Young People

Violence against young people is prevalent in Australia. Findings from Australia's first National Child Maltreatment Study<sup>4</sup> found two-thirds of Australians have been abused, neglected or exposed to domestic and family violence as children, 40 per cent of people within this data reported witnessing domestic and family violence before the age of 18. The Crime Statistics Agency in Victoria reports that in 2023, more than 14,000 Affected Family Members in a police family incident were aged 15-24.<sup>5</sup> In 2023, the Australian Institute of Family Studies also released new data revealing that almost a third of 18 and 19-year-olds had experienced violence from a partner in the previous year.<sup>6</sup> However, family violence amongst young people is under reported, and the actual figure is likely to be much higher.

Children and young people with disability, First Nations children and young people, and young people with diverse gender and sexual identities are at higher risk of experiencing violence during childhood. For example, young people with diverse gender and sexual identities experience disproportionately higher levels of mental illness, not because of their sexuality or gender identity, but exacerbated by the additional forms of discrimination they often face including homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism that drive the violence they experience, and which create additional barriers to support. There are also different ways in which family violence can be experienced by young people with diverse gender and sexual identities, including threats to 'out' or reveal their gender identity and the use of conversion practices.<sup>7</sup>

The impacts of family violence on young people are immense and can result in death. Young people experiencing family violence have an increased risk of suicide attempts, mental illness, eating disorders, teenage pregnancy, early school leaving and use of violence. They experience disrupted schooling and consequent harm to chances of getting and keeping a job, difficulty making and keeping friends due to the stress and shame of trying to keep the violence secret, and the disruption of moving houses and schools to escape. Young people who experience violence are also more highly represented in the justice system, mental health system and in homelessness services.<sup>8</sup>

The failure to identify young people as victims in their own rights can result in the high risks that young people face being missed, leading to serious injury and in some cases, death. Approximately one child a fortnight is killed by family violence in Australia<sup>9</sup>. Further, a 2019 investigation by the Victorian Commissioners for Children and Young People into children who died by suicide and were known by child protection, concluded that, 'their lives were marred by family violence, dysfunction and often chronic neglect'<sup>10</sup>.

By designing and delivering a system with only adult victim-survivors in mind, young people who experience violence are also at heightened risk of using violence. There needs to be explicit reference under this priority reform area (and throughout the entire Plan) that where young people are enacting harm in their homes or in their intimate relationships, they are often victim-survivors of family violence themselves.<sup>11</sup> The emerging practice and evidence in this area demonstrates that, more often than not, these young people are using violence in defence or in response to their own trauma — yet this is the only way that they become visible in their own right.<sup>12</sup>

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4 Haslam D, Mathews B, Pacella R, Scott JG, Finkelhor D, Higgins DJ, Meinck F, Erskine HE, Thomas HJ, Lawrence D, Malacova E. (2023). The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report. Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology

5 <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statistics/latest-victorian-crime-data/family-incidents-2>

6 Growing Up Project: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), Australian Institute of Family Studies

7 Corrie, T. & Moore, S. (2021), Amplify: Turning Up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report), Melbourne City Mission, p42

8 Ibid, p21; Melbourne City Mission (MCM) (2015) Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence; Meyer, S., Atienzar-Prieto, M., Fitz-Gibbon, K., & Moore, S. (2023). Missing Figures: The Role of Domestic and Family Violence in Youth Suicide - Current State of Knowledge Report. Griffith University: Brisbane

9 Brown T et al. 2019. Filicide offenders. Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice no. 568. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

10 Commission for Children and Young People, Lost, not forgotten: Inquiry into children who died by suicide and were known to Child Protection (Melbourne: Commission for Children and Young People, 2019), p3

11 Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020). The PIPA project: Positive interventions for perpetrators of adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) (Research report, 04/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

12 Corrie, T. & Moore, S. (2021), Amplify: Turning Up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report)

Recent ANROWS research found that 1 in 2 young people who experience domestic and family violence during childhood go on to use violence in the home during adolescence. Of those who report use of violence in the home during adolescence, almost 9 in 10 report childhood experiences of family violence and other forms of maltreatment.<sup>13</sup> This recent research is supported by a wide body of evidence which demonstrates that experiences of violence from trusted adults in their lives is the most significant risk factor for young people's use of violence in the home. Other research has signalled that children and young people who experience family violence are at heightened risk of experiencing intimate partner violence in adulthood.<sup>14</sup>

If the development of a youth-specific approach is not prioritised in the Plan, young people will continue to fall through the cracks. Without proper support, young victim-survivors of family violence are more likely to die by suicide, end up in the justice system, become further victimised by family violence or go on to perpetrate family violence, thus compromising the potential of the Victorian family violence reform.

## Contextualising family violence for young people

It is important that the different forms of family violence, and the different relationship contexts in which it occurs, are documented and understood as it specifically relates to young people.

Given the endemic nature of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) – primarily by men against their current or former partners – much of the focus to date is understandably on this issue, and it is well established the largest driver of this violence is gender inequality and control. IPV also occurs amongst adolescents and gendered drivers must continue to inform policy and practice.

However, young people also experience family violence from parents, siblings and/or other family members. While not challenging the significance of the gendered lens, these differing experiences require an intersectional and nuanced discussion of the use of power and control. In parental relationships, the power imbalance is experienced differently and limits to legal recourse for young people can be an additional tactic used. It means family violence against young men could be more prevalent in this cohort, as well as against young women, from a parent of all genders.<sup>15</sup>

The need for an intersectional approach to family violence, that recognises that multiple identities and systemic barriers influence experiences, is becoming more embedded in the response system. Sexuality, religion, racial discrimination, disability and age are key drivers of the violence young people experienced.<sup>16</sup>

**Recommendation 1:** To achieve its goal in ending family violence, the Plan needs to adopt an intersectional approach. Family violence policy and programs for young people, particularly young people experiencing violence in the home, need to recognise the multiple drivers of the violence perpetrated against them, of which gender is one factor.

## Engage children and young people to create generational change

*Children and young people are being positioned as being 'agents of generational change' – but the burden of breaking the cycle of family violence cannot solely rest on our shoulders. We need access to age-appropriate, youth specific supports that don't leave us to bear the brunt of expensive, often out of reach healing and recovery supports. Then, we can be your agents of generational change and hope for a future free of violence.*

**- Conor Pall, Deputy Chair, Victim Survivor's Advisory Council**

<sup>13</sup> Fitz-Gibbon, K., Meyer, S., Maher, J., & Roberts, S. (2022). Adolescent family violence in Australia: A national study of prevalence, history of childhood victimisation and impacts (Research report, 15/2022). ANROWS.

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, E., Ellard, R., Hew, E., Simpson, M., McCann, B., & Meyer, S. (2023). WRAP around families experiencing AVITH: Towards a collaborative service response (Research report, 04/2023). ANROWS.

<sup>15</sup> Corrie, T. & Moore, S. (2021), Amplify: Turning Up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report), Melbourne City Mission, p21

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p42-45

There needs to be a strong commitment to primary prevention with a focus on generational change and the importance of challenging the attitudes and behaviours that underpin violence. This includes targeted primary prevention and early intervention activities (including education programs and awareness raising campaigns) designed by, and tailored for, young people.

To engage children and young people to create generational change, they need access to information and resources specific to their needs that are designed, developed and delivered with them and by them.

*Resources that are made by children and young people, not for us.*

**- Conor Pall, Deputy Chair, Victim Survivor's Advisory Council**

There are a range of resources available for young people that are intended to provide them with the information they need to understand family violence and support their safety. However, it was identified in the 2021 Amplify Project conducted by MCM and other research that this information had not been designed by them, but for them.<sup>17</sup> Access to the information was also predicated on the idea that young people knew it was family violence and hence knew where to look or how to find this information.

However, young people do not always know that what they are experiencing is family violence, and often do not identify with the materials. There needs to be resources that are developed by young people where they will find them incidentally, and in places they are already engaged with. For example, schools (including through Respectful Relationships and sex education), public transport, services, online, and social media. Additionally, in formats young people identify and engage with, such as TikTok videos.

*Family violence is rarely seen or understood through the eyes of children and young people. We are the ones you leave behind.*

**- Y-Change Lived Experience Consultant**

An example of this includes Berry Street's Y-Change initiative and Safe & Equal co-produced guide<sup>18</sup> designed to help practitioners better support children and young people with experiences of family violence. This resource outlines 10 tips to read and reflect on with practical activities practitioners can use when working alongside young people. In 2023, Y-Change also worked in partnership with the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor to co-produce a child and youth friendly summary of the **Crisis Response to Recovery Model for Victim Survivors**.<sup>19</sup>

**Recommendation 2:** To provide young people with the information they need to understand family violence and support their safety, they need access to information and resources specific to their needs that are designed, developed and delivered with them and by them.

We endorse the government's continued support for schools and early childhood settings to deliver the Respectful Relationships program, however, education and targeted awareness campaigns must extend beyond the classroom. Evidence shows that young people at heightened risk of experiencing or using family violence experience disrupted schooling including early school leaving or avoidance.

Respectful Relationships education must engage with children and young people outside of formal education settings, be tailored to developmental needs, and be safe, inclusive and accessible to all.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p9

<sup>18</sup> Learning from lived experience - a guide for professionals supporting children and young people experiencing family violence (2021), Safe and Equal and Berry Street's Y-Change; accessible at [https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/SE\\_BerryStreet\\_YChange\\_TipSheet\\_03\\_01-REV-1.pdf](https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/SE_BerryStreet_YChange_TipSheet_03_01-REV-1.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Crisis Response to Recovery Model for Victim Survivors; Child and Youth Friendly Summary (2023, Berry Street's Y-Change Initiative; accessible at <https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-05/Crisis-response-to-recovery-model-for-victim-survivors-crisis-child-and-youth-friendly-summary.pdf>

# Provide support for children and young people where, when and how they need it

*Children and young people should have a dedicated, stand-alone family violence service response. The government should fund a meaningful co-design/production project to engage children and young people in designing a service offering that will meet our unique needs.*

**- Conor Pall, Deputy Chair, Victim Survivor's Advisory Council**

The service system must recognise young people as victim-survivors and help-seekers in their own right, regardless of whether they are accompanied by an adult victim-survivor, fall under the statutory obligations of the child protection services or are navigating the service system on their own. This requires the review of organisational policies to ensure young people can access support services independently regardless of age, gender, and nature of family violence experienced.

In doing so, the needs of young people must be decoupled from those of younger children for the purposes of support responses and sectoral and community capacity building. There must be consideration of the developmental needs of children and young people specifically. Youth specialisation (and youth access points and 'front doors') must be included in holistic service integration alongside family violence services, child protection services and other family services.

The need for an intersectional approach to family violence, that recognises that multiple identities and systemic barriers influence experiences, is also of particular importance when working with young people.<sup>20</sup> In an intimate partner context, violence remains highly gendered. However, with other forms of family violence, it becomes less so. Sexuality, religion, racial discrimination, disability, and age are key drivers of the violence young people experience.<sup>21</sup> Further, at times young people also experience gendered violence from a female parent.

**Recommendation 3:** To provide developmentally and age-appropriate responses to young people affected by family violence, policy settings should consider the needs of young people 12-18 as distinct from those of children, and young people 18-24 as distinct from those of adults, to recognise their differing legal rights, developmental stage and service needs.

## Conceptualising Safety

*Children and young people are often not involved or spoken to because of potential and assumed risk, but by not including and speaking to us it can be more of a risk to our safety. We need to be part of building our own spaces.*

*Safe spaces look and feel different for everyone, so asking young people what they need to feel safe and what safety means to us is critical.*

**- Y-Change**

Feelings of safety are a critical element of being trauma-informed<sup>22</sup> and are a key reason young people seek support. Young people have particular ways in which they perceive and experience safety. Support for their families – with the express consent of the young person – is important given they often have a protective role within their families and hold concerns for any family members left behind.

Young people who experience family violence in the home (normally from a parent) identify that they do not feel safe unless they can ensure their siblings or non-violent parent are safe. Many can adopt a protective role in their families and removing that role can escalate the trauma a young person

20 Corrie, T. & Moore, S. (2021), Amplify: Turning Up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report), Melbourne City Mission, pp10-11

21 Ibid

22 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAHMSA) (2014). HHS Publication No.(SMA) 14-4884

experiences. Due to trauma-bonds, they may also want violent family member to be safe, or fear getting help because they don't want to 'get them in trouble.' Where possible and safe, the service response needs to be coordinated and include support for the young person's family. If a young person independently moves away for their safety, there must be recognition within any support service of the context from which the young person is leaving, and the impact on the young person once they are no longer able to play this protective role. No longer being able to retain that role in their families must be recognised as a contribution to further trauma and threat to feelings of safety and needs to inform any practice response.

*It was hard leaving my brothers and sisters and my mum...I wish I could have taken my younger siblings with me but that just wasn't an option.*

#### - Young victim survivor

This protective role is important for young people's feelings of safety and is also one of the reasons they display violent behaviours to divert the violence away from others.

**Recommendation 4:** Where safe, and with the consent of the young person, support needs to be offered to their family or partner as part of a young person's safety planning.

Having a trusted adult is important to feelings of safety and to recovery.<sup>23</sup> This trusted adult could be members of extended family or support workers.

This need was highlighted in the 2021 Amplify research where young people wanted the trusted adult to support them to access their rights and to work alongside them. The trusted adult needs to listen to the young person, allow them time to speak, not speak for, and adopt an approach that reduces the feelings of self-blame.<sup>24</sup> In the Amplify workshops, these were identified as people including support workers, staff at school, sports coaches and extended family. It was also important to address power imbalances in this context. Peer support workers were one such way young people could feel safer that there was "someone on their side".

In Victoria, there are many emerging and well established initiatives that recruit and work alongside young people with a lived experience of socioeconomic disadvantage to inform social, organisational and systems change. This has yet to take off in the same way within the family violence service system context. There is a need for 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. There is a need for appropriate support mechanisms, resources including appropriate remuneration, and training to ensure peer support workers are safe and to prevent re-traumatisation.

*Young advocates need to be paid for their work so that we can meaningfully contribute, or ensure organisations have funding allocated to pay us. We need job opportunities that we are interested in, as well as education and meaningful training and development opportunities so that we can advance.*

#### - Y-Change

Young people have highlighted the significant power imbalance when working alongside adult case workers or clinicians. They find by sharing their stories with young people with lived experience contributes to feeling less alone and provides healing pathways.

23 Moore, T., Arney, F., Buchanan, F., Chung, D., Chong, A., Fernandes, C., Schulze, D. (2020). Practice Brief: Slow down and listen: Improving children's and young people's safety during periods of violence, separation and reunification. Adelaide: Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of Adelaide

24 Kallstrom, A., & Thunberg, S. (2019). "Like and Equal, Somehow" - What Young People Exposed to Family Violence Value in Counselling, Journal of Family Violence, pp. 553-563.

**Recommendation 5:** To help address the power imbalance and engage young people as agents of change, peer support workers need to be considered as part of developing support options for young victim survivors of family violence. This will require the appropriate level of support and training for these peer workers.

## Access points and tailored case-management responses

There is a significant gap in targeted crisis responses and case management for unaccompanied young people experiencing family violence. The reasons for this are a complex mix of lack of clarity on the rights of young people to exercise agency (discussed further below) and the ways in which the family violence, family services, youth services and child protection systems intersect – or rather, do not intersect.

The needs of independent young people as distinct from their parents, carers and younger children must be recognised and subsequent service and program responses developed to ensure access to immediate supports, to promote and secure safety.

While not without its challenges, children and young people under the age of 15 can be placed in supported accommodation with the impacted parent or, as a last resort, in out-of-home care. They can have their family violence risk managed through the specialist family violence service working with the parent.

However, most child protection and family services are not designed or resourced to work with young people over 15.<sup>25</sup> The only service available to these young people are youth and homelessness services, neither of which are designed or resourced to manage complex family violence risk.

This service response gap means youth services are managing substantial family violence risk. Critically, in practice there is no specialised, family violence crisis response or case management program for young people that has a focus on their identities as victim-survivors. This is a glaring gap within the current system including in the specialist family violence services sector and Orange Door Network. To date, there are limited (if any) family violence services for young men who identify as a victim survivor of family violence.

*When I was 16, I was only ever seen as an extension of my mum's experience as a victim-survivor. The Orange Door didn't see me as a victim-survivor in my own right, and as a result, I was locked out of receiving the support that I needed, when I needed it. Young boys and men need support to heal and recover, to be the cycle breakers in their families.*

**- Conor Pall, Deputy Chair, Victim Survivor's Advisory Council**

The need to recognise the importance of youth specialisation and the deep practice experience of the youth services sector has been highlighted by several of the Orange Door practitioners, who to date, have relied on local relationships rather than a systemic focus, with varying degrees of success.<sup>26</sup> The Orange Door's reach and scope of practice needs to be broadened to support young people as victims in their own right – regardless of parental consent or parental engagement. Delivery models such as assertive outreach models and marketing and communication strategies and campaigns must also consider the developmental needs of young people and how they interact with the service system. This will require youth services and specialisation to be included in holistic service integration within the Orange Door Network alongside family violence services, child protection and other family services.

This omission has by no means been by design, and all sectors working with these young people do what they can with what they have. However, it highlights that there is need for a better, more systemic response that must be enabled by the Plan.

<sup>25</sup> Corrie, T. & Moore, S. (2021), Amplify: Turning Up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p25

**Recommendation 6:** To support young people in their own right, youth services and specialisation need to be included in holistic service integration within the Orange Door Network alongside family violence services, child protection and other family services. This requires the Orange Door Network to have a specific youth focus in addition to the child wellbeing roles.

## Responding to young people experiencing family violence and homelessness

*Homelessness can be a punishment for standing up against family violence.*

**- Y-Change Lived Experience Consultant**

*Going back to family violence or unsafe homes should never be an option - family reconciliation and mediation is not always possible or what we want. Work with us and support us to make the best decisions for ourselves.*

**- Y-Change**

A primary causality factor for young people presenting alone to homelessness services remains family violence.

A September 2022 snapshot data capture from 110 young people supported in MCM's youth homelessness programs, found:

- almost 90 per cent of young people experienced family violence growing up in the home;
- 57.1 per cent of females went on to experience IPV; and
- 35.5 per cent of males went on to use violence in their intimate partner relationships.

We are pleased this gap has been recognised and that the Victorian Government has received some funding from the Commonwealth under the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) to develop and trial two youth specific family violence case management programs for 15- to 19-year-olds in existing youth homelessness service providers. The pilots have been funded for two years between 2023 – 2025. These demonstration programs aim to increase the safety and reduce the likelihood of young people experiencing further family violence and should be expanded and rolled out as a state-wide response.

The development of a state-wide youth specific family violence case-management response will mirror similar responses embedded in Alcohol and Other Drugs and Mental Health Services and would support MARAM alignment for the youth and homelessness sector.

## In Focus: Amplify Pilot

The Amplify pilot will provide youth specific family violence case management for young people 15-19 with complex family violence risk that cannot be managed within specialist family violence services or child and family services (addressing the system gap in support- see infographic above). The program will provide targeted and therapeutic family violence intervention and support to young people who are escaping family violence and present alone without a protective parent to a youth homelessness service. This includes young people of all genders, with co-complexities (e.g. substance use, behavioural challenges, disability and mental-ill health) and diverse experiences of family violence (e.g. from parents/carers, siblings, intimate partners and 'chosen family' for those sleeping rough).

As part of the Amplify pilot, a youth specific family violence case management response is under development that brings together a family violence-informed and safety framework and age specific risk factors, and that understands and promotes the agency and rights of the young victim-survivor. This includes a response in which young people have their thoughts and perceptions of safety respected but where the use of specialist family violence risk assessment can moderate, manage, or inform that risk; and a service that sees the young person as a victim survivor in their own right and accounts for the mental health impacts.

MARAM will form the basis of assessment and risk management and the pilot will operationalise delivery of the MARAM in response to presentation of high risk.

There are multiple ways in which a targeted family violence case-management response for young people in their own right will promote safety and reduce the risk of experiencing further family violence:

- ▶ **Young victim survivors will be heard and in control:** Increase in victim survivors feeling supported and understood and who know that the responsibility for the abuse sits with the perpetrator, will reduce the risk of re-victimisation.
- ▶ **Identifies and intervenes earlier to respond to family violence risk:** Young people who access youth and homelessness services with high levels of risk are often unaware that they are experiencing family violence or will minimise the violence because they are fearful of the perpetrator and for the safety of their siblings. In many instances, MARAM assessments occur too late (or not at all) because family violence is not identified or well understood when a young person presents at a homelessness access point.
- ▶ **Immediate safety planning and support:** Due to capacity constraints and the housing crisis, young people who present at homelessness services, may not receive immediate support or a refuge bed and are forced to continue to couch surf, sleep rough or return to violent family homes. Currently, young people who experience family violence and are sleeping rough or couch surfing are at significant risk of exploitation, grooming and drug facilitated sexual assault, especially young women who are offered protection from older men. Targeted interventions including immediate comprehensive risk and needs assessment, safety assessment and planning will promote safety and reduce risk of experiencing further family violence.
- ▶ **Stay safe at home and improved access to alternative accommodation:** Young people may be supported to stay safe at home or facilitate improved access to safe alternative accommodation. This is extremely critical in the context of a housing crisis and the challenges that exist of finding a young person independent housing, therefore forcing many young people to return to live with family.
- ▶ **Increase early identification of family violence risk and engagement of young people using family violence:** There are instances where a young victim-survivor is also enacting harm in their relationship or at home and therefore a specialist case-management response will help to engage these young people and support them towards a behaviour change program, including state-funded AVITH programs or in some cases referral to Men's Behaviour Change Programs where the young person is over 18. Due to a number of risk factors including homelessness and no mitigating influences (e.g. a safe parent), a young person may remain in a violent relationship. Young people often meet and form intimate relationships as part of their experience of homelessness and therefore have similar adverse childhood experiences and histories. In some instances, they are residing in the youth refuge together or are being supported by the same homelessness service. A youth family violence response will ensure a safety lens is applied to their general-case-management response and the risk of violence minimised.
- ▶ **A whole-of family approach:** Where safe and with the consent of the young person, a whole-of family approach that extends or enables supports to their family to recognise the often-protective role young people play, and to their partner in the context of intimate partner violence to help manage their risk.
- ▶ **Increased coordination and collaboration across the system:** The establishment of a youth specific family violence case-management response will build on existing government family violence responses and will ensure young victim-survivors have access to the broader system including recovery, legal and brokerage programs.

### **In Focus: The Aspire Program - Meli<sup>27</sup>**

The Aspire Program will work with 16 to 17-year-old victim survivors of family violence, perpetrated by a parent, guardian or intimate partner, who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness in the Geelong, Colac, Little River, Bannockburn and Teesdale areas. These young people may also be using resistive force in response to their experience. The program may also support young people outside this age group on a case-by-case basis, particularly where there is significant risk. However, the program does not aim to provide any behaviour change interventions.

The Aspire Program will be tailored to the specific needs of young people and the ways in which they are most likely to engage and respond to services. It will respond to known service delivery gaps by providing youth-focussed family violence case management and specialised support services while also building the capacity of Meli's Youth Services, Homelessness and Family Violence workforce.

**Recommendation 7:** To respond to the safety needs of unaccompanied young people experiencing family violence, the youth homelessness and family violence initiatives funded by the National Partnership Agreement need to extend beyond 2025 and be scaled across Victoria.

## Schools

*It was one of the teachers that gave me the language for the first time that what I was experiencing was family violence.*

**- Young victim survivor**

Early school leaving is often a signal that a young person is experiencing family violence and related challenges in staying engaged in education.<sup>28</sup> Research indicates that disengagement from school may also be a signal and compounding factor for young people's use of violence in the home, particularly in contexts where they are experiencing violence as well.<sup>29</sup> Young people also report that there are other indicators that there are challenges at home. This could be arriving at school having not had breakfast, needing material support from school welfare offices, arriving without proper clothing, or going to school when unwell.<sup>30</sup>

Schools are also often uniquely positioned in identifying and responding to family violence as they can know more of the family context than others in the young person's life.

These early interactions can ensure violence is picked up earlier; the ways disclosures and compulsory reports are managed can shape a young person's trust or distrust of services; and the language and approaches used can reduce or add to their understanding that what is happening is family violence and their sense of agency in this context.

Young people report a range of experiences at school when family violence is detected. Some of these are largely positive, including having someone explain to them what they were experiencing was family violence and what options they had. However, disclosure at schools and the need to report child abuse is often managed poorly, with the young person not being told what is happening. This contributes to system distrust, and a sense of shame that their disclosure sets off a chain reaction of events of which they had no say over and which impacts so deeply on them and their families.

*Talk to me before you call human services...I was kid in a room with all of these people I didn't*

27 Meli - the new name for BCYF and Bethany

28 Rosmalen-Nooijens, K. C., Wong, S. L., & Soron, T. R. (2017). Young People, Adult Worries: Randomized Controlled Trial and Feasibility Study for Internet-Based Self-Support Method "Feel the ViBE" for adolescents and young people exposed to violence, *Journal of Medical Internet Research*

29 Campbell et al, above n 16.

30 Corrie, T. & Moore, S. (2021), *Amplify: Turning Up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report)*, p31

*know and I thought I had done something wrong.*

**- Young victim survivor**

*Children and young people should have access to the right age-appropriate supports when, where and how they need it after a disclosure is made at school. Referral pathways need to be embedded within each school, and teachers should support the long-term healing and recovery of young people experiencing violence.*

**- Conor Pall, Deputy Chair, Victim Survivor's Advisory Council**

Schools being prescribed under MARAM, and the implementation of this, is pivotal. As to is the referral pathways available to schools once family violence is disclosed.

**Recommendation 8:** As part of the implementation of MARAM in schools to keep children and young people safe, the Victorian Government and the Department of Education need to consider and develop referral pathways with specialist services to support children and young people once they have elicited a disclosure of family violence. This could be supported through the Respectful Relationships program.

## Youth Accommodation and Housing

Access to safe and secure housing, is a critical foundation of a functioning family violence system and is vital for young victim survivors of family violence. As one young person said:

*Young people who have experienced homelessness, our rights have been violated. We have been made to feel that our rights are non-existent and somehow seem as privileges through the eyes of the sector. Access to adequate housing is a human right, let's not forget that.*

**- Y-Change**

Some may be supported to stay safer in the family home through the development of a safety plan through MARAM. For others, there may be a need for alternative accommodation if staying at home is no longer an option, from crisis accommodation through to longer term housing.

As a group, young people are more likely to experience financial stress and have fewer accommodation options due to affordability and a less rental experience than adults. Young people experiencing violence in the family home are less likely to have the option of remaining in the home while the perpetrator is removed, and are also unlikely to be able take on the financial responsibility of the home they live in.

Enhancing linkages between current housing options and family violence responses is a key factor in providing support, however it does not address the issue of inadequate accommodation options and the supply of social and affordable housing stock. Significant investment is needed to address the gap in youth housing in Victoria.

New solutions are needed where current family violence interventions do not address the needs of young people, across all levels of housing:

**Emergency hotel accommodation:** Motel, hotel and other brokered accommodation is often used where no refuge or emergency accommodation is available, or where the victim-survivor is not eligible. While this is problematic for many reasons, it has particular safety implications in relation to young people. Due to a lack of providers, the accommodation used for this response is often used to broker other people experiencing housing crisis including adults in the homelessness system. This can put those young people who are independent and without accompanying parents at risk of exploitation, particularly those who are vulnerable or new to homelessness.

This accommodation type is not appropriate for young people under 18, but is often used where

no other option exists, highlighting the need for an increased number of crisis beds.

**Youth Refuge:** MCM's Frontyard Youth Services is the only specialist entry point for young people aged 12-24 seeking to access the homelessness services system. In Victoria, there are over 20 youth specific refuges providing crisis accommodation to young people up to the age of 25. These refuges are separate from the family violence system and are funded through Specialist Homelessness Services. As generalist services, the youth refuge system lacks the specialist knowledge to identify and manage family violence risk, especially at the high-risk end of the violence spectrum. Victorian youth refuges are almost all low security, which poses a serious safety risk to those young people who are in danger or experiencing high risk violence. In general, young people, especially young males, are ineligible for family violence refuge in Victoria.

Family violence services often automatically refer those under 25 years to generalist youth accommodation providers with limited (if any) family violence expertise. While this response is intended to provide young people with age-appropriate support, it often fails to adequately manage risk and can put young people in danger. While many adult family violence refuges are improving responses to infants and children where they are accommodated with their mother, accommodating children can become a barrier where those children are adolescents, especially young males.

The family violence emergency accommodation system is also built on a binary understanding of gender, with most family violence refuge options in Victoria only open to women who are victim-survivors. This is increasingly problematic in the context of young people, where victims of parental rather than intimate partner violence are more likely to be across genders. In youth homelessness programs, gender diversity is rapidly increasing, making traditionally gendered services unable to meet all young peoples' needs.

However, there is a substantial gap in relation to emergency housing options for young people with diverse gender and sexual identities. The challenges due to access to age-appropriate options remain, with the addition of being excluded from some refuge due to being male and for trans women that are less femme presenting. LGBTQIA+ young people often experience misgendering, harassment, violence and discrimination in housing support services. Many services and workers have identified that there are limited safe housing options for trans and gender diverse young people and it is often safer for workers to prepare them to sleep rough until something becomes available.<sup>31</sup>

Important to note, young people who have sought crisis accommodation or have been referred as a result of their use of violence in the home face particular challenges in refuge or crisis accommodation settings. This is because, despite being victim survivors of violence themselves, the behaviours that have developed as a result of their trauma - and which may be heightened further in an unfamiliar environment - are more likely to be met with a legal response in settings outside the home.<sup>32</sup> Despite recommendations from the RCFV for specialist crisis accommodation linked to dedicated therapeutic intervention for this behaviour, this has not been made available, with the added complexity of use of violence (as well as experience) not necessarily understood or resourced.

Of additional relevance, where a court orders a young person to be removed from the home in the context of their use of AVITH, currently Victoria's legislative regime does not require a court to consider risk or safety, but only to consider whether the person with whom the young person is placed has a criminal record. Research has shown that this can result in a young person being placed with a grandmother, an intimate partner or an abusive parent - displacing or dispersing the risk, rather than addressing it.

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31 Lacy, D.S. (2018). StreetSmart Australia. LGBTI youth are more likely to experience homelessness. Retrieved from <https://streetsmartaustralia.org/lgbti-youth-are-more-likely-to-experience-homelessness/>

32 Campbell et al, above n 16.

**Recommendation 9:** To respond to the safety needs of unaccompanied young people affected by family violence, the Victorian Government, youth services, family violence services and housing services need to come together to develop and fund short-term crisis accommodation options, particularly for young people 15-19, including implementation for young people using harm in the home. These options should be co-designed with an intersectional lens and responsive to the diverse needs of young people.

**Recommendation 10:** Legislative reform to the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) should require a court to consider a young person and others' safety when ordering them to be removed from the home in the context of FVIO proceedings.

**Longer term housing:** The system of emergency accommodation is not sustainable without the next stage of stable accommodation to assist in recovery and, for young people, community connection and economic participation. These options need to be integrated with wraparound support to ensure that housing and tenancies are maintained.

A long-term lack of social housing stock is well documented in Victoria, especially for independent young people. Dedicated youth housing stock is needed and should be addressed in the Plan through measures to increase the supply of social housing for young victim-survivors of family violence. Specific housing targets, deeper subsidies to ensure viability and other measures to increase access should be considered for independent young people at increased housing risk.<sup>33</sup>

Data analysis conducted by Council to Homeless Persons indicates that there is a need for 5,000 dedicated youth tenancies in Victoria. The demand is drawn from Specialist Homelessness Services Collection data and shows that a high number of young people in the homelessness system present due to family violence. Of the young people supported by MCM's youth homelessness services in 2023, almost 90 per cent had experienced family violence in their childhood.

While we appreciate that a Plan cannot articulate a quantum, lack of supply is a key issue that should be articulated.

**Recommendation 11:** To enable access to accommodation for young victim survivors longer term, the areas of reform as outlined in the [2023 Victorian Youth Housing Framework](#) need to be prioritised. This also involves a dedicated housing target for unaccompanied young people built into social housing policy reform and investment.

## Recovery Responses

As stated in Australia's National Plan to end Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032

*"A child's worldview is shaped by the violence they see, hear and experience each day. These experiences affect their perception and understanding of the world, which can have long-term and ongoing impacts."*

There is a need to build a trauma-informed service system that meets the protective and recovery needs of young people affected by family violence and recognises the high degree of poly-victimisation and the individual and cumulative effects of various forms of adverse childhood experiences on children and young people's short -and long- term wellbeing.<sup>34</sup> The harmful impacts of experiencing family violence during childhood, including an increased risk of suicide, can persist into adulthood if left unaddressed during earlier development stages.<sup>35</sup>

33 Victorian Youth Housing Framework (2023), Melbourne City Mission, The Salvation Army, Kids Under Cover, Council to Homeless Persons, Community Housing Industry Association (Victoria); <https://www.mcm.org.au/ourpublications?publicationtype=Framework&year=2024#content-filters>

34 Meyer, S., Atienzar-Prieto, M., Fitz-Gibbon, K., & Moore, S. (2023). Missing Figures: The Role of Domestic and Family Violence in Youth Suicide - Current State of Knowledge Report. Griffith University: Brisbane, p30

35 Ibid, p15

Young people's safety and recovery needs must be recognised as a specific focus area under this Plan. This needs to be met with a resourced system to refer to and currently there are very limited age-appropriate family violence responses and programs available to support young victim-survivors to heal. An example of a targeted program is the Berry Street *Northern Healing and Recovery Program* which operates in Melbourne's northern suburbs. NHARP work therapeutically with victim survivors of family violence including young people over 15 years with or without their caregiver.

However, the Victorian state-wide therapeutic programs are often delivered by mainstream services focused on women, and young people are not provided access to age-appropriate responses. Some organisations delivering the therapeutic intervention response have determined that they will not provide access to their services without parental or guardian consent or if the young person is not in stable housing. This is particularly concerning in the context of a housing crisis for independent young people who are forced to leave home due to violence perpetrated by their parents or other family members.

Young people need access to flexible, adaptive and integrated responses. The 2021 Amplify Report identified the need for multi-modal options for support, including web-based, one-on-one, peer-to-peer and group work.<sup>36</sup> Young people need the capacity to come 'in and out' of the family violence conversations and services, and support options that recognised and attempted to deal with some of the systemic barriers they were facing. All of which points to a strong need for a multi-disciplinary approach.

There are immediate intervention opportunities that child protection services and non-statutory child, youth and family services, which are often the initial point of contact in the lives of children experiencing family violence, may have. These include identifying risk factors related to their experiences of trauma and risk of suicide and related support and recovery needs of children and young people.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, the Australian Government needs to increase the number of Medicare bulk-billed therapy sessions, increasing the number of subsidised sessions to 20 per year, especially for children and young people living in rural, regional and remote areas.

**Recommendation 12:** To meet the recovery needs of young people affected by family violence, tailored, age-appropriate responses need to be developed and resourced, alongside the mainstream therapeutic interventions delivered across each region in Victoria. These programs need to be accessible to young people, regardless of whether they are accompanied by an adult victim-survivor, fall under the child protection system or are navigating the service system on their own.

## Recognising the Rights and Agency of Young Victim-survivors

*Our rights as an afterthought. We often talk the talk when it comes to children and young people's rights but fail to enact them*

**- Y-Change<sup>38</sup>**

While individual support is important, focus must also be on the external environment that is contributing to the young person's experience and to the barriers that are impacting their safety and recovery. Structural issues such as access to income support, discrimination, and the need for parental consent to engage with services when the parent is the perpetrator of violence, all form part of a young person's experience of family violence.

*We need to shift our perspective away from this idea that young people just need more encouragement or inspiration. It's the inherent barriers in systems that are stopping us from getting access.*

**- Y-Change Lived Experience Consultant**

Existing research has revealed it is a combination of structural, legal and policy issues which exacerbate the vulnerability of young victim survivors and the ability of the system to recognise them as victims in

<sup>36</sup> Corrie, T. & Moore, S. (2021), Amplify: Turning Up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report), p47 and p54

<sup>37</sup> Meyer, S., Atienzar-Prieto, M., Fitz-Gibbon, K., & Moore, S. (2023). Missing Figures: The Role of Domestic and Family Violence in Youth Suicide - Current State of Knowledge Report. Griffith University: Brisbane, p17

<sup>38</sup> Cataldo, M. & Y-Change (2020) We are the ones you left behind: Centering young people with a lived experience in family violence service system reform. Parity magazine, Volume 33-08

their own right.<sup>39</sup>

When young people are identified as perpetrators for having used violence in the home, programs are available that acknowledge their behaviours often stem from trauma, in the majority of cases from their own experiences of adult perpetrated family violence. Yet, when their own experiences of harm go unaddressed while the system responds to their use of violence, the harm can often be exacerbated and compounded.<sup>40</sup>

The policy and legal environment for a young person experiencing family violence in Victoria, which includes an intersection of state and federal jurisdiction, can be complex, ambiguous and at times inconsistent. As a result, young people's agency is often unnecessarily diminished. Most importantly, research has highlighted the complexities of overcoming barriers faced by young people experiencing family violence in understanding and enforcing their rights and the implications this has for service delivery.<sup>41</sup>

**Child protection:** the Victorian government is responsible for the care and protection of children and young people if their parent or guardian cannot adequately care for them. However, while Child Protection have capacity to support young people under 18, those that are 15 years old and over often fall through the gaps, with support and services prioritised for younger children. The subject was also raised during the RCFV community consultations: "Child Protection won't pick up on kids 15 and over unless there are younger siblings."<sup>42</sup>

Adding further challenges, where a young person is 15 or over and is using violence in the home, research has strongly indicated that Child Protection may become involved with the younger siblings, but has no framework through which to support the young person. This in turn can discourage protective parents from seeking help.

Currently, once a young person has reached the age of 17, child protection will not respond to any reports of abuse or neglect at all, unless a protection order or the like has already been granted. In October 2021, a new amendment to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) was introduced into Parliament which would have enabled new child protection reports on at-risk 17 year olds, closing a long-standing service gap. This amendment did not pass and should be re-introduced into Parliament.

For younger children, there are clearer processes, policies and laws that are activated, including direct involvement of the Department of Child Protection and the Children's Court, in some cases, and the right to an Independent Children's Lawyer from the age of 10. Yet, older adolescents who have fallen through the gaps in the child protection system are often forced to leave home and independently navigate a complex legal system.

Capacity to make their own decisions: A significant question often raised by the service system is how to determine when decisions can be made 'for' a young person, 'with' a young person or 'by' a young person.

*Police forcing me to go back home when I had run away and not respecting my agency and sense of safety - while you think where I am staying is unsafe, I feel safer there than at home.*

**- Young victim survivor**

Young people often raise concerns that they are not being heard or believed in terms of decision making that affect their safety and wellbeing. This has been commonly raised in existing research with respect to choice over services and accommodation (where they were staying).<sup>43</sup> In some instances, decisions were made by schools, police, and health services to return young people back to unsafe homes without speaking first to the young person or considering their wishes.

The legal system recognises that as children become older and more mature, they are more capable of

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39 Corrie, T. & Moore, S. (2021), Amplify: Turning Up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report), pp37-40

40 Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020). The PIPA project: Positive interventions for perpetrators of adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) (Research report, 04/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

41 Corrie, T. & Moore, S. (2021), Amplify: Turning Up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report), pp37-40

42 Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) (2016). Summary report and recommendations. Melbourne: Victorian Government pp. 366-367

43 Corrie, T. & Moore, S. (2021), Amplify: Turning Up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report), pp37-40

making their own decisions including decisions about their healthcare, wellbeing and housing. The law recognises that a young person may reach this stage before they are 18 years old, but there is no specific legal age when a young person may be sufficiently mature and capable of making their own decision. These young people are often referred to as 'mature minors'.<sup>44</sup>

According to legal professionals, young people under the age of 18 have the right to make their own independent decisions when they have capacity to understand the nature and effect of their decision. This does not apply if the Children's Court has placed the young person on a court order which means decisions will be made by the department until the young person has reached the age of 18.

In practice, most often a young person's agency is not based on their individual capacity but rather an organisational policy based on age. For example, some organisations have determined that they will not provide access to their therapeutic or accommodation services without parental consent for young people under the age of 16 or 18.

**Recommendation 13:** To uphold the rights of young people affected by family violence, resources and practice guidance need to be developed and provided to services including Child Protection, Child and Family Services, Specialist Family Violence Services and Housing Services that clarify the thresholds for rights and agency for young people including their right to access services and speak about their experience.

**Intervention orders:** Unless a young person is involved in the child protection system or Victoria Police has decided to pursue an application, it is the responsibility of the young person themselves to navigate the legal system and take their family members or intimate partner to court to protect themselves through Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIO).<sup>45</sup>

In fact, while a young person can have an FVIO imposed against them from 10 years old, a young person can only seek the protection of an FVIO in terms of violence perpetrated against them from the age of 14.

### ***At the Age of 10:***

Apply for family violence IVO at 10 years old ✓

Have family violence IVO imposed on 10 year old ✗

Where a young person aged 14 and over does attempt to make an application for an FVIO to protect them from another person's violence, it is a challenging and often lengthy process for a young person to pursue, in particular if the matter is contested by their parent or other family member. In one matter in the 2021 Amplify consultations involving a 16 year old female, the matter took in excess of 12 months for a full FVIO to be granted against their mother, this included seven court dates and a two-day contest hearing.

For young people living in regional or remote Victoria, the task of obtaining an FVIO – especially if the respondent is contesting the matter – is extremely difficult. There are no specialist family violence courts in regional or remote areas, and in communities such as Mildura, Magistrates are on a three-monthly rotation and it is common for multiple Magistrates to be involved in a single matter, limiting the young person's access to justice.

It is important to note, that those using violence against a young person with a disability also use their disability to discredit or undermine the experience of the victim survivor with police and with the legal system.

Further, a contradiction exists whereby, despite the relative maturity required for making an application for

44 Victorian Department of Education and Training (2021) Mature Minors and Decision Making available at <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/matureminors-and-decision-making/policy>

45 Moore, S. (2017) Couch Surfing Limbo: Legal, policy and service gaps for young couch surfers and couch providers in Melbourne's West, WestJustice, p38

an FVIO, Victorian legislation not only allows for a person as young as 10 to have an order made against them, but also does not require any assessment of whether that young person understands it. Research has shown that this can lead to situations where a young person aged 10 – 13, including a young person with an intellectual or cognitive disability, can become a ‘respondent’ to an FVIO, without having any ability to understand or comply with it.<sup>46</sup>

**Recommendation 14:** To address the inconsistencies in thresholds and approaches for FVIOs for young people, a review needs to be undertaken of the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic). This needs to include the ability of legal responses to adequately assess the capacity of young people to understand and comply with civil protection orders, as recommended in the PIPA Report (2020).

**Recommendation 15:** To recognise the rights and agency of young people affected by family violence, legal services need to be provided with greater resources and capacity to work with young people affected by family violence, especially to enable their protection in a FVIO matter. This should include increased funding for specialist youth legal services and integrated into the Orange Door Network.

## Recognising the complexity of young people’s use of harm

Despite a greater community awareness of family violence in general, research highlights a lack of shared conceptualisations around the behaviours that constitute young people’s use of family violence in the home or in their intimate relationships. Accompanying this is uncertainty around the considerations required to assess or manage risk as a result.<sup>47</sup> Research suggests this is because whilst many adolescents who use family violence are victim-survivors themselves, the family violence and legal systems are designed to deal with people either as victims or as perpetrators, but rarely as both. Once an adolescent becomes labelled by the courts or a service as a “perpetrator”, they can be excluded from key supports, such as crisis accommodation because of their use of violence against others.<sup>48</sup> Research also indicates that families may struggle to distinguish between behaviours that are deemed to be part of normal adolescent development.<sup>49</sup>

While considerable research has interrogated the use of intimate partner violence by adults, and growing evidence points to the complexities of adolescent violence in the home (AVITH), the related but distinct use of intimate partner violence by young people has not been as well explored. Further, there are currently no behaviour change programs or services designed to respond to young people who use intimate partner violence in Victoria. While many services may be responding to this amongst their cohort of young clients – and while funding has been allocated to respond to young people’s experiences of violence in two dedicated areas – significantly more work needs to be done in this area.

**Recommendation 16:** To identify different types of behaviours and the experiences which sit behind a young person’s use of family violence, significant capacity and capability building is needed across workforces, including intake and referral points which need to be capable of recognising families with different service needs and experiences.

**Recommendation 17:** To support young people who use violence to heal and change their behaviour, the Victorian Government needs to work with services and young people to develop a service model for responding to the use of intimate partner violence by young people.

46 Campbell et al, (2020), n 16.

47 Campbell, E. (2022) Adolescents Using Family Violence (AFV) MARAM Practice Guidance Project – Review of the Evidence Base Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University, Melbourne, p56

48 The PIPA project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home: Key findings and future directions / ANROWS (Ed.). Sydney : ANROWS, 2020, p2

49 Fitz-Gibbon, K., Elliott, K., & Maher, J. (2018). Investigating Adolescent Family Violence in Victoria: Understanding Experiences and Practitioner Perspectives. Monash Gender and Family Violence Research Program, Monash University

## Childhood trauma is a major contributor to adolescents' use of violence in the home and in their intimate relationships

A significant body of evidence describes prior and ongoing experience of adult perpetrated family violence, both indirectly and directly, as the most significant risk factor for a young person's use of AVITH.<sup>50</sup>

While this may be partly due to “social learning” (where adolescents are exposed to intimate partner violence that they then replay or replicate), research highlights the significant impacts that trauma has on a child's ability to learn, communicate and regulate emotions and behaviour.<sup>51</sup>

Other explanations include retribution-based violence (i.e., acting out towards a perpetrator); protection-based violence (i.e., trying to protect an abused parent), or being ‘coached’ in use of abusive behaviour by a violent parent, particularly in the context of ongoing family law proceedings and system's abuse.<sup>52</sup> Importantly, researchers note that social learning can also occur through observation and replaying behaviours used by elder siblings.<sup>53</sup>

As with the evidence in relation to AVITH, evidence also indicates that experiences of adult perpetrated violence are significant risk factors for the use of intimate partner violence by young people. This can interact with gendered beliefs about relationship roles and experiences of punitive parenting for perpetration of intimate partner violence by boys and experiences of sexual abuse for perpetration of intimate partner violence by girls.<sup>54</sup> The presence of violence in peer relationships has also been shown to be a significant risk factor.<sup>55</sup>

Lack of information before the courts about prior experience of childhood trauma and ongoing experiences of family violence—including its potential impacts on capacity to regulate emotions and behaviour, or to understand and comply with orders—can undermine the effectiveness of service and legal responses.

**Recommendation 18:** To address the drivers of young people's use of violence against family members, assessment for AVITH needs to always include screening for the possibility of adult-perpetrated family violence, including current violence, to inform how any relevant intervention should proceed.

**Recommendation 19:** To adequately respond to needs and risk, police, legal and other service responses need to have access to information about risk across whole-of-family settings.

## Whole-of-family ‘wrap around’ responses

There is a need for ‘wrap around’ responses that can assess and respond to needs and risk across whole-of-family structures.<sup>56</sup> Practitioners have described the limitations they experience when they are only funded to work with young people rather than “look at what's going on in the whole family system”.<sup>57</sup> Whole-of-family support is imperative. This approach can rarely occur within the 6–12 week timeframe funded as part of the case-management service provision models. One of the PIPA project's key recommendations was for services to develop capacity to build trust and engagement over longer-term periods of at least 6 to 12 months, given previous experiences of trauma or wider complexity.

Crucial to understand, a focus on ‘whole-of-family’ responses does not necessarily mean working with

50 Campbell, E. (2022) Adolescents Using Family Violence (AFV) MARAM Practice Guidance Project - Review of the Evidence Base Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University, Melbourne., p2

51 The PIPA project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home: Key findings and future directions / ANROWS (Ed.). Sydney : ANROWS, 2020, p7

52 Campbell, E. (2020); Campbell E (2023)

53 Campbell, E. (2022) Adolescents Using Family Violence (AFV) MARAM Practice Guidance Project - Review of the Evidence Base Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University, Melbourne, p27

54 Campbell, E. (2022) Adolescents Using Family Violence (AFV) MARAM Practice Guidance Project - Review of the Evidence Base Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University, Melbourne, p63

55 Ibid

56 The PIPA project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home: Key findings and future directions / ANROWS (Ed.). Sydney : ANROWS, 2020

57 Campbell, E. (2022) Adolescents Using Family Violence (AFV) MARAM Practice Guidance Project - Review of the Evidence Base Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University, Melbourne, 57

every member of the family directly, particularly where this is not appropriate or safe. Rather, effective responses in this context often take a relational approach, where practitioners work with an individual or some members of a family, while maintaining a focus on the family system as a whole.<sup>58</sup>

Further, AVITH programs need to be mindful of cultural appropriateness: the understanding of AVITH as a distinct phenomenon is based on a culturally, economically and geographically specific family structure in which the adolescent child exists within a fairly restricted and small nuclear family unit. This understanding may not resonate with all people who experience AVITH.<sup>59</sup>

**Recommendation 20:** Continue to expand and appropriately resource evidence-based and trauma-informed AVITH-specific interventions that build capacity for whole-of-family approaches. This should include the capacity to leverage brokerage and clinical leadership to ensure that needs across the family structure are kept in view. It should also include capacity building to support services to manage the presence of ongoing adult perpetrated harm; to work with younger children; and to work with children with disability in collaboration with other appropriate supports. This will require services to develop capacity to build trust and engagement over longer-term periods of at least 12 to 18 months, given previous experiences of trauma or wider complexity.

**Recommendation 21:** Continue to expand and appropriately resource the development of strengths-based and community-led interventions that respond appropriately to AVITH in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. This similarly requires recognition of the extended timeframe over which practitioners must often work to establish and maintain trust with families from over policed or marginalised communities.

## Building upon existing AVITH responses

Beyond the delivery of AVITH specific service interventions, a shared conceptualisation of AVITH must be developed across government and the community services sector. While specialist services are working in expert and sensitive ways to address the complexities of AVITH and the unmet support needs that sit behind it, the absence of a shared understanding across services more broadly can function as a barrier to this work occurring or undermine when it does. As a result, appropriate referrals may not be made, or disciplinary approaches may conflict in relation to decisions being made around relevant service delivery or intervention. Research has indicated that this can include, for example, specialist adult family violence services taking a particularly punitive approach towards a young person, or mental health services taking an approach in which the protective parent is blamed for the behaviour.<sup>60</sup> A siloing of service delivery – or a “relay” in which families are passed on from one service to another – can also stymie the development of shared understanding across disciplines and entrench engagement from exhausted and “overserved” families.<sup>61</sup>

*The WRAP Around Families Experiencing AVITH* project, funded by ANROWS and released in 2023, produced an AVITH Collaborative Practice Framework to start to address this gap in understanding. Already taken up by service systems interstate, this Framework aims to support policymakers, service organisations and individual practitioners to develop a shared understanding and also identify the steps that they can take in order to address this challenge.<sup>62</sup> A strong opportunity exists for government to take the lead in joining service sectors together – including service sectors which are generally funded at a federal level, such as disability – to begin to communicate and collaborate about how to respond to young people’s use of harm. This includes in circumstances where a young person or child may be using harmful behaviours in the context of disability or neurodivergence and where an ‘AVITH’ response is not appropriate at all.<sup>63</sup>

58 Coogan, D. (2018). *Child to parent violence and abuse: Family interventions with non-violent resistance*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

59 The PIPA project: *Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home: Key findings and future directions* / ANROWS (Ed.). Sydney : ANROWS, 2020, p8

60 Campbell, E. (2023)

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

**Recommendation 22:** To start to address this gap in understanding the complexity of young people's use of harm, government should look at and engage properly with the AVITH Collaborative Practice Framework.

## Little attention is paid to the circumstances of young people and their families when a protection order is in front of the court

As noted above, family violence protection orders are often imposed without a formal requirement to assess a young respondent's capacity to understand or comply with the order, either because of their age, or because of other factors. This contrasts with criminal contexts, in which there is a legal requirement to determine a child's capacity to understand. Also, is particularly important given the finding (below) that there are a significant number of young people in front of the court with diagnosed (or psychosocial or cognitive disability).

**Recommendation 23:** To mitigate the risk of criminalisation, legal responses need to assess the capacity of young people to understand and comply with civil protection orders, as well as criminal justice processes. This requires urgent legislative reform, as per the recommendations of the PIPA project (2020).

## There is a high prevalence of young people with psychosocial disability who experience a family violence legal response

Many adolescents facing court for the use of AVITH have a psychosocial disability. This finding is of vital importance when it comes to considering the appropriateness of the current justice system response.<sup>64</sup> In the PIPA Project, nearly 25 per cent in a sample of Victorian Children's Court files had been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), with several having a dual diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as well.<sup>65</sup>

In relation to an adolescent's capacity to understand or comply with an order, including one excluding them from their home, adolescents may be made more vulnerable through limiting their contact with their primary caregiver. This is further complicated, however, when the protected family member is not only the parent, but the carer for a child with a disability who is using violence at home and who may also be left with the responsibility for enforcing the order.

According to YDAS', many young people with a disability are being inadvertently criminalized and/or stigmatised by the family violence reforms, due to disability-related behaviours being responded to as family violence incidents. Conversely, young people with a disability with 'behaviours of concern' or other disability characteristics can mean family violence perpetrators are more likely to offend against them. Too often, young people with NDIS plans are not having them implemented or are being used fraudulently by parent/guardian as a form of abuse and coercive control.

**Recommendation 24:** Invest significant policy attention, inquiry and advocacy into the disproportionate rates of young people with disability coming into contact with the family violence and justice system settings.

Also important to note is the fact that an FVIO application against a young person will not always be heard before a specialist Children's Court Magistrate. Matters instead may potentially be brought before a local Magistrates' Court (sitting in the Children's Court jurisdiction), particularly in rural and regional areas. This can result in a Magistrate without any specialist understanding of young people's needs or neurodevelopment hearing an application for an FVIO against a young person who, by virtue of their age, their disability or the impacts of trauma on their development, has no capacity whatsoever to understand or comply with it.

<sup>64</sup> The PIPA project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home: Key findings and future directions / ANROWS (Ed.). Sydney : ANROWS, 2020

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

**Recommendation 25:** All FVIO matters involving young people should be heard by a Children’s Court Magistrate, even if done so online.

Further, matters involving applications for an FVIO against a young person are often heard at first mention without the young person present. While this is a common practice in order to facilitate the protection of the legal system for the person deemed to be the victim-survivor, this means that courts are often making decisions without important information from the young person – including disclosures of their own experiences of violence. Linking young people with community service support and adequately resourced legal assistance as quickly as possible is therefore crucial, so that the next court mention date can be informed by the young person’s engagement and history.

**Recommendation 26:** Young people need to be linked with community service support and adequately resourced legal assistance as quickly as possible, so that the court mention date can be informed by the young person’s engagement and history.

## Understand and Demonstrate Our Impact

### Strengthen how we measure impact – the ‘missing figures’

We strongly support the need to measure our impact and ensure the right questions are being asked at the right time to be able to accurately evaluate progress.

The impacts of family violence on children and young people are immense but are not well understood, and in many cases, the risk is underestimated and downplayed at critical points of the system’s response. There is a particular lack of evidence on the impacts of family violence (including intergenerational trauma) on death rates of children and young people, especially outside the intimate partner violence lens. There is a disconnection between family violence and suicide in terms of government reporting and data collection. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics ([ABS], 2021) has linked different risk factors to youth suicides in the past years, however, the specific role of family violence has been overlooked. This renders the inherent risks and impacts of family violence on children and young people on life outcomes invisible.

Currently, in Australia, young people’s deaths by suicide sit largely outside the family violence narrative, yet internationally, the association between experiences of family violence during childhood and adolescence and youth suicide is well established.<sup>66</sup> In Australia, limited efforts have been made to systemically examine this relationship however in death reviews and coronial inquiries, the intersecting role of family violence preceding suicide is often ignored altogether or minimised in official reporting.<sup>67</sup>

Policy and practice reforms must recognise the role of family violence in youth suicide to avoid histories of childhood trauma being masked by other presenting issues (e.g., poor mental health outcomes, family, peer and intimate relationships, harmful substance use) at the time of suicide, suicide attempts and suicidal ideation. This may mediate the relationship between youth suicide behaviours and experiences of family violence but might not necessarily be its primary driver.

Future research and evaluation should address the current data gap in identifying the role of family violence in youth suicide. This can occur through the application of consistent coding schemes of police, coroners, child protection, child and youth mental health and other service system data that may not explicitly state family violence but where a family violence-informed coding scheme will allow researchers, evaluators and policy makers to identify the presence of family violence based on other key words and descriptions used in service records.<sup>68</sup>

66 Meyer, S., Atienzar-Prieto, M., Fitz-Gibbon, K., & Moore, S. (2023). Missing Figures: The Role of Domestic and Family Violence in Youth Suicide - Current State of Knowledge Report. Griffith University: Brisbane

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid, p31

**Recommendation 27:** To strengthen how we measure impact and ensure young people do not fall through the service system gaps, research and evaluation, policy and practice reforms need to recognise the role of family violence in youth suicide to avoid histories of childhood trauma being masked by other presenting issues at the time of suicide, suicide attempts and suicidal ideation. This could include establishing a data set on children and young people's deaths in the context of family violence, with a view to evidencing the relationship between young people's experiences of family violence preceding youth suicide, suicide attempts and suicidal ideation.

## Increase opportunities for Victorians to help us improve the system

*Working in partnership with children and young people must be placed centrally to system reform. We hope that one day, our visions for change directly inform research, policy and practice reforms.*

### - Y-Change

We welcome the recognition of the importance of engaging children and young people as agents of generational change and ensuring lived and living experiences of family violence are informing policies and solutions throughout the lifespan of the Plan. Currently, the voices of young people are still overwhelmingly missing from the family violence narrative and reforms in Victoria.

*Children and young people are rarely part of conversations about their experiences of family violence and hard times. We have important stories to share and by not hearing them, people are missing a massive part of the family violence narrative.*

### - Y-Change Lived Experience Consultant

Lived experience needs to do more than inform, and young people's expertise should be central and built in systemically. It also needs to recognise their skills outside of their lived experience that they can and do bring to the table.

There is a need for the right support mechanisms to ensure young people with a lived experience can be meaningfully partnered with in ways that are safe for them, that prevent re-traumatisation and that ensure they are able to have their voices heard and recommendations acted upon. Young people's experiences must be central in family violence narratives, and made visible to specialist family violence services and judicial processes, in order to support opportunities for young survivor advocates to influence policy development, service planning and practice.

An example of good practice is Y-Change's work alongside Take Two's Northern Healing and Recovery Program that provides a space for children and young people to share their experiences of family violence. They had conversations about the importance of listening to children and young people, changes they wanted to see in the broader system, the impact family violence has on their mental health, and what makes them feel both safe and unsafe. These key themes were then captured and documented in a meaningful visual form<sup>69</sup> that can be shared with other young people and organisations.

As an example, this includes continued investment in the training of Magistrates and judicial officers with people who have lived experience at the centre of this training and embedded in the Judicial College of Victoria and the Magistrates Court of Victoria.

Future research and policy making processes should explore opportunities to ensure the voices, insights and recommendations of young people with lived experience of family violence are ethically embedded

<sup>69</sup> Kirra., In our own right, we are leading change (2022), Berry Street's Y-Change Initiative; accessible at <https://www.berrystreet.org.au/news/y-change-amplifies-voices-of-young-victim-survivors-of-family-violence>

into and directly inform research, policy and practice reforms. This should include the establishment of a young person's expert advisory group to support the implementation and monitoring of the Plan's commitments to children and young people.

**Recommendation 27:** To engage young people as agents of generational change, the Victorian Government needs to establish a young person's expert advisory group to support the implementation and monitoring of the Plan's commitments to children and young people.

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