



# Client journey mapping report with men using violence in their intimate partner relationships

# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the people of the Boonwurrung, Bunurong and Wurundjeri tribes of the Kulin Nation who are the traditional owners and custodians of the Aboriginal land of our region. We recognise their continued connection to the land and waters and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. It always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

# Project Advisory Group

This report was written by Tracy Castelino and Lisa French, and The ShantiWorks Team, September 2024.



The Southern Metropolitan Family Violence Regional Integrated Committee appreciate the four agencies that formed the advisory group for this project:

**inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence**

**Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA)**

**Anglicare Victoria**

**Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV)**



**VACCA**  
Connected by culture



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# Introduction and purpose

Journey maps focus on understanding, improving or designing a client's experience of a service system. The main purpose is to see the family violence service systems through the clients' experiences of the various entry points, the transition and touch points and the interventions and responses. The aim of the Project is to enhance the family violence service system in the Southern Metropolitan Area, Victoria<sup>1</sup>, by mapping and learning from clients' experiences, specifically perpetrators of family violence or people using violence in their intimate relationships.

Across Victoria there have been several client mapping projects, all understandably focussed on the experiences of victims-survivors. The Southern Metropolitan Family Violence Regional Integration Committee (SMFVRIC), in partnership with ShantiWorks decided to focus on people using violence in their intimate relationships; the four agencies from the SMFVRIC that formed the advisory group were InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA), Anglicare Victoria, and Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV).

In Victoria there have only been victims/survivors' client journey mappings. These are important pieces of work, however, only part of the whole map. We need to better understand the experiences of people who use violence in their intimate relationships. Whilst there are dilemmas in interviewing men who harm/ed their partners (these will be discussed in the methodology): perpetrators' experiences of the family violence and community service systems are important to better respond to clients as they move through their accountability journey, for survivor-centred practice and to build a more responsive and effective service system.

This small local mapping Project of people who use violence allows insight into experiences of engagement, of accountability, of gaps and strengths in the family violence service systems. It aims to provide knowledge to inform how the current integrated family violence systems are enhancing the accountability, safety, well-being and dignity of clients, and how responses at a frontline, organisational and systems levels can be enhanced. Through this approach, it is possible to understand service delivery, local area integration, and how movement through the sector is experienced by a client. The SMFVRIC contracted ShantiWorks to develop a feminist intersectional client mapping project.



1. The Southern Metropolitan Area of Melbourne covers the City of Greater Dandenong, City of Casey and Cardinia Shire. State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, May 2023.

# Victorian family violence context

This is a brief coverage of research locally and internationally on domestic violence/family violence perpetrators. Research<sup>234</sup> constructs four points relevant for this research project:

1. **The politics of engaging perpetrators**
2. **Accountability and responsibility are a journey and follows multiple, incremental and nonlinear pathways.**
3. **Limited pathways are provided by current family violence service systems – a recurring theme.**
4. **Missed opportunities to deeply engage, connect and hold men to account for harms done.**

## Language

It is vital to note that the landscape has changed since the Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) (2016). There has been a global pandemic that has usurped lives and demanded major changes to family violence service responses, at the same time as systems reforms being implemented. These changes have occurred whilst building local partnerships and coordinated responses, engaging in multiple consultations and bringing forward new terminology, new concepts and new frameworks for practice. This change impacts on practitioners, agencies and communities.

Over the course of the implementation of the RCFV recommendations; language has substantially changed and this impacts on the work. Relevant to this report is the major modification and alterations to our frameworks and practices in Victoria. There has been a shift from *perpetrators* to *people who use violence*. This language and framing are worthy of further exploration as gender is invisible or neutralised.

### Some questions for exploration:

1. **What does this mean for practice?**
2. **What does this mean for systems responses – criminal and civil?**
3. **What does this mean for community coordinated possibilities?**

In this report, we are purposely using each of the terms – people using violence (PUV), men using violence, and perpetrators – as they each are being used in the sector.

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2. Wendt, S., Seymour, K., Buchanan, F., Dolman, C., & Greenland, N. (2019). Engaging men who use violence: Invitational narrative approaches (Research report, 05/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.
  3. Vlasi, R., Ridley, S., Green, D., & Chung, D. (2017). Family and domestic violence perpetrator programs: Issues paper of current and emerging trends, developments and expectations. Retrieved from <http://sfv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/FDV-perpetrator-programs-issues-paper.pdf>
  4. Pathways towards accountability: mapping the journey of perpetrators of family violence – Phase I. Report to Department of Premier and Cabinet Centre for Innovative Justice, November 2016

## The politics of engaging perpetrators

Journeying through the system is a strong metaphor used in the research – we have used it in this small research project with people using violence in intimate relationships. There are cautions with the journeying metaphor as its use in therapeutic work and literature can obscure the serious risk and accountability issues requiring vigilance in this work.

This project noted that there were few pieces of research examining men using violence, their experiences of the harm and the use and engagement with the family violence and other service systems. One of the most valuable ways we can learn about people's lives is by asking them directly with safety and care taking accountabilities. There are reservations when engaging with men using violence in intimate partner violence (IPV) relationships in research on their abuse, their experiences and the service systems.

As there is little research interviewing and undertaking focus groups with people using violence and mapping their journey through our systems this Project contributes to the family violence perpetrator landscape. Understanding the enablers and barriers to getting the supports that people using violence need to address family violence, at the time they need them, with accountability, respect and dignity, requires us to understand their interactions with the Victorian Family Violence Service Systems.

Domestic violence perpetrators' use of systems is a critical space for learning as it can be a critical opportunity for enhanced safety impacts for adult and child survivors and potential for positive changes for the person causing harm.

Research into perpetrators' experiences is limited. Though there has been important research looking at evaluations of perpetrator programs and projects examining the root causes of domestic violence perpetration<sup>5678</sup> there is very little looking at the journey through the service system from the perspective of the perpetrators. This is an important gap in perspective – learning from perpetrators about what works for them, how they use the service systems and how risk and safety management is experienced.



5. Kelly, L., & Westmarland, N. (2016). Naming and defining 'Domestic Violence': lessons from research with violent men. *Feminist Review*, 112(1), 113-127
6. Pathways towards accountability: Mapping the journey of perpetrators of family violence – Phase I Centre for Innovative Justice Report to Department of premier and Cabinet October 2016
7. Fitz-Gibbon, K., McGowan, J., Helps, N. & Ralph, B. (2024) Engaging in Change: A Victorian study of perpetrator program attrition and participant engagement in men's behaviour change programs. Monash University, Victoria, Australia. DOI: 10.26180/26046856

## Perpetrator journeys towards accountability

Perpetrator accountability is essential to enhancing victims/survivors' safety and well-being, to creating a community where domestic violence is not tolerated and demonstrating to boys and men that there are respectful, non-violent ways of being and managing difficult moments, stressors and trauma. People using violence in their intimate relationships make choices to use tactics of harm to diminish their partners, and they can make choices to repair and re-build relationships with respect and safety. Perpetrator accountability is not a point of change rather, recent research and projects state that accountability is a journey that requires scaffolding with monitoring, tracking and holding mechanisms<sup>9,10</sup>. Personal, collective and social accountability through local communities and through co-ordinated government and non-government systems responses offer some success as risk management and victim safety is central whilst held within a local integrated context<sup>11</sup>.

Centre of Innovative Justice completed a three-part project series on perpetrator accountability and interventions, the pathways to accountability, a developing framework of roles and responsibilities of services and systems to discourage the siloed practice; and detailing ways for services and systems to identify, manage and reduce domestic violence risk and lethality through co-ordinated collaborative accountable responses<sup>12</sup>.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV, 2016) highlighted the serious and substantive investment into responding to perpetrators of IPV. The RCFV alongside Victorian research pieces underscored the importance of moving beyond men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs). Research notes the need for multiple pathways for people using violence on the journey to accountability and safety. The journey towards perpetrator accountability and behaviour change requires a multifaceted and collaborative approach, with a commitment to understanding individual pathways to change, and to ensuring that adequate support systems are in place to facilitate long-term behaviour change and attitudinal transformation.

The most recent report by Fitzgibbon et al (2024)<sup>13</sup> continues to reiterate the importance of varied and different pathways and post-program engagement for perpetrators; aligning with other Victorian research that asserts that perpetrators require: more than 20-week men's behaviour change programs for attitude and behavioral transformation; different engagement and levels of support; and ongoing monitoring through connected community assessments and responses.

The research indicates that we need to go beyond MBCPs for accountability. The journey towards non-violent ways of being and relating and responsibility taking for their behaviour can be very long-term and a MBCP is but one point in a journey towards repair and transformation.<sup>14</sup>

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9. Vlasis, R., & Green, D. (2018). Developing an outcomes framework for men's behaviour change programs. Fremantle: Stopping Family Violence.

10. No To Violence and the Men's Referral Service, 2015

11. Douglas, Bathrick & Perry. Deconstructing male violence against women: the men stopping violence community-accountability model. Violence Against Women. 2008 Feb;14(2):247-61.

12. Vlasis, R. and Campbell, E., (2019) Bringing pathways towards accountability together – Perpetrator journeys and system roles and responsibilities, RMIT University, Melbourne.

13. Fitzgibbon et al (2024)<sup>13</sup>

14. Rodney Vlasis, Elena Campbell and Damian Green December 2019. Foundations for Family and Domestic Violence Perpetrator Intervention Systems RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice Stopping Family Violence Inc.

## Limited pathways are provided by current family violence service systems – a recurring theme

The third theme garnered from the Victorian research reviews is the limited pathway offered for support and accountability for people using violence in their intimate relationships. This thin understanding of accountability, where the response/intervention remains narrowly focused on family violence safety notices and intervention orders. The main trajectory followed; Police contact – L17 – Magistrate’s Court – Referral to Men’s Behaviour Change Program, rarely with coordinated risk management and follow up throughout this timeline. Whilst there are multiple possible pathways into family violence men’s case management and MBCP, service systems seem not to proactively undertake risk assessments or family violence responses.

This gap was noted in the RCFV (2016) where insufficient service coordination between agencies in sharing risk and lethality information about perpetrators is not openly shared and therefore this limits systems risk management, safety and well-being changes for victims/survivors, PUV accountability and responsibility taking.

## Framework for the project and methodology

ShantiWorks uses a feminist participatory action research (FPAR) methodology and follows the principles of this when working with people using violence. These include:

- **Centring the most oppressed and treat everyone with respect.**
- **Acknowledgement and recognition of the distinctive rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; the importance of cultural safety frameworks.**
- **Utilising a focus group approach to gather thematic across people’s lives rather than focusing on individual stories; linking the complexity of individual lives – there is no universal family violence perpetrator.**
- **Concentrating on what matters to participants and understanding their knowings and current experiences.**
- **Noticing risk management and accountability systems gaps for perpetrators.**
- **People using violence rights to access information enabling them to make informed decisions; providing choice, control and agency over their lives and future.**

A dignifying space was created for participants and our team took care with knowings about the tendency of success and victim narratives being presented by the men; we held stories and examples shared and took care of potential risk (blatant, potential or escalation) however this project was not about changing behaviours but about learning about men’s access and journeying through the family violence service system.



Working with male domestic violence perpetrators is a tension; there is a focus on engaging them with dignity whilst managing the risk they pose and accountability mechanisms. The research team all have practice expertise and therefore stepped into the interviews and focus groups with particular cautions:

- Focus groups are not therapeutic or educational groups for perpetrators however risk is dynamic and therefore assessments of safety are continuing;
- Uncertainty on whether perpetrators provide reliable versions of service engagement and response and self-assess their abusive behaviour accurately, their changes, their use and experiences of family violence services; and
- Dynamically assessing whether partners and ex-partners, require support and contact during and post the research interviews.

Perpetrators may withhold information or be more inclined to tell 'success' stories which position themselves as reformed, changed and compliant, due to perceived risks about what might happen if they don't. As demonstrated in this research, not being seen to be compliant and positive about systems of power and services received carries particular risks for some perpetrators (Aboriginal men and migrant men) for example, being framed as a problematic client, threat of not returning home or seeing their partners and families. Given this, it is important that practitioners working directly with perpetrators understand this and encourage perpetrators to talk about these issues without fear of repercussions.

### The overarching aims for the project:

- To identify the access, engagement, and overall experiences of the family violence service system for people using violence within the SMFVRIC.
- To understand the perceptions and experiences that people using violence have had with the family violence service system.
- To explore the supports that assisted people using violence to change attitudes and behaviours that contributed to family violence.
- To consider how effectiveness might be better conceptualised and assessed with regard to the impact on people using violence and their families, their lives, their relationships and their choices.
- To expose gaps in safety assessments, support, and interventions – immediate, ongoing and long-term.

In the set-up of the focus groups, ShantiWorks stepped through a number of considerations to hold safety, risk and wellbeing concerns for participants and for their families – see *Appendix 1 – Set Up Guide For Facilitators*.

Through analysis of the findings from the client experience mapping, areas for system improvement are recommended by identifying key pain points; gaps and barriers; and highlight examples of good practice. It aims to provide crucial knowledge to inform future strategic system focus, how best practice can be sustained and adopted by organisations and opportunities for coordinated community risk and safety interventions.

The questions developed to ascertain the experiences of the family violence service systems by men in this project can be read in *Appendix 2 – Questions We Asked Men – Version 1*.



## Criteria to participate in this project

The following criteria was used to recruit participants into this project:

- Be aged 18 years and over.
- Be engaged with a men's behaviour change program or case management.
- Participants of the program and ShantiWorks facilitators have an agency contact for any follow up that is required.
- Men, or people who identify as male, and who admitted to using violence.

## Participants

This is a small client mapping project, 13 men participated. Participants were men aged 18 years and over who are receiving response and support from services in the Southern Metropolitan Melbourne Area for using violence against their intimate partners (current and previous) and children.

**Gender and relationship context:** All participants were men and were in heterosexual relationships.

**Race locations:** 5 migrant men of colour, 1 Aboriginal man and race locations of the remaining participants not named.

**Fathers:** 6 men named that they had children.

## The limitations of Western framework

*“History frames our cultural identity and is important for it can reveal the values we bring to our teaching, and subsequently how these influence classroom practice. Many of the everyday choices a teacher makes are mediated by their cultural values. This includes resource selection, teaching strategies, ideas about behaviour management, interpretations of (and assumptions about) students and their backgrounds, and the relationships they build with students on this basis. History is foundational to how we think of ourselves in the present.”<sup>15</sup>*

Aunty Jean Phillips and Jo Lampert assert the significance of our cultural frames for teaching, research and community learning and engagement. Whilst we attempted to take care of cultural safety with this small research project we made mistakes. Our settler frameworks were invisible to us and therefore our methodology had limitations:

- We consulted with Aboriginal colleagues, but we did not work with them to develop the interview questions or the process for focus groups;
- We used western frameworks of interviewing and project design rather than sit with VACCA colleagues and develop a cultural safe, respectful and grounded process;
- We expected Aboriginal men who continue to live in colonised and racist lands to come and speak for one hour about their lives; and
- We did not appreciate the story telling experience is more important than just answers to interview questions.

Given the systemic racism experienced daily for Aboriginal and First Nations families, trust building with Aboriginal workers was critical in taking care not to increase risk and lack of care meted out by government and non-government systems.

VACCA colleagues/workers generously stepped into a focus group with us to share their knowings and realities of the service systems, and how this impacted men from Aboriginal communities. In response to these reflections, the focus group questions were revised – see *Appendix 3 – Questions We Asked Men Version 2*. We were not governed by time and an ordered process: we sat with VACCA colleagues for 2.5 hours talking, listening and exploring working with Aboriginal men with dignity and accountability practices.

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15. Phillips J and Lampert J, 2012, *Introductory Indigenous Studies in Education. Reflection and the importance of knowing*. Pearson, Australia.

# Themes and learnings identified

With feminist action research methodology, the questions offered to men create an opportunity to hear from men their experiences of the family violence systems' responses in the Southern Metropolitan Area: it is not problematising or judgemental. As interviewers we did not critique men's responses, we opened up space for them to reflect on their responses in the moment and for others in the focus group to extend on the issue they brought forward.

We know this is a small data set, but it is a beginning contribution to this new space of hearing from perpetrators about their journeys through a revised and reformed family violence system. The methodology is purposefully used to bring forward rich, meaningful narratives from men and it is hoped that this piece of research will be combined with the other local projects, alongside client journey mapping projects with victims-survivors to build a Victorian picture of key learnings to better strengthen family violence service systems for victims-survivors and perpetrators, their families and the communities in which they live.

Quotes from participants and workers are provided with detail and context below, to give a full-bodied experience of the various stories of family violence, harm doing and systems' caretaking's. The themes that emerged from the conversations are not discrete. They are interwoven and offer ideas about how we can create coordinated interventions that increase safety, accountability and support options for people using violence and their families.

Four themes emerged from the focus groups noting alignment with the key gaps and issues documented in the research.

## **1. Seeing men's humanity and not losing sight of the threat they pose**

- a) Respect is more than being nice
- b) Naming and challenging abuse - "get the fluff out of the way so you can get things done"
- c) Shame – expanding systems' understandings of shame

## **2. Men defining domestic violence – the incident**

## **3. This is not a new theme – still working in silos**

- a) Blunt contact
- b) Safe enough – job done
- c) Service systems not designed for safe passage - moving beyond individual treatment models and men's behaviour change programs

## **4. Skilled engagement**



# I. Seeing men's humanity and not losing sight of the threat they pose

Seeing men as whole people, connecting with them in humanising ways without losing sight of the harm they have done and the risk that they pose is a critical principle for social and individual transformative change, based on Domestic Abuse Intervention Program (DAIP)<sup>16</sup>.

Through the focus groups men did not deny domestic violence, they emphasised how they were treated, and how they anticipated being treated. The men highlighted:

- a) **Respecting them meant more than being nice**
- b) **Being upfront about domestic violence/family violence**
- c) **Guilt and shame as part of the journey**

## **a) Respect is more than being nice**

From the first contact with the family violence system (whether police or the Orange Door or a community organisation) men were wary of how they were perceived. Respect for men, for men's family and culture mattered for men to feel respected and to remain engaged in programs and interventions.



*“So, they treated me... like that I'm a donkey....as if I don't know anything but to be honest.... from my culture or people from my culture we are as intelligent and knowledgeable... as educated as people in Japan....Australia...America....” Ramat*

In contrast:



*“As an example, one time, we, in our culture, we had a new year festival and things, so I have to engage with those things, and I explained to my teachers about my needs, and they respected that.... and they gave a chance to me to meet up later for the requirements in group....So I felt that, yeah, they do respect our culture.” ABC*

Respect practices and doings were shared by VACCA workers in the focus group: they highlighted that respect did not mean not talking about the family violence issues, in fact it meant creating space to discuss the family violence and safety and risk management plans. VACCA practitioners were clear that they would be with the men on their whole journey – as journey walkers it was their role to guide the men and move with them so that the whole family was safe.

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16. Creating a Process of Change for Men Who Batter Curriculum Package. DAIP.



*“Respect doesn’t mean liking each other...it’s about working together. Elders do a talk with us....we listen...it is more than just words. Settlers need to understand what we want from the space.....what our clients want in the space to trust us to speak. It’s not just ticking boxes – it’s consultation with Aboriginal peoples, from the beginning of the idea and the Project. Clients do not walk out with nothing...if they come to us....they do not walk out with nothing, they are:*

- *Listened to*
- *Referral*
- *Supports*
- *Connections to someone*

*We need to relate to them, not patronise them” VACCA workers*



*“Actually at inTouch when I start that course I think I felt like I was an empty person because I didn’t know a lot of things about those relationships and changes in of my behaviour. And I learned a lot of things in that 20 weeks. They tried to hear our story, our side. You know, .... yes, we did the wrong thing, but we need to repair that. We need to your help. What we did wrong, where did we go wrong...? How are we gonna stop in the future?*

*That’s the thing...the help... we’re looking from them. Not the blaming us. It’s okay, blame, you know, we expect that yes, I did the wrong thing I got the punishment for that. I expect that.” ABC*

Men, like ABC and Ramat spoke about respect meaning “being treated like a human being, not a monster” and “repairing the wrongs...learning”.

## **b) Naming and challenging abuse - “get the fluff out of the way so you can get things done”**

John and ABC spoke about blunt honesty “helped them know the problem, feel shame and then work on what needs to get done... to be a better partner, father....family....”



*“She (worker from Anglicare) was very upfront through the whole program, like I know she is in communication with all the other services, and she knows everything that’s going on, which I’ve also found was a strength because there wasn’t any like tiptoeing around certain things. It meant that we could dedicate more time to treatment, where in other cases you can spend a lot of time just like, you know, okay, tell me your story. It’s like, well, okay, you read my file, you already know my story. So yeah, we’re already one step ahead and it’s like, I don’t need to feel like I’m hiding anything, you know everything.*

*So, it means we can get down to the important things. And get down to my behaviour and get down to treatment. And that’s what’s important. So, I feel the program really focused on that goal.*

*You get all the fluff out of the way so you can get things done.” John*

### c) Shame - Expanding systems' understandings of shame

Through the focus groups, the issue of men entering the family violence systems and being worried about judgment, de-humanising treatment and responses emerged. Shame for harms done, shame for encountering police, child protection and shame for being like and with other men who are perpetrators was an echoed experience.

If we are wanting to do non-judgemental, non-shaming work, we cannot do this ethically if it uses practices of shaming men, rather, it is the role and responsibility of workers to offer safe passage to assist men in discovering and facing the inevitable experience of shame because of the effects of his abusive practices<sup>17</sup>.

In responding to men who have used violence in their intimate relationships, there is a need for service systems to deepen our understanding of shame as it is experienced and enacted within a domestic and family violence context. As workers and services, we need to be skilled at distinguishing between *shaming* and *facing shame*. When a man faces shame, he comes to his own realisations through recognising a contradiction between his ethics and his actions. By contrast, shaming others is a political act, an attempt to coerce or compel<sup>18</sup>.

Men in the focus group spoke about how systems employ shaming practices when they colluded together without offering opportunities for help and safe passage for repair or seeing the man only in a thin description as a perpetrator.



***“No one, even police thought to tell me, no one told me to you know, find accommodation or whatever. I was totally helpless and even like, for me, it was a shame to share with my friends as well that this kind of incident happened”.*** Proc

***“As soon as systems know that a man is Aboriginal, they are red flagged and something is going to be watched with all security around”*** AJ

Although people using violence must have agency in telling their stories of their lives in their own ways, sharing stories or admitting to using violence against their intimate partners and family members carries stigma and shame in ways that other stories do not, therefore, there are risks that accompany the telling of these<sup>19</sup>.

In addition, the risks are not equally weighted to all men using violence. Systemic racism and discrimination labels and limits Aboriginal and First Nations men, and migrant and men of colour creating barriers for engagement and increases risk for all family members.

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17. Jenkins, A., 2005. Knocking On Shame's Door: Facing Shame Without Shaming Disadvantaged Young People Who Have Abused. In M. C. Calder (Ed.), *Children and Young People Who Sexually Abuse; New Theory, Research and Practice Developments*, London, Russell House.
  18. Shame, Realisation and Restitution: The Ethics of Restorative Practice. September 2006. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy (ANZJFT)* 27(3)
  19. The Complex Pathways to Violence in the Home Better understanding male domestic abuse perpetration (Final Report, October 2021). Dr Kerry Ellis Devitt, Dr David Coley, Matthew Hockley, Jess Lawrence (Interventions Alliance), and with freelance support from Dr Sarah Lewis (Penal Reform Solutions).



## 2. Men defining domestic violence - the incident

Men rarely used the term ‘domestic violence’ but instead employed a set of colloquial terms to describe their behaviours and harms done<sup>20</sup>. Questions were posed to explore what the incident was and how had facing up to the incident impacted their lives, relationships and family.

They admitted to “the incident”. Often there were no details about the incident, there was no context, or no threading of other incidents or experiences of abuses or coercive control. There were no details offered by the men, and when asked, they were often reluctant to provide descriptions.

Jenkins (1990, 2009)<sup>21</sup> and Pence and Paymar (1993)<sup>22</sup> note the importance of detailed descriptions of the acts of harm as a way to critical empathy, reparation and movement towards self-transformation.

Whilst most of the focus group members accepted that they were primarily responsible for domestic violence, they also emphasised that women could play a part in provoking violence and could also be perpetrators and that they too contributed to the family violence, for example - that it was a bad time where there were lots of arguments and then “the incident” happened. Responsibility taking is in the details of the story by the men as it offers perspective and reality checks.

This term, “the incident” highlights the current landscape of Victorian family violence system interventions. There is a threshold for intervention by the service systems and it is known as the incident: police are called by a neighbour because there is a violent argument or an assault. Men spoke about “not knowing why this time the police came...but they did...” The incident seemed to be understood as some external person determining that the situation was abusive and violent, the family was not safe enough and therefore systems’ interventions were required.



**“So, it was so a little incident that happened at the end of last year and from that incident I had child protection involved with my case because I’ve got full custody on my two kids.” Jeff**

**“So, with me it was an incident back in 2022. My incident obviously it calls me to go to jail in the end.” Jay**

**“There was an incident that happened. Last year in the city on a night out on a day out with my partner.” Dave**

20. Walker, K., & Goodman, S. (2017). How do intimate partner violent men talk about self-control? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(9), 1315–1331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515588537>

21. Jenkins, A. (1990) *Invitations to Responsibility: The Therapeutic Engagement of Men who are Violent and Abusive*, Dulwich: Dulwich Centre Publications and *Becoming Ethical: A Parallel, Political Journey with Men Who Have Abused* - Russel House Publishing 2009 [Jenkins, Alan](#)

22. Pence, E., & Paymar, M. (1993). *Education groups for men who batter: The Duluth model*. Springer Publishing Company.





*“So, people do mistakes, right? So that’s why this thing happened, and no one is perfect in this world. So, I’m still worried about this thing happening because I feel they are always one sided I mean. I always I feel that only I am wrong. So, my wife is violent back, of course. But those facts were never told. But she is the one who initiated everything and provoke me for violence or something like that.” Proc*

This definition or understanding of family violence incidents concerningly means that the service system stops intervening when the risk is paused e.g. police remove the threat, the situation is safe enough, the man is referred to or goes to a MBCP. From conversations with the men in this project, the services are inconsistent in their responses to men. This highlights the misalignment with service system goals to provide safe and accountable pathways throughout the family violence service systems for perpetrators.

### **3. This is not a new theme - still working in siloes**

This CIJ research projects and the completion of the RCFV recommendations did not bare changes to the service system experience by the PUVs: the men interviewed did not notice a more nuanced and complex understanding of their problems and the support and interventions required to resource them and their families.

The men in the focus groups generously shone a light on the theme of the lack of service contact points in a fluid and accessible way. This is not a new service system problem. The family violence systems reforms were to remedy this siloed practice responses. As noted in the CIJ (2018) Report<sup>23</sup> and FSV (2022) perpetrators were hard to involve in family violence interventions voluntarily. Further, predominantly MBCPs was the only option given and as such there were multiple missed opportunities for supporting men in their families in their communities.

The Victorian reports showed that even with the RCFV and the massive systems reforms there was still limited contact with the Orange Door, and MBCPs, and then a decline in service connection or a complete disengagement.



#### **a) Blunt contact**



*“At court, the lady from Legal Aid, she was helping me, but she only really said good luck, look this could be the outcome or whatever. But no, I didn’t really have anyone. Also, the lady at the front desk at Dandenong court, she kind of helped me a little bit.” Dave*

Like Dave, other men mentioned that help stopped after the intervention order was handled, or the court process was complete. Men in the focus groups talked of the harsh and blunt contact with the family violence service systems: police involvement and intervention orders served and then limited to no follow up or assistance.

23. Centre for Innovative Justice's (CIJ). (2018). 'Bringing pathways towards accountability together Perpetrator journeys and system roles and responsibilities' (pp.11-13)



*“I think what they can improve is by providing us pathways. Explaining the process to us because what I felt on that night when I was taken to police station and then after the whole procedure, it was midnight, roughly one o’clock or something...the police came home with me. They let me pick up my car and some of my belongings. And then I was asked to leave. I was given the orders and then I was left stranded. I slept in my car on the night as well because it’s a weird time and I wasn’t able to get any motel or something. So, you’re left stranded, and you are confused.” Robbie*

*“Lot of guys end up on the street,...they have nothing, sleeping rough, don’t get FSPs - program not funded to help them get a house, get furniture, - not the way to treat these men....they are still entitled to something.....” VACCA worker*

In the focus group with VACCA colleagues, they shared their culturally safe and respectful practices with their communities. Proactive engagement and outreach using a systemic approach is their local solution. At VACCA the roles are entitled – journey walkers.

### VACCA workers spoke about:

- *‘There is “no wrong door” with us.... clients can self-refer at any time to access more support if required.*
- *‘Clients always leave with something...even if it’s a meal, ....or being listened to....’*
- *Meeting outside the office, makes the engagement more personalised...the men have said they feel seen.... like we the workers are “part of their space”. When visiting in the home, workers said they can “see other ways that we can help....you know for example we notice that there’s not enough bed linen, food, clothes.”*

Coordinated, cross-system collaborative engagement and outreach may have an added benefit of helping to build the family violence capability of professionals within these touchpoint agencies to monitor and track perpetrators as well as provide them with an opportunity to make a journey towards repair and accountability.

## **b) Safe enough – job done**

Men spoke about no dignifying or safe passage through the family violence systems; they had to learn to navigate the service pathways themselves, be proactive in their help-seeking, and persist if they wanted more or different support. There was little clarity about the MBCP process and how these programs fit within a web of accountability interventions. Often these initial family violence contact actions/interventions were the end point of service support. There was minimal detailed contact or support.



*“In December the court give me an intervention order. So, then I had to find a separate place to live. So, you know, I was in my car for nearly 6 days at a car park and I was not told by anyone that I have to find temporary accommodation. How it happened was the day after court I returned home. So that was a breach of you know the court order. Actually, I did not do it intentionally. But I had had no contact from anyone to help. I’m working at a restaurant, you know, casual basis for 4 days. So, I return home and, on that day, actually my wife again informs police so they on the following day came and asked me to leave immediately, so I packed everything and went. So, from that day I was in my car for 6 days then I found a place to temporary accommodation.” Proc*



*“But if they don’t do anything, you shouldn’t just separate this family. You have to put someone else in the middle of this family to help and to fix the problem. It’s not fair to separate them first without any help.” Max*

*“I think that having support even after the program has finished will go a long way. Because a lot of people, they get the support for the 20 weeks that they’re doing it. But then most of them feel that they no longer have that support or that assistance behind them when they finish. I think just letting them know that it is still there, and they do have those options would help in a big way.” Jay*

This last quote above by Jay is consistent with some of the research identifying ongoing support post-MBCPs is required for men to sustain and extend on learnings from program to application in relationships, and to maintain visibility of risk<sup>24</sup>.

The Orange Door was mentioned once throughout this small research project. The absence of discussion about The Orange Door is worthwhile noting given this was a newly developed service response pathway coming from the RCFV reforms. The one mention, noted below by Jay, showed limited understanding of its role and purpose. Jay, described his experience of having to navigate the services by himself and persist if wanting further support:



*“I guess it was just a phone call with them. It was just to say, look, I’ve been referred here because this is what’s happened. They said to me, give a little bit of the story and then they ask where are you, what services do you think you might need, and then they give you a call back. That might have taken them about 10 days, but they called me back and said, look, this is who we would recommend to go through. It was like a choose your adventure effectively.” Jacob*

Through these examples and gaps in service responses identified in the literature, there is a need for services and workers to provide men with clear information about pathways for support and change such as MBCPs, as well as other help options such as legal and housing, so that a man knows what he could expect when he is contacted or calls for support, the process about if he is required to attend a program, the process for abiding by intervention and court orders, the process for managing safety and family wellbeing.

Locating relevant and local help for perpetrators of domestic violence was considered a problem. One man described being taken to the police station in the city and after being processed, then just being told to leave whilst still intoxicated and having to source his own way home and accommodations for the night and he didn’t know what to do:



*“The night I was arrested I was very intoxicated. They (police) still let me out when I was drunk... they still let me out when I was drunk and it probably would have been nice if a third party come and offer something. To give me some guidance because when I left, they just let me out when I was drunk still and I obviously wasn’t allowed to go home, so I had to find my way from the city to my sisters and she lives a long way from the city. I think it would be nice if I could get some sort of help, maybe not at the police station, I don’t know that’s different, but yeah, I think the hospitals and stuff would be a good idea. The police were really helpful. I think that they were just more worried about charging me and stuff than, you know my health and safety or whatever or even the safety of others to know what I could have done when they let me out.” Dave*

24. Fitz-Gibbon, K., McGowan, J., Helps, N. & Ralph, B. (2024) Engaging in Change: A Victorian study of perpetrator program attrition and participant engagement in men’s behaviour change programs. Monash University, Victoria, Australia. DOI: 10.26180/26046856

Another man spoke about hearing about MBCP from a cell mate rather than by any referrals or proactive interventions within systems:



*“I was recently released from prison and while I was in custody I had one of the other inmates talk to me about to a men’s behaviour program or he done one. So as soon as I got out within the first week of release, I was online googling it, trying to find a service near me. He had highly recommended it, and he said it was one of the best things he’d done, and it helped him turn his life around. I figured if it could work for him, there’s a shot that’s gonna work for me. Anglicare were the first ones to get back to me. I’d contacted about three different groups. They had the first availability to start. So, with Anglicare being able to start the program sooner rather than go on a waiting list, I wanted to get in with the first available group that that could fulfill my needs.” Tom*

Another man spoke about there being no conversations about programs or support available for men using violence before or during time when he was incarcerated, it was only until post-release this was explored:



*“No, no there wasn’t and information during that time (when incarcerated). It wasn’t until I got released. So, once I got released from prison onto a corrections order, they obviously sat down and explained everything that I was going to have to do. They told me the different services I could go through to do it. So, they were very helpful at that point, just nothing before.” Jay*

Men spoke about the first point of contact or response as being punctuated or often being the end point. For instance, men shared multiple examples of:

- **Police removing him from the home, family, and situation**
- **Court orders with conditions**
- **Referral options**

A strong message from participants was that there was blunt contact and intervention by the service system and then it ends with little resources or support. Men spoke of feeling lost and not knowing the next steps for themselves or their relationships or their families.



### c) Service systems not designed for safe passage - moving beyond individual treatment models and men's behaviour change programs

As noted in the literature review there is the usual trajectory followed; Police contact – L17 – Magistrate's Court – Referral to Men's Behaviour Change Program, rarely with coordinated risk management and follow up throughout this journey timeline. The literature covers pre and post RCFV and the reforms, and thus the lack of clear, safe and accountable passages towards accountability seems a transient issue. In this focus group project, the lack of tracking and engaged assessment and support with men along their family violence journey was highlighted. Most men shared opinions about the limited information about, and availability of services for people using violence that was not conducive to those who sought help. They spoke about a focus on the justice system as being a limited response.

In addition, men in the focus groups did not name supports or programs other than MBCPs which exposes the limitations of our service system mindset. Quite a few of the men discussed issues related to housing and homelessness and the lack of service provision or support in this area. Men noted limited counselling support, assistance and pathways for struggles with substances or trauma. Men and advisory group workers noted the narrow and well-worn path of MBCPs, with the family violence services systems not seeing men in the complexities of their contexts. Given that homelessness, struggles with mental health, substance use, and trauma are all such a significant part of the typical journey it has huge implications for the safety and wellbeing of all involved, perpetrators and victims.

Men from migrant communities and workers from VACCA who represented men from Aboriginal communities, spoke about the absence or scarcity of availability of mainstream services specifically designed to meet the unique cultural needs:

- At times no interpreters or bi-cultural workers.
- No consideration of other communication options.
- Lack of cultural care and safety in the interventions – interventions only offered from an office space rather than workers going to the man and his family and community.



*“The office is too clinical, men (and women) are too uncomfortable – it’s seen as an interview, a corporate environment”.* VACCA worker

One man spoke about his experience with the police:



*“Okay, so the experience with the police it was horrifying and also being face to face with the police because they perceive me or my community as being Hazara, or where I come from, or they perceive me like in a racist discriminatory way, like, okay their country is destroyed so probably they’re not a proper human being. The police don’t even think we know about simple things.” Max*

*“Prison is not supportive of Aboriginal prisoners – no, not much at all.” G*

Men also stated that having more diverse and representative staff at all agencies would help them to feel more understood, more comfortable, and more likely to be treated fairly when seeking services. They also believed having more representative staff would help them relate better and get more helpful feedback because they would be understood, in the context of their community, faith, culture.



*“These guys aren’t born bad; they have come up through hell and high water. I was brought up in the system and relate to that trauma. At some point in time, you need to stop blaming for what happened back then, when we were kids. A time comes, do I continue to blame them, the Department that hasn’t changed in 60 years, it wasn’t them that made those decisions back then. It comes to a fork in a road, sink or swim, am I going to keep blaming someone for the rest of my life or do I need to take accountability. Even with trauma and pain, can’t keep blame.”*

VACCA worker

When talking with men, it was important to them that help for the whole family is considered and offered, and that cultural safety practices are understood with depth, rather than tokenistic gestures like “ticking boxes”; “in mainstream services, it’s all about ticking the box, it’s all training modules online, don’t take note of what is being presented.” (VACCA worker).

The notion of families is an important consideration for men from Aboriginal and migrant communities, as they spoke of family and community. Whilst there were times where their responsibility for the harm and hurt was obscured, there was also a strong concept of helping the whole family.



*“VACCA has supported me hugely. Like my health, alcohol and drug use, family connections, financially as well.” G*

*“Here in the system, perceives everyone like coming from different cultures, so then that means that they have to hear from them. They have to meet them, invite them, include them in the decision-making, and also it shouldn’t be black and white that family should be separated. Here, the child has to go to a foster parent or taken care by government. And, unfortunately, what happens is the child is separated from the parents and especially if they’re from another culture or a different bringing up the problem or any culture doesn’t matter the culture... What happens is really traumatic for the child. Some of the damage is made to the child. It’s not gonna be, repairable in future. So, everyone shouldn’t be like treated the same. Everyone should be understood, included, and also their point of view.” Ramat*

*“...wrap whole service around families if they want to stay together. If they don’t, let’s find a way they can part company respectfully without being toxic, horrible or with violence and let’s not let the children see this...” VACCA worker*



In contrast to mainstream service system responses, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, migrant and refugee communities, and communities that have been marginalised, an all of family response is often a beginning point and a central underpinning ethic of connection and work.

There are learnings for mainstream services in how to offer support beyond current limitations they often impose on themselves. Client-centred and family-centred responses require workers and systems to go beyond western framings of help and support to listen and learn from communities they are working with. Some examples were offered where good practice was noted, although it was identified that this was more at an individual worker level rather than a consistent organisational approach.

The sample of men interviewed offered a seedling of ideas of what might have been possible if there was more and varied contact options and more explicit persistence and constructive engagement interventions. A clear and resounding theme from these men was more and different pathways for change, support and accountability.



*“I was struggling to go to the court, and I needed to provide the report. I was trying to engage and I’m starting those things, but I had to wait to start a group. And my concern in between that time is that I’m going crazy you know, because I’m still thinking I’m the right person and I did the right thing. So, if I could engage earlier, maybe I’m learning something you know, there’s some sort of opportunity for me to change. So, if you take like three months or six months, my thoughts are not gonna be the right way.” Abe*

## 4. Skilled engagement

Engagement in the family violence service system as a concept is used often in the literature, however with varied meanings:

- Engagement - has contact with family violence or justice systems
- Engagement to change
- Engagement as accountability
- Engagement to monitor for risk management

The term engagement is used in different ways; this conflation of meaning is problematic for measuring first contact success, transitioning from service to service, and responsibility taking and accountability. This small research project indicates that dignified engagement at every single point of contact with service systems is critical. The way men described the experience of dignified engagement was:

- Feeling like a person who had made mistakes and is possible of change.
- Being listened to enough to want to listen to being challenged about the harms caused, and taking steps towards accountability.
- Not feeling judged and so being more open to learning new ways.
- Allowing men to consider taking steps towards change and to take up family violence and family care support.

The engagement of men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships is not enough, skilled engagement is required.

A key theme emerging from the focus group discussions and supported by the literature review was that abusive men often fail to recognise their behaviour as violent and have little awareness of the impact of their behaviour on their partners. Recognising their behaviour as domestic violence was identified as the first essential step in the help seeking process; this work requires skill by the practitioner to hold dignifying rather than shaming practices, non-judgmental responses to harm and abuse and exploring empathy and impact and risk assessments for managing coercive control and social entrapment and lethality.

Whilst focus group participants spoke of valuing the family violence workers and the groups, only three men named their harm and responsibilities and spoke about workers being honest and clear about the issues, why they were there and what was possible for them to be better men.





*“If I didn’t go to the inTouch or Relationship Australia group, I never, never know about those things. Especially the anger management and to manage that, and how to manage that in front of other human beings - kids, wife or friends or community. That’s the main thing and help for those things that build up and have those things hiding inside. Before I didn’t know that, I just always thought, no, my angriness is right. My angry is right because they did something wrong. Those services provide to us the technical theory and for us to practice those things. We have to use those things in a family or community. Or your workplace or whatever. That’s the main point I seen that those services gave to us. To improve knowledge. The theory and how to practice. I’m practicing those things you know to my day to day life and I’m getting a lot of good connections, you know, from my workplace, my friends and, you know, on the community. So, I want other people, other men to be changing their behaviour, same as me and help their family kids. And in the future don’t want to let down them any other way.” ABC*

Jay, who spoke about not having committed family violence but being ordered by Corrections to attend a MBCP. He detailed how he persisted to find a MBCP, and after many “rejections and refusal” finally a program accepted him, on his terms. As he spoke in the focus group, he was still articulating that he had not perpetrated family violence but had completed the conditions of his Corrections Order. While the scope of this Project does not allow us to examine his case in detail, we are left wondering at the missed opportunity to work honestly and safely with Jay to change his mind set, his empathy, his responsibility taking, given he completed the program still thinking he had done nothing “really wrong...and definitely not family violence...”:



*“At first it was deemed unnecessary for me to do the men’s behaviour change program. Yeah, no information provided at all. And when I asked Corrections Victoria, why I kept getting refused... if I have to do this and why can’t I do it? What’s the issue? Corrections said to me, they said chances are high it’s because men’s behaviour change program is normally designed for instances of domestic violence. Yours wasn’t domestic violence, so they’re deeming that you don’t need to do the program. Because as much as my crime had nothing to do with domestic violence, it was after the fact, so it was the underlying issue behind it. So, what it was, I’ll happily tell everyone... my now ex-partner, her ex was withholding her kids. So, me, getting angry and all the rest of it, decided to go and light his car on fire. So, I got done for arson. But because the issue was involved her ex-partner it’s still in a way classed as violence against an extended family member or something. So, they deemed the men’s behaviour change program is something that I would have to do as part of my corrections order to try and change that behaviour.” Jay*

## Discussion

Client mapping projects offer the possibility to see how far we have come since the RCFV reforms, and to expose how systems are aligned, or not aligned, in a co-ordinated manner to enhance the safety and well-being of victims-survivors and hold perpetrators to account. There is a relatively small body of research interviewing male perpetrators about their experiences of the family violence and justice service systems. This small research project is innovative as it is the first in Victoria to specifically interview domestic violence perpetrators' navigation and experiences of the family violence service systems and its current reforms.

### **This client mapping project noted three points that are worthy of consideration:**

1. The family violence service system still feels dis-jointed to the men using violence, they often were unclear about services or supports possible. Men told us they need to be active-proactive in help-seeking appropriate services for them, rather than experiencing the family violence services as proactively contacting them for engagement, assessment and support.
2. To reiterate the desire for alternatives to MBCPs – the service system must go beyond what they know and are comfortable with to proactively and dynamically work with men in their contexts, in their communities. It is imperative that our service systems go beyond limiting the current journey for change for family violence perpetrators: we need responses beyond men's behaviour change programs; we need proactive and varied sector engagement and interventions.
3. It is worthwhile recognising that there has been a language and discourse shift since the Victorian systems' reforms: in the initial DPC, then FSV documents, in line with the RCFV the language of perpetrator and accountability were strong and clear and there was a focus on developing co-ordinated responses with justice sectors. In the last couple of years, the language has converted to people using violence and trauma informed work within this context. It is worthwhile to consider:
  - What are the implications for practice with those who use violence and are mandated or voluntarily attending family violence services for men's case management, or MBCPs?
  - What are the implications for practitioners when language and frameworks shift?

### **This Project revealed themes akin to those pre and post the RCFV and the massive systems' reforms:**

- There is a need to develop shared understanding of family violence;
- Consistent and collaborative practice rather than siloed agency responses;
- Systemic and integrated shared responsibilities for risk assessment and management of perpetrators; and
- Co-design development of systems for those who are at the centre of the reforms – the clients.
- More pathways to change for perpetrators.

It is disappointing that there is an obvious repeating of past mistakes as a service system.

# Recommendations

This Project is an innovative piece of work commissioned by the SMFVRIC to map the journey of people using violence and their experiences of the family violence systems' reforms in the Southern Melbourne Metropolitan area.

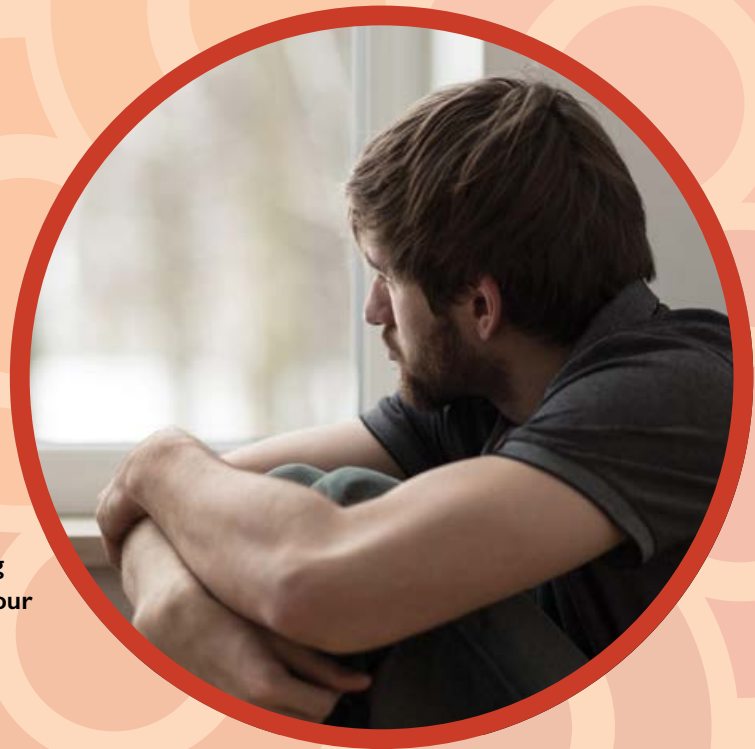
The men we interviewed spoke about being happy with the family violence men's services and workers they were linked with currently. However, most men did not detail the family violence incident or take responsibility for harms caused – this is an important point, as work with men using violence requires skilled engagement, it should not be shame based but it should safely challenge and provide opportunities for learning non-violent ways of relating in their relationships and in their communities. In addition, MBCPs as the only mechanism for change is not a reasonable expectation, for men using violence, and for those working within these programs; expecting change at the end of a twenty week program without broader community-based support is a limiting pathway to change.

Given that risk management interventions, and support is required outside of the typical mainstream service system hours of service (9am-5pm), clients are often stranded and left to work out their next steps. These blunt contacts and interventions increase risk and are missed opportunities to respond to men using violence. It is worthwhile for the family violence service system to expand its thinking and responses to offering meaningful practical supports to facilitate safer pathways to change outside of a 9am-5pm business model.

From the conversations with men in this project, none of their journeys were the same, but there were distinct themes about service gaps and practice areas to strengthen. We have detailed four themes that emerged throughout the conversations:

- 1. Seeing men's humanity and not losing sight of the threat they pose**
  - a) Respect is more than being nice
  - b) Naming and challenging abuse - "get the fluff out of the way so you can get things done"
  - c) Shame – expanding systems' understandings of shame
- 2. Men defining domestic violence – the incident**
- 3. This is not a new theme – still working in silos**
  - a) Blunt contact
  - b) Safe enough – job done
  - c) Service systems not designed for safe passage - moving beyond individual treatment models and men's behaviour change programs
- 4. Skilled engagement**

Given the above themes, in collaboration with the Advisory Committee, we have noted three recommendations.



## **1. Critical connection and review of all client mapping journeys**

It would be useful to connect this Client Mapping Journey across the State. Individual regions have completed small local client mapping journey projects.<sup>25,26,27,28</sup> Reviewing these projects we have noted similar themes; siloed practice, offering respect and dignity for victims-survivors, perpetrators and families rather than blunt contact, connected risk management and coordination to interrupt patterns of harm by people using violence, skilled engagement for survivor-centred and family-centred care and practice.

Given this local and Statewide knowledge source of system deficits, we need provocative communities of practice to explore why there is still insulated practice and what do we need to do at a local level to produce better joined-up practice responses.

## **2. Engagement with men is not enough**

With the RCFV Reforms there was a major focus on better, integrated and comprehensive responses to the perpetrator. Much has changed since 2017. The language of perpetrator is shifted to people who use violence. Accountability is being discussed through a trauma-informed rather than a just lens. There is still rhetoric about 'pivoting to the perpetrator' and 'keeping the perpetrator in view', however, what is noted in this Project is limited intervention and support options. There is an inconsistency in practice frameworks, models for interventions, internal and external agency risk assessments and management plans.

Skilled engagement is required in our work with people who use violence. It is an opportunity when men connect with our service system, at any pathway. It is an opportunity to prevent further domestic violence, support new ways of being, and create a safer community. Skilled engagement requires: a clear and consistent framework and model for practice; co-ordinated and scaffold training and caretaking and accountability mechanisms for sector colleagues and agencies.

## **3. Imagining beyond the pathways we have devised**

These themes in this Project are like other client journey mapping projects – this is a concern. How can we imagine other possibilities of supported accountability for people who use violence? From our Project and from the literature men are telling us they want more and different contact. They are telling us they want to be treated with dignity, and this opens them up to listening, to change, to wanting to be better men. Men are wanting responses that are context based and recognise the complexities of their lives.

One example wanted by men was an after-hours response; for example, in person support, meeting at the police station, assistance with a crisis response after the incident had required system intervention.

An after-hours response is a pathway beyond what mainstream service systems currently offer. Men noted the harshness and diminishing in-the-moment intervention at points of connection with the system, e.g. at police call out, at the time of service of order, upon being interviewed and released from the police station, or receiving support at emergency departments. Given that a major gap in the system journey that men detailed was a lack of supports and information following these critical moments, an afterhours response puts responsibility on the system to offer alternative pathways that support men to take responsibility and ensure safety for their partners and families.

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25. Bayside Peninsula Integrated Family Violence Partnership and ShantiWorks. 2023. 'Client Journey Mapping – Bayside Peninsula Integrated Family Violence Partnership – Focus Group Report'.

26. Northern Integrated Family Violence Partnership. 2023. 'Victim Survivor Experience Mapping Report'. Women's Health In The North. <https://www.nifvs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/02/Victim-Survivor-Experience-Mapping-Report.pdf>

27. Eastern Metropolitan Family Violence Partnership (EMFVP). 2023. 'Client Experience Project: "To understand means to listen."'. EMFVP. <https://rfvp.app.box.com/s/0lggqz30ppkbc6kp2hqfy724fizari6>

28. Peer Academy. 'Designing a safe and accessible support system for people experiencing family violence in Central Highlands. Prepared for Central Highlands Integrated Family Violence Committee.

## Final reflections

The ShantiWorks' team have undertaken a complex and nuanced research project seeking to understand the views of male domestic violence perpetrators within Victoria. We believe that the quality of the research methodology, the literature review and presentation of the findings together provide a powerful source for learning to make sense of men's journey through the new family violence systems.

These Project findings will be a vital component in improving the family violence service system locally to explore and support:

- **Men who choose help.**
- **Men who are compelled to seek support.**
- **For practitioners and systems who have a critical role in engaging and holding people using violence to account with dignity.**
- **For enhancing the wellbeing and safety of the many women and children who are the victims/survivors of domestic and family violence.**

To conclude with one man's words:



*'Respect doesn't mean liking each other... it is not just coming for a piece of paper to be stamped....it is about giving us a safe space to come and talk...to be better men, fathers, brothers... it's about working together...in stereo'*

# Appendix I

## Set up guide for facilitators

### Welcome participants

Thank you for joining us this morning – for this client mapping project – to learn about your experiences with the family violence service systems. I/we will do a bigger introduction as everyone arrives.

### Acknowledgement of Country

We want to begin together by acknowledging the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation who are the Traditional Custodians of the lands that we are on in Melbourne and pay our respects to Aboriginal and First Nations Elders past and present and their ancestors.

### Set up and caretakings

Thank you for taking the time to be part of our family violence services review. We know this is a significant request – to ask you to share your experiences and knowledges of the family violence service systems that are supposed to support you with respect and accountability.

We appreciate you telling us what was helpful as well as not helpful about these services. We take your comments seriously and are always trying to improve our services for you and other clients. We will take care of your stories, advice and experiences – we can share your name or keep it confidential – this is up to you.

#### 1. Transcript

As you might have already noticed – transcript is on – we wanted to make sure we took care of your words, in detail so that we are accurate in representing your themes. No one else can take the notes or share them outside of the ShantiWorks' team.

*If in person – name the colleague who is taking notes and documenting men's words for the above purpose.*

#### 2. Your names

We will use first names tonight but as your workers might have already told you – we will use pseudonyms or safe names in the report to take care of you and your family's privacy and safety.

#### 3. Your family's names – partners, ex-partners and children

We thought it important to take care of your family, their privacy, and so would like you to not use their names, so we will just refer to them as partners, your children's mothers.

#### 4. Agency support and accountability

You have a worker from (agency/organisation the man is linked with) who is available for you now, during the session and after. A colleague from here will be available for check in if you require further conversation.

#### 5. Review and report

We will collect themes, some quotes and build a report. We have offered each man participating to receive a copy of the draft report and if you want to you can read, review, and offer comments.

Then we will send to the SMIFVP team, and they will review and hope fully it will offer them learning opportunities to make the system responses better.

#### 6. The space you are in

We want to check in with you about where you are having the conversation with us today. If you are in your home, are there:

- Any worries?
- Any care you need to do for family? Kids?
- Your self?

#### 7. Any questions?

## Appendix 2

### Questions we asked men

#### Version 1



1. How did you come into contact with a family violence service for help?
2. Do-did the services and workers acknowledge and respect who you are?
3. Do-did the services and workers acknowledge and respect your cultural stories and identities?
4. What experiences did you have with services when you talked about your use of family violence, your worries of harming your partner?
5. What are some of the barriers you experienced when trying to access support?
6. Which agencies/services/workers stand out to you?
7. Were there any compromises you had to make to be engaged with a family violence service system/program?
8. In what ways were the programs and services give you the opportunity to take accountability and repair?
9. In what way were the programs and services dignifying and respectful while they managed everyone's safe and risk?
10. If a friend of yours told you that he was thinking of seeking support services, what would you tell him?
11. Is there anything that we haven't asked that you want us to know?

# Appendix 3

## Questions we asked men

### Version 2

#### Questions developed with VACCA colleagues

#### Understanding Men's Support Journey Interview Guide

#### Why are we seeking the voices of men?

When we think about the family violence service system, we consider all the sectors / services a person may have interacted with/connected with for support. This may be an Aboriginal organisation such as VACCA, or a mainstream service provider. Community may connect with services through The Orange Door, Police, Child Protection, Courts, Mental Health, AOD, ACCOs etc. We seek to understand how men journey through this system and where there are barriers as well as opportunities for engagement through the voices of lived experience.

1. Reflecting back to your journey, how did you come into contact with our service?
2. What experiences did you have with services when you talked about your relationship and the impact of your behaviour on your family?
3. In what way were the programs and services dignifying and respectful while they managed everyone's safety and risk?
4. What are some of the barriers you experienced when trying to access support?
5. Can you share positive experiences of services that you have visited that have supported you? What was it about the worker and/or service that stood out?
6. Throughout your journey, did you feel supported and how did the program and services give you the opportunity to take accountability, heal and move forward?
7. What does self-determination mean to you and how has this been reflected on your journey?
8. What are your thoughts on what we have discussed and is there anything that we haven't asked that you want us to know?



# Appendix 4

## Briefing statement for workers

There is little research interviewing and undertaking focus groups with people using violence and mapping their journey through our systems. Understanding the enablers and barriers to getting the supports that people using violence need to address family violence, at the time they need them, with accountability, respect and dignity, requires us to understand their interactions with the Victorian Family Violence Service Systems.

The aim of the People Using Violence Client Journey Mapping Project is to map the journey of clients who have perpetrated family violence and engaged with the service system in the last five years. This project and focus group participation is different than men's behaviour change programs.

Participants can opt in or refuse involvement with no consequences or impacts on the services they are currently receiving or may receive in the future.

### Through the project we aim to:

- Identify people using violence access, engagement, and overall experiences of the family violence service system.
- Understand the perceptions and experiences that people using violence have had with the family violence service system.
- Understand system factors that may have contributed to delaying acknowledgement that family violence is unacceptable.
- Explore the supports that assisted people using violence to change attitudes and behaviours that contributed to family violence.
- Consider how effectiveness might be better conceptualised and assessed with regard to the impact on people using violence and their families, their lives, their relationships and their choices.
- Expose gaps in safety assessments, support, and interventions – immediate, ongoing and long-term.

Through analysis of the findings from the client experience mapping, areas for system improvement will be ascertained by identifying key pain points; gaps and barriers; and highlight examples of good practice. It aims to provide crucial knowledge to inform future strategic system focus, how best practice can be sustained and adopted by organisations and opportunities for coordinated community risk and safety interventions.

ShantiWorks uses a feminist participatory action research (FPAR) methodology and follows the principles of this when working with people using violence.

### These include:

- Centring the most oppressed and treat everyone with respect.
- Acknowledgement and recognition of the distinctive rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; the importance of cultural safety frameworks.
- Utilising a focus group approach to gather thematics across people's lives rather than focusing on individual stories; linking the complexity of individual lives – there is no universal family violence perpetrator.
- Concentrating on what matters to participants and understanding their knowings and current experiences.
- Noticing risk management and accountability systems gaps for perpetrators.
- People using violence rights to access information enabling them to make informed decisions; providing choice, control and agency over their lives and future.

### The eligibility criteria for participating:

- Be aged 18 years and over.
- Be engaged with a men's behaviour change program or case management.
- Participants of the program and ShantiWorks facilitators have an agency contact for any follow up that is required.
- Men, or people who identify as male, and who admitted to using violence.

# Appendix 5

## Participant information sheet

Dear Participant,

The aim of the Client Journey Mapping Project is for the Southern Melbourne Family Violence Regional Integration Committee (SMFVRIC) to learn about what is working well, the gaps in services, and how it can be strengthened to better respond to people using violence and support the safety of victims-survivors and families.

We would like to invite you to attend a focus group to talk with other people who have used the family violence service systems to learn about safety and respect in relationships. We would like to learn about your experiences of accessing family violence services in the Southern Melbourne region.

The purpose of the conversations will not be to hear personal stories or focus on individual people's relationships and struggles. The main aim will be to hear from people using violence about their experiences of accessing and engaging with the family violence service system.

The SMIFVP has contracted ShantiWorks ([shantiworks.com.au](http://shantiworks.com.au)) to run a series of focus groups over the next few months across the Southern Metropolitan area.

### The goals of each focus group are to:

1. Learn how our service systems' response to family violence engages and supports people using violence and enhances victim safety and the accountability of people using violence.
2. Identify how people using violence have accessed and engaged with the family violence service system.
3. Identify gaps and barriers for engaging and responding to people using violence.
4. Highlight examples of good practice that supports and assists people using violence.





Each focus group will run for 60 to 90 minutes. It will be run by two team members from ShantiWorks. The focus groups will not be video recorded. Conversations will be transcribed live by one ShantiWorks team member or will be audio-recorded for transcription following the focus group.

**We will offer several focus group options:**

- Online
- In space
- After men's behaviour change programs
- Others?

For in person sessions, a light meal, and tea and coffee will be provided. Every participant will be provided with a \$50 Coles voucher as a reimbursement for any travel and parking costs.

Where any safety or risk worries are identified, the ShantiWorks' team will speak with the practitioner linked to the participant and the program/agency.

No participants will be publicly identified in the focus group report and all participants will be offered the option to use a name of their choice for notetaking and for any quotes used in the final report.

If you have any specific needs related to your participation, please let us know so we can consider how to accommodate them.

You can call \*\*\*\* at \*\*\*\*\* at to confirm your participation, or to request additional information. If you are unable to attend on the day, a worker may contact you to check in with you. We appreciate your consideration of our request and look forward to hearing from you soon.

**Southern Melbourne Family Violence  
Regional Integration Committee**

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Written by Shantiworks

