ACWA Association of Children's Welfare Agencies

CCWT Centre for Community Welfare Training

Family Safety Collaboration

Waluwin Wayadan

Place-Based Planning to Improve Child Safety and Domestic and Family Violence Responses

Maria Kissouri Senior Consultant April 2022 – December 2024
Carolyn Thompson Senior Consultant April 2022 – December 2024

PROJECT REPORT

Acknowledgement of Country

ACWA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we and our members and associates work and live, including the Gadigal people of the Eora nation where our offices are located. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Wiradjuri Elders past, present and emerging, on whose land this project took place, and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who contributed directly and indirectly to this project.

In this report, a reference to "Aboriginal" people, children and young people is intended to be a respectful reference to all and any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW, in recognition that NSW is home to First Nations people from across the lands of Australia.

Acknowledgement of Contributors

Special thanks to the four women who contributed their stories through Journey Mapping. They did so selflessly to contribute their lived experience to help inform decision makers and service providers about strengths and pain points in responses to domestic and family violence and child safety.

Sincere thanks to member agencies of ACWA, DVNSW, AbSec and Dubbo and Wellington community members, service providers and individuals who contributed to this Project.

ACWA also thanks the project's NSW Government Partners, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Health, and NSW Legal Aid.

Children's Artwork courtesy of Wellington Breakfast Club, Barnardos Australia.

Published August 2024
NSW Association of Children's Welfare Agencies.

© ACWA 2024

Published by the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA)
PO Box 418, Darlinghurst, NSW 1300
www.acwa.asn.au

ABN: 24 459 406 828

ISBN: 978-1-7636782-0-0 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-7636782-1-7 (PDF)

Contents

Executive summary 2
- Project Background 2
- Project activities 3
- Achievements 4
- Next Steps 5
- Recommendations 6

1. Background 8
- Project introduction 8
- Purpose of this report 11
- Strategic context 12
- Local context 16
- Family Safety Collaboration Aims 17
- Program logic 17

2. The Family Safety Collaboration Process 19
- Process overview 19
- Engagement 19
- Dubbo co-design workshops and working groups 21
- Wellington process 22
  - Action planning workshops 23
- Concurrent enabling activities 24
  - Journey mapping 24
  - System mapping 25
  - Sector development planning 26
  - Communications 27
  - Governance and Implementation Planning 27

3. Process Insights - benefits and challenges 28
- Process strengths and early benefits 28
- Process challenges 30

4. Strategic Insights – Systemic state and local recommendations to sustain positive change 32
- Regional and local governance and planning for implementation of state and national strategies. 32

5. Conclusion and Next Steps 40

6. Appendices 42

Executive summary

Project Background

In early 2022, the NSW Association of Child Welfare Agencies (ACWA) established a partnership with the following agencies to work together to identify opportunities to improve integrated responses to Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) where there are children in the family. ACWAs project partners:

- Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW),
- AbSec (the NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation),
- Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), and
- Ministry of Health (MOH)

This group's vision was to introduce an initiative that would strengthen collaboration at both systemic and frontline levels so that families receive effective, seamless support in response to child protection and domestic violence risks.

ACWA utilised existing resources to support the project, with the aim of demonstrating that place-based planning and evidence informed change readiness work contributes to improved outcomes for families. This planning approach and the resources developed, can be adapted and applied in other NSW locations to improve families' experience of multiple and complex service systems.

The **Family Safety Collaboration** project was implemented in partnership in Dubbo and Wellington NSW. It has fulfilled its objective to demonstrate that a place-based approach to improving the integration of the varied and complex responses to families impacted by DFV is desirable in NSW.

The Collaboration worked closely with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners to identify and implement initiatives that contribute to improvements in responses by government and NGO agencies toward child safety and domestic violence. At the advice of partners, the project focussed on Dubbo and Wellington, and engaged local representatives in developing plans to create positive change for local families.

A strong early engagement process with community representatives, leaders, elders and professionals enabled ACWA to develop a strong partnership with a range of local agencies and groups. Lived experience and local leaders and elders drove the direction of the project at the local level. State partnerships drove the direction at a strategic policy and program level.

At the local level, the process of developing a vision, agreeing on the priorities, and developing change actions assisted local individuals and agencies to commence the process of change toward integration of responses to families.

Using evidence to inform the process was beneficial in the first phase of the local change process. This included local ecological assessment and planning. The ecological assessment involved workshopping with local agencies and community representatives about whether the local service system is delivering outcomes for families as intended, and the planning process workshopped how the system can be enhanced to better meet local needs. A place-based approach brings agencies and services together, identifies and builds on system strengths and filling strategic gaps, and enabling planning that is responsive to local needs, and ensures services have the required capabilities for working together.

Working more collaboratively across government and non-government agencies at the local level and at the earliest opportunity, provides partners the chance to build on current strengths, develop an early, integrated and trauma-informed whole of family response, supporting diversion away from the criminal justice and child protection systems.

Project Activities

The project aimed to develop and test an approach to place-based planning and change management to improve responses to children and families impacted by domestic and family violence.

The key project activities included facilitation of large workshops in Dubbo with local partners to agree key priority areas, the formation of Working Groups in Dubbo, and large interagency planning meetings in Wellington where partners co-designed the development of local change action plans for each place.

In Dubbo, the activities focussed on three key priorities, overseen by three small working groups:

- Ensuring early and seamless support to families.
- Breaking cycles for adult and young men who use violence in relationships.
- Increasing access to crisis accommodation and ongoing housing.

In Wellington, the local interagency and community participants identified three key priorities:

- Service access for families in Wellington.
- Responses to families in crisis.
- Emergency accommodation and ongoing housing

Local vision

Co-developing the local vision, objectives and program logic paved a path for the co-design on the Action Plans. This work laid the foundation for readiness to improve local collaboration across services and agencies responding to families impacted by DFV.

Dubbo Vision:
Ensuring Dubbo is a safe community where families grow and thrive, and agencies work together to prevent violence and provide support pathways towards healing.

Key enablers to achieve the locally developed vision are:

- Strong system governance and ongoing collaboration.
- A strong whole of family-focussed workforce.

DCJ Commissionng and Planning and Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes staff, ACWA CEO, and project team.

Achievements

Wellington

To work toward the three Wellington priorities listed above, the Collaboration held a series of workshops and working group meetings, where the outputs below were achieved:

- Modelling a collaborative planning approach to address sector silos.
- Service mapping and development of a comprehensive service list showing what service options are available in Wellington, and what is available from Dubbo.
- Development a flowchart for after-hours response options in Wellington.
- Establishment of a project to enable the Local Health Service to be used as a place for victims to wait safely and be cared for in an emergency, until services are available during business hours.
- Collaboration between specialist homelessness service providers to support a local funding application for new emergency accommodation in Wellington.
- Interagency support of a submission for a Men's Healing Centre in Wellington.
- Scheduling of training targeted to the identified needs through ACWA's training arm, the Centre for Community Welfare Training and external providers.
- Take up of actions developed in the co-design process by the Wellington DFV Collective, which has increased in membership and elected new leadership supported by the longstanding office bearers.

The focus on Wellington as a discreet community enabled Wellington community members and agency representatives to develop a plan that reflected the unique strengths and needs of local families.

Dubbo

To achieve the Dubbo vision for families, the following outputs were achieved:

- Three large workshops where all local partners identified opportunities for positive change in service responses to families.
- Formation of three working groups focussed on three Dubbo priorities listed above and the development of change action plans for implementation locally.
- Identification of strategic change and resource sharing to improve after hours crisis responses and earlier triage opportunities that include services working with local men, and a commitment to collaborative family practice approaches in DFV.
- Comprehensive service mapping with information about how to access relevant local DFV and child and family support. This resource can contribute to NSW Police's Empower You App for victims/survivors.
- Initiation of a project to develop local Interagency Guidelines, articulating how services will work together to ensure more seamless services responses.
- Workforce development needs identification and opportunities to improve joint training and development opportunities. This includes a localised sector development plan, and agreement to establish a Community of Practice for people who work with families, to improve engagement with men and boys.
- Agreement by the local Housing District Implementation Group to move toward strategic place-based networks to troubleshoot solutions locally.

Local leaders reflected on the value of ACWAs resourcing in their local community and the importance of the change process being facilitated by an agency that is independent to local service delivery and not a competitor for government funding.

> **The team from ACWA... made the engagement process a great experience. Connecting with other agencies should be something we do organically, however it doesn't occur. This process has reminded services we need to work together to support our families and young people in our communities to have the best access to supports. This collaboration piece should be a standard framework for services to work together on meeting demand in a community**
>
> Head of First Nation Partnerships and Cultural Lead, Uniting

Next Steps

In mid-2024, on behalf of local partners, ACWA secured NSW Government funding under the National Partnership Agreement, to continue the implementation of the Family Safety Collaboration. It is anticipated the funding will be auspiced by ACWA from August 2024. Local project implementation officers will be recruited in Dubbo and Wellington to support the achievement of both Dubbo and Wellington Action Plans. These local project officers will play a critical role in supporting local strategic governance to oversee the project activities, and to maintain a focus on the establishment and maintenance of cross-agency oversight of outcomes for families with children impacted by DFV. A local sector development plan will also be implemented, along with a process evaluation.

Recommendations

Based on the experience of delivering the Family Safety Collaboration in Dubbo and Wellington, ACWA submits the following recommendations to DCJ for consideration and discussion with the peaks, partner agencies and local members of the Collaboration.

Governance

To connect central planning to local community service systems, and to enable greater collaboration across sectors locally:

Recommendation 1. Establishment of regional leadership cross-sector governance mechanism including government, NGO and Aboriginal led services across DFV, specialist homelessness and child and family sectors. The purpose is to oversee implementation of agreed actions, identify and resolve local challenges, support sector readiness for new programs such as Core and Cluster and changes such as family preservation recommissioning, and plan for sector development.

Recommendation 2. Continuation of the Family Safety Collaboration as a demonstration site, now focussed on improved governance and driving implementation. This would include development and trial of mechanisms to establish and connect local governance groups to statewide governance, so that foundations laid in the Collaboration can be built upon. This would require using identified resourcing to support a backbone team to:

- Lead implementation and delivery of locally agreed change plans
- Facilitate cross-sector governance,
- Oversee activities to support practice improvement and whole of family focused collaboration,
- Oversee the delivery of a local sector development plan including communities of practice and training.
- Lead ongoing engagement with Aboriginal community and governance groups,
- Continue the use of journey mapping to identify areas where ongoing change is needed, as an action research strategy.
- Support development of a shared outcomes measurement approach

Early support for families and responses to men who choose to use DFV

When considering the behaviour of people using violence, its important they are visible in the common risk assessment, particularly the impact of their behaviour on child, youth, and adult family members.

Recommendation 3. That DCJ consider opportunities to improve earlier access pathways in NSW to support for adult, child and youth victims, and people using violence, when families have not yet reached a Serious Threat or ROSH threshold.

Recommendation 4. Child and family and DFV services trial communities of practice focussed on collaborative response to families across the DFV and child protection and youth sectors, including government and NGOs and with a focus on early and seamless support for families.

Recommendation 5. DCJ's review of the Safety and Risk Assessment tools applied in child protection practice should include consultation with families to ensure the new tools equally reflect the needs, risks and relationship dynamics for adult and child survivors and fathers who use violence.

Recommendation 6. DCJs planned development of a common risk assessment framework for DFV includes use of the framework by all services working with families impacted by DFV including child and family NGOs and incorporates a focus on children and young people impacted by DFV (along with adult survivors), and people who choose to use DFV; including consistent language and responses to the impact abusive fathers have on children's safety.

Recommendation 7. When identifying risk and needs within families where DFV is present, a whole-family perspective should be considered so that interventions better reflect the family, including cultural considerations.

Commissioning activities and capabilities

Commissioners at the local level have the potential to enable improved integration and take a more holistic approach with families.

Recommendation 8. Introduce commissioning approaches that facilitate greater local planning and decision making about funded programs for families. This would ideally include strategic partnership across Commissioners (state and commonwealth) at the local level to influence investment decisions, where those decisions do not compromise probity.

Recommendation 9: Ensure Commonwealth, State and Local service contracts require providers to actively engage in interagency collaboration, for clients as well as in interagency meetings, training and engagement. Interagency collaboration across DFV and child protection which is facilitated by Commissioning teams could be valuable.

Recommendation 10. Identify an appropriate mechanism to ensure each LGA has a delegated person/ agency responsible for maintaining an accurate and accessible service directory such as the Info Exchange Service Seeker supported by DCJ. DV, child and family and housing collectives funded by DCJ could provide some resources toward this important activity.

Workforce development

There are three key learning areas identified for improving family safety:

- Culturally responsive practice with Aboriginal people and families.
- Skills in collaboration and shared responsibility for outcomes.
- Working with men who use violence.

Recommendation 11: Government organisations and peak bodies collaborate to develop an approach to Regional Sector Development Planning, to be implemented locally with child and family and DFV services and local governance groups, with the aim of strengthening sector development, building foundational skills and supporting cross sector collaboration between child and family and DFV services. Relevant stakeholders include ACWA/CCWT, DVNSW, fams, ECAV, DCJ and NTV.

Recommendation 12. Promote collaboration as a core skill, and prioritise training in advanced interagency practice, or rollout of cross sector DFV and child protection training such as Safe and Together.

1. Background

Project introduction

Initiation

Early in 2022, as an outcome of the NSW Child Wellbeing Taskforce, the NSW Association of Child Welfare Agencies (ACWA), Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW), AbSec (the NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation), Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), and Ministry of Health (MOH) agreed to identify and collaborate on activities to improve integrated responses to Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) where there are children in the family. This included a focus on where NGO engagement can be strengthened in this work.

The peaks and agencies aimed to identify and implement initiatives to ensure services in the government and NGO child protection and domestic violence sectors, health, and justice work more closely together, to strengthen collaboration at both systemic and frontline levels so that families receive effective, seamless support in response to child protection and domestic violence risks. ACWA utilised existing resources to support the project. The project commenced with state-based and regional consultations with peaks, agencies and frontline Aboriginal and non-government organisations to consider areas of need and opportunity.

Demonstration of place-based planning and change readiness

After an exploratory phase, a key need was identified to demonstrate the implementation and benefits of place-based work to improve the integration of responses to families impacted by domestic violence. The Executive District Director, Murrumbidgee, Western and Far West District of DCJ identified Dubbo as a potential demonstration site that would benefit from the process and subsequently sponsored the place-based project. Community members identified Wellington as a town within Dubbo LGA requiring discreet and focussed engagement.

The Family Safety Collaboration (the Collaboration) in Dubbo and Wellington was established as an integrated DFV and child protection planning process, to improve the way services, agencies, and community work together to support families. The process was designed to bring together partners with a role in responding to families impacted by DFV to identify shared outcomes, build links, and identify new ways of working together.

The project also aimed to contribute to the *Closing the Gap* outcomes *Families and households are safe,* and *Children are not overrepresented in the child protection system*. The project is also aligned with *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027* objectives, most particularly that *'DFV prevention and response is coordinated, evidence-based, informed by people with expertise and lived experience, and delivered by a supported and competent workforce'.*

As implementation of the Collaboration progressed, the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 had been released. Areas of action identified through the Collaboration are aligned with four of its domains: *early intervention, response, recovery and healing.*

The process recognised Wellington as a standalone community with distinct needs and aspirations.

The Collaboration aimed to address the lack of integration between child protection services and interventions and DV responses. Positive outcomes for children and families impacted by DFV are significantly limited by the current gap in regional and local system governance and planning in NSW. Importantly, identifying and responding to local needs, systemic and functional challenges, would require the process to make links between State and National Plans relating to child safety and DFV, and Closing the Gap in order to achieve the communities' desired outcomes.

The process recognised the multiple layers of change impacting on the sector locally (as in other areas of NSW), and aimed to improve change readiness through local system planning, strengthening governance, system culture and relationships, so that the benefits of current and future reforms can be maximised.

Ultimately, the Collaboration aimed to identify opportunities to improve the way agencies work together across child protection, interventions toward people who choose to use violence, and DFV victim-survivor response systems, to achieve the agreed vision that:

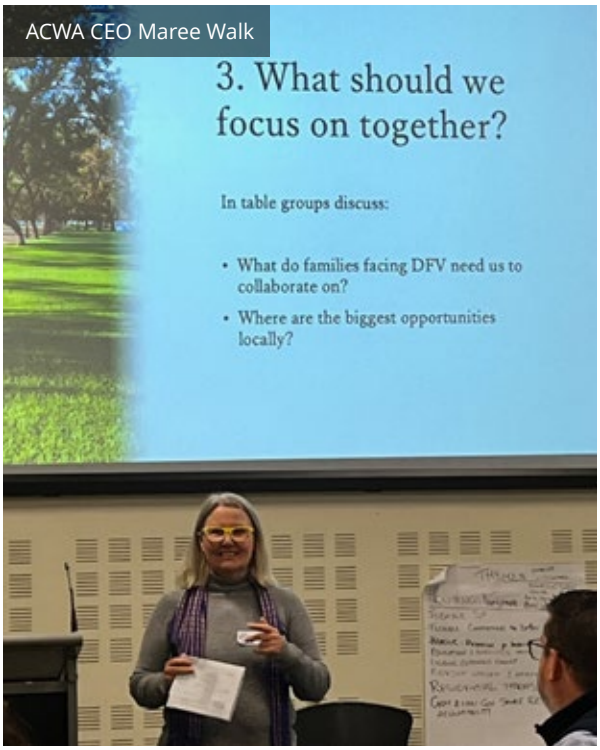
Dubbo is a safe community where families grow and thrive, and agencies work together to prevent violence and provide support pathways towards healing.

Place based approach

The Collaboration took a place-based approach, recognising that strengths and needs vary in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities. Within these communities cultural backgrounds differ, including First Nations people and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Some locations have significant resources and services, while some have service gaps or higher rates of domestic violence crime, and levels of need can differ due to economic disadvantage or natural disaster. Available services also vary from place to place, and the relationships between them and capabilities of services also differs.

A place-based approach is needed to coordinate the multiple separately commissioned services accessed by families impacted by DFV. Specialist DFV services are commissioned centrally through a range of program streams, assisting people through the legal process, and providing safety planning and case management services. In the child welfare space, NGO delivered therapeutic family and early intervention services have been commissioned separately from domestic violence programs and are more closely linked to statutory child protection services than DFV specialist services. Specialist homelessness services are also commissioned separately. Some men's behaviour change interventions have links to specialist DFV services for the provision of partner support, however, some provide partner support in-house. Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are growing in their provision of holistic women's, children's and men's programs, alongside the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector. Commonwealth funded child and family and domestic violence programs add to this patchwork, the fabric of which differs in every location.

A place-based integrated planning exercise looks at the service ecosystem in each location to consider whether it is delivering outcomes for families as intended, and how it can be enhanced to meet local needs. A place-based approach brings agencies and services together to identify and build on system strengths and fill strategic gaps, enable planning that is responsive to local needs, and ensure services have the required capabilities and are aligned and working together towards shared outcomes. Inclusive and sustained over time, it can become an effective co-design mechanism for system and service planning.



ACWA CEO Maree Walk

Evidence informed approach

The Family Safety Collaboration has been significantly informed by research published by the Australian National Research Organisation on Women's Safety (ANROWS)[1]. This includes the report on the PATRICIA Project by Humphries and Healey (2017) focussing on improved integration of child protection and DFV services using the Safe and Together model, as well as the PATRICIA practice framework by Connolly, Humphreys and Healey (2017), which outlines an approach to knowledge translation for the findings of the PATRICIA research and makes recommendations for policy and practice[2].

Humphries and Healy report integration needs the following six elements:

a. Effective and strong governance.
b. Collaboration.
c. Information sharing about people who use violence in relationships.
d. Universal risk assessment and risk management.
e. Co-location.
f. Data systems.

Common language and understanding of what it means to collaborate, is also of critical importance to the process of evolving child protection and domestic violence responses to families toward integration. To define collaboration, integration and partnership, the theoretical underpinning for this project included research released in 2015 by the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited[3].

Culturally informed approach

In addition to available research about integration, evidence regarding appropriate cultural responses was sought through literature, consultation and most importantly, deep listening by the facilitators to survivors, Aboriginal elders, community members and Aboriginal staff working in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice with children impacted by DFV takes into consideration the impacts of intergenerational trauma on individuals, families and communities since colonisation. Cultural practice is holistic rather than individualistic (Morgan et al 2022[4]). Integration is elevated in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice to include spiritual and emotional elements.

The Family Safety Collaboration is intentionally focussed on whole family and whole community responses to DFV and child protection, given the literature and community feedback about the importance of this for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally diverse families. DFV and statutory child protection intervention disproportionately impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and therefore an inclusive, reflective, and representative approach was applied to engagement, planning and design of the Collaboration.

ACWA sought advice from local Wiradjuri language teachers and traditional owners and elders on a Wiradjuri language name of the project, **'Waluwin Wayadan'**, meaning good, strong, whole family or kindred.

---

[1] A Literature Summary is available at Appendix VI.

[2] Humphreys, C and Healey L. 2017 PAThways and Research Into Collaborative Inter-Agency practice: Collaborative work across the child protection and specialist domestic and family violence interface: The PATRICIA Project. Final report Published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited; and Connolly M, Healey L, and Humphreys C, 2017. The Collaborative Practice Framework for Child Protection and Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Services: Key findings and future directions, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited.

[3] Breckenridge, J. Rees, S. Valentine, K. Murray, S. 2015 *Meta-evaluation of existing interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated interventions and service responses to violence against women: State of knowledge paper.* Published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited

[4] Morgan, G. Butler, C. French, R. Creamer, T. Hillan, L. Ruggiero, E. Parsons, J. Prior, G. Idagi, L. Bruce, R. Gray, T. Jia, T. Hostalek, M. Gibson, J. Mitchell, B. Lea, T. Clancy, K. Barber, U. Higgins, D. Cahill, A. Trew, S. Research Report Issue 06 | April 2022 *New Ways for Our Families: Designing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice framework and system responses to address the impacts of domestic and family violence on children and young people.* Published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited

Purpose of this report

This report provides an overview of the context, aims, process, challenges, observed benefits and actions that were identified in the Collaboration process. It also provides recommendations arising from identified challenges, with a focus on local and broader NSW systems. This report was written at the end of the planning process, on the cusp of implementation, so it isn't yet expected that agreed actions will have had their intended impact. It is therefore not intended as an evaluation, rather as a document to inform future independent process and outcomes evaluations, for which funding has been sought.

Strategic context

Why are integrated, whole of family responses to domestic violence and child safety important?

Domestic and family violence is a leading driver of child at risk of harm reports. The endemic levels of harm caused to adult and child survivors of this type of abuse, have been evidenced in countless studies in this country. They include the landmark Australian Child Maltreatment Study[5] which reports the prevalence of children's exposure to domestic violence is increasing. The National Plan to end Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 also acknowledges children in families where DFV occurs as victim/survivors and recognises the immediate and long-term impact this form of abuse has on children.

Although there is growing evidence and acknowledgement of the impact of DFV on children and adults, response systems frequently operate in parallel rather than being integrated. This has perverse impacts on adult and child victims, where mothers can be held accountable for child safety with poor recognition of the impacts of violence on them and their relationship with their child. A focus on mothers' ability to protect a child, can result in people using violence becoming less visible and accountable.

An over reliance on justice system and adult DFV responses as a key referral pathway can mean families affected by domestic violence, (adult and child victims and people who use violence), do not get support or intervention early enough, with missed opportunities to avoid the need for intervention by criminal justice and child protection systems. Families with intergenerational trauma, complex needs and multiple vulnerabilities are at even greater risk of entrenchment in these systems without access to comprehensive or holistic responses. Working more collaboratively across government and non-government agencies at the local level and at the earliest opportunity, provides the chance to build on current strengths, develop an early, integrated and trauma-informed whole of family response, supporting diversion away from the criminal justice and child protection systems.

[5] A 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.

Complexity of DFV and child protection response systems

A further challenge for families impacted by DFV is the complexity of disparate response systems. Diagram 1 outlines key elements of the ecosystem of responses to child and adult victims of violence.

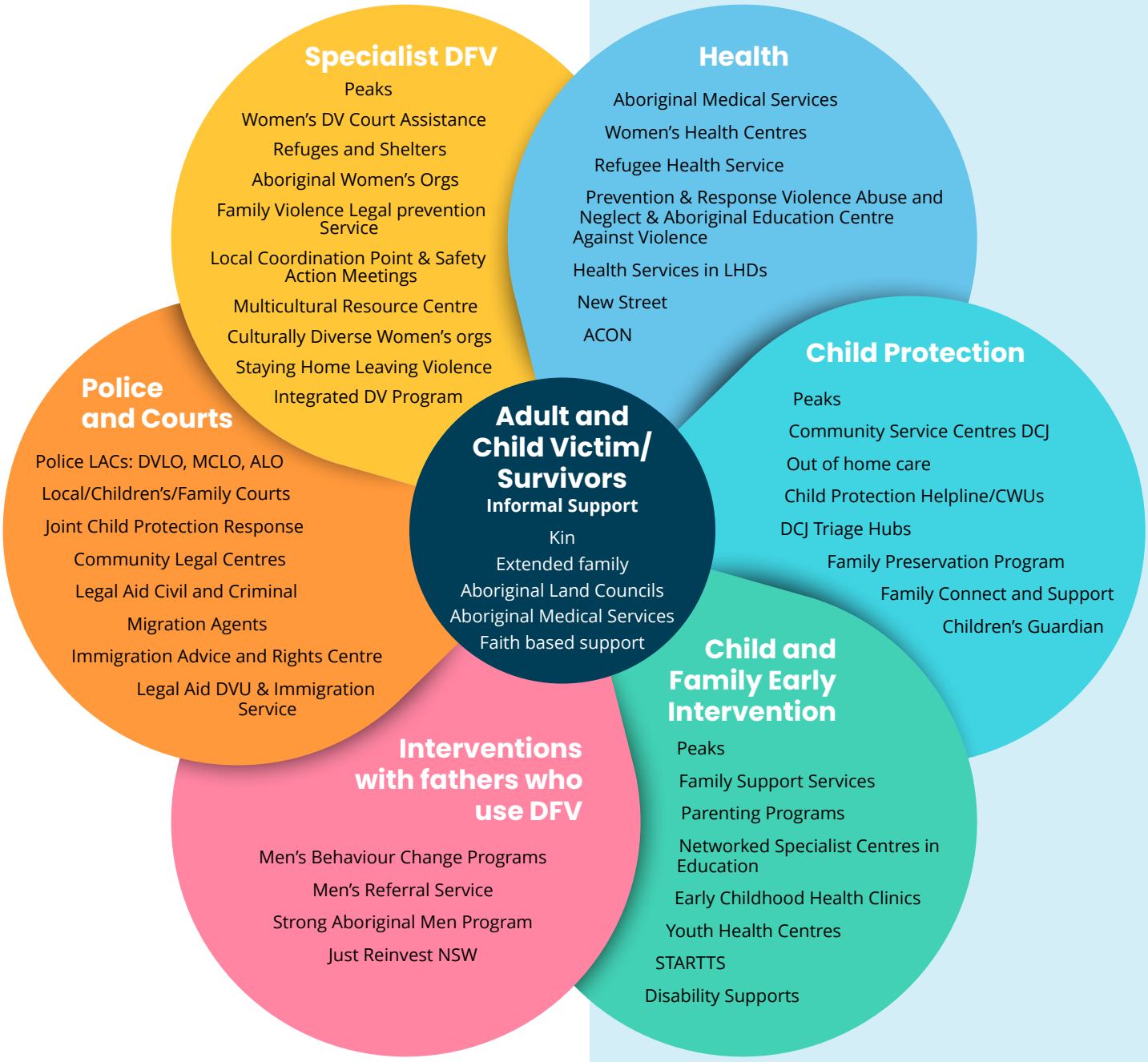


Diagram 1: Eco support system

Areas of need and opportunity

In June 2022, at the outset of the project, a paper regarding emerging themes and opportunities to improve and better integrate child protection and DFV responses systems was developed. The paper is available upon request.

In summary, key areas of need and opportunity identified include:

- **Reducing the silos between DFV and child protection response systems** and improving links across the spectrum of services working with families to reduce the need for families to navigate complex systems.
- **Bringing together key concepts in the DFV and child protection sectors** to improve risk assessment and safety planning and shared case management.
- **Ensuring there are mechanisms to refer and support families earlier** before escalation to the point of child protection and justice system intervention. This includes effective engagement with fathers, which is critical to the whole-of-family work required for earlier intervention.
- **Developing the capability of child protection and DFV workforces** to engage and work successfully with adults, young people and children impacted by domestic violence and child protection risk, to reduce risk and the need for statutory intervention. This includes workforce development, to address challenges in recruitment retention and capability. Capability development is also needed to build confidence and skills in effectively identifying father's perspectives and values about relationships, family and parenting; this enables earlier identification and response to dynamics of power and control within families.
- **Continuing to develop capability and capacity to work with men who use violence** on the child protection and DFV workforces as well as in behaviour change interventions and including early intervention and strengths focused approaches.
- **Creating system wide opportunities for early positive engagement with Aboriginal families,** building on individual family and community strengths, supporting development of Aboriginal led services, and improving cultural safety and capability of mainstream services.
- **Strengthened local governance** with appropriate links to central structures, particularly through place-based assessment of system strengths and need, service capacity, workforce capability, and joint planning and strategy, including to meet the specific needs of local demographics.
- **Using place-based planning** to embed new programs and initiatives into local service systems and networks, to maximise the benefit of investment.
- **Ensuring NGO programs are aligned with and able to contribute to Closing the Gap** place-based initiatives.
- **Addressing critical issues** like deficits in emergency accommodation and housing and access to trauma healing and recovery supports for fathers, mothers and children.

The strategic need for regional governance and planning in DFV and child protection responses.

Dubbo Regional Local Government Area (LGA) is one of many facing substantial change. Diagram 2 shows the scale and volume of reform and change occurring simultaneously and relating to individuals and families impacted by DFV and child protection in the Dubbo LGA at the time the project was initiated. The diagram is limited to reforms led by the NSW state government only. There were additional reform and change processes also being implemented at the commonwealth and local levels.

Each reform area shown in the diagram is led by central and local teams, operating in parallel to one another. The absence of strong, collaborative leadership and governance across these reforms, potentially limits the positive impact each initiative can have for families. Strong regional leadership over efforts to reduce DFV and statutory child protection interventions could support service delivery by government and NGO child protection and domestic violence sectors, health, and justice. Evidence supports the need for senior regional leadership to strengthen collaboration at both systemic and frontline levels so that families receive more effective support in response to child protection and domestic violence risks. Regional governance and oversight that includes genuine engagement with Aboriginal communities, enables the planning of initiatives that respond to local demographics, local historical contexts and community dynamics such as immigration trends, environmental factors and future population projections.

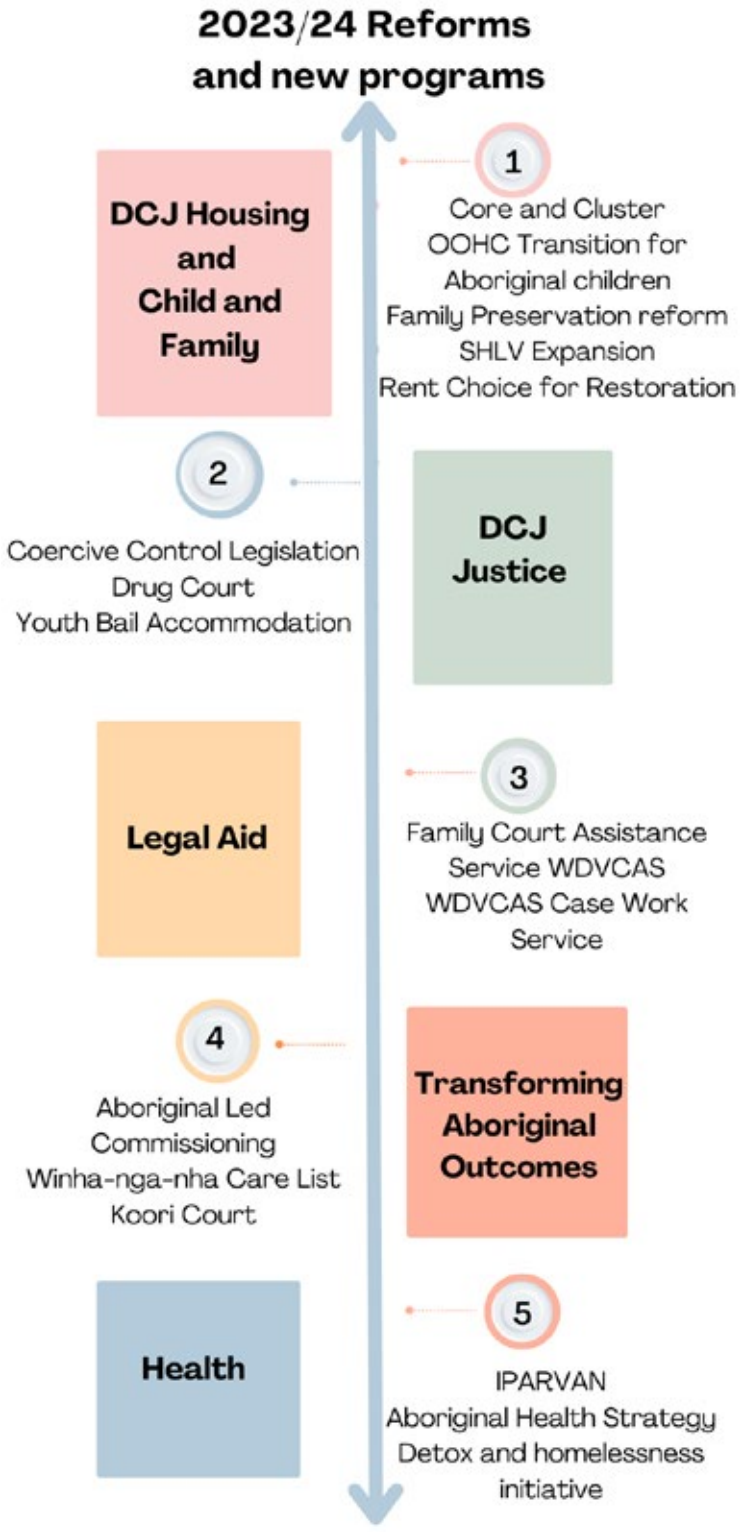


Diagram 2

Local context

Needs, strengths and community aims

Dubbo and Wellington were chosen as demonstration sites because of their significant needs, including high rates of domestic violence and a significant Aboriginal community that is impacted by overrepresentation in the justice and child protection systems. Dubbo and Wellington also face unique circumstances as a regional hub and satellite town respectively.

The Dubbo Regional LGA, which includes Wellington township and other surrounding villages, has a population of around 74,000 people, of whom 16 percent or 12,000 identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the 2021 census. Wellington has a population of around 4100, of whom 19 percent were identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the census.

The Dubbo Regional LGA ranked eighth highest of 129 LGAS in NSW for domestic violence (DV) assault, a rate of 1062.7 per 100,000 population, with 590 DV assault incidents in the 12 months to June 2023. This number significantly exceeds the number of recorded DV assaults in all other top ten ranked LGAs. Dubbo also ranked tenth in the state for breaches of apprehended domestic violence orders by rate (709.7per 100,000), but had the highest number of breaches of all LGAs ranked in the top 10 (394).

While Dubbo has a range of social, family and community services, there is high demand including from those rural and remote communities seeking support. Dubbo is also the focus of significant change, with new and planned initiatives including the Youth Koori Court, Adult Drug Court, the Winha-nga-nha Indigenous Children's Court care list, state and commonwealth programs to address targets 12 and 13 of Closing the Gap, and establishment of new 'Core and Cluster' emergency accommodation.

Wellington is located 45 minutes from Dubbo, and with a small number of local services, limited transport, no 24-hour police station and no emergency accommodation. Wellington families report limited access to support to secure their safety, in some cases being asked to wait outside an unmanned police station for help to arrive, with no local access to emergency accommodation, and having to travel to Dubbo for many services despite limited public transport.

Communities' strengths

While Dubbo and Wellington face significant challenges, both communities have clear strengths. The communities have strong Aboriginal leadership, with members of community who are leading the delivery of activities to support families and community. Their deep knowledge of their community is a significant asset, and there is a growing generation of emerging leaders. The region is also now home to a growing community of culturally and linguistically diverse families.

Within the numerous organisations working with families, victim/survivors, children and young people, and people who use violence, staff and leaders are passionately committed to improving children and families' safety. Mapping these services was identified as an early opportunity to further strengthen networks and aid future planning.

Dubbo also has a core network of services and agencies responding to families at serious threat of domestic violence through the Safer Pathway program. Safer Pathway provides interagency management of high-risk families, who benefit from stronger connections and mutual accountability between agencies. An important opportunity was identified to consider how families in Dubbo could receive support earlier, and how more seamless responses could be provided before families reach crisis or serious threat threshold, to prevent or reduce harm from domestic violence, and reduce the need for crisis accommodation, justice and child protection system involvement.

As noted above, Dubbo is also benefiting from new services and programs for children, young people and families including the Youth Koori Court and First Nations Care List in the Children's Court, new investment in emergency accommodation for adult and child victims of DFV, and a residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation service planned in Dubbo.

Wellington is served by a smaller number of locally managed and staffed services, but with strong connections to local community, and strong leadership. The Wellington Aboriginal Action Panel is a key element of that leadership, with cultural authority and strong advocacy about key issues impacting on the community.

Family Safety Collaboration Aims

In summary, the project has had the following aims:

Strategic	To develop and test an approach to place-based planning and change management to improve responses to children and families impacted by domestic and family violence
Local	To develop plans to achieve communities' desired outcomes for family safety: Ensuring Dubbo is a safe community where families grow and thrive, and agencies work together to prevent violence and provide support pathways towards healing, focussing on three key priorities: • Ensuring early and seamless support to families • Breaking cycles for adult and young men who use violence in relationships • Increasing access to crisis accommodation and ongoing housing Increasing service access for families in Wellington: • Improving responses to families in crisis • Improving access to emergency accommodation and ongoing housing • Prevention and early intervention In both communities: • Identifying mechanisms for strong system governance and ongoing collaboration • Supporting development of a strong whole of family-focussed workforce

Program logic

The following program logic was developed to describe the intended long-term impacts of place-based planning through the Collaboration process.

It should be noted some activity described in the program logic predated the initiation of the Collaboration, and occurs alongside it, for example activity in relation to police and court innovation, but nonetheless is part of the ecology of change impacting on DFV and child protection response systems. Those initiatives benefit from enabling activities undertaken or planned as part of the Collaboration such as improved governance, planning, fostering a culture of collaboration and responsiveness, improving workforce capability, and increasing leadership collaboration. Similarly, targeted commissioning and increasing service delivery by ACCOs is not within the scope of collaboration activities, but better planning to meet local needs will positively influence these processes.

Family Safety Collaboration - Theory of Change

2. The Family Safety Collaboration Process

Process overview

Diagram 3 gives an overview of the Family Safety Collaboration process, including key phases of Engagement, Co-Design, and Implementation.

Engagement

The engagement phase included initial meetings with the project sponsor and a core team of DCJ leadership staff to understand the key local stakeholders to be engaged in both communities. After initial stakeholder mapping, project consultants met one to one with stakeholders, usually in person. At each meeting stakeholders were asked to outline the local issues from their perspective, and an overview of the proposed process was given.

NGO and Government agencies also received formal correspondence from the project sponsor, with government agencies asked to nominate a representative to participate in workshops and working groups. Throughout the Collaboration, meetings were held with senior stakeholders to ensure senior managers were kept informed.

Cultural protocols were also observed by meeting with the CEO of the Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Dubbo Working Party of the Three Rivers Regional Assembly, and the Wellington Aboriginal Action Panel. Both groups provided guidance about key contacts and how they would like to be engaged and informed, and members of the groups have been integral participants throughout the planning process.

The engagement phases took place from February to May 2023 in Dubbo, and May to August 2023 in Wellington. This timeframe was longer than anticipated, but vital because of the need to maximise the engagement of an extensive list of stakeholders across both communities.

In summary, those involved included NSW Government agencies (DCJ Community services and Corrective Services, Housing), Police, NSW Health, Department of Education, Aboriginal Affairs, Local Government, through Dubbo Regional Council Social Justice Advisory Group, Commonwealth Government, through the Department of Social Services, peaks (DVNSW and AbSec), Aboriginal Governance organisations, Aboriginal community controlled organisations and health services, non-government organisations providing specialist DFV, specialist homelessness and child and family support and family preservation services, men's behaviour change providers, legal services providers, community centres, and judicial officers, Charles Sturt University Faculty of Social Work and other stakeholders. A full list of participating agencies and services can be found at Appendix I.

Notably, engagement with local services strongly influenced the co-design process in each site, in response to stakeholders needs and preferences.

Diagram 3 - Family Safety Collaboration in Dubbo and Wellington - Process Outline

Phase	1. Engagement	2. Co-Design				3. Implementation
		Stakeholder Workshop - Setting Directions	PCG and Co-Design Working Group meetings		Stakeholder workshop - Testing and confirming the way forward	
Activities	Planning the engagement process with local Aboriginal leaders and relevant agencies. Setting up governance including a Project Control Group (PCG), and Co-Design Working Group One to one engagement meetings with community members, relevant agencies, NGOs and ACCO's. Identifying the key issues, and what outcomes the community needs.	Play back and confirm key issues and outcomes Agreeing common values/ principles to guide the process and outcomes Identifying strengths, challenges and opportunities Brainstorming opportunities	Exploring and prioritising opportunities Reviewing available data on community need Identifying improvements to be made to collaborative mechanisms Identifying system changes Service system mapping and gap analysis	Identifying mechanisms for impact within and across organisations. Identifying commissioning gaps and opportunities Reviewing the capability needs survey outputs and confirming a local development plan	Using client journey mapping to test outcomes Re-confirming a governance approach to support ongoing achievement of outcomes Outcomes measurement planning	Stakeholder forum to playback proposed plans. Refining the plan with stakeholder input	Collaborative governance to oversee reform Establishing local change strategies for Dubbo and Wellington Developing detailed plans for local change projects Continuing to engage community about community need and the impact of changes
Enabling activities	**Data analysis regarding demographics and vulnerability**						
	Service system mapping						
	Workforce capability survey and planning						
	Sector Communications and Partner Feedback Loops						
	Journey Mapping						

Dubbo co-design workshops and working groups

Initial workshop

In May 2023 an initial directions setting workshop was held to kick off the planning process for Dubbo by confirming intended outcomes, strengths, areas of opportunity and priorities, and agree on how local detailed plans will be developed together. Discussion centred on the following questions:

- What outcomes do we want for family safety in Dubbo?
- What is our shared vision?
- What strengths will a future change process build on, including those relating to the service ecosystem, collaboration and governance, and community and cultural strengths?
- What do families facing DFV need us to collaborate on, and where are the biggest opportunities locally?
- What are our highest priorities and how do we want to work together?

The following themes emerged from the conversations:

- The need for seamless, end to end support, focussing on whole of family including children and young people, adult victims, people who use violence, and extended family members.
- Creating early support pathways for families to avoid escalation of risk.
- Leveraging existing resources and planned investment to increase housing and accommodation options to prevent homelessness and ensure safety.
- Strengthening work with men who choose to use violence.
- Building a strong and capable workforce with a culture of sustained collaboration.
- Drawing on extended family and community strengths, through education and engagement
- Ensuring mechanisms for collaboration and problem solving.

Workshop participants identified the outcomes and shared vision for families in Dubbo.

Focus Outcomes:

- Family violence is prevented before it starts.
- Children are safe and supported, within their families, kinship network and communities.
- People enjoy high levels of social, emotional and cultural wellbeing, belonging, love and connection.
- Children, young people and families get early help to build resilience and stay safe.
- Families feel safe to ask for help, and support is flexible, collaborative and meets their needs.
- People have a safe place to live, and there are more options to meet family and community needs.
- People using violence have help and support to understand the impact of their behaviour and opportunities for behavioural change.
- Families can heal and recover and have help to break the cycle of DFV.
- Government, NGO and community leaders in Dubbo champion, coordinate and solve systemic challenges together.

Working groups

Based on these outcomes, three working groups focus areas were identified:

- Ensuring early and seamless support to families
- Breaking cycles for adult and young men who use violence in relationships
- Increasing access to crisis accommodation and ongoing housing

Working groups on seamless and early support for families, and breaking cycles with adult and young men violence were held fortnightly from Late July to October, to identify key actions.

Regarding crisis accommodation and housing, local DCJ Commissioning and Housing teams, a Housing head office representative, specialist homelessness service providers and ACWA held a one-off meeting to clarify areas of local needs and opportunity. That group resolved to utilise the existing District Implementation

Group (DIG) to develop and pursue those opportunities. ACWA presented to the DIG at its September meeting to provide background, and the DIG resolved to take carriage of action planning.

Final planning workshop

A final workshop was held in late November, where all participants came to review change plans, identify leadership and responsibility for next steps for actions, discuss constraints and opportunities for each action. The group spent time working on a future journey map for Dubbo, mapping out families' experiences in the future, when change activities have been implemented.

The group discussed governance needs, including a senior leadership group of government and NGO leaders in the child and family, homelessness and DFV sectors in the region.

The group also affirmed a mutual commitment to shared training and learning to develop the sector, and identified key learning priorities.

Action Plans for Dubbo are available at Appendix II.

Local leaders reflected on the value of ACWAs resourcing in their local community and the importance of the change process being facilitated by an agency that is independent to local service delivery and not a competitor for government funding.

Wellington process

Engagement

On 20 June 2023, the project team met with the Wellington Aboriginal Action Panel (WAAP) to discuss the best way for the change planning process to be led by local Aboriginal leaders, service providers and community members. The WAAP requested the ACWA project team work closely with Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Services' Social and Emotional Wellbeing team. ACWA also engaged with local service providers and the Wellington Domestic Violence Collective, and attended the Wellington Domestic Violence Collective to understand the local issues and get to know service providers.

A series of three workshops was held in Wellington between July and October 2023, with participants from DCJ (Commissioning and Planning and Corrective Services), NSW Police, NSW Health, Department of Education. the WAAP, WINS Community Centre, Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Service, Dubbo Regional Council, non-government organisations providing specialist DFV, specialist homelessness and child and family services in Wellington and community members.

Identified areas of need in Wellington

Key issues identified by stakeholders included:

- **Service access for families in Wellington**. Stakeholders identified that while there are range of services funded to provide support in Wellington, families report often having to travel to Dubbo to access support. Families and stakeholders within the network aren't clear which services are being provided in Wellington and how to access them.
- **Responses to families in crisis.** Families and stakeholders reported that in a domestic violence crisis support is often not accessible, particularly after hours. Statewide services such as Link2Home, DV Line and 1800 Respect are available, but they rely on local services and accommodation providers to which they can refer. Greater access and collaboration are needed to ensure Wellington families are safer in a crisis.
- **Emergency accommodation and ongoing housing.** Families reported significant challenges because of the housing crisis. There are few options in Wellington, resulting in families staying in unsafe situations.
- **Prevention and early intervention.** Stakeholders expressed that there is a need and opportunity to refocus on a coordinated approach to prevention and early intervention with families in Wellington, to support family and children's safety and healthy social and emotional development and safety.

- **Services for men, including those recently released from custody.** Engaging and supporting men, addressing health and mental health needs, promoting behaviour change and healing from trauma, were recognised as significant needs. Stakeholders also raised a frequent concern that people were often released from two Wellington based correctional centres after hours with no means of support, accommodation or transport.
- **Supporting development of a strong whole of family-focussed workforce in Wellington.** Like in Dubbo, there was an identified need to strengthen the local workforce to be able to support families, including planning training together to meet local Wellington needs and priorities.

The top three issues were prioritised, recognising the Wellington DV Collective was already focussed on prevention actions, the WAAP was liaising with correctional centre leadership, and ACWA had concurrent activities on workforce development underway.

Wellington action planning workshops

To work toward these three priorities, the Collaboration held a series of three workshops over the course of two months. Key outcomes and outputs achieved in this process included:

- Modelling a collaborative planning approach to address sector silos.
- Service mapping and development of a comprehensive service list showing what service options are available in Wellington, and what is available from Dubbo.
- Shared problem definition (systems and services), based on deep analysis of the lived experiences shared via Journey Maps.
- Development of a flowchart for after-hours response options in Wellington, and a commitment to share resources to improve after hours crisis responses to families.
- Establishment of a project to enable the Local Health Service to be used as a place for victims to wait safely and be cared for in an emergency, until services are available during business hours.
- Collaboration by a subset of participating agencies who were specialist homelessness service providers, to support a local funding application for new emergency accommodation in Wellington. That discussion identified a provider interested in making a submission, and other providers agreed to support the application. The outcomes of that process will be announced in mid-2024.
- Interagency support of a submission for a Men's Healing Centre in Wellington.

To maintain the positive changes underway, the Wellington Domestic Violence Collective have agreed to take ownership of actions coming from the Family Safety Collaboration in Wellington, with support from ACWA.

Outputs of the working groups are available at Appendix III

The early engagement process included the facilitation of a workshop where local partners defined integration and collaboration in the context of their work with families. Available evidence about effective integration informed these discussions. For example, in 2015, Breckenridge and colleagues[6] evaluated integrated interventions in violence against women using a set of criteria for integration. The three key criteria adapted from this research that were applied in the process of action planning for The Project are:

- Coordination protocols for integrated service provision and/or a formalised partnership or joint service agreement between agencies. Several change actions relate to the development of service coordination, and moving toward joint triage to provide earlier support to families.
- Funding for integrated service provision. Utilising and attracting additional resources for facilitation of leadership activities was considered a key strength of the project.
- A formalised statement of shared principles/ goals between agencies. Formation of a shared vision and action plans was a key project achievement.

[6] Breckenridge, J. Rees, S. Valentine, K. Murray, S. 2015 *Meta-evaluation of existing interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated interventions and service responses to violence against women: State of knowledge paper.* Published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited

Concurrent enabling activities

Journey mapping

A core part of the Collaboration process has been listening to people with lived experience and presenting their stories through Journey Mapping. A Journey Map is visual story about the process of seeking support, safety, change and recovery.

Journey mapping involves listening to a person's story to gain insights into their experience, with the aim of improving the system of support. A visual 'map' is made to communicate the person's experience. Each map focuses on a specific aspect of their journey to see where people are getting frustrated or hurt, and where efforts should be focussed to improve support.

Journey maps help avoid assumption by grounding the change planning process in people's real-life experiences. Developing each journey map involved recruiting participants through local support services and contacts, seeking informed consent, hearing the person tell their story over a 2-to-3-hour period, identifying themes and creating a visual map to illustrate their experience, and confirming the map is accurate and the person is happy for it to be shared. Minimal prompting is used, and all words used in the map are those of the person telling their story.

Four maps were completed across the course of the Collaboration. Participants were compensated for their time, and consideration given to ensure the person had current avenues of support, particularly for those facing ongoing risk. All participants also received further follow up contact some months after their interviews to check they remained comfortable with the use of their journey maps, and all affirmed their use.

Participant stories reflected the following themes:

- **Longstanding and serious risk of harm to adults and child victims** through multiple forms of violence, abuse and coercive control, including post separation.
- **The impact of violence on children and young people**, including persistent harm actively caused by the person using violence after separation.
- **The courage and resilience of people who have experienced violence**, and their use of informal networks including family, kin, cultural connections, friends, faith and school communities to improve their safety.
- **The range of challenges of seeking safety**, and the complexity and uncertainty of systems that people need to navigate, particularly the criminal justice, family law, child protection and housing systems.

- **The impact of remoteness** on access to help and protection in a crisis, and support to recover. Those living in remote communities faced significant barriers to accessing emergency help, support services and safety planning, and ongoing help for recovery.
- **The impact of the housing crisis on families facing domestic violence.** Limited housing and emergency accommodation options was a critical theme for several participants, clearly impacting people's ability to escape violence.
- **The clear benefit of having access to knowledgeable and skilled services.** Participants described the impact of skilled workers in helping them navigate complex systems, access the services they needed and manage ongoing risk.
- **The need for services to work together** so that people experience seamless support. Participants gave examples of a lack of support, and the transformation when services worked together to meet families' needs.
- **The need to keep a focus on people who choose to use violence in relationships.** Each participant spoke about the invisibility of the person using violence, and missed opportunities for accountability and change.

Once complete, the Journey Maps were shared in workshops with agencies and services, and insights from the maps informed group discussions about areas of need and opportunities for change. The maps have been vital in challenging assumptions and helping participating Government agencies and NGOs see the impacts of systems and services, both positive and difficult.

Journey maps completed through the process are at Appendix IV

System mapping

System mapping was initiated early in the Collaboration process to understand and detail the range of services available in Dubbo and Wellington. The mapping process included engaging service providers and funding agencies, and collecting and validating details of available services, including location, availability in Dubbo and/or Wellington, service type, organisation name, place on the service delivery continuum (including prevention, early intervention, crisis, and response), specialisation, after hours availability, service description and funding program.

The mapping process highlighted to stakeholders the range of services available in Dubbo and Wellington, and they identified it as a much-needed resource to enable access to a greater range of supports for families. Importantly some stakeholders in Wellington had been unaware of the range of services funded to outreach to Wellington, or available to Wellington residents in Dubbo.

Strategically, the list also highlights the range of funding programs under which services are commissioned and this underscores the need and opportunity to ensure programs are locally coordinated.

Initially the service mapping process aimed to identify and communicate the service strengths within the Dubbo and Wellington service infrastructure. The process was lengthy, and it was difficult to maintain an accurate service map due to constant change in service contracts. For example, during the mapping process some contracts had ended, and other new contracts were being awarded.

Service maps were not initially intended as a resource to facilitate improved awareness and knowledge of service availability in the communities. However, stakeholders requested the service maps include details about how each service and program is accessed, who the contact people are, the intended purpose and target group, and hours of operation. With the changeable nature of service contracts, both Wellington and Dubbo stakeholders identified a plan to maintain the lists for the benefit of sustaining families' engagement with the range of support available.

In addition, DCJ had identified Infoxchange as the preferred platform for all child and family, DFV and housing services to use and this requires agencies to introduce consistent approaches to maintaining accuracy of the information about their service listed in Infoxchange. Moving toward regular and consistent reliance on the Infoxchange platform will require active promotion and implementation effort by DCJ and NGOs.

Sector development planning

Staff readiness is a critical implementation consideration in the shift toward improving integration of DFV and child protection responses. Cross-agency learning is a crucial factor in workforce development. Developing and maintaining a workforce that can confidently address the needs of adult and child family members affected by DFV requires ongoing investment of learning opportunities within the local service networks.

To contribute to developing readiness for improved collaboration and practice in DFV and child protection, the project included the development and implementation of a workforce needs survey. The survey questions related to the integration elements explored in research (Humphries and Healy 2017).

The Collaboration included a focus on strengthening the local sector's capacity to support families facing DFV. A survey of leaders and staff working with families facing DFV was developed and distributed to local stakeholders identified through service mapping, targeting leadership teams, and asking for distribution through their staff networks. There were 56 responses from a broad range of services including NGO, ACCO and Government agencies.

The survey identified the following as the highest sector development priorities for Dubbo and Wellington and the surrounding area:

- Advanced interagency practice.
- Knowledge and skills to respond to DFV in the context of child protection practice.
- Foundational DFV capabilities for specialist DFV, child protection and family services, e.g. behaviours, impacts, risk and needs assessment, case planning, and managing escalating risk.
- Working with children and young people affected by DFV.
- Working with men who have used violence, for family services and child protection practitioners.
- Foundational DFV knowledge for generalist staff, for example receptionist staff in NGOs.

Managers identified their own teams' highest priorities as trauma informed practice, safety planning, collaborative interagency practice, DFV in the context of child abuse and neglect, and vicarious trauma.

Practitioners identified their highest priorities include working with children and young people impacted by DFV, safety planning, and trauma informed practice. Managers and leaders also reported a range of sector development challenges including recruitment, retention, staff wellbeing, and funding for competitive salaries.

Respondents preferred a range of training types, with face-to-face training, online and communities of practice most popular.

Notably, many staff were accessing training within their own agencies, focussing on practice frameworks specific to the agency or program. However, there was little opportunity for cross agency training, limiting opportunities to learn with and from members of other agencies, and to build networks and shared practice values and approaches that support collaboration.

In late August, managers in the DFV and child and family sectors met to discuss the survey outcomes. There was widespread support for collaboration across the sector to agree to a development plan including cross agency training, to meet the identified needs.

At the time of writing ACWA is working to schedule training targeted to the identified needs through its own training arm, the Centre for Community Welfare Training. Training through other providers will be requested if funding becomes available.

Managers have also expressed strong support for the implementation of the Safe and Together model in the region. Safe and Together model includes interagency training and communities of practice that challenge silos, and build shared knowledge, values and practices across DFV and child protection response systems.

A copy of the survey and outcomes is available on request.

Communications

Regular updates have been provided to stakeholders throughout the project. The updates have the benefit of promoting stakeholder engagement, communicating the outcomes of workshops and working groups, sharing important information, for example Domestic Violence NSW Good Practice Guidelines and highlighting coercive control, and outlining next steps in the Collaboration process.

Project updates published throughout the planning process are available at acwa.org.au.

Governance and Implementation Planning

During the Collaboration process there have been ongoing conversations about the governance structures needed initially to support the implementation of resulting actions, and to support sustained and collaborative planning and problem-solving in the region.

Agencies and NGOs participating in the Collaboration affirmed that an ongoing overarching cross sector leadership group was needed, to oversee implementation of agreed actions, drive and sustain change activities including for new programs in the area, support sector development, and identify and develop strategies for local challenges.

Stakeholders noted the District Implementation Group has a similar function in relation to housing, however this role does not currently extend to DFV and child protection systems. Stakeholders also noted the value of the independence ACWA has brought to the planning process. Government agencies have noted that resources are required to establish and maintain a governance structure.

3. Process Insights – benefits and challenges

Process strengths and early benefits

This section of the report reflects the numerous benefits realised in the first phase of a local change process, that is, the ecological assessment and planning phase rather than the benefits realised from implementation of the change activities. The following strengths and benefits have been apparent:

An early focus on engagement

Spending time engaging one to one with Aboriginal governance groups, and agencies and services in the DFV and family sectors was vital in ensuring as wide a network as possible participated in the Collaboration process. The advice the local DCJ District Commissioning and Planning team and the Wirrimbirra Family Preservation Manager was invaluable in supporting engagement. This also enabled the process to be informed their detailed knowledge of historic and contemporary local arrangements within the child and family, housing and DFV service provision.

Developing a shared vision

Starting the process with common needs identification and gaining agreement on shared outcomes was an effective way to demonstrate the shared vision all partners have for local families. Through the process partners have further developed this vision with clear actions they can take together.

Building relationships and a culture of collaboration. Stronger relationships have formed across the spectrum of agencies and services responding to families, and a culture of collaboration is emerging that creates a platform for future regional leadership where local voices can influence change planning in the future.

Building readiness for change

The change planning process has improved the readiness for local change amongst Family Safety Collaboration participants. The process of developing shared change plans required local partners to reflect together on the key challenges and opportunities in their work and the impact for local families. Some of the key benefits of the change plan relate to:

- shared knowledge and skills to strengthen the focus on people who use violence and increase men's access to supports and programs to ensure families are safer.
- a clearer focus on early, seamless support for families, through an improved culture of sharing responsibility and troubleshooting to meet families' needs earlier in their journey within the system.

Local problem solving

The planning process also clarified areas of critical need, where focused problem-solving was required for each community. Housing proved to be the most significant worry in both communities. The local housing District Implementation Group is now moving toward strategic place-based networks to troubleshoot solutions locally.

The focus on Wellington as a discreet community enabled Wellington community members and agency representatives to develop a plan that reflected the unique strengths and needs of local families.

Giving voice to people with lived experience

The use of Journey Mapping gave a voice to local women with lived experience on intimate partner violence. Sharing Journey Maps with local partners in workshops assisted the local networks to agree on key pain points within systems and practices that respond to domestic violence. Journey Maps reflect the language and perspective of service recipients which assisted in motivating change at the local level.

Development planning

Leaders have identified important priority areas for sector development, and there an opportunity to work together with peaks and training providers to ensure access to local training, so that staff are equipped and supported.

Increasing knowledge of service system

Service mapping, and development of a comprehensive service list has improved partner knowledge of the local system. This assists with improving referrals, and maximising benefit of government and community investment in local service provision.

Partnership with other peaks

Ongoing engagement with DVNSW was a strength because both agencies are strong representatives of their member agencies and both represent the parallel systems responsible for responding to DFV, i.e. child protection and adult survivor responses. Similarly, collaboration with AbSec was helpful in the early stages of the project, in identifying key contacts within Aboriginal networks, governance organisations and services.

Independence of leadership

Participants in the Collaboration have provided feedback that they highly valued the independent facilitation by ACWA, in that it set aside competition between services that has historically resulted from competitive commissioning processes, and enabled service leaders to engage within their roles as service advocates and focus together on improving client outcomes across an interconnected system.

Process challenges

This section outlines challenges that impacted the Collaboration process.

Central Governance

At the commencement of the project ACWA intended to convene and maintain a statewide project leadership group comprising senior executives from NSW Police, DCJ (TAO, Commissioning, Child and Family and Justice), DVNSW, ABSEC, McKillop, Uniting, FAMS and Ministry of Health. The project team remained flexible and adaptive in the governance process for the project. The ACWA CEO and the project facilitators (Senior Consultants) convened a series of two meetings with state-based government and non-government leaders to provide guidance and direction to the project. The advice provided by the group was to undertake place-based work to demonstrate the opportunities for improving child protection and DFV integration at the local level.

Once the place-based work commenced, it was more critical to convene a local project leadership group informed by local expertise. Consequently, the state-level project governance occurred via one-on-one briefings and meetings with each senior leader. This meant the project was enriched by the intermittent guidance and support provided by key senior partners, however there was not a single consistent project leadership group operating at the statewide level as originally envisaged.

Local governance

At the local level, there was no existing senior leadership group covering DFV and child protection in operation in the Dubbo area that would provide project governance for the Collaboration. A small project leadership group was formed early in the project, and it was intended to include a range of government and non-government representatives, however its membership was limited to DCJ Western NSW staff who acted as sponsors of the project and met on a fortnightly basis. The project leadership group membership included local experienced and well-respected Aboriginal community members who provided sound guidance and connection to local Aboriginal leaders.

The limited membership of the project leadership group was mainly due to time restrictions, and the level of commitment required to oversee the project process (i.e. fortnightly meetings). Further, there is significant diversity in the size and scope of local partners, including small agencies with less than 10 staff, to large National and International NGOs. This meant the project team expanded the engagement phase of the project to ensure an inclusive approach was taken locally, and to ensure early engagement occurred in a safe and culturally appropriate environment that suited each agency.

Following the engagement period, it became evident that project partners and stakeholders' time was better spent engaged in workshops and working groups with peers from the local network, rather than project oversight. This meant the project was action and solution focussed, however the result of this is that a strategic DFV and child and family regional leadership group will need to be formed to oversee the implementation of change plans going forward.

Concurrent reforms

Throughout the project's planning phase, multiple concurrent reforms were underway at the local, state and national levels and therefore there were several reference, advisory and governance groups formed for those reforms. Each reform project engaged local leaders, including Aboriginal elders. Diagram 2 above illustrates some of the state government initiatives operating during the project's planning phase. ACWA was particularly aware of the multiple and competing demands placed on local Aboriginal leaders and service providers during the establishment phase of these reforms.

Engagement

Notwithstanding the high levels of engagement throughout the process, readiness, motivation and willingness to engage in a collaborative change planning process varied across local stakeholders. Commissioners of funded programs played a vital role

in supporting and championing the change planning process. DCJ Western, Far West and Murrumbidgee commissioning teams had a positive impact on the level of engagement by local stakeholders in workshops and working groups.

All project partners gave in-principle agreement to work collaboratively within the limitations of their current resources, to find opportunities to improve collaboration across child and family and DFV services to improve families' experience. Maintaining ongoing participation in working groups was a significant challenge, largely due to the competing demands on people's time.

Overall, the level of engagement by local partners in the working groups and workshops was strong, however a couple of key service providers, vital to the local support network, did not consistently engage in the collaborative process. Not all local partners had an adequate understanding of the value and critical importance that each service is required to engage in a collaboration if the system is going to make positive changes towards better integration. Whilst commissioning partners agree that partnership and collaborative ways of working is an expectation of funded agencies, there is currently no mechanism for leadership of a strategic governance group that brings together domestic violence, justice (including perpetrator interventions), child and family and specialist homeless service systems.

Community preferences

There were significant differences in the desired approach by project partners based in Wellington, which resulted in a longer engagement phase. The project team were committed to adhering to cultural protocols that required engaging with the Wellington Aboriginal Action Panel as the local Aboriginal governance group, but competing WAAP priorities meant it took some time for discussions to occur. Despite that delay, the Wellington process resulted in well attended and productive conversations.

Need for implementation resources

The Collaboration aimed to demonstrate the need and process of interagency planning to improve whole of family responses to DFV across the DFV and child and family service system, to support the achievement of state and community outcomes through place-based planning.

Its notable that there is currently no single agency in NSW with responsibility for coordination and planning across the service sector responding to families with complex social needs arising from DFV, with responsibility for place-based planning and implementation. While DCJ has overarching leadership of child protection, womens safety, homelessness and justice responses to domestic family and sexual violence, it does not have a regional planning or governance function that coordinates across these systems, or across the broader network of health, education, policing, NGOs and ACCOs needed to respond to families affected by DFV.

While the planning process in Dubbo and Wellington was resourced by ACWA, there is a clear need for resources to support implementation of action plans and sustain a cycle of continual system improvement in the longer term, in these sites. At the time of writing an application has been made for funding to establish cross-sector governance, implement agreed actions, support sector development, drive and sustain change in the Dubbo and Wellington communities, and evaluate the planning and implementation phases.

4. Strategic Insights – Systemic state and local recommendations to sustain positive change

The Family Safety Collaboration has aimed to demonstrate the process and benefits of place-based planning to ensure integrated responses to families impacted by DFV and child protection concerns. This section outlines strategic insights apparent through the process, notably that the key to improving outcomes for families experiencing domestic violence is enabling local leadership and local action, and maintaining stronger feedback loops between Commonwealth, state and local leaders working toward common goals, through improved governance and planning[7].

Regional and local governance and planning for implementation of state and national strategies

Currently there is a significant gap in cross sector governance and planning at a regional and local level for responses to families impacted by violence and child safety concerns.

The NSW Domestic Violence Reforms Delivery Board, comprising mainly government agencies, operates at a statewide level to oversee implementation of government priorities and reforms, but there is no mechanism by which planning reaches regional and local levels to effect changes needed to achieve intended outcomes of National or State plans or strategies. There is no vertical alignment of strategy and policy into action, and no structure for regional and local feedback into state strategy and policy.

The NSW Government provides minimal funding of $1800 per annum for local Domestic Violence Collectives or Interagencies, however these are not governance mechanisms. In Dubbo and Wellington for example, the Collectives are led by professionals working in NGO and government agency roles who contribute time toward leading the Collective toward its goals. The Collectives make a positive contribution toward local event planning that aims to raise community awareness of DFV, and they contribute to information sharing across the local service network about programs and services being run locally. The Collectives do not have an avenue or mechanism for providing strategic input into regional or state planning and strategy, nor the authority to resolve local systemic challenges like agency disengagement, underperformance or conflict.

Peak organisations including DVNSW, provide a vital service to the DV Collectives to contribute to state advocacy, however strategic feedback loops are required across all local, state and commonwealth parties engaged in child and family work. This would help ensure state policy and strategy is reflective of diverse cultural and demographic dynamics. Such feedback loops could enable the elevation of the impact of local DV Collectives and increase their capacity and capability to successfully represent local families' experiences in the development of policy, strategy and programs.

[7] In the context of child protection and domestic violence, common goals include government strategies such as the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Girls, Closing the Gap Targets 12 and 13, Safe and Supported Plan for protecting Australia's children, and the NSW DFV Plan.

Family Safety Collaboration Dubbo workshop, November 2023

The absence of infrastructure in connected governance between local and state bodies; and the lack of connection between child safety and domestic violence policy and strategy, limits opportunities for local inter-agencies and networks to effectively drive and support systemic improvements. This is a missed opportunity to improve outcomes for families impacted by domestic violence.

Structures to support cross sector collaboration to improve family outcomes

There was widespread agreement across all project partners, both across statewide teams and local teams within the Dubbo LGA, that a lack of collaboration and coordination of service responses is adversely impacting families surviving DFV. Families impacted by DFV often face multiple challenges, and navigate disparate systems of responses across justice, family law, child protection (statutory and NGO child and family services), specialist housing and domestic violence services. The intersection of cultural identity, age, sexuality, health status, wealth status and geographic location, and DFV responses, is of critical consideration for the broad range of agencies engaging with families.

Systemic silos are reflected in the stories told by women who participated in journey mapping, who spoke of the impact of lack of collaboration on their immediate and ongoing safety.

Journey maps also confirmed that victim/survivors expect the justice, DFV and child protection sectors to communicate and work together to share information and meet their needs so that they are not in a position of navigating a complicated bureaucratic process to gain essential supports such as housing assistance and counselling for adults and children. Collaboration across statutory and non-statutory agencies is most critical during a crisis. Both families and service providers across Dubbo and Wellington report they currently find it difficult to identify the right local service to meet families' needs.

There are limited opportunities for service providers across DFV and child protection to reflect on and address local trends and barriers to preventing crisis escalation, by working together to resolve local resourcing and practice issues collectively.

Creating seamless responses to families requires collaboration at both frontline case management and strategic levels. At the frontline, it includes working directly with families by assisting them to navigate and access a range of services to meet their needs. At a local systems level, it means working between agencies to identify system challenges, collaborate on solutions and develop a plan to address local community needs. In Western NSW, the current District Implementation Group for Housing is an example of a strategic senior leadership group focused on problem solving around a critical issue, however this approach of cross-agency collaboration and troubleshooting is needed more broadly, across DFV, child and family, justice, health and education.

There is significant benefit in enabling leaders from all agencies and services responding to child and adult victims and people using violence to agree on action plans and have the autonomy and flexibility to enact those plans in the best interests of their local communities and regions. This approach supports improvements across both frontline and systemic levels.

Partner agencies and local stakeholders across Dubbo and Wellington, consistently affirmed the need for this collaborative approach, but note that additional resources and autonomy are required to support such a regional leadership approach. Ongoing implementation of the Collaboration requires resources to lead implementation of cross-agency actions that have been agreed through the planning process.

A need to connect central planning to local community service systems, and to enable greater collaboration across sectors locally gives rise to the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1. Establishment of regional leadership cross-sector governance mechanism including government, NGO and Aboriginal led services across DFV, specialist homelessness and child and family sectors. The purpose is to oversee implementation of agreed actions, identify and resolve local challenges, support sector readiness for new programs such as core and cluster and changes such as family preservation recommissioning, and plan for sector development.

Recommendation 2. Continuation of the Family Safety Collaboration as a demonstration site, now focussed on improved governance and driving implementation. This would include development and trial of mechanisms to establish and connect local governance groups to statewide governance, so that foundations laid in the Collaboration can be built upon. This would require resourcing of a backbone team to:

- Lead implementation and delivery of locally agreed change plans
- Facilitate cross-sector governance,
- oversee activities to support practice improvement and whole of family focused collaboration,
- Oversee the delivery of a local sector development plan including communities of practice and training.
- Lead ongoing engagement with Aboriginal community and governance groups,
- Continue the use of journey mapping to identify areas where ongoing change is needed, as an action research strategy.
- Support development of a shared outcomes measurement approach

Earlier, integrated whole of family engagement and support, risk assessment and risk management

A common theme in Family Safety Collaboration discussions was the need for earlier and, whole of family support to address domestic violence before the need for justice and child protection intervention, however current approaches are centred around families in the justice system, and those assessed at 'serious threat'. This was also reflected in journey mapping for all the women interviewed, where incidents of abuse had occurred over many years, before they received responses that genuinely improved their circumstances.

While statewide implementation of Safer Pathway has been vital in improving interagency collaboration for victims at serious threat from domestic violence, families not assessed at serious threat are not consistently referred for support, and early opportunities to prevent serious harm to adult and child victim/ survivors are missed. Families may also be experiencing other needs not addressed in the assessment being applied, for example, homelessness or mental health concerns, support for which may prevent escalation to homelessness or child protection intervention.

There is also a concern about misalignment between the risk and needs assessments applied in DFV and those applied in child protection. The Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT) and the child protection structured decision-making (SDM) tools for assessment of children at risk have a vastly different approach to identifying the threshold of risk. This significantly impacts families' access to services required to improve the safety of adult and child victim/survivors. For example, access to intensive home-based family support is only available to families who meet the child

protection threshold, while access to the multi-agency safety planning mechanism (Safety Action Meetings) is available to adult survivors at serious threat, based on domestic violence risk factors that have a limited focus on children's experiences.

Examples of gaps in service access were discussed and debated during working group meetings. An area of common concern was young people's risk of homelessness and access to emergency and temporary accommodation during or following times of family violence when they were either victimised by the violence in their home or they were using violence in their home, or, in some instances, both co-occurring. Neither the DVSAT, nor the SDM provided adequate assessment of risk and need to enable young people in this situation the opportunity to have their needs met at a time of crisis and avoid homelessness. Despite local child protection teams in non-government agencies having some capacity to resource temporary accommodation options, young people in this situation would often not come to the attention of the right service due to the highly centralised and siloed approach to risk and needs identification.

It's understood that at the time of writing, development of a NSW common risk assessment and management framework (CRAMF) for DFV is underway, commissioned by DCJ. To achieve a whole of family integrated response it will be important that the CRAMF incorporates whole of family assessment, including risk to adult, youth and child victims, and behaviour of people who choose to use violence and their impact on parenting. It's also vital that the assessment is applied not just in Specialist DFV services and Safer Pathway participating agencies, but also in NGO child and family services, family support and preservation services and other contexts where families receive support for domestic violence. Beyond assessment, its vital that management of risk is shared across systems and services, with clear responsibility to take action to address risk, not just report or refer to another agency. This will necessitate building capacity to for risk management and safety planning, partnering with adult victims to build genuine safety.

Recommendation 3. That NSW consider opportunities to improve earlier access pathways to support for adult, child and youth victims, and people using violence, when families have not yet reached a Serious Threat or ROSH threshold.

Recommendation 4. Child and family and DFV services trial communities of practice focussed on collaborative response to families across the DFV and Child protection and youth sectors, including government and NGOs and with a focus on early and seamless support for families.

Recommendation 5. DCJ's review of the Safety and Risk Assessment tools applied in child protection practice should include consultation with families to ensure the new tools equally reflect the needs, risks and relationship dynamics for adult and child survivors and fathers who use violence.

Recommendation 6. DCJs planned development of a common risk assessment framework for DFV includes use of the framework by all services working with families impacted by DFV including child and family NGOs, and incorporates a focus on children and young people impacted by DFV (along with adult survivors), and people who choose to use DFV, including consistent language and responses to the impact abusive fathers have on children's safety.

Information sharing about people who use violence in relationships

Working Group Two of the Family Safety Collaboration focussed on the need for improved responses to men and boys who use violence in relationships. The group reflected on the limitations created by triage systems that are driven by government agencies at times of family crisis. For example, most referrals to the community-based men's behaviour change program are received after fathers who use violence are identified in the child protection or justice systems and generally after significant harm has been caused to mothers and children.

An alternative early intervention triage approach, led by community-based teams who are aware of families where fathers are at risk of using violence at home, was seen as being equally important as the justice and child protection triage systems operating at the crisis end of the system.

Current mechanisms and protocols for collaboration across agencies to reduce harm to victim/survivors are focussed on Safer Pathways where it is recognised that harm has already occurred in the family. This focus on collaboration at the tertiary prevention end of the system is invaluable, and therefore a collaborative approach for secondary prevention could provide much needed results in preventing risk of significant harm in children, and risk of serious threat to adults.

There are minimal opportunities within existing service systems to identify fathers and young men at risk of using DFV. Referral pathways into family preservation services are narrow and only occur once significant risk of harm to children has occurred.

To enable earlier access to needs-based support, families would benefit from a triage approach that enables child, youth and family services to collaborate with DFV services earlier in the life of the problem, to avoid escalation of abuse, and avoid the need for statutory system involvement.

Early support could include effective engagement with fathers where dynamics of power and control are present in the family and fathers have the opportunity for culturally appropriate education and reflection about the impact of their use of control tactics on their children and partners.

In mid-2023, the NSW Police introduced a registry to analyse information about people who use violence in relationships. The registry is informed by internal intelligence that predicts the likelihood that a person will cause serious harm, so that protective strategies can be put into place by police and justice agencies and DFV specialists. The Family Safety Collaboration partners who specialise in working with people who use violence are planning to develop an approach that identifies families where fathers are at risk of using DFV. The aim is to offer needs-based supports to them to avoid the escalation of abuse.

Recommendation 7. When identifying risk and needs within families where DFV is present, a whole-family perspective should be considered so that interventions better reflect the family, including cultural considerations.

Gaining a whole-family perspective generally requires collaboration or integration across DFV and child protection teams. This is consistent with NSW Health's investment in implementation of the Safe and Together model which includes a framework and practice tools to enable shared risk identification and management in this context. NSW Health are developing a cultural adaptation to improve Safe and Together results for Aboriginal communities in NSW.

In addition to the challenges with sharing information about people using violence, Collaboration participants strongly identified their need for greater training and support to develop practice skills to work with people using violence. As part of the Collaboration ACWA surveyed participants about their sector development and learning needs, and 75% of respondents identified working with men who use violence as a high priority. The need was specifically identified by child protection, child and family NGOs and health services, and was seen as a higher priority than Men's Behaviour change facilitator training by respondents.

Aboriginal Community engagement

Aboriginal staff working within both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations were critical partners, without which, the project would not have had engagement or relevance to the local community.

Local Aboriginal community members and leaders expressed ongoing frustration at the barriers that disable self-determination practices such as local problem solving.

Effective implementation of state and commonwealth plans impacting Aboriginal communities, requires local resources and local decision-making authority. Place based approaches to implementation of strategic plans and strategies have the potential to maximise benefit via genuinely handing over leadership to local Aboriginal communities to identify and address their own priorities for families. A place-based approach to the Collaboration acknowledged the unique strengths of each local area and community, the existing formal and informal approaches, and mechanisms already in place for supporting families to stay safely together.

Commissioning practices

Ongoing improvement of outcomes for families impacted by domestic violence is reliant on successful commissioning of a diverse range of responses to meet family needs. Improvements in strategic governance and coordination across Commissioners, in the planning and delivery of commissioning process across Local, State and Federal funding bodies could significantly improve access, equity and responsiveness to families.

A service mapping process in Dubbo and Wellington revealed the extent of the diverse and multiple government, non-government and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) being separately commissioned to respond to the needs of families in Dubbo and Wellington. A list of Commissioners against relevant child and family and DFV programs is at Appendix V.

One of the top concerns raised by the Wellington community is that there is no emergency accommodation option in town. Whilst this gap remains, the state and federal governments released competitive tendering processes in 2023 to establish emergency accommodation options. The Family Safety Collaboration project enabled the local community to access information about which local service providers will be tendering to deliver the new accommodation in their town. Generally, the local community would not necessarily have access to this information.

The absence of strategic mechanisms for communication between government and non-government, and between regional governance groups and state governance exacerbates the proliferation of commissioning of community programs and services.

Communication mechanisms between government commissioners and non-government partners are often ad hoc or focussed on monitoring and review at the funded program-level, rather than continuous quality improvement at a systemic and strategic level and therefore opportunities for improving practice collaboration across funded programs may be missed.

There is progressive work being undertaken in 2023/24 by AbSec in designing and implementing an Aboriginal Commissioning approach for Aboriginal child and family services in NSW. The Aboriginal Commissioning Framework seeks genuine Aboriginal self-determination and collective rights and decision-making authority of the supports, services and actions of child protection. The Aboriginal Commissioning Framework developed by AbSec refers to the devolution of decision making and a new approach to resourcing child and family services to Aboriginal people to achieve better outcomes for families and communities.

An approach that facilitates decision making about funded programs, in close proximity to the intended beneficiaries of those programs, has the potential to improve flexibility and agility to respond to local needs and challenges.

Commissioning for improved integration between child and family and domestic violence services, could also include:

- Identifying need through an ongoing and collaborative process with community and sector representatives, to create a shared vision and identify and agree on a set of outcomes for commissioned services.
- Convening an inclusive and representative group to help safeguard sustainable and effective implementation of commissioning, that is collaborative and local so that real time feedback about lived experience and impact can be understood by agencies and commissioners.
- Local governance and interagency groups that collaborate with community and stakeholders on the development of local strategic plans to address the identified needs. These plans would include mechanisms for building an ongoing understanding of people's experience of the services available and the professionals delivering those services, including Aboriginal and culturally diverse people's lived experience of cultural safety.
- Connections across local, state and commonwealth measurement of achievement of goals against relevant strategic plans, including locally developed plans.

Commissioning activities and capabilities at the local level that enable improved integration and take a more holistic approach with families:

- Facilitation of interactions across local interagency groups so that a more coordinated and holistic approach is taken to problem solving across housing, children protection and DFV responses.
- Active problem solving and conflict resolution between individual local agencies to improve service quality and accessibility for community where it is being impacted by interpersonal conflict between agencies or individuals.
- Data analysis and sharing that facilitates system stewardship. This includes access to and analysis of routinely collected data on services delivered internally by DCJ. For example, local demand and utilisation of Temporary Accommodation, statutory child protection, court and incarceration diversionary activities.
- Analytical skills to oversee impact, including impact of workforce development activity relevant to the outcomes they are commissioning, and the local gaps in service provision that they are aware of. This also supports system stewardship.
- Service mapping and service directories. There is a high value placed by front line agencies on the ongoing maintenance of service maps and directories. This is potentially a result of the multiple commissioners across DFV and child and family services, as well as the short-term nature of funding arrangements which results in frequent changes to service provision including referral arrangements and personnel. Effective collaboration across agencies and systems is reliant on both skill and knowledge. Knowledge of available local services, the scope and scale of service delivery and the intake mechanisms in the local area. Local project partners valued the creation of a service map which is intended to serve as an aid for enabling equitable and efficient access to services that best meet their needs. The importance of shared knowledge about available supports cannot be under-estimated and resources are required to develop and maintain this knowledge locally. In Dubbo, stakeholders reflected there was no one agency or professional delegated to ensure effective maintenance of a local service directory and this exacerbated the lack of coordination in service responses to families impacted by DFV.

Active system stewardship of commissioned services requires contracting teams to engage, and where appropriate, take the lead on local activities for improved coordination and collaboration.

Stewardship requires commissioners to develop and model strong partnership approaches with local providers and other local commissioners. For example, Commonwealth commissioners and state government commissioning teams engaging local service providers in shared planning and strategic oversight of achievement of improved outcomes. Improvements in integration of services can be enabled by commissioners focussing on both a whole of system view, and programmatic contract compliance for quality assurance. This approach would be enabled by introduction of a vertically connected strategic governance processes, where a shared (formal) commitment by commonwealth, state and local front-line agencies is made to maintain a focus on locally identified priorities.

Recommendation 8. Introduce commissioning approaches that facilitate greater local planning and decision making about funded programs for families. This would ideally include strategic partnership across commissioners (state and commonwealth) at the local level to influence in investment decisions, where those decisions do not compromise probity.

Recommendation 9: Ensure Commonwealth, State and Local service contracts require providers to actively engage in interagency collaboration, for clients as well as in interagency meetings, training and engagement. Interagency collaboration across DFV and child protection which is facilitated by Commissioning teams could be valuable.

Recommendation 10. Identify an appropriate mechanism to ensure each LGA has a delegated person/agency responsible for maintaining an accurate and accessible service directory such as the Info Exchange Service Seeker supported by DCJ. DV, child and family and housing collectives funded by DCJ could provide some resources toward this important activity.

Impact measurement

Although commissioned services often align with national and state government plans and strategies, monitoring and evaluation systems do not align and therefore understanding the impact the investment is having against the plan is generally unachievable.

The lack of an infrastructure for shared impact measurement across agencies responding to domestic violence, limits government's ability to understand the extent to which their strategies are solving local issues that contribute to child and family safety.

When new government strategies are introduced, new programs and monitoring system are introduced that match the relevant government priorities. This occurs in an already crowded and confusing service infrastructure. This is limiting the community's ability to address their own identified goals and gaps in service provision which may be a priority over the new government program introduced in the area. Connected State and local governance is therefore critical for understanding government return on investment at the local level.

Lived experience to inform continuous system improvement

The Journey Mapping proved to be a successful tool for engaging the project partners in the change planning process. Given the Journey Maps reflected the perspective, language and experience of women with lived experience, they paved a path for honest, brave and productive brainstorming about what each agency, and each practitioner could do differently to respond to the pain points communicated in Journey Maps. Recommendation 2 above states the value that continued Journey Mapping in Western NSW could bring to ongoing evaluation and monitoring efforts, that includes opportunities for inclusion of people with lived experience in system planning.

Sector development

Collective workforce planning within the child and family and domestic violence service systems in the Dubbo LGA, has the potential to drive sustained improvement in families' experience of improved safety and recovery from DFV. Sustainability of workforce development activity at the local level is a challenge in the current environment due to high rates of staff turnover across both government and non-government agencies. High staff turnover rates are commonplace across NSW and mainly due to the level of complexity of DFV and child protection work. A collective workforce planning strategy would potentially maximise the benefit of existing staff development resources held by government and non-government agencies. A shared approach to building and increasing the capability of the local sector will improve family engagement and benefit local communities.

Recommendation 11: Government organisations and peak bodies collaborate to develop an approach to Regional Sector Development Planning, to be implemented locally with child and family and DFV services and local governance groups, with the aim of strengthening sector development, building foundational skills and supporting cross sector collaboration between child and family and DFV services. Relevant stakeholders include ACWA/CCWT, DVNSW, fams, AbSec, ECAV, DCJ and NTV.

Recommendation 12. Promote collaboration as a core skill, and prioritise training in advanced interagency practice, or rollout of cross sector DFV and child protection training such as Safe and Together.

5. Conclusion and Next Steps

The Family Safety Collaboration fulfilled its objective to demonstrate place-based work focussed on improving the integration of the varied and complex responses to families impacted by DFV. The Collaboration worked closely with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners to identify and implement initiatives that contribute to improvements in responses by government and NGO agencies toward child safety and domestic violence. At the advice of partners, the project took a place-based approach in Dubbo and Wellington, and engaged local representatives in developing plans to strengthen collaboration at both systemic and frontline levels in the hope that families receive more effective, seamless support in response to child protection and domestic violence risks.

Early engagement of the Collaboration involved a mixed methods approach including informal one on one meetings, whole team briefings with small NGOs, and small forums bringing together key local experts. This enabled ACWA to develop a strong partnership with local agencies and partnerships across agencies working with families. Lived experience and local leaders and elders drove the direction of the project toward the formation of working groups for Dubbo covering the areas of priority: early support and seamless response, working with men and boys who use violence, and housing issues. Following the advice of local Aboriginal leaders, one on one discussions and larger interagency planning meetings were conducted with Wellington partners to develop a Wellington action plan.

Wellington Aboriginal Action Panel, community members and project team at the Wellington Wiradjuri Cultural Centre, June 2023

Development of local Action Plans was the first step toward improving local collaboration across the service systems and agencies responding to families impacted by DFV. The process of developing a vision, agreeing the priorities, and developing change actions assisted local individuals and agencies to commence the process of change toward integration of responses. In December 2023, ACWA reduced the level of facilitation of the project due to expending the available internal resources it had made available for the project, but has maintained a level of support to enable some work to continue while implementation resources are secured. Local leaders continued to meet locally to continue to progress the positive change toward improved collaboration.

Local leaders reflected on the value of ACWAs resourcing in their local community and the importance of the change process being facilitated by an agency that is independent to local service delivery and not a competitor for government funding.

In mid 2024, on behalf of local partners, ACWA secured NSW Government funding under the National Partnership Agreement, to continue the implementation of the Family Safety Collaboration. The funding will be auspiced by ACWA who will recruit local project implementation officers to support the achievement of both Dubbo and Wellington Action Plans. These local project officers will play a critical role in supporting local strategic governance to oversee the project activities, and to maintain a focus on the establishment and maintenance of cross-agency oversight of outcomes for families with children impacted by DFV. A local sector development plan will also be implemented, along with a process evaluation.

6. Appendices

Appendix I: Participating Agencies

State and Local Government organisations

- Department of Communities and Justice - Community Services, Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes, Housing, Community Corrections, Youth Justice
- NSW Health - IPARVAN, Wellington Community Health Service
- NSW Police Force
- Department of Education
- Aboriginal Affairs Dubbo
- Dubbo Regional Council, Social Justice Advisory

Non-Government organisations

- Dubbo Neighbourhood Centre
- Western Women's Legal Centre
- Mission Australia
- Orana Support Services
- Housing Plus, WDVCAS
- Catholic Care
- Uniting
- Dubbo Regional Council, Communities for Children
- Marathon Health
- Barnardos
- Wellington Aboriginal Action Panel
- Wellington DV Collective
- Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Service
- WINS Community Centre
- Legal Aid
- Wirrimbirra
- Charles Sturt University
- Western Women's Legal Centre

Aboriginal Governance organisations

- Dubbo Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Three Rivers Regional Assembly - Dubbo Aboriginal Working Party
- Wellington Aboriginal Action Panel

Domestic Violence Interagencies

- Wellington Domestic Violence Collective
- Dubbo Domestic Violence Collective

Peaks

- Domestic Violence NSW
- AbSec

Appendix II Local Action plans

Working Group 1 Change Actions Early Support and Seamless Response			
Outcome Areas	**Short Term Actions** ***6-12 months***	**Medium Term Actions** ***12-18 months***	**Measuring Success**
Families receive the support they need and there is no wrong door	- Develop Interagency Guidelines to establish shared principles for local interagency practice, clarify agencies roles and commitment to collaboration. - Publish and keep updated a comprehensive list of local services, roles, target group and contact information.	- Increase collaboration across the services network by collating and sharing a matrix of service information and referral forms for local child and family services, to facilitate easier and earlier access to the right service. - Develop a monitoring plan for service access and demand. - Ensure service gaps and system issues are identified and challenges resolved through improved governance and planning – See Governance	- Seek direct feedback form families, utilising mixed methodologies like journey mapping, surveys and other mechanisms.
Families receive early help to meet their needs	- As part of the Interagency Guidelines Develop local Family Engagement Agreement between agencies to guide effective relationship building with families. - Reflect engagement benchmarks into service contracts so families get their needs met earlier.	- Create more accessible pathways of families into support, prior to statutory intervention or serious threat. For example, implementing the Family Connect and Support app, to increase access to needs-based supports through greater connection with Health education, and generalist community and family services. (for discussion with Uniting)	- Monitor referrals into early support services like Family Connect and Support, as well as uptake of referrals on to other services.
Escalation of harm to families is reduced due to after hours and crisis supports being available	- Negotiate interagency response (shared resources) to after-hours emergency help for all families with children, utilising existing after-hours resources. - Develop clear guidelines for agreement by partners.	- Pilot the after-hours response over 12 months, iterate and deliver ongoing. - Develop a common needs assessment tool for after-hours work. - Collaborate to identify and advocate for greater access to crisis accommodation for young people, including those not in the justice system	- Seek direct feedback from families who accessed the after-hours response service

Sector development supports continuous service improvement	- Develop sector capability to provide integrated responses to domestic violence and child protection concerns, by Develop shared local workforce development strategy (based on 2023 survey) that enables interagency learning.
	- Work with CCWT, DVNSW and ECAV to plan local shared training, based on workforce development plan.
		- Implement a Community of Practice to improve and sustain:
		  - Interagency practice in responding to domestic violence and child protection risk and need.
		  - collaboration and sharing of expertise in working with men who use violence.
			- Monitor the uptake of training and identify ongoing sector development needs.
			- Review the community of practice at 12 months, to determine if it is function as intended

Working Group 2 Change Actions

Improving work with people who use violence

Outcomes	Short Term Actions *6-12 months*	Medium Term Actions *12 -18 months*	Measuring Success

More fathers and boys access support across a range of service types	- Trial (3-month) an **inter-agency client-focused triage group** to facilitate access to needs-based supports. This group would involve a small group of managers with leadership of programs and services for men who use violence, eg MBCPs, Intensive Family Preservation, Community Corrections, AOD, mental health and court based programs and services.
	- Operationalise with:
	  - Terms of reference including membership by decision makers
	  - Adaptation of Community Corrections tool for the triage process
	  - Information sharing based on consent and in line with Corrections and other relevant policy and procedure.
		- Review the effectiveness of the trial, iterate and implement ongoing. Review includes whether longer term safety planning was undertaken by the agency the person was referred to.	- Feedback directly from families that are brought to the triage group. Person referred engages with the service they are referred to.

Develop capability to work with men who use violence	- Develop shared **local workforce development strategy** (based on 2023 survey) that enables interagency learning.
	- Develop a Community of Practice to improve collaboration and sharing of expertise in working with men who use violence and their families. Include joint community engagement activities to build community trust for engagement.
	- Operationalise with:
	  - Governance group to oversee and maintain COP.
	  - Appointing an independent facilitator
	  - Shared funding arrangement by each participating agency to cover facilitation costs.
	  - Tailoring to meet needs of both male and female staff workforce in child and family work
		- Attract additional funds for tailored, local programs across the service continuum that address gaps in services.	- Engagement by those invited to the COP. Feedback from families receiving services regarding safety and wellbeing.

Strengthening prevention and early intervention with young men Fathers and boys have ongoing support to maintain the benefits of programs accessed	- Shared data collection to build evidence of need and inform shared funding submissions to increase service availability.	- Introduce a **social and peer support group** with the aim of maintaining the positive impact of behaviour change groups.	- Engagement by those invited.

Appendix III: Working Group Outputs

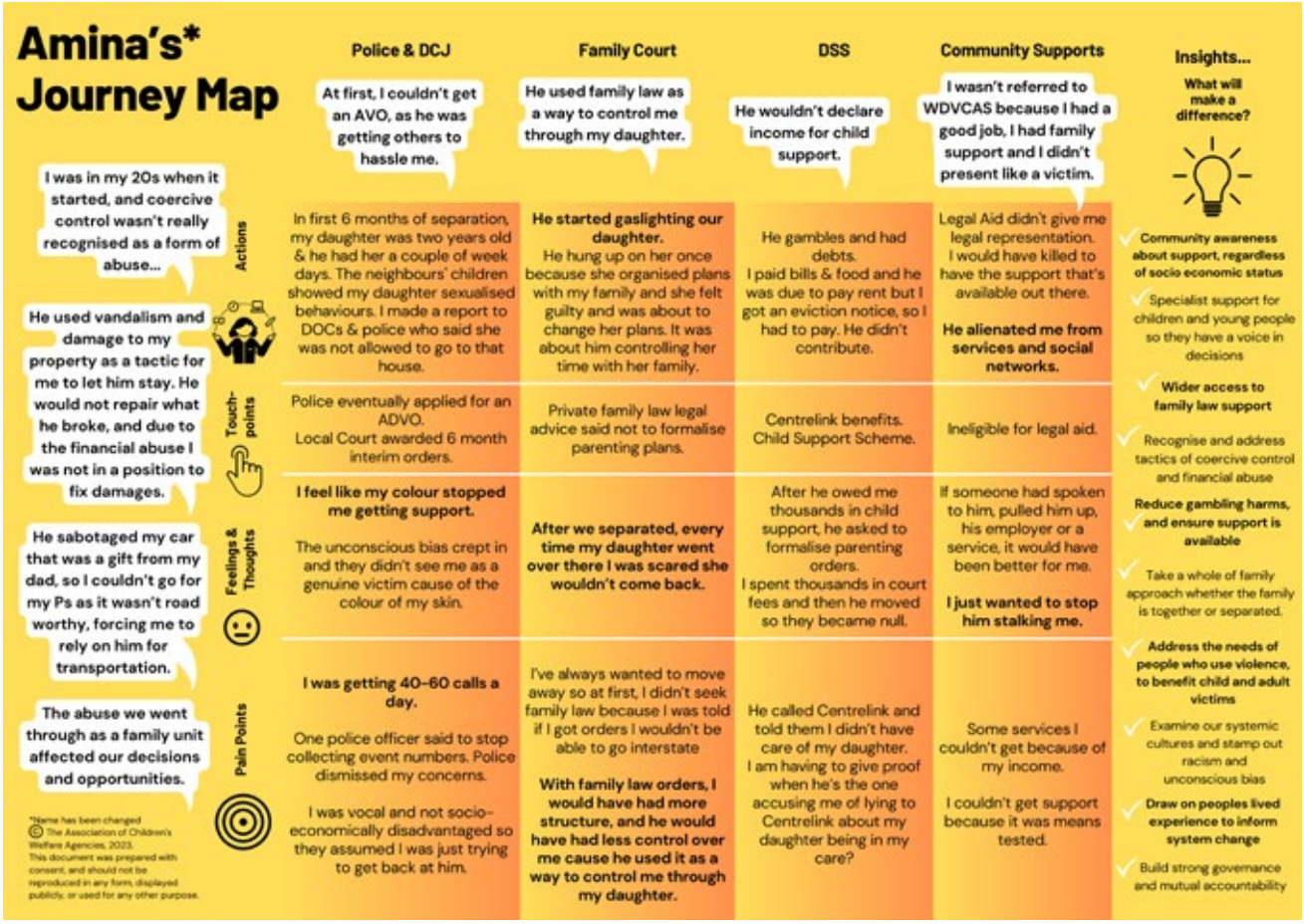
Wellington

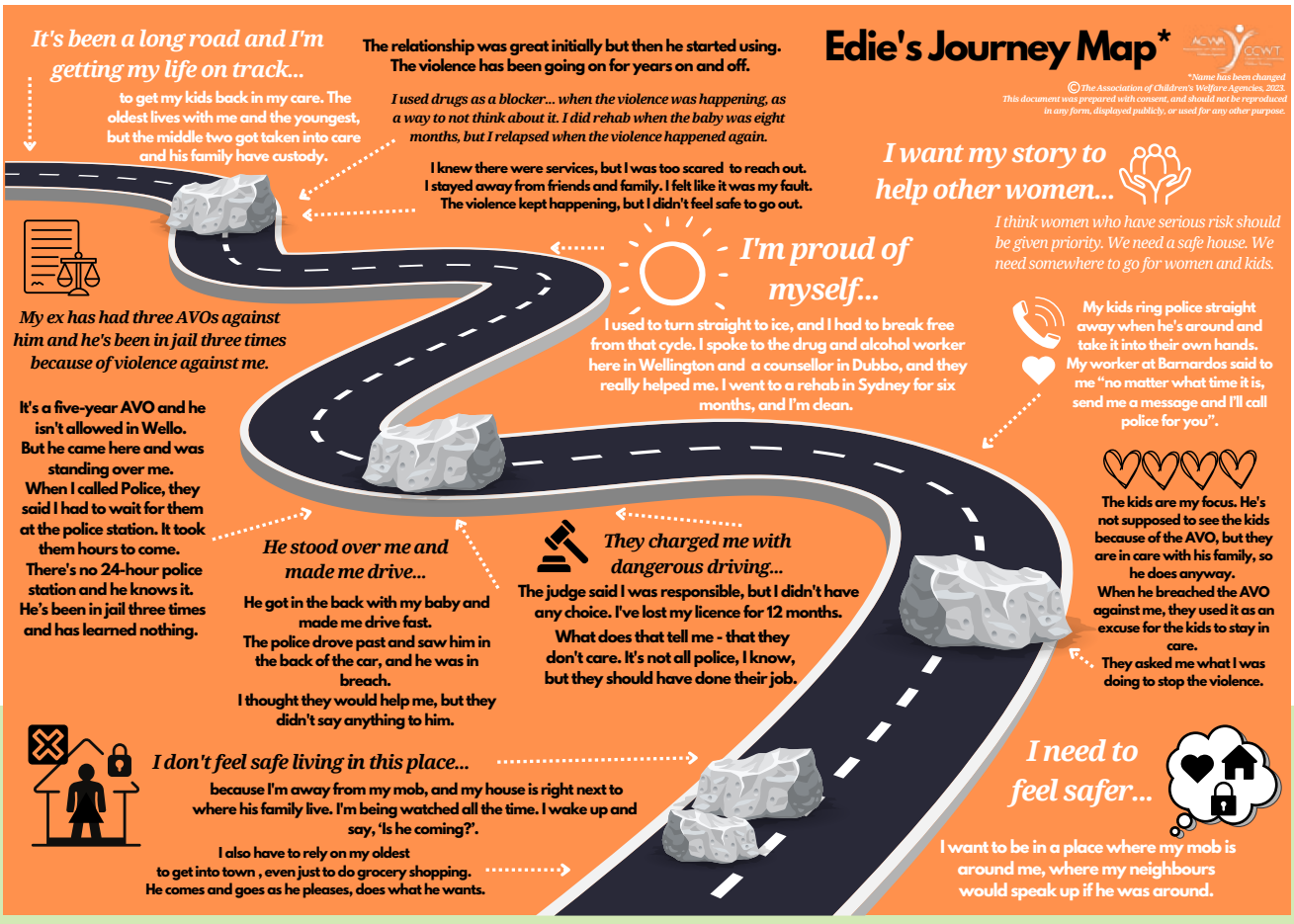
- Modelling a collaborative planning approach to address sector silos.
- Service mapping and development of a comprehensive service list showing what service options are available in Wellington, and what is available from Dubbo.
- Development a flowchart for after-hours response options in Wellington.
- Establishment of a project to enable the Local Health Service to be used as a place for victims to wait safely and be cared for in an emergency, until services are available during business hours.
- Collaboration between specialist homelessness service providers to support a local funding application for new emergency accommodation in Wellington.
- Interagency support of a submission for a Men's Healing Centre in Wellington.
- Scheduling of training targeted to the identified needs through ACWA's training arm, the Centre for Community Welfare Training and external providers.
- Take up of actions developed in the co-design process by the Wellington DFV Collective, which has increased in membership and elected new leadership supported by the longstanding office bearers.

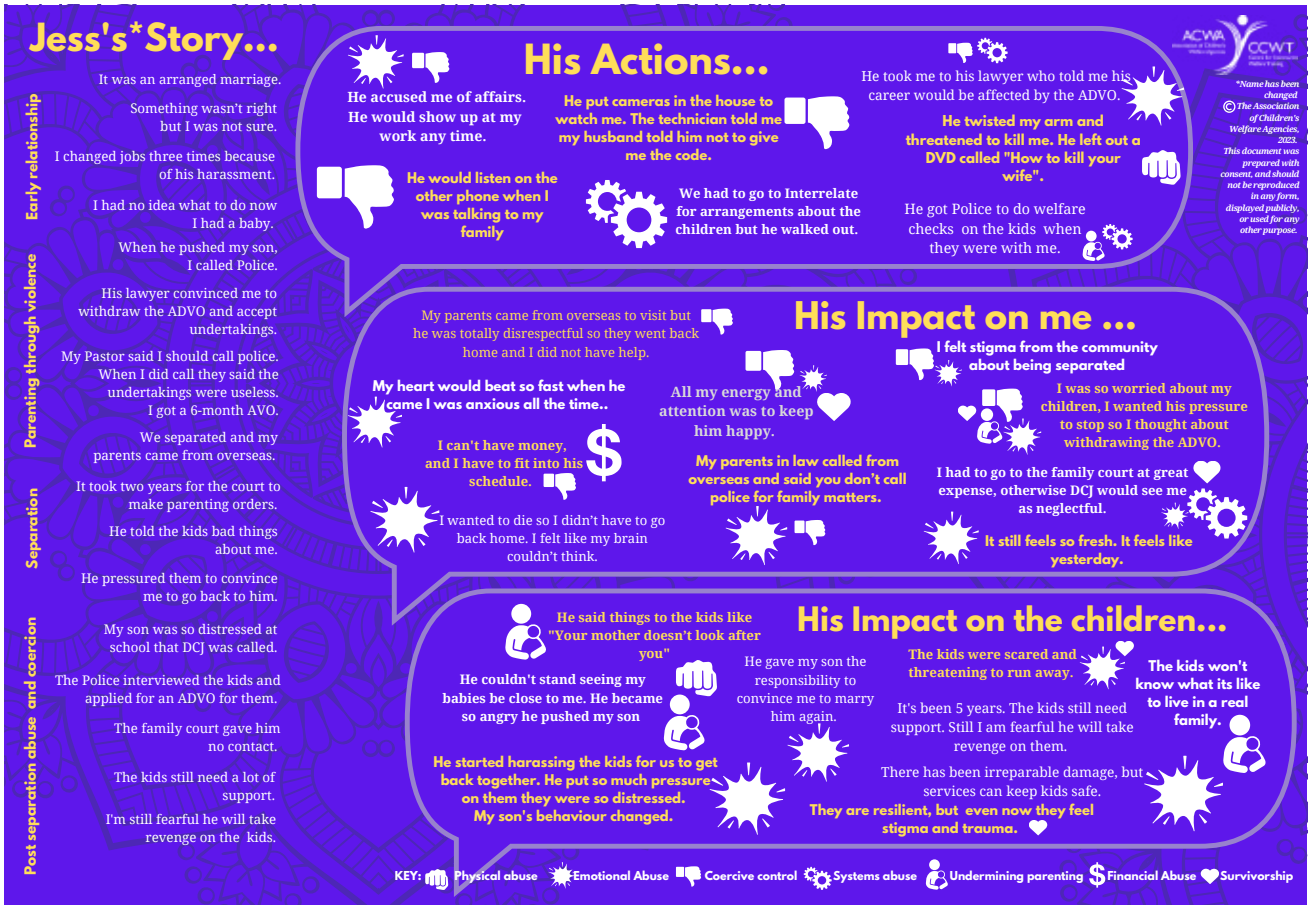
Dubbo

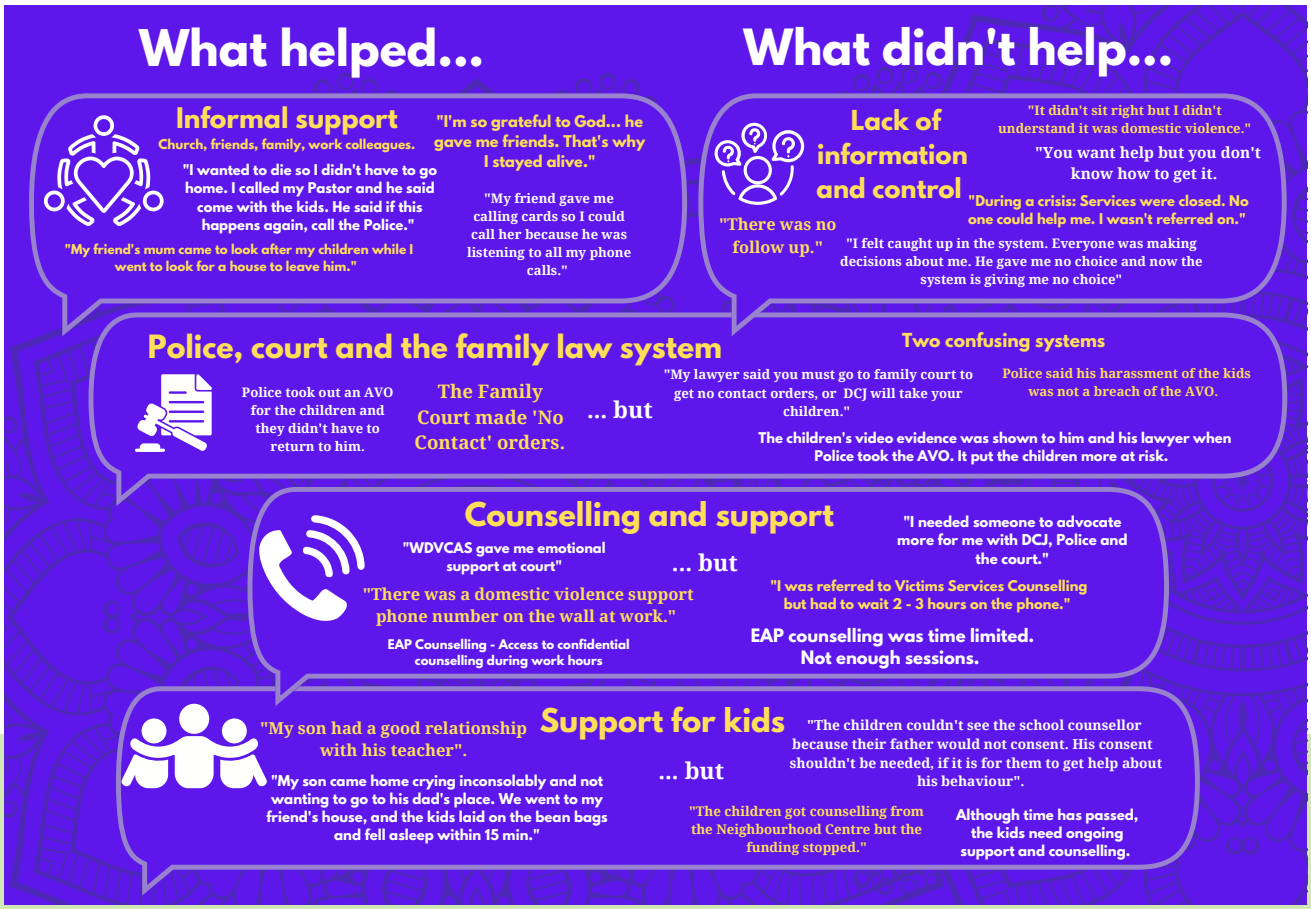
- Three large workshops where all local partners identified opportunities for positive change in service responses to families.
- Formation of three working groups focussed on three Dubbo priorities listed above and the development of change action plans for implementation locally.
- Identification of strategic change and resource sharing to improve after hours crisis responses and earlier triage opportunities that include services working with local men, and a commitment to collaborative family practice approaches in DFV.
- Comprehensive service mapping with information about how to access relevant local DFV and child and family support.
- Initiation of a project to develop local Interagency Guidelines, articulating how services will work together to ensure more seamless services responses.
- Workforce development needs identification and opportunities to improve joint training and development opportunities. This includes a localised sector development plan, and agreement to establish a Community of Practice for people who work with families, to improve engagement with men and boys.
- Agreement by the local Housing District Implementation Group to move toward strategic place-based networks to troubleshoot solutions locally.

Appendix IV: Journey Maps

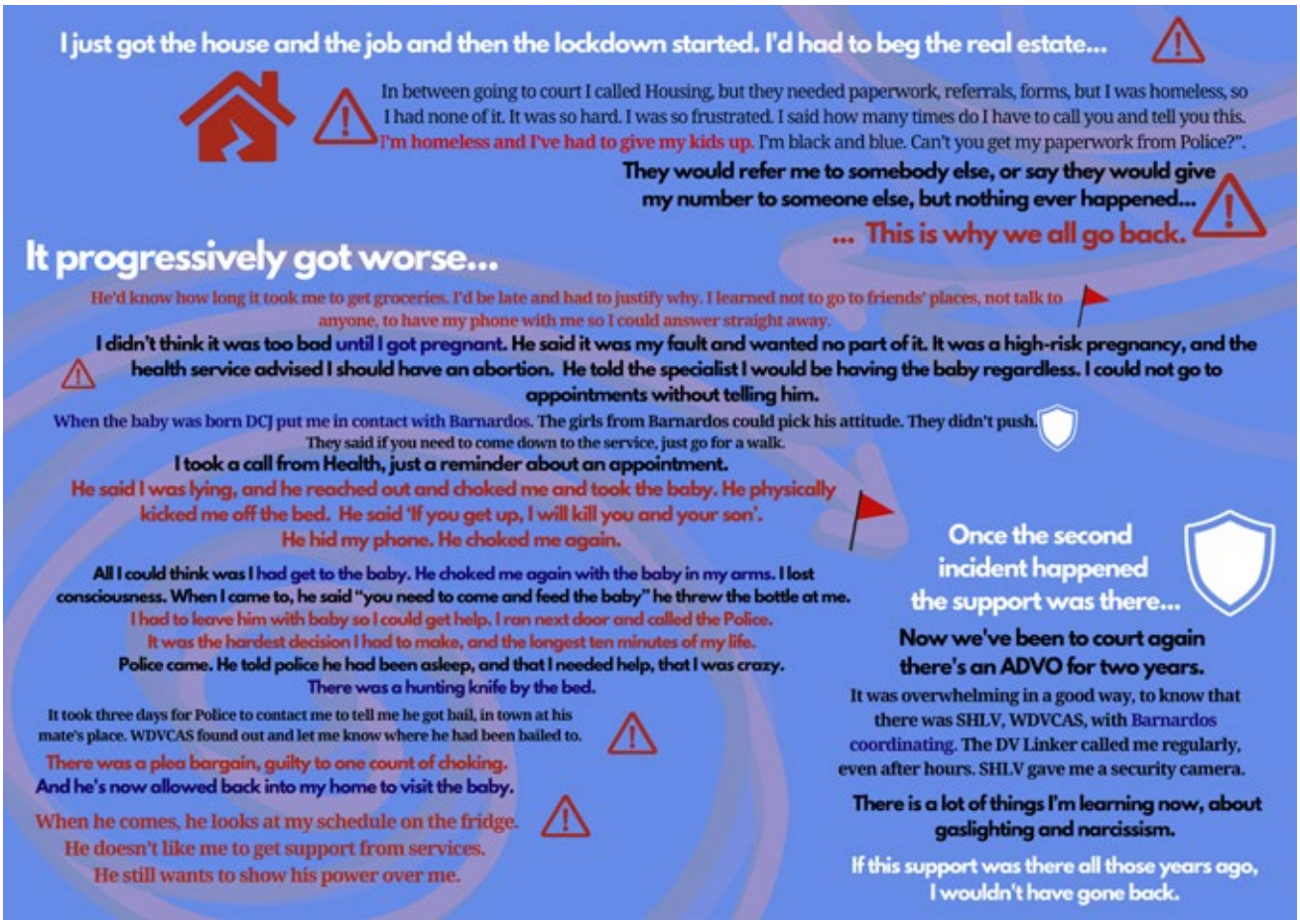





Jess's*Story...
Early relationship
It was an arranged marriage.
Something wasn't right but I was not sure.
I changed jobs three times because of his harassment.
I had no idea what to do now I had a baby.
Parenting through violence
When he pushed my son, I called Police.
His lawyer convinced me to withdraw the ADVO and accept undertakings.
My Pastor said I should call police. When I did call they said the undertakings were useless. I got a 6-month AVO.
Separation
We separated and my parents came from overseas.
It took two years for the court to make parenting orders.
He told the kids bad things about me.
He pressured them to convince me to go back to him.
Post separation abuse and coercion
My son was so distressed at school that DCJ was called.
The Police interviewed the kids and applied for an ADVO for them.
The family court gave him no contact.
The kids still need a lot of support.
I'm still fearful he will take revenge on the kids.
His Actions...
He accused me of affairs. He would show up at my work any time.
He put cameras in the house to watch me. The technician told me my husband told him not to give me the code.
He would listen on the other phone when I was talking to my family
We had to go to Interrelate for arrangements about the children but he walked out.
He took me to his lawyer who told me his career would be affected by the ADVO.
He twisted my arm and threatened to kill me. He left out a DVD called "How to kill your wife".
He got Police to do welfare checks on the kids when they were with me.
His Impact on me ...
My parents came from overseas to visit but he was totally disrespectful so they went back home and I did not have help.
My heart would beat so fast when he came I was anxious all the time..
I can't have money, and I have to fit into his schedule.
I wanted to die so I didn't have to go back home. I felt like my brain couldn't think.
All my energy and attention was to keep him happy.
My parents in law called from overseas and said you don't call police for family matters.
I felt stigma from the community about being separated
I was so worried about my children, I wanted his pressure to stop so I thought about withdrawing the ADVO.
I had to go to the family court at great expense, otherwise DCJ would see me as neglectful.
It still feels so fresh. It feels like yesterday.
His Impact on the children...
He said things to the kids like "Your mother doesn't look after you"
He couldn't stand seeing my babies be close to me. He became so angry he pushed my son
He started harassing the kids for us to get back together. He put so much pressure on them they were so distressed. My son's behaviour changed.
He gave my son the responsibility to convince me to marry him again.
The kids were scared and threatening to run away.
It's been 5 years. The kids still need support. Still I am fearful he will take revenge on them.
There has been irreparable damage, but services can keep kids safe.
They are resilient, but even now they feel stigma and trauma.
The kids won't know what its like to live in a real family.
KEY: Physical abuse Emotional Abuse Coercive control Systems abuse Undermining parenting Financial Abuse Survivorship
*Name has been changed
© The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, 2023. This document was prepared with consent, and should not be reproduced in any form, displayed publicly, or used for any other purpose.


What helped...
Informal support
Church, friends, family, work colleagues.
"I'm so grateful to God... he gave me friends. That's why I stayed alive."
"I wanted to die so I didn't have to go home. I called my Pastor and he said come with the kids. He said if this happens again, call the Police."
"My friend gave me calling cards so I could call her because he was listening to all my phone calls."
"My friend's mum came to look after my children while I went to look for a house to leave him."
What didn't help...
Lack of information and control
"It didn't sit right but I didn't understand it was domestic violence."
"You want help but you don't know how to get it.
"During a crisis: Services were closed. No one could help me. I wasn't referred on."
"There was no follow up."
"I felt caught up in the system. Everyone was making decisions about me. He gave me no choice and now the system is giving me no choice"
Police, court and the family law system
Police took out an AVO for the children and they didn't have to return to him.
The Family Court made 'No Contact' orders.
... but
"My lawyer said you must go to family court to get no contact orders, or DCJ will take your children."
Police said his harassment of the kids was not a breach of the AVO.
Two confusing systems
The children's video evidence was shown to him and his lawyer when Police took the AVO. It put the children more at risk.
Counselling and support
"WDVCAS gave me emotional support at court"
... but
"I needed someone to advocate more for me with DCJ, Police and the court."
"There was a domestic violence support phone number on the wall at work."
"I was referred to Victims Services Counselling but had to wait 2 - 3 hours on the phone."
EAP Counselling - Access to confidential counselling during work hours
EAP counselling was time limited. Not enough sessions.
Support for kids
"My son had a good relationship with his teacher".
"My son came home crying inconsolably and not wanting to go to his dad's place. We went to my friend's house, and the kids laid on the bean bags and fell asleep within 15 min."
... but
"The children couldn't see the school counsellor because their father would not consent. His consent shouldn't be needed, if it is for them to get help about his behaviour".
"The children got counselling from the Neighbourhood Centre but the funding stopped."
Although time has passed, the kids need ongoing support and counselling.

Appendix IV: Journey Maps



Appendix V: Current Commissioning Mechanisms

The following is a list of funding bodies that are commissioning service delivery to local families with children where the intended outcomes are common across the programs. `

Commonwealth	**Department of Social Services**	Communities for Children
		Parent Next
		Family and Relationship Services
		Reconnect
		Safe Places
	National Indigenous Australians Agency	Tackling Family Violence
		Family Violence and Legal Prevention Services including Domestic Violence Casework
		Justice Reinvestment Unit
State	**Department of Communities and Justice**	Specialist Homelessness Services
		Core and Cluster
		Community Housing Program
		Opportunity Pathways
		Bail Assistance Accommodation Service
		Reintegration Housing Support Program
		Youth Justice Community Support Program
		Youth on Track
		Strong Aboriginal Youth
		Intensive Family Preservation
		Targeted Earlier Intervention
		Men's DV Behaviour Change Program
		Family Connect and Support
		DV Committee Grants
		DFSV Multicultural Community Grant Program
		Sexual Violence Project Fund
	Legal Aid	Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Service
		Family (Law) Assistance Service
	NSW Health Aboriginal Health Adult Alcohol and other drugs Adult mental health	Social and Emotional Wellbeing teams AMS
		Continuing Coordinated Care
		Community Living Program
Local	Community Services Fund	Community Grants
		Community and recreational infrastructure

The government priorities these commissioned services align with include:

- **National Plan to End violence against Women and Children 2022-2032**
- *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027*
- **Closing the Gap Targets** 12. Children are not overrepresented in the child protection system and 13. Families and households are safe.
- **Safe and Supported:** The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021 - 2031

Appendix VI: Literature Summary - Defining integration in the context of Domestic and Family Violence and Child Protection

Note. *This literature summary was prepared in June 2022 to inform the scoping of ACWA's Domestic Violence and Child Protection Integration Project, which led to initiation of the Family Safety Collaboration. Since finalisation of the summary, substantial research has been released that underscores the impact of DFV on children and young people and the need for integrated responses that focus on children and young people as primary victims alongside adult victims, and incorporate a focus on accountability of fathers who choose to use violence.*

Purpose

This paper summarises relevant literature in the areas of child protection and domestic and family violence, and integration. Most of the literature relates to service provision and practice interventions and less relates to the integration of systems.

A key theme in the literature and in sector consultations regarding integration is the importance of agencies having shared language and understanding, hence the need to explore definitions of integration in the context of this project.

Integration is essential in domestic and family violence (DFV) and child protection system responses because:

A. Multiple hardships often co-occur for children in families where DFV occurs. For example, where statutory child protection agencies are involved, mental ill health and alcohol and other drug use can be co-occurring in the home.

B. Multiple government and non-government systems and services operate in response to DFV and child protection. For example, a range of justice agencies respond to DFV as a crime.

C. A complex service ecosystem is commissioned by all three tiers of government, for delivery of services to adult and child victim/survivors by non-government agencies.

Defining integration

The literature confirms anecdotal evidence that there is no consensus definition for integration, however there are common systems and practices that characterise integration. Common language and understanding about integration is considered important to the process of evolving child protection and domestic violence responses to families.

Integration can be seen as the interface between multiple systems. Additional language used to describe integration includes joined-up, interagency, co-located, linked, cooperative, collaborative, streamlined and coordinated.

In 2015, Breckenridge and colleagues evaluated integrated interventions in violence against women using a set of criteria. These criteria below were included in a definition of integration for a meta-evaluation of interventions in violence against women.

- Coordination protocols for integrated service provision and/or a formalised partnership or joint service agreement between agencies.
- Funding specific to integrated service provision.
- A formalised statement of shared principles/ goals between agencies.

Literature in child protection and domestic and family violence indicates integration is far more complex than the criteria above. Stepping outside of the practice of working in isolation from other professionals or agencies is the central tenet to integration. To provide an integrated response, professionals and agencies need to step outside their own contextual practice.

In 2018, Professor Blagg and colleagues found mainstream agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait women hold different notions of what constitutes an integrated response. Mainstream practice focuses on integration at the level of agencies. In comparison, Indigenous organisations looked at integration in

terms of a holistic response that focuses on prevention and integration with cultural health and healing, and integration occurs at the level of place ("bottom-up").

Herrenkohl and colleagues (2019) argue for system re- alignment to integrate public health prevention and early intervention in order to engage, support, and empower families. These authors argue that in order to improve the lives of children at risk of abuse and neglect, jurisdictions need to engage a public health prevention framework focused on promoting safe, supportive, and caring environments and a continuum of 'blended' services across prevention and proportionate universalism. The 'blend' is heavily weighted in prevention and if successful, fewer secondary and tertiary prevention services are required. Where a proactive support system is in place, integration across education and health sectors is required with a shared orientation toward prevention.

Essential components of integration

In the PATRICIA Project (Humphries and Healey 2017), factors for collaboration included:

Governance:

- strong and stable governance or leadership including managers who have appropriate qualifications, skills, and expertise to guide the work,
- strong authorising environments involving strong senior management support that enables more effective work across organisations,
- practices, partnerships and decision-making processes shared by all partners, and
- a belief in change and a culture of trust and learning.

Collaboration:

- The Collaborative Practice Framework for Child Protection and Specialist Domestic Violence was published to build and sustain collaboration between DFV and child protections sectors.

Information sharing about perpetrators:

- Shared risk assessments leading to safety planning and risk management.
- Trust in information sharing; nuanced so there is no harm caused to women and children as a result of blanket sharing of information.

Universal risk assessment and risk management:

- Sufficient detail in child protection assessments about the risk indicators for DFV.
- Application of models such as Safe and Together as a complement to standardised child protection risk management tools.

Co-location:

- Co-location of services or face to face meetings for collaboration such as cooperative safety planning.
- Authorising environments enabling co-location, tight working relationships and effective communication.
- Avoiding collusion with perpetrators through shared identification of risk.

Data systems:

- Data communication linkages between systems such as Police, child protection and DFV services. (Noting the SAMs have since been established to contribute to the sharing of records but not entirely addressing the issue).
- Measure impact of services through a comprehensive data set; facilitate future research to inform policy and practice.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice to respond to children impacted by domestic and family violence takes into consideration the impacts of intergenerational trauma on individuals, families and communities since colonisation and responses being holistic rather than individualistic (Morgan et al 2022). Integration is elevated in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice to include spiritual and emotional elements:

- opportunities to heal from witnessing or being a victim of violence, including in the mind, body and spirit,
- support for families, not just individuals to address DFV in holistic and culturally strong ways that use the power of cultural lore and values to drive changed behaviour,
- therapeutic healing circles embedded within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family services to help fill the gap of limited specialist support; where community - controlled organisations engage children, young people and their families to have conversations about the use of violence and the impact on the family,

- opportunities to learn about and be held within cultural values, systems and traditions to support connections to the strength of identity and spirituality, and to provide a strong cultural compass for future guidance (pp7).

Integrated responses to children and their families victimised by and surviving DFV in the mainstream literature often refers to collaboration and sharing across agencies. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature, integration is extended to also include emotional, spiritual and cultural healing to prevent and break cycles of violence.

Commissioning related considerations from the literature

Integrated approaches are efficient and cost-effective ways to respond to victims/survivors with complex needs. Time limited funding can create organisational stress and limits opportunities for collaboration due to limited DFV knowledge and training. A lack of specialist services is available in regional and remote areas, and existing services experience constraints in delivering effective integrated approaches including seamless referral pathways and partnerships.

Infrastructure support such as improved data collection and sharing systems is required to overcome the challenges of integration and barriers to collaboration. Further exploration is needed of the nature of required infrastructure by non-government agencies as the literature is not sufficient in this area.

Considerations for NSW

1. There is an opportunity to extend the mainstream understanding of integration to include Aboriginal and Torres Islander perspectives of the need for healing of mind, body and spirit to break cycles of violence. This may require acknowledging a possible disconnect between notions of causality of DFV across mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Adoption of best practice models identified through the research and local knowledge will contribute to enhanced wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

2. Implementation of a Collaborative Practice Framework for Child Protection and Specialist DFV as per the PATRICIA project's recommendation in 2017. The Framework would offer a guide to training of professionals in approaches such as Safe and Together. Collaborative practice is said to be guided by:
   - formal collaboration mechanisms,
   - information sharing agreements,
   - shared risk assessment and management tools,
   - joint training,
   - co-locating services and
   - shared language between sectors.

3. Policy and strategy to address the common theme in literature where mothers who experience DFV are often seen to fail to protect their children while men who perpetrate DFV are invisible in the service.

4. Improved assessments of the risk and impact of DFV on children and on the mother-child relationship. Improved documentation of the impact on children of living with fathers who use violence will better enable continued protection of children.

5. Widening of DFV services to include pathways for fathers who use violence. This requires training for professionals working with families.

6. Improved information sharing about the perpetrator and victim-focussed consent processes (noting some progress has been made since the introduction of Safer Pathways).

7. Exploring public health models of primary prevention to reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors is required. Making use of early intervention that cuts across child welfare, justice, mental health and education to better support vulnerable families and intensify preventative approaches.

8. Effective governance that empowers the non-government sector so that professionals working with families and communities are formally engaged with policymakers to ensure all women are represented in future policy initiatives and their needs are reflected in the development and evaluation of integrated responses.

References

Breckenridge, J. Rees, S. Valentine, K. Murray, S. 2015 *Meta-evaluation of existing interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated interventions and service responses to violence against women: State of knowledge paper*. Published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited

Blagg, H. Williams, E. Oscar, J. 2018 *Evaluation of innovative models of interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated responses to family and/or sexual violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities* Published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited

Herrenkohl, T. Lonne, B. Higgins, D. Scott, D. 2019 *The Personal Security of Children Demands Bold System Reform*. Published by International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice (2020) 3:9–17

Humphreys, C and Healey L. *2017 PAThways and Research Into Collaborative Inter-Agency practice: Collaborative work across the child protection and specialist domestic and family violence interface: The PATRICIA Project.* Final report Published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited

Morgan, G. Butler, C. French, R. Creamer, T. Hillan, L. Ruggiero, E. Parsons, J. Prior, G. Idagi, L. Bruce, R. Gray, T. Jia, T. Hostalek, M. Gibson, J. Mitchell, B. Lea, T. Clancy, K. Barber, U. Higgins, D. Cahill, A. Trew, S. Research Report Issue 06 | April 2022 *New Ways for Our Families: Designing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice framework and system responses to address the impacts of domestic and family violence on children and young people.* Published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited

PROJECT REPORT