

Meeting the needs of children

FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE
(CALD) BACKGROUNDS IN THE CONTEXT OF
DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (DFV)

NSW ROUNDTABLE INSIGHTS SUMMARY



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

SSI and Myriad Kofkin Global (MKG) acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which we meet, live, work and learn. We pay respect to the Elders of each Nation – Past, Present and Future – and promote the continuation of the cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

SETTLEMENT SERVICES

INTERNATIONAL (SSI) BACKGROUND

SSI is a community organisation and social business that supports members of the community to achieve their full potential. We work across the Eastern Seaboard with people who have experienced vulnerability, including refugees, people seeking asylum, migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, children, families, people living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and LGBTQIA+ communities to build capacity and overcome inequality.

In the context of this work SSI is committed to amplifying the voices of children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds who are impacted by domestic and

family violence (DFV) so they are no longer invisible in the development of public policy and programs that affect their lives.

MYRIAD KOFKIN GLOBAL (MKG) BACKGROUND

Myriad Kofkin Global is an impact advisory business partnering with purpose driven organisations to maximise their impact and future sustainability. MKG support organisations to build inclusion capabilities across culture, systems and structures using intersectional analysis, and work collaboratively with communities to co-design sustainable solutions that reflect community needs and expectations. MKG are passionate about driving bold and innovative impact with social conscience.

Our principal consultants have made a significant contribution in ensuring family and domestic violence responses at policy, systems and practice levels are inclusive of the voices and needs of multicultural women and their families. These efforts have included advisory roles to government, representation on peak bodies and working with organisations to embed intersectional approaches to programs and services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SSI and MKG would like to thank the following people for their support and participation at the roundtable:

Presentations:

1. Zoe Robinson, NSW Advocate for Children and Young People
2. Dr Hannah Tonkin, NSW Commissioner for Women's Safety
3. The Hon Natalie Ward, MLC, former Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Panel:

1. Rebekah Grace - Director TeEACH, Western Sydney University
2. Jess Harkins - DFV Practice Manager, SSI

3. Synthia Huynh - lived experience
4. Kathy Karatasas - Multicultural Child and Family Program Lead, SSI
5. Nemat Kharboutli - Linking Hearts Service Manager, Muslim Women's Association

We acknowledge the importance of including children's voices in all discussions and decisions related to them. However, few children are sufficiently supported to participate in difficult and sensitive conversations of this nature at this time.

In lieu of children's voices, we are deeply thankful for the contributions from young adults with lived childhood experience and extend our sincere appreciation to all roundtable participants.

THE NATIONAL PLAN TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN 2022-2032

The *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children* (the National Plan) released in October 2022, acknowledges that women and children from diverse cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds and migrant and refugee women and children, including those on temporary visas can face specific challenges. It specifically identifies migrant and refugee women and children as target communities across the four National Pillars (Prevention, Early Intervention, Response, and Recovery and Healing) and the need to co-design activities with, and tailor activities to, these communities.

The National Plan also acknowledges children, including LGBTQIA+ children and young people, as victims of gender-based violence in their own right and identifies actions to prevent and address violence against children in each of the four domains, from prevention through to recovery and healing. Making sure that all children in Australia can access age-appropriate consent and respectful relationships education and supporting recovery from childhood trauma are important strategies for ending gender-based violence.²

The National Plan commits to 10 years of sustained action, effort and partnership across sectors and levels of government towards our vision of ending violence against women in one generation. It outlines what needs to happen to achieve this vision, including building the workforce, growing the evidence base and strengthening data collection systems, while delivering holistic, coordinated and integrated person-centred responses. To achieve this, we must listen to and be guided by victim-survivors and people with lived experience.¹

There is growing recognition that children from CALD backgrounds do not have an influential voice in government policy making in general, let alone in the complex area of domestic and family violence (DFV), and that this needs to change. As much of the public discussion about how this cohort is impacted by DFV is new, little formal research, data, and best practice information is available. The invisibility of these children in decision-making processes is a high-level policy issue that requires attention.

The release of the National Plan and the development of a five-year Action Plan present a timely opportunity to spotlight the DFV challenges children from CALD backgrounds face, and to commit to working collectively with them to build, implement and evaluate solutions.

1. National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, p18
2. IBID, p44

ROUNDTABLE SCOPE AND APPROACH

To build on publicly available material and the current understanding of how DFV impacts children from CALD backgrounds, SSI developed and ran in partnership with Myriad Kofkin Global (MKG), a series of three roundtables (QLD, NSW, VIC) that focused on amplifying the voices of CALD children and young people (aged 0–under 19yrs) impacted by domestic and family violence.

The roundtables brought together people with lived experience, academics, and experts from across government, DFV, community, legal, multicultural and children’s services to:

- ✓ focus on service delivery gaps, opportunities and solutions
- ✓ identify potential policy, planning and funding levers
- ✓ identify where collaboration might be possible.

Approximately 50 people attended the NSW Roundtable, including keynote speakers, panel members and participants.

THIS INSIGHTS SUMMARY

This summary provides a high-level overview of what participants told us at the NSW roundtable.

The insights form an important anecdotal evidence base and part of the grassroots foundational work required to develop a strategic approach to influencing the national debate and State, Territory and Federal Governments’ frameworks, policy and funding decisions impacting children from CALD backgrounds, that derive from the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*. We recognise the variation in policy levers and service delivery systems across different states will require different responses tailored to each jurisdictional setting.

We also understand there are viewpoints that sit outside the roundtable process and do not suggest this content provides an exhaustive picture of NSW knowledge and experience. However, we are confident that the insights strongly reflect the challenges, gaps and opportunities identified in formal mainstream contemporary research and public policy debate as they relate to children from CALD backgrounds in the DFV domain in Australia.

A comprehensive Roundtables Report, which combines insights from QLD, NSW and VIC roundtables and contains recommendations for Australian, State and Territory governments has also been developed.

KEY THEMES

The following seven key themes highlight **what we heard**; they integrate the perceptions, knowledge and experience of people who attended the event.

1 CREATING GENUINELY SAFE ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN

Children speak from their own unique perspective, so their voices need to be central and elevated. They need opportunities to speak for themselves rather than be spoken for. Although adults have become better at hearing young voices, we still need to listen more actively and openly, and be prepared to hear uncomfortable and different truths rather than enter conversations with pre-determined ideas about what is happening and how to fix it. Decision makers need genuinely to hear what children say and act on it.

Consultations with children and young people show they are asking for **love**, **connection**, and **safety**. If we are to build trust and help children and young people open up, then we need to lead and work with these values. Children don't think in terms of government frameworks, they think of their reality in the moment and won't always share the truth for fear of exposing the people they love.

Young people often feel that adults won't believe them, so they won't easily reveal their family circumstances. While their hesitation might demonstrate loyalty and care for others it can also see them withholding their stories, especially when the system does not reflect their needs or interests, and they feel unsafe. Much more work needs to be done to create trusting environments where difficult stories can be disclosed.

2 THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

A change in victim/survivor terminology, particularly in conversations with children who are impacted by DFV is necessary. Some research suggests that this terminology can reinforce negativity and trauma, and that it pathologises the children we most need to support. The emphasis should be on affirmative and respectful language that recognises and acknowledges the value of the child in their own right, rather than drawing conclusions about them primarily through the lens of DFV.

3 DATA COLLECTION AND INTERSECTIONALITY

There are significant cultural diversity data gaps in NSW.

More focus needs to be on building partnerships and agreements that ensure organisations collect standardised, easily comparable information that provides a good evidence base and a deep understanding of the contributing factors and impact of DFV on children from CALD backgrounds.

These data sets need to be valued and embedded in mainstream and non-mainstream services. We need to question what data we're collecting and why, and identify opportunities to unearth, validate and use cultural diversity statistics that already exist.

Some data collection improvements have been made over recent years. For example, SSI's Multicultural Child and Family program has been collecting language, faith, and ethnicity data, identifying children from 50 ethnicities, 40 language groups and 50 faiths in that program alone. SSI's DFV Practice Unit data is also collecting data on DFV disclosures.

Replicating these examples in program design and evaluation across the DFV system would better assist us to understand the experiences of children from CALD backgrounds and improve our responses. For example, there are types of abuse and barriers to help-seeking which are more commonly experienced by victim survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds that do not appear to be collected by other mainstream DFV services.

A lack of data sharing across services is also a key issue. Although only a small number of providers in the broader DFV landscape use the Data Exchange (DEX) data collection system it is said to provide the potential opportunity to capture vital information about the safety and security of children and parents who access funded early intervention services.

There is also a strong need to increase intersectional data analysis that involves different but relevant data sets (for example visa status, recency of arrival, socio-economic status, disability, LGBTQIA+, poverty indicators, DFV presentations). This approach could identify service access trends across a range of sectors and provide a robust evidence base that makes the complexity of DFV explicit, and better targeted programs more possible.

Nuance to cultural background and life experience should be considered in the development of 'safety' measures used in DFV programs. A measure of safety for a newly arrived refugee, for example, may be based on their recent freedom from war and persecution, more than the safety they feel within the immediate family dynamic at the point of time they connect with services. A trauma-informed approach can assist in not misinterpreting or misunderstanding responses.

4 CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE RESPONSES ARE ESSENTIAL

Policy makers, who are often far removed from community, need to enhance their understanding of the intersection between DFV, CALD communities and children; they need to recognise that DFV is not a homogenous experience and that there is critical need to focus on culturally specific services. Specific and nuanced data is required to influence new directions and for evidence-based decision making.

The challenges of migration, settlement and intergenerational differences can cause significant stress on children who are often torn between their home culture and the Australian culture they navigate every day. To understand the multidimensional contributing factors, services would benefit from cultural responsiveness training that takes faith, language, ethnicity, the unique migration experience, and the point of view of the child into consideration.

DFV services should be available on an as-needs basis rather than eligibility based on visa category, age, language proficiency and so on. They should be intersectional, trauma informed and tailored in approach, taking the nuance and complexity of each individual and family into consideration.

Reference was made to the impact that loss of language and culture has within Aboriginal communities, and the need for Aboriginal children in out of home care environments to stay connected through kinship. The same principles apply to children from CALD backgrounds; language and culture are critical to their sense of belonging, and affinity can most easily be found in families where ethnicity, language, culture, and faith are shared and celebrated.

Children in DFV refuges are increasingly receiving tailored support in recognition of their unique needs. However, more work is needed in this area.

5 THE SERVICE SYSTEM

Despite the many DFV services available to Australians, it was agreed that we still have a long way to go to solve complex issues and break down barriers to access for culturally diverse communities and their children.

Participants felt that much of the current system is siloed and crisis-focused, and immediate access to practical supports such as safe housing is often not possible. Women and children seeking support are frequently re-traumatised as they connect with different services at the same time but not in a cohesive way. The key is to get the right support when accessing the service system the first time and this requires good case management and support with navigation. At the moment workers need to go the extra mile but a shift in service commissioning practices that enables non-competitive, client focused, integrated service delivery would make a positive difference.

There needs to be much stronger emphasis on early intervention and prevention so that people are less likely to require crisis support in the future. More research and conversations within the sector and with children from CALD backgrounds about how this might be achieved, what different services of care might look like and how they might be measured, should be part of this review process.

There are currently only five questions about children in the NSW DFV risk assessment process (DVSAT) and none of these questions are aimed directly at children. There are also minimal numbers of counsellors across the state for all children aged 0-6yrs in Victim's Services. Overlay the resource shortage with the complex needs of CALD communities and this demonstrates how unlikely in the current environment children from these communities are to receive the critical care they need.

6 A FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE

The impact on children of positive reinforcement cannot be underestimated.

Parenting courses and support services need to be reframed to focus on and incorporate positive experiences that help children develop confidence, feel safe and thrive. We need to work collaboratively with trusted community leaders to share information with, and provide support to, culturally diverse communities.

The science tells us that the experience of genuine love and care, and the opportunity to pursue interests can be equally as valuable as therapeutic interventions. We need to invest in what's important to children; when they have positive experiences, they are at less risk of long-term negative outcomes as a result of adversity.

7 **COMPLEX MIGRATION CIRCUMSTANCES**

We know that women and children on temporary visas face multiple barriers to speaking up and that many cannot access essential supports including housing, income and health care. We need more data to understand how visa insecurities impact children impacted by DFV.

We also know that the perpetrators of the abuse can vary, and in the case of forced marriage and dowry abuse, that women can face subjugation from multiple abusers including their parents, in-laws, siblings, and partner. In these environments children can grow up believing that violence is normal and shifting these attitudes can take generations.

NSW INITIATIVES KNOWN TO PARTICIPANTS

PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE/ FOCUS AREA	COMMENT
<u>Youth Consult for Change</u>	DCJ Program for young people 14-17yrs to give advice on OOHC and foster care system. Is there an opportunity to build in a children's version?
<u>Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Multicultural Community Grant Program community grant program (20K-100K) round closed 27 March</u>	DCJ grants program. Eligible incorporated not-for-profit NSW multicultural organisations were able to apply for grants from \$20,000 to \$150,000. Successful grant applicants will build the capability of multicultural communities to recognise and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence.
<u>Linking Hearts</u>	Muslim Women's Association – Multicultural Family Domestic Violence and Homelessness Support. Brings expert service providers together to deliver holistic support options in prevention, early intervention, crisis and transitional accommodation, rapid rehousing and intensive support for clients with complex needs.
<u>SSI Multicultural Foster Care</u>	Multicultural Foster Care programs have run for 10 years.
<u>White Ribbon</u>	Digital Barber Shop, State Committees, Mensline, Mens Referral Service, Better Man Program, You Can Ask That (learning initiative for young people) Youth Roundtable – 16 people, 14 -17yrs – focus on engaging young men to develop respectful relationships program? Opportunities to influence for more CALD focus?
<u>RESPECT Project</u>	Music program for boys under 12 years old, teaching them about domestic violence and gender equality, with a view to prevent and reduce domestic violence in the future. Run by Outloud.
<u>Voices for Change</u>	DVNSW program aiming to empower lived experience women to speak out and lobby for change. Opportunity to build children's focus and CALD voice?
<u>Voice of Change</u>	Supports art-based projects that champion meaningful education about, and action against, family violence.



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE	COMMENT
Let young people lead with their own voices, do not speak on their behalf	<p>Adults need to listen to children around their experiences of DFV.</p> <p>We need to find safe and dignity-driven ways to integrate children's voices across program design and delivery going forward and they need to be supported by frameworks and resources.</p>
Increased funding for service provision for children from CALD backgrounds impacted by DFV	<p>There are insufficient services in NSW responding to children. Children have different needs to their parents/carers and require appropriately targeted and culturally responsive supports.</p>
DFV CALD Framework for NSW Justice	<p>Currently in the design phase. Aiming to identify how to reduce barriers and increase engagement with children to prevent, heal and respond to their needs.</p> <p>Is there an opportunity to influence? Partner in a co-design process?</p> <p>NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022-2027 (acknowledges children as victim/survivors in their own right)</p> <p>NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022-2027</p>
Children from CALD backgrounds are best supported in kinship and familial relationships	<p>Children in refuges are increasingly receiving their own separate support as a recognition of their unique needs.</p> <p>What are the opportunities to support children from CALD backgrounds in kinship and familial relationships?</p>
Work with men and boys	<p>Primary prevention with community involvement is needed to prevent violence.</p> <p>More involvement of men and boys in programs e.g. mentoring, role models, father and son programs.</p>
Specifically targeted campaigns for CALD communities	<p>Messages need to be developed collaboratively with community leaders.</p> <p>Primary prevention needs to be developed with community involvement. Customised campaigns need to be rooted in cultural practices.</p>
Visa status challenge	<p>Insecurities of visas are barriers to women escaping DFV, need more data to understand how this affects children.</p>

PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE	COMMENT
Improve data collection	<p>Need to accurately record cultural background of children in out of home care.</p> <p>Understanding need is reliant on adequate data which is currently not being captured across the system.</p> <p>Is the Data Exchange (DEX) system a platform we could try to influence?</p>
Policy makers and responders need to understand the different aspects of different communities	<p>Need to educate about the nuance of behaviours that occur where there is difference in cultural values, language and expectations.</p>
Research	<p>More funding for research.</p>
Reframe programs to focus on strengths, positive reinforcement, opportunities	<p>Services need to better understand what children need to thrive and integrate these learnings into programs going forward.</p>
Changing language around DFV	<p>Work is being done in this space. Looking at the impact of current language use in DFV.</p>
Community level engagement	<p>More programs for young children are needed, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-defence training • After school sports involving local sporting heroes (sport is a great way to burn energy and generate positive thought processes).

