

Meeting the needs of children

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

VIC 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:

Anne Hollonds, National Children's Commissioner – keynote address

Panel:

1. Francoise Le Gall – Program Manager, Multicultural Foster Care, SSI
2. Elvis Martin – lived experience
3. Michal Morris – CEO, inTouch
4. Liana Papoutsis – Board Director, RESPECT Victoria; Academic, Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre

5. Deb Tsorbaris – CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

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 we 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 victim/survivor advocates, academics, and experts from across government and 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 VIC 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 Victorian 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 VIC 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 nine key themes highlight **what we heard**; they integrate the perceptions, knowledge and experience of people who attended the event.

1 STATUS OF CHILDREN IN AUSTRALIAN POLICY LANDSCAPE

The Human Rights of children are not prioritised in family violence situations. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is applied in other countries but does not appear to be so in Australia. The UNCRC needs to guide Australian government policy and the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children* across the four pillars (Prevention, Early Intervention, Response, and Recovery and Healing) of the plan.

Despite 24% of the Australian population being under 19yrs of age, there is no Minister for Children responsible for developing a holistic and consolidated vision that co-ordinates children's policy across government. There is no national child wellbeing strategy, and children's policy is widely dispersed across portfolios and jurisdictions.

In the DFV context, where responses most often concentrate on the needs of adults, this uncoordinated approach can result in children being invisible and missing out on the help they need. Yet, children impacted by DFV are some of the most vulnerable in our community, and structurally marginalised children from CALD backgrounds, are even more so.

Children need attention now; their wellbeing needs to be elevated to the national agenda and decision makers need to get to root causes and drivers of the problems children face.

2 BUILDING CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

There are some concerns about the way mainstream services collect information from, and respond to, culturally diverse clients. Respect for people's identity and an understanding of the 'whole' person is key to delivering culturally responsive services and culturally safe spaces. Cultural responsiveness in DFV and children's services is key to conducting safe and ethical conversations and delivering supports that take the cultural context of clients into consideration.

It is important to understand that individuals within ethno-specific and/or faith communities are not homogenous and that differing beliefs, values and attitudes within groups can further complicate people's sense of identify and belonging, their level of safety, and the appropriate way for services to respond.

The child protection system is not always culturally responsive, and this can result in adverse outcomes for children from CALD backgrounds. Lack of intersectional frameworks within the system that could assist in developing a deeper knowledge of children's ethnic and religious background, migration experience, length of time in Australia and so on, make it difficult to tailor appropriate, well-informed, nuanced support.

Another area that requires further attention in the context of child protection, is the value of pre-existing relationships between siblings who share cultural and religious connection. In crisis scenarios, families are often split up and these relationships, which can offer cultural and religious comfort and consistency, are often overlooked by caseworkers whose main aim is to find a physically safe environment.

Grandparents can also play a pivotal role in the care of children impacted by DFV but they need to be identified as appropriate carers before they are given this responsibility. Grandparents may provide short or long term support and need to be equipped to find information and access services.

3 FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

A constant challenge in the NGO sector is funding. In the community legal sector, for example, we heard that 70% of clients are victims of DFV, but because funding contracts are inflexible, the sector is unable to pivot when new challenges are identified, even though solutions might be obvious and straightforward. In rigid funding environments, there is a strong need to establish intra and inter-sector collaboration so that referral pathways across services can be built to meet needs.

Government campaigns, gaps in services for young men and specific child-focused funding are other examples of areas that are under-resourced or not a priority.

Competitive, siloed, short-term funding models are in urgent need of reform.

4 A FRAGMENTED SERVICE SYSTEM

Structural barriers to accessing services, along with psycho-social considerations such as trauma and mistrust, can stop people seeking support at any point of their exposure to DFV. Where individuals do seek help and their case might require multiple services, there is often a disconnect across sectors that can lead to piecemeal and inadequate support.

An example of this complexity was demonstrated through the story of a young LGBTQIA+ DFV survivor who arrived in Australia as an international student. Their life fell apart and was endangered on disclosing their gender diversity to their parents, who sought the death penalty from abroad. No DFV or LGBTQIA+ support was available from within their local cultural community, which resulted in a period of homelessness and attempted suicide. Health, mental health, immigration, justice, housing and other social services were all required in this case, but the support was disjointed, inconsistent and culturally uninformed. The client's journey back to health and safety was problematic, fragmented and took four years.

The complexities of migration add further layers to already complicated DFV circumstances. Visa restrictions can prevent access to commonwealth and/or state services and limited support options are available for children on temporary visas. The justice system stands out as a system that is not readily culturally responsive to the needs of children from CALD backgrounds.

5 COLLABORATION ACROSS AND WITHIN SECTORS

Centering the needs of children and mapping their journey through support systems can help connect the service delivery dots, identify gaps, and assist in the design of seamless service delivery models. However, the focus is most often on funding contract requirements, not the client, and children miss out as a result.

While many services do their best to meet the needs of children from CALD backgrounds, they can be ill-equipped and insufficiently resourced to support migrant communities. The demand for DFV support far outweighs the service system capacity.

Building on and integrating existing DFV and children's services would help organisations leverage off each other and strengthen the sector through capacity building, knowledge sharing and new partnerships. Ethno-specific communities have a significant role to play, too. While they have received DFV funding in the past, we heard it tends to be for prevention programs focussed primarily on women. There does not appear to be any funding to grassroots community organisations specifically related to children impacted by DFV.

Direct collaboration with community members and community organisations is needed to ensure grassroots voices are heard and community knowledge is deeply embedded across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery planning.

Integrated approaches require funding reform, less competition and more cooperation across sectors.

6 CENTERING CHILDREN

We need to be co-producing and co-evaluating programs with children, not just co-designing. Children's lived experience should be integrated into every step of policy development, program planning and management. Children identify and express what's happening to and around them in ways that make sense to them, and adults need to grasp and respond to that lived experience feedback in ways that can make a difference.

More young people from CALD backgrounds are feeling angry about not having a voice and are finding new opportunities to be heard through avenues such as government and NGO youth committees and youth advisory councils. However, children from CALD backgrounds almost invariably remain voiceless in the context of DFV, and schools in particular, are seen as having a big role to play in developing culturally responsive staff, spaces, programs and supports.

Rather than focusing primarily on academic learning, it was suggested that schools should address the needs of the whole child and become 'social support hubs' that employ educators appropriately equipped to deliver culturally responsive programs. Aspects of this thinking are already being applied in some primary schools through the Community Hubs program.

7 INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATING

There is currently no national interpreter service specifically for children and no apparent training on how to interpret for children impacted by DFV. Interpreters are thought of as part of ‘the response team’ so are often an after-thought, and may not have DFV expertise. Well-trained, culturally responsive interpreters could give children a strong voice.

There is also a lack of translated DFV information on websites that children might access for support. This is an equity issue that unfairly impacts children from non-English speaking backgrounds.

8 DATA COLLECTION

It was suggested by one community leader that when services approach them to work with children for different reasons, it would be helpful to have an evidence base that identifies how many children are in the community. This would assist communities to understand the extent of the reach required and why their community needs to act. Access to broader data can also alert communities to the fact that DFV affects communities beyond their own, and it is therefore the responsibility of everyone to be aware and respond appropriately.

SSI is capturing data across all programs to develop an evidence base that is helping to build a robust profile of client groups and needs. But there are many data gaps, due to non-mandatory fields, related to children from CALD backgrounds and DFV across government and non-government sectors. This makes it difficult to paint an accurate picture of DFV prevalence and impact within and across communities

Some relevant family violence data is available via Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP), but it is not disaggregated and does not give a complete picture. Disaggregated data that is comparable across services is needed to capture the complexity of different client groups.

9 IN-LANGUAGE INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Many non-English speaking background communities do not have DFV information in language so there is little or no awareness of services for children from CALD backgrounds.

Newly arrived community members often have few opportunities to be part of mainstream social events such as sports and recreation which build trust and can be important avenues for awareness raising and information sharing. A key challenge is how to make opportunities affordable and accessible; there is much to learn from organisations, such as the Country Fire Authority (CFA) who have been doing a lot of work around inclusion.

VIC INITIATIVES KNOWN TO PARTICIPANTS

PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE/ FOCUS AREA	COMMENT
<u>Family Safety Victoria Portal</u>	Vic Government organisation that leads the implementation of many government family violence reforms. The portal will be expanded to include what's working.
First Nations approaches to self-determination	Communities have the solutions. Look at adapting First Nations approaches to CALD community approaches (<u>Dhelk Dja - Safe Our Way</u>).
<u>Community Hubs</u>	Welcoming places where families from diverse backgrounds, particularly mothers with pre-school children, go to connect, share and learn.
<u>Oz Child</u>	Connecting with the youth justice system connected with African communities' services. Collaboration approach has worked.
Community leaders speaking with their communities	Leaders are trusted sources of information (Covid example) Very effective across the state, including regions.
<u>International Social Service (ISS) Australia</u>	Successfully providing free social work/ free legal advice in the area of abduction (incoming or outgoing).
<u>Communities for Children Facilitating Partners (CfC FPs) Department of Social Services, Australian Government (dss.gov.au)</u>	Placed-based model of investment supporting children and families in 52 disadvantaged communities across Australia. CfC FP facilitates a whole-of-community approach to support early childhood development and wellbeing.
Let Them Do Well program (SSI)	Consulting community leaders and bringing connection and advocacy to the Tamil community.



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE/ FOCUS AREA	COMMENT
<u>Earn and learn Jobs Victoria</u>	Suggestion that volunteers are trained up in grassroots communities to provide support (type of support not identified).
<u>Multicultural Women Victoria</u>	Works collaboratively with refugee and migrant women to meet their needs, objectives and goals. Suggestion that staff need training to be prepared and connected. Not currently connected with DFV system but working with women everyday.
Mainstream organisations to partner with community lead organisations	How equipped are communities to deal with family violence? Suggestion that grassroots community orgs with larger NGOs such as Red Cross (eg temp visa holders, pathway to permanent residence) to provide connected pathways.
Peer led community education model	Suggestion that the peer led model be embedded in DFV work with children from CALD backgrounds. Peer-practitioner model 'walks the talk'. It highlights and practices the foundational importance of having people with lived experience participating in all aspects of support.
<u>Refugee minor program (DFFH)</u>	Suggestion to look to the program to identify and support future leaders and community leaders. Connect them with education dept, law firms to be a trusted person with any issue that comes. Need generational change - bringing young people into the space is important. Suggestion that a training package is developed.
DFV and Children's Services	Suggestion that more work on trauma-informed practice, understanding of migrant and refugee experiences, and the process of acculturation is developed and provided.
Definitions of prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing	Suggestion that national definitions are developed to provide consistency.
Locate previous reports	Victorian government has previously developed research/reports into building CALD voices and capacity in DFV prevention. Unclear where these reports are now.

PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE/ FOCUS AREA	COMMENT
<p>Develop a place-based approach</p>	<p>Suggestion that all supports/programs/initiatives should be built around a place-based model and focus on priority cultural groups.</p> <p>Place-based models are collaborative, long-term and delivered in a defined geographic location. They aim to build thriving local communities.</p>
<p><u>Communities for Children</u></p>	<p>Community Hubs focus – expanding, opening up more Community Hubs.</p> <p>Suggestion that work could be done through the Community Hubs (eg possible place for legal services and DFV services).</p>
<p><u>The Orange Door</u></p>	<p>There are 17 Orange Doors across Vic. They are continuing to learn about CALD specific needs and have already learned a lot.</p> <p>Suggestion that we connect better with this organisation.</p>

