



# Amplify: Turning up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence

## RESEARCH REPORT

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## Acknowledgment of Country



Melbourne City Mission acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work and note that this document was developed on the lands of the Bunurong, Wurundjeri and Woi Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation.

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

We recognise that the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, children and young people in the child protection and justice systems, many of whom have experienced family violence, is in part a devastating consequence of colonisation, intergenerational trauma and ongoing experiences of systemic racism.

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

## About Melbourne City Mission

Melbourne City Mission (**MCM**) is a community service organisation that provides a range of supports to people who are experiencing different forms of disadvantage across Victoria.

Our vision is to contribute to a fair and just community where people have equal access to opportunities and resources. We work alongside people and communities to provide long-term, sustainable pathways away from disadvantage.

MCM has more than 80 programs which span multiple service systems, including homelessness, disability, early childhood intervention, education and care, health (home-based palliative care), mental health, and education and training. MCM also runs the Hester Hornbrook Academy, an independent specialist school providing education and wrap-around supports to some of the most challenging and disengaged young people in Victoria.

Family violence is a common thread that underpins much of our work. There are very limited specialist family violence supports for young people who are victim survivors of family violence – the default response to young people disclosing family violence in Victoria is to pathway them into the homelessness system.

MCM provides a range of homelessness supports to young people, including:

- Frontyard Youth Services which provides a range of integrated supports to around 2,500 young people aged 12 to 24 experiencing or at risk of homelessness each year, including support with housing, health, mental health, legal issues, Centrelink, employment and living skills. Frontyard operates the only state-wide specialist access point for young people aged 16-24 seeking to access the homelessness services system, including an 18 bed CBD-based crisis accommodation service supporting over 300 complex young people each year experiencing rough sleeping.
- Four youth refuge programs across the Northern and Western suburbs of Melbourne which provide short-term accommodation to over 600 young people each year.
- Youth Foyer Programs that provide intensive case management and fully furnished medium term accommodation to young people for up to 2 years.
- Early intervention programs across Victoria supporting over 594 young people each year to remain connected to family, school, and their community, and in housing each year.

MCM has implemented a systems-level, whole of organisation approach to trauma informed healing-oriented care. A 'Healing Oriented Framework' has been developed by MCM to promote the physical, emotional, social, psychological and spiritual health and wellbeing, cultural inclusion and ongoing safety of people in contact with MCM. MCM maintains a holistic view of individuals, families and communities in their ongoing process of healing.

## Acknowledgments

This research and final report would not have been possible without the generosity and support of several organisations and individuals. We are grateful they were able to share their time to assist us in this project.

Most importantly, we would like to acknowledge and thank Tash Anderson, Elvis Martin, Kaitlyne Bowden and Kirra Horley, youth advocates with lived expertise, whose insights have been integral to shaping and guiding this project.

Invaluable input was provided by a range of organisations. These include:

- Berry Street Y-Change
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- Centre for Innovative Justice (RMIT)
- Domestic Violence Victoria/ Domestic Violence Resource Centre
- Drummond Street Services
- Family Safety Victoria

- Hester Hornbrook Academy
- Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre
- Sexual Assaults Services Victoria
- Victim Survivor Advisory Council
- Women's Legal Service Victoria
- Youthlaw
- Youth Advisory Council of Victoria

The submission also draws on the expertise of MCM staff. Particular thanks to: Wayne Merritt, Zoe Vale, Molly O'Shaughnessy, Arry Valastro, Joel Douth, Brian Graetz, Mark O'Brien, Ben Spooner, Jemma Rowe, Mia Caruso, Sarah McDonald, Bethany Lawly, Marianna Cichello, Mackayla Lawley, Sandhya Jadunundun, Arlene Muys, Debra McPhee, Andrea Hutton, Marita Hagel and Emma Bruce.

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

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## Acronyms

While we have tried as best we can to avoid the use of acronyms, some were necessary in the interest of brevity.

AVITH:	Adolescent Violence in the Home
FVIO:	Family Violence Intervention Order
IPV:	Intimate Partner Violence
LGBTIQA+:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer or Questioning, Asexual, Plus
MARAM:	Multi-Agency Risks Assessment and Management
RCFV:	Royal Commission into Family Violence



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

Victoria is better placed than many other jurisdictions in Australia and indeed globally when it comes to family violence reform. The Royal Commission into Family Violence has led to over \$3 billion being invested into transforming the family violence system, with 204 of the 227 recommendations being acquitted. This includes the roll out of place-based support and safety hubs, or the Orange Doors; improvements in police practice in responding to family violence; information sharing and redevelopment of the risk assessment tool; and continuing development of refuges.<sup>1</sup>

However, gaps remain for young people who are experiencing family violence either in the home or from an intimate partner.

This is in part due to:

- Policy settings that classify ‘children and young people’ as one group, meaning family violence services are not adapted with the developmental needs of young people specifically.
- Children and young people are often seen as extensions of their parents or carers for the purposes of support.
- Children and young people who use violence at home, often as a result of their own experiences of trauma, do not have their identity as victim survivors recognised.
- Children and young people remain the ‘silent’ victims of family violence, as the Royal Commission described. This includes their voices not being heard when they interact with the service and legal system in multiple different ways.

The **Amplify Project**, undertaken by Melbourne City Mission, seeks to understand this gap in policy and services and map a way forward. It has done this through conducting a literature and policy review; one-on-ones and workshops with young people with lived experience; and workshops with specialist family violence, housing, youth, legal and sexual assault service

practitioners. This report outlines the findings from this research which has been shaped and guided by the insights of lived expertise.

## Key findings

The key findings from the research are that:

### 1. Young people experiencing violence from a parent are often not seen as victim survivors of family violence

Family violence involving young people is often seen through the prism of violence from a male partner or parent against their female parent. It is true that many young people are exposed to violence, and this is still an important narrative.

While young people’s experiences as victim survivors are often invisible to the family violence system, they can become all too visible to this system when the impacts of trauma lead to their own use of violence at home. An emergent focus on the use of violence at home by some young people neglects their identity as victim survivors. Young people can exhibit a wide range of responses to experiences of violence, many of which are explored further below.

Violence from a parent against a young person, and violence in the context of intimate partner relationships featured heavily in the research. The abuse of power through controlling the young persons agency due to their age and other factors was also present. However, support options in this space were largely missing. Young people felt overlooked in the current framings of family violence given this and it became clear that this was a significant service and knowledge gap.

### 2. Young people experiencing family violence are not going to ask for family violence support

The research made clear that young people are unlikely to present asking for support for family violence. A lot of this was driven by a lack of awareness by young people that what they were



experiencing was family violence. This was also driven by young people feeling apprehensive reporting to Child Protection for fear of the potential consequences.

It is more likely they will be experiencing mental illness, health issues, school avoidance, and at times, using violence.<sup>2</sup>

They were also likely to run away from home, couch surf or stay at a friend's to avoid the violence at home making them less visible to services and support.<sup>3</sup>

### **3. Young people experience and perceive safety in a range of different ways that is often not acknowledged**

What safety means for a young person might be different to what it means for others. This is not always reflected in the ways in which their risk is managed and how services respond.<sup>4</sup>

For some young people, feelings of safety require feeling their family, too, are being supported. This makes sense particularly when young people are needing to manage family violence risk while still living in the violent home,

but it was also true for young people who needed to leave the home.

Often these young people play, or had played, a protective role in their family for their non-violent parent or siblings. When they are unable to maintain that role, they need to feel that something or someone else is. The trauma this creates for them also needs to be considered in any service response for them.<sup>5</sup>

However, this must be done with the express consent of the young person unless there is a statutory reason otherwise. There were numerous examples in the consultations where disclosures of family violence led to a chain reaction of events through reporting that made young people less safe in practice. This also took away their agency and added to their sense of shame, two factors that can negatively impact on safety for young people.

A protective and safe adult in their lives was important. These were people in which respectful relationships can be modelled and someone who can support them in accessing their rights and agency.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4. Services often misinterpret and undermine a young person's attempts to stay safe**

Young people also had their own ways of managing their safety that were not recognised as protective, but rather, seen as problematic, such as running away from home, resisting against the violence, or avoiding school. Their views of their safety were not recognised, and again in practice service responses by schools or police sending them back home, or telling the parent, made them more unsafe.

#### **5. There is a distinct lack of services for young victim survivors of family violence between 15-19**

The literature and consultations persistently highlighted a significant gap in support options specifically for young people aged 15-19. These young people, of all genders, fall through the gaps.

The reasons for this are a complex mix of lack of clarity on the rights of young people to exercise agency (discussed further below) and the ways in which the family violence, family services,

youth services and child protection systems intersect – or rather, do not intersect.

While not without its challenges and still rolling out, there is a system in place for children experiencing family violence through the Orange Door, where specialist family violence, child and family services, child protection and men's services work collaboratively to assess and refer people with family violence risk.

Young people under 15 can be placed in supported accommodation with the impacted parent or, as a last resort, in out-of-home care. They can have their family violence risk managed through the specialist family violence service working with the parent. Similarly, there is a service system for adults experiencing family violence through the specialist family violence sector and access to emergency accommodation. There is also work being developed to respond to young people who may be using harm in the home. The emerging practice and evidence in the AVITH area demonstrates that, more often than not, these young people are also victim survivors of family violence – yet this is the only way that they



become visible in their own right. This means that young people may only be seen by the service system for their *use* of harm, rather than their experience of it — neglecting the wider needs of these and other young people who respond to violence in a range of ways.

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

This service gap means youth services are managing substantial family violence risk. Critically, in practice there is no specialised, family violence case management for young victim survivors that has a focus on their identities as victim survivors. This omission has by no means been by design, and all sectors working with these young people do what they can with what they have. However, it highlights that there is need for a better, more systemic response.

## **6. There are existing frameworks to manage safety that need a youth lens**

Youth Services are currently prescribed under legislation to align their policies, procedures and practice to help identify and refer family violence risk. However, the framework is not at this stage youth informed outside of some of the work underway in adaptations of tools for AVITH programs,<sup>7</sup> and once that risk is identified, there are very few services to refer them to so that risk can be managed.

Risk assessment must be adapted to recognise young people's views on safety, the different ways they present to services, and to enable service delivery to be done in a youth-informed way.

## **7. Young people need access to information and resources specific to their needs that are developed with them and by them**

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



However, young people did not always know that what they were experiencing was family violence, and often did not identify with the materials.

There needs to be resources that are developed by young people where they will find them incidentally. Schools (including through Respectful Relationships and sex education), services, online, and in spaces where young people already play a critical role. The development of these resources needs to be led by young people.

## **8. Clarity is needed on the rights of young people so systems and services do not unnecessarily limit their agency**

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



The research has revealed that it is a combination of structural, legal and policy issues which exacerbate the vulnerability of young victim survivors and the ability of the system to recognise them as victims in their own right. When they are identified as perpetrators for having used violence in the home, programs are available that acknowledge that their behaviours often stem from trauma, in the majority of cases from their own experiences of adult perpetrated family violence. When their own experiences of harm go unaddressed while the system response to their use of violence can often exacerbate and compound this harm.

The policy and legal environment for a young person experiencing family violence in Victoria, which includes an intersection of state and federal jurisdiction, can be complex, ambiguous and at times inconsistent and as a result young people's agency is often unnecessarily diminished.

Most importantly, the research has highlighted the complexities of overcoming barriers faced by young people experiencing family violence in understanding and enforcing their rights and the implications this has for service delivery.

## **9. Supports need to employ a range of ways to equalise the power imbalances young people experience**

Young people need to be able to engage at different levels to equalise the power imbalance that exists between services and young people. This should be through less intensive ways such as consultation and feedback, through to more organised ways including peer support workers, involvement in recruitment processes, co-design and memberships on boards. This needs to be adequately resourced and training provided for young people to engage in these processes meaningfully that harness their skills beyond their lived experience and beyond story telling.

## **10. An intersectional lens is critical**

The need for an intersectional approach to family violence, that recognises that multiple identities and systemic barriers influence experiences, is becoming more embedded in the response system.

This came through as of particular importance when working with young people. In an intimate partner context, violence remained highly gendered. However, with other forms of violence, it became less so. Sexuality, religion, racial discrimination, disability and age were key

drivers of the violence the young people experienced. Further, at times young people also experienced violence from a female parent.

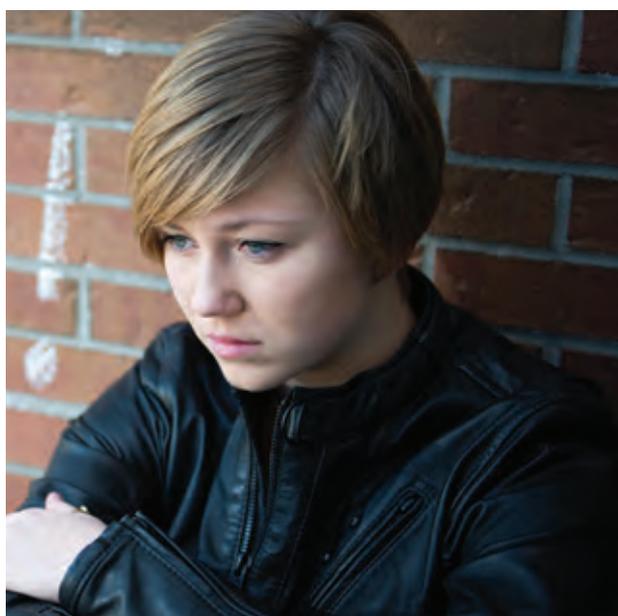
### **11. More work is needed to understand and respond to sexual violence in the context of family violence against young people**

The issue of sexual violence against young people was raised throughout the consultations as an important intersection. Existing work within sexual assault services could be leveraged to ensure sexual assault and sexual violence support is included in responses to family violence for young people.

### **12. There is a need for a service and housing response within the current family violence system for young people 15-19 that are experiencing family violence that adopts multiple lenses**

There is a need for service and housing responses for young people experiencing family violence. This is a glaring gap within the current system. This response should work within, rather than replicate the existing family violence service system given most of the critical elements of the response exist (however limited) including access to existing therapeutic programs, brokerage, youth development programs and youth legal services.

These all require applying a youth lens to the current system, realising the Royal Commissions recommendation on youth family violence



refuge, and developing flexible crisis accommodation options.

It also requires a case management response that is specific to the needs and safety of young people, given all the complexities as outlined in this report. That is, a service response that understands and promotes the agency and rights of the young person; a response in which young people have their thoughts and perceptions of safety respected but where the use of specialist family violence risk assessment can moderate, manage, or inform that risk; and a service that sees the young person as a victim survivor in their own right and accounts for the mental health impacts.

It requires working within the multi-disciplinary approach already adopted in the Orange Door model, but with a youth lens that equalises some of the power imbalance due to age and the different ways in which young people experience family violence and incorporates a range of therapeutic recovery supports. The need to recognise the importance of youth specialisation was highlighted in consultations with Orange Door practitioners who to date have relied on local relationships rather than a systemic focus, with varying degrees of success.

As with other approaches to supporting victim survivors of family violence, the response needs to recognise the distinct structural barriers and challenges young people face and work with their strengths to manage them.

Critically, it must be co-designed with young people themselves rather than imposed upon them so to not recreate the same challenges the service system is intended to overcome.

As such, the report makes the following recommendations.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Services for young victim survivors:

1. Family violence responses for young people 15-19 be explored and designed with the range of sectors that work with these young people. This includes, but is not limited to, the Orange Door network and partner agencies, Youth Services, Housing Programs, Legal Services and most critically, young people themselves.
2. Support options be available for young people who have experienced violence, regardless of where or why they interact with the service system.
3. Where safe, and with the consent of the young person, support be offered to their family or partner as part of a young persons safety planning.
4. Case workers and peer support workers be considered as part of developing support options for young victim survivors of family violence.
5. Options for a youth-specific, family violence case management and support program be considered which includes the elements as outlined in MCM's Youth Family Violence Support Scaffold.

## Housing:

1. Government, youth services, family violence services and housing services come together to develop and fund short-term options for young victim survivors in family violence crisis including crisis accommodation (refuge) options, particularly for young people 15-19, including implementation for young people using harm in the home. These options should be co-designed with an intersectional lens and responsive to the diverse needs of young people.
2. The areas of reform as outlined in MCM's Submission to Victoria's 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Plan be prioritised to enable access to accommodation for young victim survivors longer term.

## Rights and Agency:

1. Resources be led by young people that outline information about family violence, their rights, and where they can get support. This information should be available where young people already are rather than relying on them to seek the information.
2. Resources and practice guidance be provided to services including Child Protection, Child and Family Services, Specialist Family Violence Services and Housing Services that clarify the thresholds for rights and agency for young people including their rights to speak about their experience.
3. The Australian Government review its processes for young people not able to live at home due to family violence and streamline access to Youth Allowance to make is easier to leave the violence.
4. Fair Work Australia review minimum wage laws that ascribe lower wages to young people based on age to enable greater financial independence for young people.
5. A review be undertaken of the Family Violence Protection Act (Vic) (2008) to address the inconsistencies in thresholds and approaches for Family Violence Intervention Orders for young people including inconsistencies with age limits as to when a young person can be listed as a protected person and have access to legal protections.
6. Legal services be provided with greater resources and capacity to work with young people to enable their protection in a Family Violence Intervention Order in their own right.

## Risk management and MARAM<sup>1</sup>:

1. As part of the evolution of MARAM, practice guidance continues to be developed for young victim survivors of family violence in collaboration with peak bodies. AVITH MARAM risk assessment may provide a point of reference in the development of a youth responsive approach to risk assessment for young people that are not using harm given many in AVITH programs are also victim survivors of family violence.
2. MARAM alignment in the mental health sector explore and recognise the distinct needs of young people that are victim survivors of family violence including the adoption of a trauma-informed, healing oriented lens.
3. As part of the implementation of MARAM in schools, government and the Department of Education consider and develop referral pathways with specialist services.
4. As part of MARAM risk assessment adaptation, the young persons view on their safety form part of the basis of their safety planning, as is the case with adult victim survivors.

## Research and policy:

1. Further research be conducted into the prevalence of family violence against young people, the nature of the relationship in which the violence is occurring, and the characteristics of both the users and the victim survivors of this violence.
2. In policy settings, government consider the needs of young people 12-18 as distinct from those of children, and young people 18-24 as distinct from those of adults, to recognise their differing legal rights, developmental stage and service needs.
3. Family violence policy and programs for young people, particularly young people experiencing violence in the home, recognise the multiple drivers of the violence perpetrated against them, of which gender is one factor



<sup>1</sup> MARAM is the framework that organisations are prescribed under legislation to align their policy, practice and procedures with in order to identify and respond to family violence risk



**SECTION 1**  
OVERVIEW

## 1.1 Introduction

Family violence and violence against women continues to be a pervasive, systemic issue in Australia. In Victoria, the need for deep and sustained reform to address this challenge was reflected in the outcomes from the Royal Commission into Family Violence handing down 227 recommendations to essentially rebuild Victoria's family violence system.<sup>8</sup>

Significant progress has been made in implementing these recommendations, with a range of reforms including the roll out of place-based support and safety hubs, or the Orange Doors; improvements in police practice in responding to family violence; information sharing and redevelopment of the risk assessment tool; and continuing development of refuges.

However, gaps remain for young people who are experiencing family violence, either in the home or from an intimate partner.

The **Amplify Project**, undertaken by Melbourne City Mission, seeks to understand this gap in policy and services and map a way forward. This report outlines the findings from the research conducted as part of this project.

## 1.2 About Amplify

Many young people that are experiencing family violence present to Melbourne City Mission's Frontyard Youth Services. Of the young people supported by Frontyard in 2020, 45 per cent of young women and 26 per cent of young men identified family violence as a reason for presentation.

Practitioners reported concern over the lack of specialist family violence support options for these young people, and that while reforms (particularly MARAM, as discussed further in the report) provided them with a basis to identify family violence risk, the tools were not adapted for young people; and if family violence risk was present, there were no referral pathways for case management for them that recognised their distinct needs, particularly those young people who presented for support without a parent or guardian.

As such, Melbourne City Mission commissioned this research to develop recommendations for service and policy responses for young people experiencing family violence that recognises the distinct needs of adolescents and young people,



and the ways in which they are more likely to engage and respond to services.

This includes refuge, case management, wellbeing, financial and other supports necessary to keep young people safe from family violence. It will build on and leverage existing service structures and fill in any necessary gaps to enable this level of service.

### Project Scope

For the purposes of the project, young people are defined as anyone 12-24. The scope for this research project is largely focused on young people 15-19 who are experiencing family violence given the clearer gap in service for this group.

They may be experiencing family violence in the home, or intimate partner violence.

While intersectional needs, including for LGBTIQA+ young people, young people from diverse cultural communities, young people with disability, and Aboriginal Young People, are explored, specific adaptations to policies and programs should be co-designed with these communities in the next stage of this project.



## Methodology

The first step in the research was conducting a literature and policy review to place the issue of family violence and young people within the Victorian and Australian policy context, and to gather evidence and practice frameworks that have been shown to work when supporting adolescents and young people who have experienced family violence.

This review then informed a series of five workshops with:

1. Young people with lived experience of family violence
2. Youth Work Practitioners
3. Specialist Family Violence Practitioners
4. Legal services
5. Orange Door Practice Leadership Team

There were also additional consultations with specialists in family violence, youth work, sexual assault services and housing services and one-on-one feedback and input sessions with individual young people.

The project has tried as much as possible to ensure a **co-design** process that privileges young people with lived experience, not just because of their knowledge given their experience, but for their capacity to identify and articulate the systemic and programmatic challenges.

As such, there is no identifying information within this report about any of the lived experienced participants.

The project was overseen by a Project Reference Group with membership from:

- Melbourne City Mission
- DVVic/DVRCV
- The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- Drummond Street Services
- Safe Steps Family Violence Crisis Service
- RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice
- Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
- Two young people with lived expertise

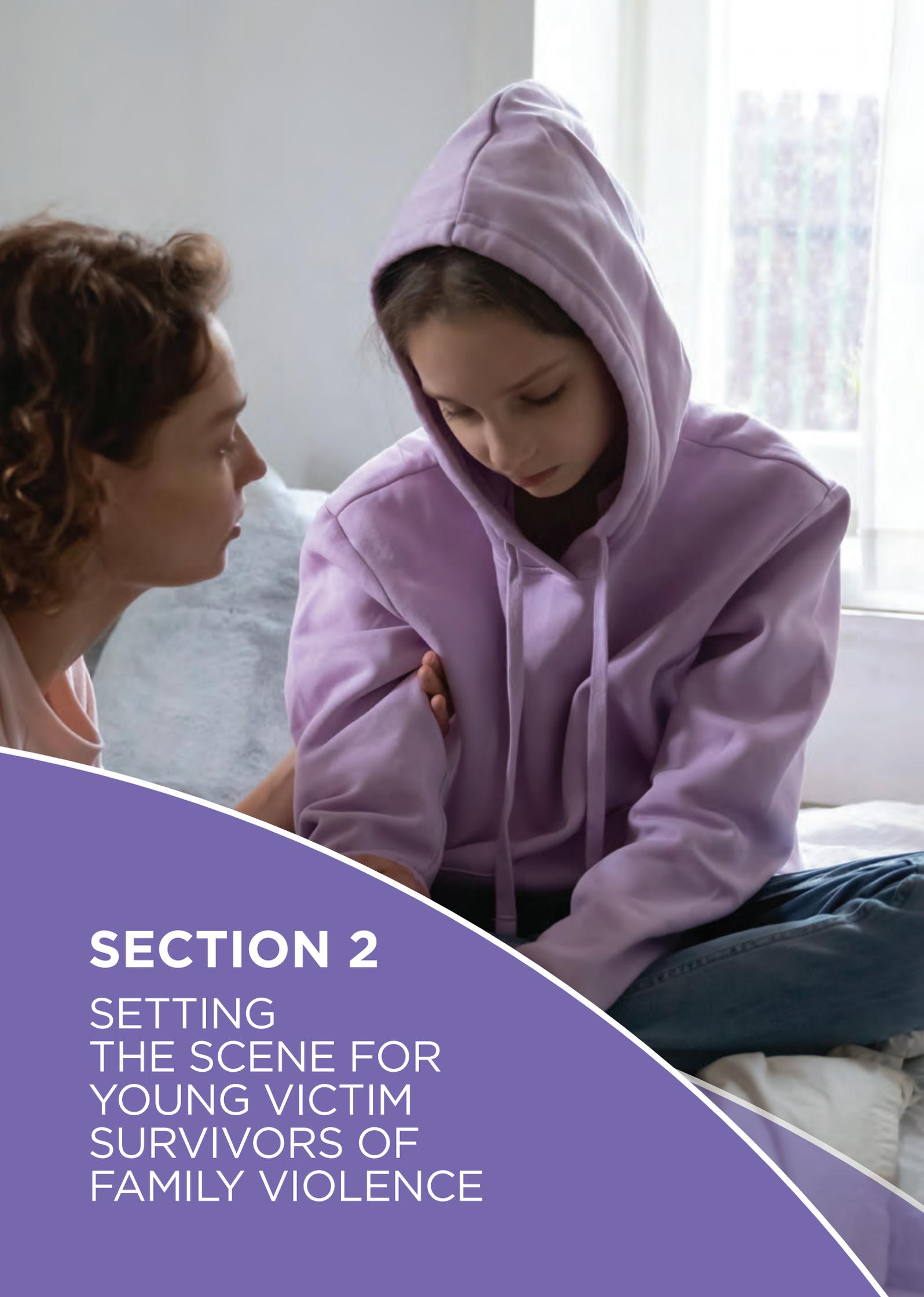


### **1.3 Outline of this report**

Section Two sets the scene in which this project has taken place. This includes an understanding of the challenge this project is attempting to address, the policy context and enablers, and an outline of the existing service system.

Section Three describes the findings as they relate to the needs of young victim survivors of family violence identified throughout this project, and how they differ to those from other cohorts. Issues such as identification of the signs a young person is experiencing family violence; how they perceive safety and what that means for them; and the challenging legal landscape which influences their agency and the extent to which responses enable choice.

Lastly, Section Four brings the findings together to map a way forward in policy and services to cater to the specific needs of young victim survivors of family violence.



## **SECTION 2**

SETTING  
THE SCENE FOR  
YOUNG VICTIM  
SURVIVORS OF  
FAMILY VIOLENCE

*“I didn’t know what I was experiencing was family violence. I didn’t have the words to describe it. I thought all families were like this” – Young victim survivor*

## 2.1 Family violence and young people

### Defining family violence

As per the Family Violence Protection Act (Vic) 2008, family violence is:

- a) behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour—
  - i. is physically or sexually abusive; or
  - ii. is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or
  - iii. is economically abusive; or
  - iv. is threatening; or
  - v. coercive; or
  - vi. in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or
- b) behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a).<sup>9</sup>



Family violence occurs in a range of family or family-like relationships. This includes:

- **Intimate partner violence**

Intimate partner violence is the most common form of family violence and violence against women<sup>10</sup> and occurs between current or previous intimate partners, including young people in intimate relationships.

- **Adolescent violence in the Home (AVITH)**

Adolescent family violence describes the “use of physical, emotional, psychological, verbal, financial and/or sexual abuse by a child or adolescent against their parent, carer, sibling or other family member in the home”.<sup>11</sup>

Family violence used by adolescents is a distinct form of family violence and requires a different response to family violence used by adults, because of their age and the likelihood that they are also victim survivors of family violence.<sup>12</sup>

In fact the majority of adolescents using violence in the home have experienced violence themselves, or are continuing to experience it. Children and young people using violence are often doing so as a response to trauma, including through the impacts of trauma on neurological development and capacity to regulate emotion and behaviour.<sup>13</sup>

- **Violence against children and young people**

Children and young people are also affected by family violence. Exposure to violence against their mothers or other caregivers causes profound harm to children, with potential impacts on attitudes to relationships and violence, as well as behavioural, cognitive and emotional functioning and social development.<sup>14</sup> In addition to being exposed to violence against other family members, children may also experience family violence directly, as primary victims in their own right, requiring specialised supports.<sup>15</sup>

- **Elder Abuse**

Elder abuse is defined as “a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person” of which an older person is aged 60 years of over.



### **Incidents of family violence against young people**

Violence against young people is prevalent in Australia. It is estimated that 1 in 8 women, and 1 in 9 men aged 18-24 experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in the past twelve months, half of which is in the context of family violence. Young women were far more likely to experience sexual assault, at nine times the rate of that against men.<sup>16</sup>

Women in this age group are also more likely to experience family violence, at three times that rate of men.

The Crime Statistics Agency in Victoria reports that in year ending June 2021, 15,096 Affected Family Members in a police family incident were aged 15-24. 76 percent were young women, and 24 per cent were young men.<sup>17</sup> However, family violence amongst young people is under reported, and the actual figure is likely to be much higher.

### **Contextualising family violence for young people**

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

Given the endemic nature of Intimate Partner Violence - primarily by men against their current or former partners - much of the focus is understandably on this issue. One woman on average dies every week due to IPV<sup>18</sup>, and it is well established the largest driver of this violence is gender inequality and control.<sup>19</sup>

IPV also occurs amongst adolescents (as can be seen above) and gendered drivers must continue to inform policy and practice as can be seen in the figures above.

However, violence against young people from a parent featured highly in the literature and was a consistent theme throughout the workshops.



This often started from childhood and experiences of child abuse and bearing witness to violence against a parent were also consistent themes.

Young people also experience violence from siblings or from other family members which was rarely recognised for the harm it caused.

As noted by Safe Steps in their annual report “For almost all of the young people who contacted us, the primary issue was parental/ guardian coercion or violence. This was often complicated by rejection of the family faith, exploration of gender identity or sexuality, and limited supports in isolated communities.”<sup>20</sup>

While not challenging the importance of the gendered lens, these differing experiences require an intersectional and nuanced discussion of the use of power and control in parental relationships, where the power imbalance is experienced differently and whereby limits to

legal recourse for young people can be an additional tactic used. It means family violence against young men could be more prevalent in this cohort, as well as against young women, from a parent of either gender. This is discussed in more detail in section 3.4 and further interrogation is required to properly understand this dynamic.

As well as understanding the different contexts in which young people experience violence, there are also specific types of tactics that are unique for young people. Refusing to forego family tax benefit to enable a young person to claim Centrelink, refusing access to computers and other means for education and connection, and using siblings against them was also an important theme.

### **Impacts of family violence on young people**

The impacts of this experience are immense. Young people experiencing family violence have an increased risk of eating disorders, teenage pregnancy, early school leaving, suicide attempts, mental illness and use of violence. They experience disrupted schooling, and consequent harm to chances of getting and keeping a job; difficulty making and keeping friends, due to the stress and shame of trying to keep the violence secret, and the disruption of moving houses and schools to escape.<sup>21</sup> Young people who experience violence are also more highly represented in the justice system – including when becoming visible to the system for their own use of harm,<sup>22</sup> mental health system and in homelessness services<sup>23</sup> with young people making up 26 per cent of people experiencing homelessness.<sup>24</sup>





## 2.2 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence

In 2015, The Victorian Government instigated the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Royal Commission) in response to the tragic murder of Luke Batty by his father.

The Royal Commission handed down its report in 2016. It highlighted that there was a “lack of targeted resources to meet the specific needs of children and young people,” and the few services that are offered are not supported in any systemic way.<sup>25</sup>

It made four recommendations to improve services for children and young people that are victim survivors of family violence, including access to crisis accommodation, greater protection under the Family Violence Protection Act, and improved access to therapeutic, age-appropriate supports.

Six further recommendations were made to improve the intersection of Child Protection and the family violence system, and six related specifically to improvement in responses for young people of adolescents who use violence in the home.

Young people are disaggregated from children in the recommendations regarding the use of

adolescent violence in the home; family violence against young people in the context of intimate partner relationships; and in developing youth-specific accommodation for adolescent victim-survivors.<sup>26</sup>

### Family Violence Rolling Action Plan

The Victorian Governments Rolling Action Plan identifies children and young people as victim survivors as a priority area.<sup>27</sup>

It highlights the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM); the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme and the Child Information Sharing Scheme; the Orange Door Network; justice programs; and therapeutic interventions as ways in which the Victorian family violence reform has responded to children and young people as victim survivors. The plan lists areas for future reform as continuing these initiatives and continued collection of data for best practice. It also, again, highlights the issue of adolescents who use violence.<sup>28</sup>

These initiatives would be strengthened greatly through the articulation of the needs of young people as distinct to those of children outside of the adolescent family violence in the home context.

This lack of recognition of young people and adolescents as having distinct needs to that of children was noted in the most recent report from the Family Violence Implementation Monitor, which stated that “the needs of...young adults be considered an area for future attention.” The report also found that the perspectives of children and young people are still overwhelmingly missing from the family violence narrative<sup>29</sup>

## Research and Policy Recommendation 2

In policy settings, government consider the needs of young people 12-18 as distinct from those of children, and young people 18-24 as distinct from those of adults, to recognise their differing legal rights, developmental stage and service needs.

### Information Sharing and MARAM

Information sharing and MARAM are interdependent reforms. Information sharing removes barriers and provides a legislative framework for organisations to share information regarding risks to children (Child Information Sharing Scheme, or CISS) and family violence risks (Family Violence Information Sharing

Scheme). MARAM provides a framework to enable this, as well as support organisations to recognise and manage family violence risk.

The **Child Information Sharing Scheme** allows authorised organisations to share information to support child wellbeing or safety for children under 18 years. It has expanded legal permissions for professionals to share and request information from other professionals including services that work with children, young people and families, such as Child Protection, Youth Justice, Maternal and Child Health, and Victoria Police as defined under *Child Wellbeing and Safety (Information Sharing) Regulations 2018*

The **Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme** enables key organisations and services to share information related to assessing or managing family violence risk. The Scheme is underpinned by the *Family Violence Protection (Information Sharing and Risk Management) Regulations 2018*, with a focus on keeping perpetrators of family violence in view and accountable, and to promote the safety of victim survivors of family violence.<sup>30</sup>

**MARAM** is designed to provide a holistic picture of the risk posed to a victim survivor of family violence by ensuring relevant services that intersect with family violence can effectively identify, assess and manage risk.





Under MARAM, organisations must align policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools with the framework.

There are a range of services prescribed under MARAM that work directly with young people. Notably: schools, child protection, and Youth Justice.

There are some practice guidelines for working with children and young people, including a Child Victim Survivor Tool and a risk management tool specifically for older children and young people,<sup>31</sup> specific practice guidance for young people is currently only being developed through an AVITH lens for young people who are using harm as a response to their own experience.<sup>32</sup> MARAM has also been adapted for Child Protection and a range of information sheets on working with children and young people have been developed. As part of the continuing evolution of MARAM, practice tools specifically for young people should form part of this suite of tools.

### **Risk Management and MARAM Recommendation 1**

**As part of the evolution of MARAM, practice guidance continues to be developed for young victim survivors of family violence in collaboration with peak bodies. AVITH MARAM risk assessment may provide a point of reference in the development of youth responsive approach to risk assessment for young people that are not using harm given many in AVITH programs are also victim survivors of family violence.**

## **2.3 Service responses**

There are a range of services across Victorian designed to work with young victim survivors of family violence.

### **Adolescent Violence in the Home**

As discussed in the previous section, Adolescent Violence in the Home was recognised as a distinct problem through the Royal Commission and is often a manifestation of a young person's own experience of family violence.<sup>33</sup>

It highlighted that responses for adolescents who are using violence in the home need to be different to those provided to adults, and recommended the state-wide roll out of a specialist AVITH program and for the provision of supported accommodation options for young people using violence where it is not viable or safe for them to remain in the home.<sup>34</sup>

Responses to young people who use violence in the home must "consider their protection, safety and developmental needs, as well as their offending behaviour."<sup>35</sup>

The most recent Victorian State Budget committed to the state-wide roll out of AVITH programs, bearing in mind these programs are still in developmental stages.

There is yet a unified theory of change or practice for working with young people using violence<sup>36</sup> and some of the evidence-base for programs is still being developed.

Given the strong correlation between young people using family violence being victim survivors themselves,<sup>37</sup> these programs are an important addition. They do not, however,

address the needs of young people who are not displaying violent behaviours and are experiencing other impacts of family violence.

### Therapeutic programs

In Victoria, there is a state-wide therapeutic platform to deliver therapeutic interventions for victim survivors of family violence, with therapeutic program available in all regions some of which work with children and young people.<sup>38</sup>

These focus on recovery, healing and safety through individually tailored and planned responses to client need.

### Orange Doors

The Support and Safety Hubs, now known as the Orange Doors, are a response to recommendation 37 from the Royal Commission.<sup>39</sup>

The Orange Door brings services together including Specialist Family Violence Services, Child and Family Services, Child Protection and perpetrator services as a partnership to provide an integrated intake and assessment so that individuals and families don't have to retell their

story multiple times to have their needs met.<sup>40</sup> Some have also started to include legal supports. It aims to support adults, children and young people who are experiencing family violence; families who need support with the care and wellbeing of children and young people and perpetrators of family violence with risk and needs assessment, safety planning and crisis support.

After initial intake and assessments, Orange Door clients are referred to community-based support depending on their needs. For young people, this can be a complex process based on age and presentation but includes:

- For young people (generally under 16), referrals to non-specialist youth housing programs when presenting alone; or to specialist family violence programs and child and family services when presenting with a parent.
- For young people over 18, referral to specialist family violence services.
- For young people under 18 who are using violence in the home, referral to AVITH programs.

For 15-19 year olds presenting alone who are not using family violence, or who are experiencing intimate partner violence, there is a lack of specialist case management and lack of housing options. This means that while youth services and refuges as prescribed under MARAM have some capacity to identify risk, they critically have nowhere to refer these young people.

Practitioners at the Orange Door also highlighted the importance of a youth specialisation when working with young victim survivors of family violence. Some had good relationships with local services, although none of these services were family violence specific. All highlighted that this needed to be built into the response in a more systemic way.



### Services for Young Victim Survivors Recommendation 1

Family violence responses for young people 15-19 be explored and designed with the range of sectors that work with these young people. This includes, but is not limited to, the Orange Doors, Specialist Family Violence Services, Youth Services, Housing Programs, Legal Programs and most critically, young people themselves

## 2.4 Impacts of COVID

*'If children continue to remain invisible in the discourse around Covid-19 and DFV-related support and recovery needs, Australia will see long-term effects on children that will likely exceed documented adverse effects in intensity and longevity.'*<sup>41</sup>

COVID-19 has had a disproportionately negative impact on young people aged 15-19 than it has had on older groups.

Young people have experienced higher rates of psychological distress, loneliness, educational disruption, unemployment and family violence. For many, this is the first time they had experienced family violence, particularly young women experiencing coercive controlling behaviour from their partner.<sup>42</sup> A global survey conducted by Save the Children found that the reported rate of violence at home doubled during school closures from eight to 17 per cent. There was also an increase in the use of children in parental disputes and in relation to Family Court Orders.<sup>43</sup>

While the public health orders may have been necessary, it is important to highlight that the pandemic not only increased experiences of family violence for young people, it has also limited their capacity to manage their safety by restricting access to avenues that were previously used. Young people report managing their safety through support at school, being able to couch surf, being able to leave the home, and through avoiding parental substance misuse.<sup>44</sup> All of these avenues were no longer available in the context of the pandemic.



## Joining the dots for young victim survivors

As this section highlights, young people experience violence differently to others and will present in different ways. While the Royal Commission made important leeway in identifying young people in this context, and despite the progress made in the implementation of the Royal Commissions recommendations, young people who are not using violence are falling through the cracks.

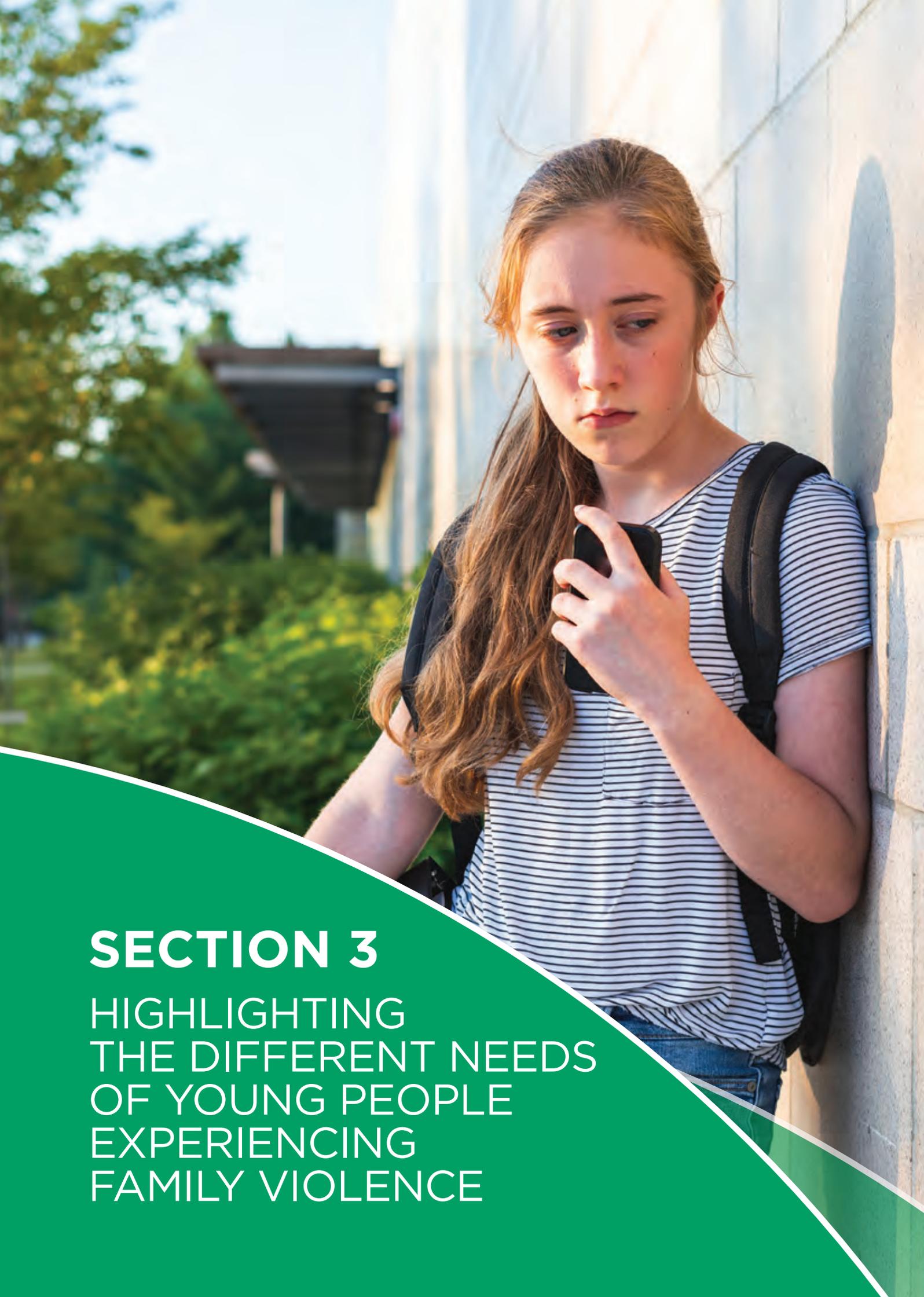
While not without its challenges and still rolling out, there is a system in place for children experiencing family violence through the Orange Door, where specialist family violence, child and family services, child protection and men's services work collaboratively to assess and refer people with family violence risk.

Young people under 15 can be placed in supported accommodation with the impacted parent or, as a last resort, in out-of-home care. They can have their family violence risk managed through the specialist family violence service working with the parent. Similarly, there is a service system for adults experiencing family violence through the specialist family violence sector and access to emergency accommodation. There is also a recognition of the need for a service for young victim survivors that are using harm, most often in the context of their own experiences of family violence, through the state-wide roll out of the AVITH program. Albeit still in its developmental stages, this manages one of the ways in which young people may become visible as victim survivors.

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

This service gap means youth services are managing substantial family violence risk. Critically, in practice there is no specialised, family violence informed supports for young victim survivors that are not using violence, with specialisation still developing in the latter field as well. This omission has by no means been by design, and all sectors working with these young people do what they can with what they have. However, it highlights that there is need for a better, more systemic response.





## **SECTION 3**

**HIGHLIGHTING  
THE DIFFERENT NEEDS  
OF YOUNG PEOPLE  
EXPERIENCING  
FAMILY VIOLENCE**

## 3.1 Recognising the signs

***“I wasn’t being naughty, I was traumatised... (I needed people) to see beyond my behaviour” – young victim survivor***

A review of the literature highlights that young people present different signs that they are experiencing family violence to adults and children. This was further highlighted in the workshops conducted with young people and practitioners.

This is, in large part, due to their developmental stage,<sup>45</sup> the impact of trauma on behaviour and decision making<sup>46</sup> and their different coping mechanisms<sup>47</sup>, including self-protective behaviours.<sup>48 49</sup>

However, these signs can be overlooked or not understood to be related to experiencing family violence. This can mean young people do not feel seen despite these presentations, and hence feel nothing is done to support them.<sup>50</sup>

These different presentations, and ways of understanding and managing these are critical in any youth-specific family violence response program. It requires an ability, to “understand that responses to traumatic stress are adaptive and that people learn to keep themselves safe (and)...all behaviour has function.”<sup>51</sup>This includes manifestations such as mental illness, using violence, presentations at school, running away from home and drug and alcohol misuse.

### Mental ill health

The vulnerability and trauma many young people experience with family violence leaves them at increased risk for a range of serious mental health concerns including anxiety, depression and suicidal behaviours.<sup>52 53</sup>At MCM, 64% of young people accessing our service had a mental health issue or concern identified.<sup>54</sup>

Mental ill health is often a manifestation of experiencing family violence and poor mental health can be used against victim survivors to undermine their disclosure of family violence and limit their access to support.<sup>55</sup>

The role of the mental health sector in working with survivors of family violence was identified consistently in the literature and throughout the workshops. So too was the need for mental health services to adopt trauma informed and family violence informed lenses.



Young people highlighted that perhaps due to lack of other options, they were exited out of acute mental health services to the unsafe home. When family violence was identified, they were not offered family violence support. Being in a mental health facility however provided an environment where protective factors could have been put in place.

***It was one of the first times I felt safe to disclose what was happening (when in acute mental health facility). But it wasn’t dealt with – Young Victim Survivor***

### Royal Commission into Mental Health

In February 2019, the Victorian Government established a Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System in recognition that the current system was failing and was essentially ‘broken.’<sup>56</sup>

It found that Victoria’s mental health system is constantly in crisis mode, and that it had drifted from aspirations of integrated community-based care underpinned by de-institutionalisation to being overly reliant on hospital-based interventions.

The Commission highlighted the specific mental health needs of young people 12-24 as a distinct group from children with “youth services being reformed and expanded.”<sup>57</sup>

It recommended youth-specific residential services, specific supports for LGBTIQ+ young people, holistic healing models for Aboriginal young people and state-wide, coordinated primary prevention.

As highlighted in MCM’s submission to the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental health system, there needs to be additional mental health services for young people with complex needs; better coordination and planning between the mental health, housing and disability services given the commonality of clients in these services; and a broader community capacity to support young people in early treatment of trauma<sup>58</sup>including that caused by family violence.

Given mental health services are also covered under the MARAM framework, any MARAM alignment in the mental health sector should include the distinct needs of these young people.

## Risk Management and MARAM Recommendation 2

**MARAM alignment in the mental health sector explore and recognise the distinct needs of young people that are victim survivors of family violence including the adoption of a trauma-informed, healing oriented lens.**

### Using harm

It is not unusual for a young victim survivor to present as a user of violence. Young people can provoke violence in the home as a defence mechanism<sup>59</sup> or as a response to trauma.<sup>60</sup> It can also be a way the young person manages violence in the home, so that other members of the family do not become a target.

AVITH was highlighted in the report from the Royal Commission.<sup>61</sup>The subsequent work in developing policy and program responses for AVITH highlighted the high proportion of young people who use violence in the home are victim survivors themselves, and responses need to recognise this and work with the young person in trauma-informed and non-collusive ways. This need too was highlighted in the workshops with young people and practitioners.



For those young victim survivors who do not use violence in the home, there is much that can be learned from AVITH work, and many of the presenting challenges are the same, namely:

- Services and police carrying the risk in the absence of options or framework within which to respond
- An almost complete lack of crisis or alternative accommodation and legal services for young people
- The need for whole-of-family risk assessment and support options
- The need for review of civil order protection mechanisms
- The use of therapeutic options
- The need for better policy and child protection frameworks<sup>62</sup>

The potential for the development of a consistent, trauma-informed AVITH program is significant. It is critical that these services are not only trauma informed but healing oriented.<sup>63</sup>

It is also critically important to recognise that, while some adolescent victim survivors can enact harm, many do not. Many can retreat and become passive.<sup>64</sup> These young people are falling through system gaps.

It is also indicative of a lack of early intervention to manage the trauma that is potentially driving some of this behaviour.

## Services for young victim survivors Recommendation 2

**Support options be available for young people who have experienced violence, regardless of where or why they interact with the service system.**

## Schools

***I went to school when I was clearly unwell. I often had to go to the welfare office for food.***

***It was one of the teachers that gave me the language for the first time that what I was experiencing was family violence – Young victim survivor***

Early school leaving is often a signal that a young person is experiencing family violence and related challenges in staying engaged in education.<sup>65</sup>

Young people also reported that there were other indicators that there were challenges at home. This could be arriving at school having not had breakfast, needing material support from school welfare offices, arriving without proper clothing, or going to school when unwell.

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

What has been consistently identified is the importance of schools in identifying family

violence and critically, how the ways in which they respond. It should be noted that this is true for all service responses, but particularly critical for schools.

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

Young people reported a range of experiences at school when family violence was detected. Some of these were largely positive, including having someone explain to them what they were experiencing was family violence and what options they had. When discussing the possibility of reporting violence, practitioners and young people both emphasised the importance of leading the conversation with a rights-based approach. This demonstrates to the young person that they have a right to feel safe, and highlights where they have choice and agency in what is happening.





Disclosure at schools and the need to report child abuse had also been badly managed, with the young person not being told what was happening. This contributed to a sense of shame that their disclosure had set off a chain reaction of events of which they had no say over and impacted so deeply on them and their families. They felt interrogated by a group of people who they did not know, asking questions they did not always know how to or want to answer.

***Talk to me before you call human services...I was kid in a room with all of these people I didn't know and I thought I had done something wrong***

Schools being prescribed under MARAM, and the implementation of this, is pivotal in this and is a recognition of the role schools play in the lives of young people. As to is the referral pathways available to schools once family violence is disclosed.

### **Risk Management and MARAM Recommendation 3**

**As part of the implementation of MARAM in schools, government and the Department of Education consider and develop referral pathways with specialist services**

### **Running away from home**

***"I was running away from family. Dad was very scary, for sure there was mental and emotional abuse. It wasn't mum, she copped it as well and she was avoiding home. So I left to stay at a friend's house."***  
**- 17 yrs, couch surfer<sup>66</sup>**

Often young people would run away from home, couch surf and sleep at a friend's house to escape violence in the home. However, this was often dismissed as misbehaviour, rather than a recognition of the ways the young people were attempting to keep themselves safe.

These young people would at times be returned to the unsafe home. This was a combination of not recognising the young person's perception of their safety, and not identifying that the behaviour was a consequence of family violence.

Further challenges exist for young people given the limitations on access to other forms of housing and the lack of recognition of their ability to exercise choice about where they lived. As put forward by one of the young people in the research

***They (police) may not have thought where I was staying was safe, it was safer there than at home - Young victim survivor***

### **Risk Management and MARAM Recommendation 4**

**As part of MARAM risk assessment adaptation, the young persons view on their safety form part of the basis of their safety planning, as is the case with adult victim survivors.**

### **Drug and alcohol misuse**

There are a range of ways in which people respond to trauma and the mechanisms they use to cope. Some young people misuse drugs and alcohol in this context and can become involved in the justice system.

It was raised in the workshops that drug and alcohol facilities can provide a level of respite for young victim survivors of family violence as a place of recovery outside of the home. At times, it was the only respite available with many drug and alcohol services recognising their behaviour as a coping mechanism, rather than a personal failing.

## 3.2 Conceptualising safety

Feelings of safety are a critical element of being trauma-informed<sup>67</sup> and are a key reason young people seek support.<sup>68</sup>

Young people have particular ways in which they perceive and experience safety. Support for their families – with the express consent of the young person – was important given they often have a protective role within their families and held concerns for any family members left behind.

In the context of intimate partner relationships, workers interviewed identified the importance of working with the young person who is using violence also, as a way of minimising harm and encouraging the young victim survivor to seek support.

They seek support from an adult in which they can trust and model respectful relationships with, in a way that is “power with” rather than “power over.”<sup>69</sup>

They further needed access to information and resources that resonated with them, and that they might find incidentally rather than seeking them particularly those that build their capacity to understand and uphold their rights and agency, and access to safe accommodation when it was not safe for them to stay in the home.

### The role of family

Young people who experience family violence in the home (normally from a parent) identify that they do not feel safe unless they can ensure their siblings or non-violent parent are safe. Many can adopt a protective role in their families and removing that role can escalate the trauma a young person experiences. Where possible and safe, the service response needs to be coordinated and include support for the young person’s family. If a young person independently moves away for their safety, there must be recognition within any support service of the context from which the young person is leaving, and the impact on the young person once they are no longer able to play this protective role.

It was also critical for young people who remained in the violent home. As one young victim survivor highlighted:

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

Where possible and safe, the service response needs to include support for the young person’s family. If a young person moves away for their safety, there must be recognition within any support service of the impact not being able to provide that protective role might have.

Children and young people are rarely passive witnesses to violence<sup>70</sup> and adopt protective behaviours including vigilance in managing the violence and feeling responsible for it.<sup>71</sup>

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

Supporting them in connection to family is important<sup>72</sup> particularly their relationship to the non-violent parent.<sup>73</sup>

Where safe, and with the express consent of the young person, a whole-of-family approach has been shown to be beneficial for the recovery of young people that have experienced family violence.<sup>74</sup>It is also important where the young person needs to remain in the violent home, to monitor and manage any potential risk.

However, maintaining this role may not be feasible or safe for the young person. No longer being able to retain that role in their families must be recognised as a contribution to further trauma and threat to feelings of safety and needs to inform any practice response. As one young person articulated:

***Reunification with my family was important to me and it should be an option where it is safe. For me, it was not possible. I was always going to be unsafe with them.***





In the context of intimate partner relationships, working or engaging with the young person who is using violence was also highlighted as important. This was due to the increased likelihood of the victim survivor remaining engaged in support, managing their potential risk, and intervening early to prevent violence from escalating. This was also due to the fact that many of the young people using violence against their partner were victim survivors themselves.

**Services for Young Victim Survivors Recommendation 3**

Where safe, and with the consent of the young person, support be offered to their family or partner as part of a young persons safety planning

**A trusted adult**

Having a trusted adult was identified as important to feelings of safety and to recovery.<sup>75</sup> This trusted adult could be members of extended family or support workers.

Importantly, young people wanted the trusted adult to support them to access their rights and to work alongside them.

This person needs to listen to the young person, allow them time to speak, not speak for, and adopt an approach that reduces the feelings of self-blame.<sup>76</sup>

In the workshops, these were identified as people including support workers, staff at school, sports coaches and extended family.

It was also important to address power imbalances in this context. Peer support workers were one such way young people could feel safer that there was “someone on their side”.

**Services for young victim survivors Recommendation 4**

Case workers and peer support workers be considered as part of developing support options for young victim survivors of family violence

**Understanding of rights**

*I deserved more...this is not meant to happen to you as a kid – Young victim survivor*

Access to contextualised information is critical for all victim survivors of family violence. Young people identify how important it is to them, and how this information needs to support them in understanding what is happening to them is family violence, what they can do to manage this risk, and information about support that is available.<sup>77</sup>They also highlighted that knowledge of their rights was particularly critical. This is dealt with in more detail in Section 3.3.

All the young people observed that at the time they were experiencing family violence, that is

not what they identified it as. They felt if information had been available at the time that helped them find the language to describe what was happening, they would have been more likely to seek help.

Young people and youth practitioners also highlighted that while some information does exist, it is not in places where young people would see them. Further, some of the resources that were available did not resonate with young people. They felt that resources that were designed by young people, and were available in places where they would see them, would be more useful.

These places include on public transport, in youth services, on dating applications, in gaming application, fast food restaurants and other places where they would be found incidentally, rather than needing to be looked for.

## Rights and Agency Recommendation 1

**Resources be led by young people that outline information about family violence, their rights, and where they can get support. This information should be available where young people already are rather than relying on them to seek the information.**

### Safe housing

Access to safe housing is vital for young victim survivors of family violence. As one young person said:

***You can't heal in the environment that is making you sick - Young victim survivor***

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

### Emergency accommodation

At times of high risk, and when there is no current refuge available, homelessness services use brokerage money to accommodate victim survivors of family violence in motels. While this is not optimal, it is often used. For young people under 18, this is problematic given many motels

will not accommodate them and some services spoken to in this research were not clear on their duty of care to someone under 18 being accommodated in a motel. The preference for these services for the young person to have a chaperone or guardian while in emergency accommodation was a significant challenge. For those over 18 who can access motels, these are not age appropriate for most young people.

There are approximately 23 youth-specific refuges in Victoria, of which MCM operates five, with Frontyard being the state-wide youth intake point. MCM also operated one refuge specifically for young women. At present, this is insufficient to meet demand and there are rarely places available. Further, while there is a refuge which specifically accommodate young women and children, no Victorian youth refuge operates under a family violence model.

The Royal Commission recommended that that government fund a broader range of supported accommodation options for young people (Recommendations 24 and 124) with the funding of youth foyers in Preston and Werribee contributing towards its acquittal.<sup>78</sup>

MCM maintains the concern raised in our submission to the Royal Commission that current youth refuge models are not designed to manage high risk family violence. They do not have the requisite security needed and the level of family violence specialisation required for recovery.<sup>79</sup>

While demand continues to exceed supply, there also needs to be further exploration of shorter term, crisis options given the challenges accommodating young people in sub-standard motels and hostels. These too, are not age-appropriate and can be difficult to arrange given safety concerns and duty-of-care for young people under 18.

### Out of home care

For young people under 18, the Out-of-Home care system is still an option that is explored. However, this is more a more likely option for the younger cohort as placement of older children is more challenging, and if a young person over 15 is presenting to services for the first time, this is even more difficult.

Many young people run away from home or sleep rough rather than enter the out-of-home care system.<sup>80</sup> Further, trauma and mirroring of learned behaviours can mean young people

display behaviours which can exclude them from the Out-of-Home care system<sup>81</sup>. This can include use of behaviours that can lead to them being the respondent to Personal Safety Intervention Orders or criminal charges.<sup>82</sup>

These findings highlight a gap in housing services. While still requiring improvement, with one young person highlighting they felt safer in the violent home than they did in Out-of-Home-Care, accommodation pathways generally exist for young people under 15 through Child Protection and the Out-of-Home Care system. While Child Protection Services have the capacity to work with young people under 18, the research identified that they more often did not, and still adopted a child focused, rather than young-person focused lens. They also exist for young people aged over 18 through mainstream housing services.

Outside of youth refuge, there are almost no emergency accommodation options for young people 15-19 years old.

### Longer-term housing

The lack of social housing stock is well documented in Victoria. For young people that are unable to live at home, this creates significant barriers to their safety and wellbeing.

As outlined in MCM's submission to Victoria's 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Plan, "the social housing system is designed for adults and adult problems. Young people have different experiences of homelessness."<sup>83</sup> As such, solutions need to:

1. Create pathways for young people through
  - a. Adjusting the social housing rent model for young people
  - b. Quarantine dwellings from the Big Housing Build
  - c. Expand the number and medium-term, supporting housing options
  - d. Incorporate therapeutic support model for young people experiencing homelessness
2. Strengthen communities through
  - a. Place-based and pro-social connections
  - b. Design social housing with a therapeutic lens
3. Create a shared Housing Outcomes Framework



4. Create partnerships through establishing a Housing Youth Advisory Group and improve access to data.

These areas of reform need addressing in order to support young victim survivors to live independently and free from violence.

### Housing Recommendation 1

Government, youth services, family violence services and housing services come together to develop and fund short-term options for young victim survivors in family violence crisis including crisis accommodation (refuge) options, particularly for young people 15-19, including implementation for young people using harm in the home. These options should be co-designed with an intersectional lens and responsive to the diverse needs of young people.

### Housing Recommendation 2

The areas of reform as outlined in MCM's Submission to Victoria's 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Plan be prioritised to enable access to accommodation for young victim survivors longer term.

## 3.3 Rights and agency

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

***Our rights as an afterthought. We often talk the talk when it comes to children and young people's rights but fail to enact them – YChange<sup>84</sup>***

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

The research has revealed that it is a combination of structural, legal and policy issues which exacerbate the vulnerability of young victim survivors and the ability for the system to recognise them as victims in their own right.

The policy and legal environment for a young person experiencing family violence in Victoria, which includes an intersection of state and federal jurisdiction, is complex, ambiguous and at times inconsistent and as a result young people's agency is often unnecessarily diminished.

Most importantly, the research has highlighted the complexities of overcoming barriers faced by young people experiencing family violence in understanding and enforcing their rights and the implications this has for service delivery.

This report does not attempt to comment on all the laws and policies impacting the rights and agency of young victim survivors. For example,



the Family Law system and the legislative presumption of equal shared parental responsibility, which has recently been highlighted as a reform priority in developing the next *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*<sup>85</sup>.

This section introduces some of the rights and entitlements that belong to young people experiencing family violence. Any legal information provided in this section is provided as information only and is not provided as professional legal advice.

#### Child protection

State and territory governments are responsible for the care and protection of children and young people if their parent or guardian cannot adequately care for them. However, while Child Protection have capacity to work support young people under 18, those that are 15 years old often fall through the gaps, with support and services prioritised for younger children.<sup>86</sup> In their submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, Melbourne City Mission highlighted, for example, that some child protection workers consider young people aged 15 to 17 years 'old enough to look after themselves' and therefore in less need of protection after experiencing family violence. The subject was also raised during community consultations: "*Child Protection won't pick up on kids 15 and over unless there are younger siblings.*"<sup>87</sup>

Currently, once a young person has reached the age of 17, child protection will not respond to any reports of abuse or neglect at all, unless a protection order or the like has already been granted.<sup>88</sup> However in October 2021, a new amendment to the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* was introduced into Parliament which will enable new child protection reports on at-risk 17 year olds, closing a long-standing service gap.

For younger children, there are clearer processes, policies and laws that are activated, including direct involvement of the Department of Child Protection and the Children's Court, in some cases, and the right to an Independent Children's Lawyer from the age of 10.

Yet, older adolescents who have fallen through the gaps in the child protection system are often forced to leave home and independently navigate a complex legal system.

This report does not seek to make recommendations regarding the child protection system<sup>89</sup>. Rather, it acknowledges the system's difficulties and challenges and provides alternative solutions to complement the Victorian government's existing programs and services.

## Capacity to make their own decisions

A significant question raised by this research is how to determine when decisions can be made 'for' a young person, 'with' a young person or 'by' a young person.

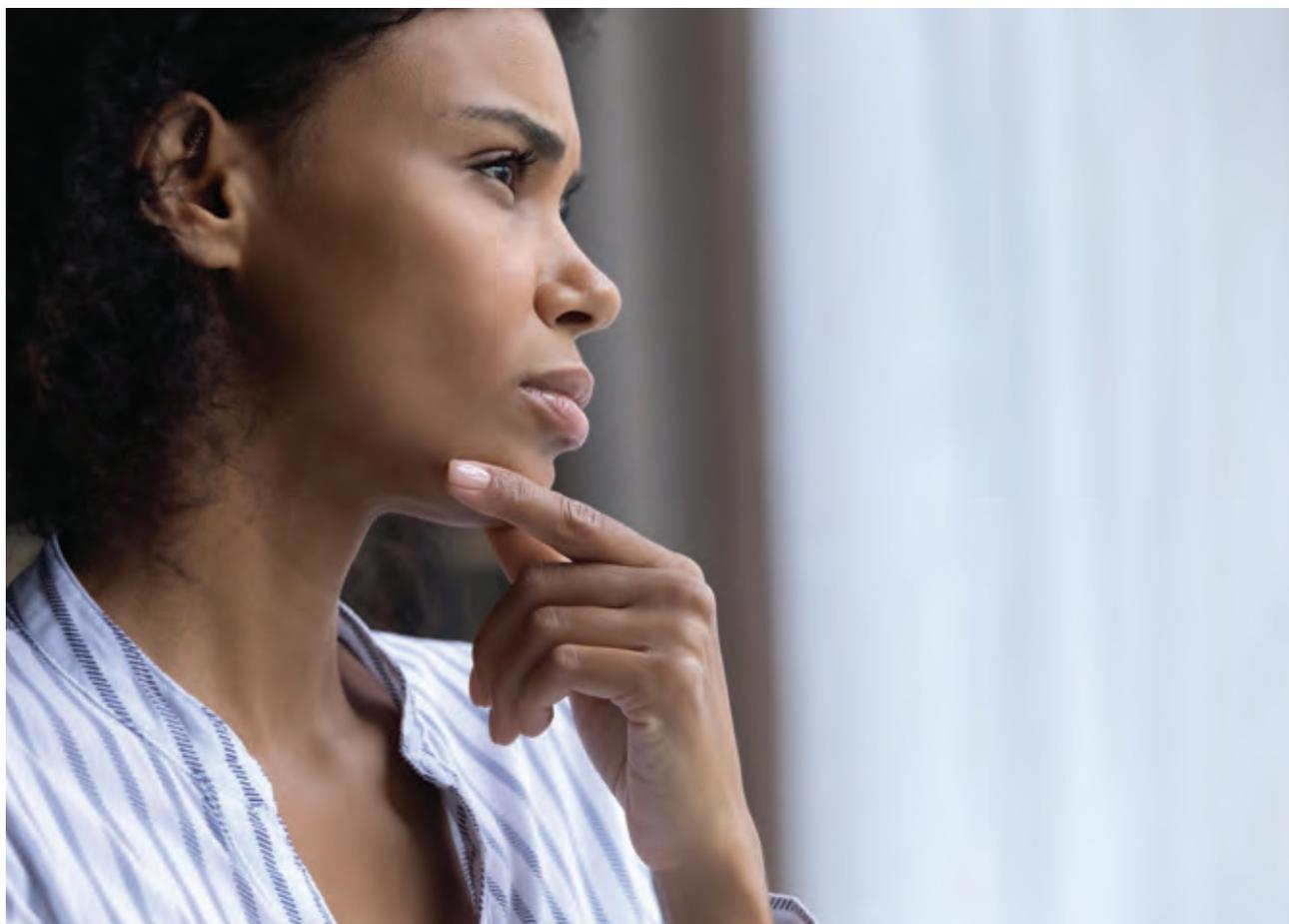
***Police forcing me to go back home when I had run away and not respecting my agency and sense of safety - while you think where I am staying is unsafe, I feel safer there than at home***

The research has raised concerns that young people are not being heard or believed in terms of decision making that affect their safety and wellbeing. This was commonly raised in workshops with respect to choice over services and accommodation (where they were staying). In some instances, decisions were made by schools, police, and health services to return

young people back to unsafe homes without speaking first to the young person or considering their wishes.

***Our experiences are not being validated. There has been strong, ongoing and necessary advocacy around women being believed, but not much has changed for children and young people. We are often blamed and stigmatised for our own abuse and deemed 'troublemakers' if we act out in response to being abused or neglected. Women are often praised for leaving family violence situations, as they should be – but when children and young people leave in response to toxic family dynamics, we are labelled as 'absconding', 'rebellious' or 'naughty'.<sup>90</sup>***

The legal system recognises that as children become older and more mature, they are more capable of making their own decisions including decisions about their healthcare, wellbeing and housing. The law recognises that a young person may reach this stage before they are 18 years old, but there is no specific legal age when a young person may be sufficiently mature and capable of making their own decision. These young people are often referred to as 'mature minors'<sup>91</sup>.



According to legal professionals, young people under the age of 18 have the right to make their own independent decisions when they have capacity to understand the nature and effect of their decision<sup>92</sup>. This assessment is done by the individual professional, organisation or school. This includes access to services and housing but does not include more complicated or non-therapeutic treatments such as sterilisation and gender affirmation surgery.<sup>93</sup>

This does not apply if the Children's Court has placed the young person on a court order which means decisions will be made by the department until the young person has reached the age of 18<sup>94</sup>. However, children and young people have the right to always have their wishes listened to.<sup>95</sup>

In practice, this research has highlighted that most often a young person's agency is not based on their individual capacity but rather an organisational policy based on age. For example, some organisations have determined that they will not provide access to their therapeutic or accommodation services without parental consent for young people under the age of 16 or 18. Without parental or guardian consent, some workers expressed concerns relating to duty of care obligations, kidnapping and assumed reliance on the child protection system.

It is also worth noting, that while most services working with young people under the age of 17 or 18 are required under the law to report concerns of child abuse and/or family violence, it seems that these reporting obligations on some occasions are unintentionally used to remove other agency in terms of decision making.

## Rights and Agency Recommendation 2

Resources and practice guidance be provided to services including Child Protection, Child and Family Services, Specialist Family Violence Services and Housing Services that clarify the thresholds for rights and agency for young people including their right to speak about their experience.

## Access to Centrelink and property

For young people, Centrelink's Youth Allowance provides the bridge to help them transition to independence.

This research has highlighted the struggle young people face in accessing Youth Allowance and navigating a complex administrative system.

### At the Age of 15:

- Leave home and stay at a friend's house ✓
- Access unreasonable to live at home allowance ✗

Young people 16 years and over, can access Youth Allowance's Unreasonable to Live at Home benefit if they can prove independence, for example not being able to live at home because of extreme family breakdown or due to family violence<sup>96</sup>. However, for young victim-survivors who are in the process of transitioning out of the family home, it is very difficult to prove their independence. 'A young person must have left home permanently and not receive continuous support to be entitled to the allowance'<sup>97</sup>. If a young person is experiencing family violence and supporting themselves but is not in a position to leave home, they are not entitled to the benefit.<sup>98</sup>

In most cases, a young person under the age of 18 must be sleeping rough, in a youth refuge or other unstable accommodation before they are able to access the Unreasonable to Live at Home benefit. This effectively means that the benefit is given to a young victim-survivor when they become homeless, instead of being used to prevent homelessness.

Accessing Centrelink benefits also requires negotiating a bureaucratic maze. Young people generally face difficulties with the system owing to its immense complexity and onerous reporting requirements.<sup>99</sup> To apply for Centrelink benefits a young victim-survivor must provide proof of identification including their birth certificate or visa, however in most instances, these documents are in their family or partner's possession and are being withheld.<sup>100</sup>

Young people also have constraints on their capacity to maintain economic independence due to the ways in which minimum wages are set based on age rather than skills or experience.

### Rights and Agency Recommendation 3

The Australian Government review its processes for young people not able to live at home due to family violence and streamline access to Youth Allowance to make it easier to leave the violence.

### Rights and Agency Recommendation 4

Fair Work Australia review minimum wage laws that ascribe lower wages to young people based on age to enable greater financial independence for young people.

## Intervention orders

*Finding out that I could get an IVO but told I was not allowed to because my mental health meant I could not make decisions - I could*

Unless a young person is involved in the child protection system or Victoria Police has decided to pursue an application (in which case, applications are made on behalf of the young person), it is the responsibility of the young person themselves to navigate the legal system and take their family members or intimate partner to court to protect themselves through Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIO).<sup>101</sup> An FVIO is a court order that seeks to ensure the safety of an applicant in circumstances involving family violence. A FVIO can range from a single condition on prohibition of family violence to restricting the Respondent's (perpetrator) ability to approach or communicate with the Affected Family Members. If a person is<sup>102</sup>:

- **under 14** – a parent, guardian, police or any other person (with leave of the Court) can apply for a FVIO on behalf of the young person at the Children's Court<sup>103</sup>. Here the young person will be listed as the Affected Family Member. **14 to 17** – they can apply for a FVIO in their own name if the Children's Court allows it. Here the young person will be listed as both the Applicant and the Affected Family Member.

### At the Age of 10:

Apply for family violence IVO at 10 years old ✘

Have family violence IVO imposed on 10 year old ✔

Although a young person can take out a FVIO against family members or an intimate partner from the age of 14 (i.e., be not just the Affected Family Member but the Applicant), they can have a FVIO imposed against them from 10 years old. It is a challenging and often lengthy process for a young person to pursue, in particular if the matter is contested by the other party. In one matter in the consultations involving a 16 year old female, the matter took in excess of 12 months for a full FVIO to be granted against their mother, this included seven court dates and a two-day contest hearing, where the young woman gave evidence and was cross examined. She pursued the application in her own right in circumstances where multiple reports to police about her experiences of violence were disregarded.

### Rights and agency Recommendation 5

A review be undertaken of the Family Violence Protection Act (Vic) (2008) to address the inconsistencies in thresholds and approaches for FVIOs for young people including inconsistencies with age limits as to when a young person can be listed as a protected person and have access to legal protections.

### Rights and agency Recommendation 6

Legal services be provided with greater resources and capacity to work with young people to enable their protection in a Family Violence Intervention Order in their own right.

### 3.4 Applying multiple lenses

***“Young people who witness or experience violence in the family home don’t always get the support they need. Family violence supports are traditionally geared toward supporting women experiencing intimate partner violence.”***<sup>104</sup>

As outlined in the opening of this report, family violence is a gendered problem. Women are far more likely to experience family violence at the hands of a male partner or former partner, with one in four women having experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15.<sup>105</sup>

This is still true for young people in an intimate partner relationship. Practitioners in particular recounted examples of disrespectful attitudes towards women by young men being a warning that there might be violence present, and observed that when they had identified IPV, women were more likely to be experiencing it.

The literature and workshops made evident that, while it is imperative to maintain a gendered lens on family violence, this lens felt limiting for young people, particularly where the violence

was from their mother, when they were male, or when their sexuality, religion, race or disability was a large contributing factor. Their age, too, was always a contributing factor in relation to the power held over them when there was an abusive parent.

The importance of adopting an intersectional lens when working to end family violence is being more broadly recognised and embedded in the family violence system. An intersectional lens helps understand:

***“how systems and structures interact on multiple levels to oppress, create barriers and overlapping forms of discrimination... such as Aboriginality, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, colour, nationality, refugee or asylum seeker background, migration or visa status, language, religion, ability, age, mental health, socioeconomic status, housing status, geographic location, medical record or criminal record. This compounds the risk of experiencing family violence and creates additional barriers for a person to access the help they need.”***<sup>106</sup>





This section describes the multiple lenses that became clear throughout the research as it applies to young people specifically. It is important to note that this project does not presume to speak on behalf of the communities, nor to cover the whole range of systems and structures that lead to this marginalisation.

## LGBTIQA+ Young People

***I needed access to information about coming out...what it meant for my safety and where I could get support if I needed it – Young victim survivor***

LGBTIQA+ young people experience disproportionately higher levels of mental illness, not because of their sexuality or gender identity, but exacerbated by the additional forms of discrimination they often face including homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism that drive the violence they experience, and which create additional barriers to support.<sup>107</sup>

61 per cent of young people report experiencing verbal abuse because of their gender identity or sexuality, and 18 per cent report physical violence. They also report being kicked out or excluded from their family, community and/ or faith for 'coming out'.<sup>108</sup>

There are also different ways in which family violence can be experienced by LGBTIQA+ young people, including:

- “Threats to ‘out’ or reveal the victim/survivor’s sexual orientation, gender identity and/or intersex status to friends, families, peers, or work colleagues as a method of control
- Abuse towards the victim/survivor that is directly associated with their sexuality, gender or biological sex
- Questioning an LGBTIQA+ person’s ‘true’ identity (sexuality and/or gender) – this includes questioning a partner’s sexual orientation and coercing a partner to ‘prove’ their sexual orientation
- Exploiting the heterogendered understanding of family violence as a way to shame the victim/survivor into not disclosing the abuse.”<sup>109</sup>
- Homophobic, transphobic and heteronormative views leading to young people remaining in “the closet” and isolated from supports.
- The use of conversion practices, both informal and formal.

Young people and practitioners throughout the workshops identified strongly that family violence against LGBTIQ+ young people was of particular concern for a range of reasons. They saw often that young people experiencing violence in the home were targeted because of their sexuality or gender identity. While it may not have been the first experience of violence against the young person (although at times, it was), it escalated the violence to the extent that the young person had to leave the home or were kicked out of the home and excluded from the family, community and/or faith.

To an extent, there are programs for young people in this context offered through specialist LGBTIQ+ services that provide this lens, and mainstream family violence services, through Rainbow Tick accreditation, are working to being more inclusive. However, these services were not always known to the young person.

There is a substantial gap in relation to emergency housing options for LGBTIQ+ young people. The challenges due to access to age-appropriate options remain, with the addition of being excluded from some refuge due to being male and for trans women that are less femme presenting. LGBTIQ+ young people can also experience homophobia and transphobia from other young people within emergency housing options and there is an urgent need for specific safe housing options. In working toward safer housing options for young people (recommendation 4a), this issue must be explored.

## Cultural Diversity

Young people from culturally diverse backgrounds make up 25 per cent of people in Australia aged between 12-24.<sup>110</sup> Culturally diverse young people face a range of unique barriers given their backgrounds, including inter-generational family conflict, discrimination within their own community as well as within the broader social context; lack of awareness of services; language barriers; and challenges co-existing within two or more cultures.<sup>111</sup>

This can mean they do not realise what they are experiencing is family violence, and when they do, they do not know where to access supports. It also changes the ways in which family violence is perpetrated against them such as cultural shaming and exclusion.<sup>112</sup>

At times, abuse could be dismissed as cultural differences and not recognised as family violence. For other young people, neglecting the cultural drivers of their experience diminished their experience and provided barriers to support.

While it is not necessarily feasible to provide culturally specific services to each of Australia's uniquely diverse community, it does require cultural understanding and cultural sensitivities.

It also needs to be understood how significantly this impacts on young people.



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people experience additional inter-generational trauma, racism and prejudice and subsequent socio-economic disadvantage<sup>113</sup> that need to be recognised in forming any family violence response. This means they are over-represented in the justice system and as victim survivors of family violence.

Aboriginal young people represent a disproportionately high number of service users at MCM.<sup>114</sup> Working with them requires a level of cultural competency that recognises their unique experience and the importance of connection to culture.

Most importantly, it requires responses for Aboriginal young people that are developed and managed through the lens of self-determination.

In Victoria, the Dhelk Dja framework aims to provide for this, through an *Aboriginal-led agreement to address family violence in Aboriginal communities*.<sup>115</sup>

MCM is not an Aboriginal-led organisation, and hence not in a position to make determinations on behalf of community. Responding to the challenges in this report for community should be led by Aboriginal young people and organisations.

## Violence from a parent

***I felt like I should not have said anything. I finally realised that it is okay not to love someone that hurts you – Young victim survivor***

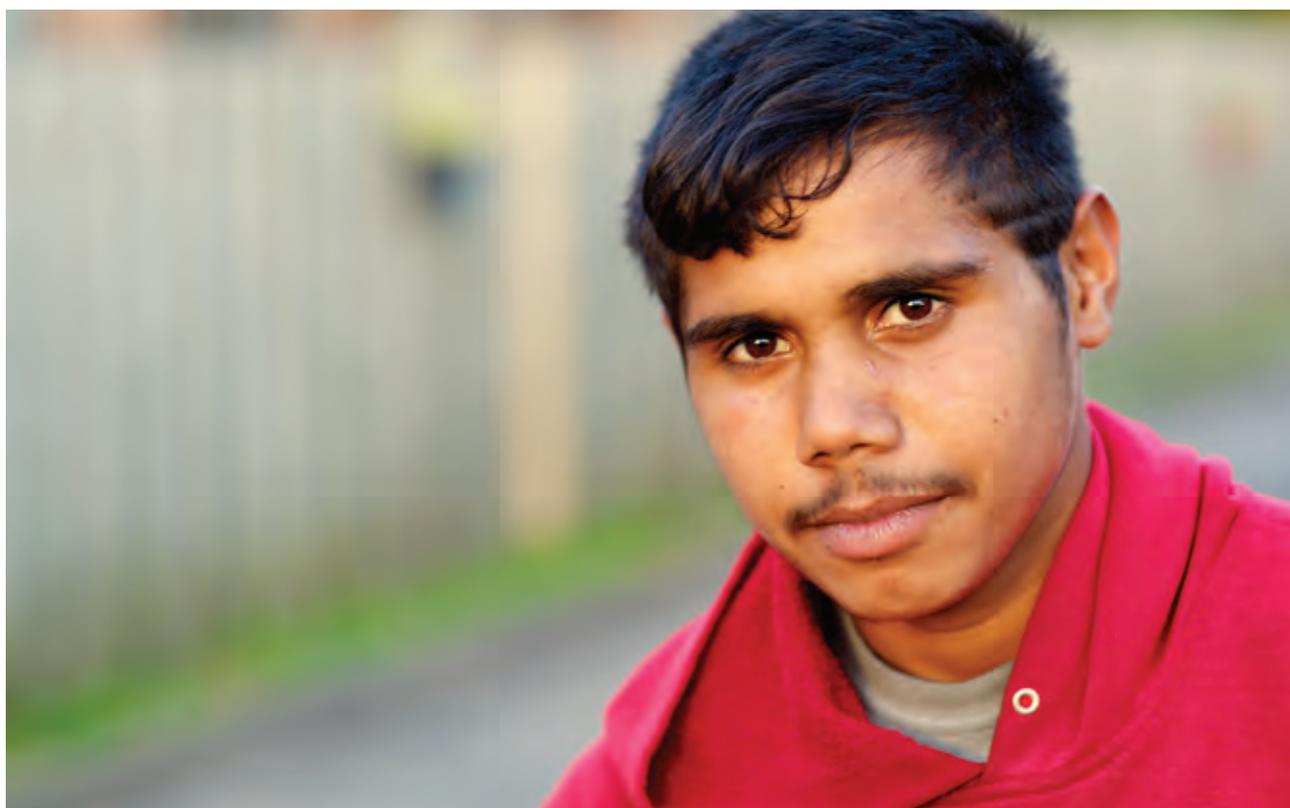
Violence from a parent against a young person featured prominently in this research, and perhaps anecdotally where the violence was less gendered.

It is true that young people are more likely to witness violence in the home from a male parent or partner against a female parent, and childhood exposure to violence is similarly gendered.<sup>116</sup>

Parental violence against children is also more likely to be experienced by a young person – male or female – from a male.

However, there were enough examples in the workshops and consultations where this was not the dynamic. Young people reported that when violence from their mother was disclosed, it was dismissed to an extent given their mother, too had been a victim of violence. This added further to their sense of shame about their experience, and to their feeling that they ‘deserved’ the violence.

It is a challenge to manage the intersection between male violence against women and their use of violence in response, similarly to





adolescent use of violence when they too are victim survivors. However, this is a critical intersection that requires further investigation.

## Disability

**Women with disability** are twice as likely than women without disability to report intimate partner violence.<sup>117</sup> Young people with a disability can also use behaviours at home that bring them in contact with the family violence system.

Disability is a driver of family violence for young people. Young people with disability experience a lack of recognition and acceptance, and have less access to places, institutions and physical spaces in which to feel safe.<sup>118</sup> Their disability can increase the power held over them in the home or in an intimate relationship due to a range of factors including economic dependence, fewer social networks, physical barriers and treatment by services. It could limit access to crisis responses where there was an intellectual disability that may bring into question a person's capacity.

Those using violence against a young person with a disability also used their disability to discredit or undermine the experience of the victim survivor with police and with services.

## Being truly intersectional

The need for an intersectional approach to family violence, that recognises that multiple identities and systemic barriers influence experiences, is becoming more embedded in the response system.

This came through as of particular importance when working with young people. In an intimate partner context, violence remained highly gendered. However, with other forms of violence, it became less so. Sexuality, religion, racial discrimination, disability and age were key drivers of the violence the young people experienced. Further, young people also experienced violence from a female parent including young men.

### Research and Policy Recommendation 3

**Family violence policy and programs for young people, particularly young people experiencing violence in the home, recognise the multiple drivers of the violence perpetrated against them, of which gender is one factor.**

Further research, as per recommendation should be conducted into this dynamic so these young people do not continue to be ignored in the system.



## **SECTION 4**

**FLEXIBLE, ADAPTIVE  
AND INTEGRATED  
RESPONSES**

## 4.1 Delivery options

Young people highlight that they prefer multi-modal options for support, including web-based, one-on-one, peer-to-peer and group work. They needed a capacity to come ‘in and out’ of the family violence conversations and services, and support options that recognised and attempted to deal with some of the systemic barriers they were facing. All of which points to a strong need for a multi-disciplinary approach.

This was confirmed in the literature and throughout the consultations with practitioners.

This section discusses each of these delivery options which contribute toward the program scaffold in section 4.3.

### Web-based information and support

***It was an online forum where I learned about what I was going through but I was still struggling to acknowledge as I was not sure what to do. I was able to chat to other young people experiencing the same thing as me and I felt less alone – Young victim survivor***

The internet can be an unsafe place for some young people, particularly when online abuse is a feature of the violence they are experiencing, normally in an intimate partner context.<sup>119</sup> However, it can also be an important avenue for young people seeking support. It can allow for anonymous discussion, which increases their feelings of safety, and can be an important pathway from recognising what they are experiencing is family violence to considering doing something about it (pre-contemplation or contemplation to action).<sup>120</sup>

A key element of the success of online support is access to peers and the capacity to activate real-life support quickly when needed.<sup>121</sup> When young people are ready to disclose, the mechanisms need to be in place to provide information to them in a timely way, similar to a chat function that is monitored so contact can be made.

When positioning web-based resources and information, young people made clear that these need to be available in places where young people might find them ‘incidentally,’ as is the case with other resources designed for young people.

### “In and out”

***Don’t go straight to the problem. And don’t treat me as the problem. Let me get there myself – Young victim survivor***

Being able to move in and out of family violence conversations, and in and out of services was critical for young people. They want the choice about who and the ways in which they tell their story as a way of maintaining their sense of agency.<sup>122</sup> Being able to go ‘in and out’ of dealing with the family violence issue is also an important way of protecting themselves against trauma and a signal that their boundaries are being respected and acknowledged.<sup>123</sup>

As well as choice in the ways they disclosed and discussed family violence, being able to go “in and out” reflects the realities of the ways family violence is experienced. It is not a linear process but rather a cyclical one in which a range of factors influence the capacity to engage in services.

Practitioners also expressed a strong preference for programs that allow exit and re-entry without the pressure of waitlists and did not exclude young people based on previous service engagement or prior, problematic behaviours.

There was a strong sense of support needing to be there unconditionally. The impacts of trauma and developmental stages meant developing trust and rapport was challenging (this is dealt with more in Section five).

As such, a range of activities or responses need to be developed to sit alongside any case management or crisis response, and flexibility in entry and exit into this support is essential.



## One-on-one

There needs to be an option for one-on-one, therapeutic supports. Young people value that therapeutic relationship with a trusted adult and found it critical to their recovery.<sup>124</sup> One-on-one support is also critical for any case management approaches in order to properly identify and manage family violence risk.

The use of language in this context was important. When talking about one-on-one supports, while young people wanted that person to enable them to recognise and realise their rights, they did not want an ‘advocate.’ They felt an advocate was someone with lived experience, or a peer worker. This one-on-one support was with a professional person that understood how to work with them, understood the more subtle ways they might describe their family violence, would speak to them in an honest way about their professional assessment of risk while respecting the young person’s views on their safety.

They expressed experiences where that one-on-one support felt more like things were being done ‘to’ them, rather than ‘with’ them, and where there was a lack of honesty or clarity.

They also expressed how the power imbalance between young people and professionals could be mediated through access to peer supports and group work.

## Groups and peer-to-peer

The relationship between an adult case worker or counsellor can be quite unequal<sup>125</sup> and peers are critically important to young people. They find that sharing stories with young people makes them feel less alone<sup>126</sup> and peer-to-peer support is a preference for many young people.<sup>127</sup>

The use of lived experience in service design and delivery is a growing and important initiative in this context. As one young victim survivor stated:

***Do not assume we don't want to get involved...there needs to be different ways and opportunities based on where we are at...but don't assume. Ask. There is no legal or ethical reason you should not ask***  
- Young victim survivor

The young people in this project were involved in a range of programs that enabled young people to be that advocate for others and provided them with a platform to do so.

MCM offers the option to young people for support with a peer worker who, through their lived experience of homelessness, provide support to other young people in their recovery journey to navigate the homelessness system, as well as inform and contribute to staff learning, service understanding, and delivering client- led, strengths focused, recovery-based language practice.





The Victim Survivor Advisory Council (VSAC), run by the Victorian Government, was “created to give people with lived experience of family violence a voice and to capture those insights to improve the delivery of Victoria’s family violence reform.”<sup>128</sup>

VSAC represents the lived experiences of people of different ages, genders, demographics and communities across Victoria, including young people.

Berry Street also operate a program, Y-Change, which is a “social and systemic change platform for young people aged 18 to 30 with lived experiences of socioeconomic disadvantage.”<sup>129</sup> Berry Street also employ peer support workers and their lived experience specialists provide advice to a range of community and government groups on developing better responses for young people.

DVVic have also recently convened a group of lived experience experts, underpinned by their “Experts by Experience” framework developed by them the University of Melbourne.<sup>130</sup>

These could be leveraged in increasing access for young people to peer support.

### **Multi-disciplinary**

No one worker or discipline can provide the range of holistic responses identified. This is true for all victim survivors of family violence, and access to a range of young-people specific supports is critical.

There is a need to manage the multi-complexities of trauma, legal support, youth development, mental health, housing and family violence risks; as well as the different ways in which young people present and respond to support.

This is the model provided for in the Orange Doors in which child protection, family services, family violence services and perpetrator services come together to collectively identify and manage family violence or other presenting challenges a family might face.

Any work with young victims of family violence should integrate with, rather than replicate, this model.

### **Systems focus**

As well as providing individual support, this needs to recognise the complexity of the structural issues influencing young people’s experience of family violence<sup>131</sup> and to the barriers that are impacting their safety and recovery.

Access to income support, parental consent, limited housing options and intersections of discrimination all form part this experience.<sup>132</sup>

This is in part why many young people want a trusted adult to support them in realising their rights,<sup>133</sup> and to support them in removing any sense of self-blame for the situation that they are in.

They felt there needed to be:

***An understanding that it is the system of abuse...that it is not my fault – Young victim survivor***

## 4.2 Practice frameworks

There are a range of practice frameworks that align with and support the program approaches. This includes practice that is family violence informed and safety focused. It also requires approaches that are trauma informed, strengths based, empowering and therapeutic that are healing oriented.

These frameworks are underpinned by a healing-focused model that is already applied in a range of social services and should inform support options for young victim survivors of family violence.

### Family violence-informed and safety focused

Family Violence Practitioners highlighted the importance of adopting a safety lens when working with young people, particularly in the context where the disclosure and subsequent report might increase the risk posed to the young victim survivor.

MARAM provides a key framework through which organisations and their practice can be family violence informed, with the specific skills sets outlined in Responding to Family Violence Capabilities Framework. These range from capabilities required for workers in universal services (Tier four) through to specialist family violence services (Tier one).

Capabilities under MARAM are:

1. Engaging effectively with those accessing services
2. Identifying and assessing family violence risk
3. Managing risk and prioritising safety
4. Providing effective service
5. Advocating for legislative, policy and practice reform

The framework is underpinned by available evidence; the recognition of Aboriginal self-determination; the need for an intersectional approach that is inclusive of a range of identities and experiences including young people that are LGBTIQ+, culturally diverse and/or have a disability; and the links between family violence and sexual assault practice.

The framework highlights the importance of a focus on the needs of children and young people as victim survivors in their own right. It does not,

however, “articulate the capabilities in relation to these matters.”<sup>134</sup>

Hence, the capabilities will need to be adapted for young people and this research makes a range of recommendations about how MARAM can be adapted to better support the needs of young people experiencing violence and are not using violence in the home.

### Trauma-informed

Trauma-informed practice allows practitioners to respond to a young person’s trauma through providing safety, empathy and empowerment. This includes understanding the unique challenges and difficulties young people face due to their experience of trauma; as well as the impact trauma may have on the therapeutic relationship. In addition, trauma-informed practice ensures practitioners and support workers understand the symptomatic repercussions of trauma, such as flashbacks, intrusive memories and impacted affect regulation.<sup>135</sup>

To successfully undertake trauma-informed work with young people, creative, flexible and adaptive approaches are required. In order to work with the complexities of adolescence and trauma, it is important to move beyond traditional talk therapy and frequently re-assess therapeutic interventions to cater to the client’s individual needs. Engaging young people and building a therapeutic relationship requires the young people to have a sense of power, competence and significance.<sup>136</sup>



## Strengths-based

Consistent with trauma-informed practice and feminist approach, is the use of a strengths-based approach. A strengths-based approach highlights that even in contexts of adversity, people demonstrate significant strength. Responses need to work truly collaboratively with young people to support them in recognising and utilising their strengths and social assets to enact change and meet goals. Such an approach, as per the empowerment model described below, situates the client as the expert in their own life.<sup>137</sup>

## Therapeutic

Therapeutic models are established groups of theory and intervention from psychology, counselling and social work. These include but are not limited to:

- **Psychoeducation:** Psychoeducation provides clarity about the dynamics of power and control, which is key when supporting victim survivors in understanding family violence. This includes dispelling common myths associated with trauma; understanding power and control and other factors that exist in interpersonal violence; Typical responses to trauma, such as physiological, psychological, social and sexual responses; the lasting post-traumatic symptoms, such as hyperarousal, flashbacks and numbing/avoidance, but also substance abuse, panic attacks and issues with intimacy, and safety planning, both regarding family violence and mental health.<sup>138</sup>
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy:** is a type of psychotherapy that aims to help a person change unhelpful or unhealthy patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. It is based on the understanding that negative thinking is a bad habit that needs to be broken. It involves learning practical self-help strategies for approaching challenges and problems in a more positive way.<sup>139</sup>
- **Narrative Therapy:** Narrative therapy examines the way clients construct and express their experiences, or stories, and invites clients to use metaphor and creative therapies to examine and re-author these stories to recover from trauma and facilitate growth and support in reframing their story.<sup>140</sup>



## Healing oriented

Being healing oriented brings together all of the above practice frameworks in a way that “seeks to understand people’s life stories and the context of their experience...by asking ‘What has happened to you?’ rather than ‘what is wrong with you?’” as outlined in MCM’s *Healing Oriented Practice guide*.<sup>141</sup>

The framework understands that trauma and stress impact on many of the domains in someone’s life and adopts a whole of organisation approach to addressing this.

In the context of services support, the framework provides a direction for service approaches for young people that reflect what was identified in the literature but most critically, what was identified by the young people themselves.

This ecological approach appreciates the macro level and systemic impacts and adopts ways of working that reframes the ways trauma is addressed.

It moves from approaches in which there is ‘power over’ rather than ‘power with;’ where services are not here to fix someone, rather support them; and in which behaviours are a way of coping with trauma rather than a problem.<sup>142</sup>

It also incorporates the elements of staying with the young person and offering unconditional regard for them, which prioritises the young persons safety.

## 4.3 Bringing it together to support young victim survivors

Based on the research findings, a program scaffold has been developed (below) that might help inform the design of supports.

### Working where they are

Young people present differently to older people that are experiencing family violence. Tools need to be developed that recognise this (including MARAM) and the sectors which intersect with young people should form part of response.

This includes:

- Community services such as child protection, family services, and family violence services, who already have the skills and frameworks to identify family violence risk that could be strengthened with an additional youth lens, particularly co-located services within the Orange Door.
- Youth, housing and Alcohol and Other Drug services that are already working with young people and have this expertise but are not necessarily trained or are experts in managing family violence risk.
- Mental health services for those young people presenting with mental health concerns, suicidality, depression and anxiety, who adopt a recovery lens and could be better supported in their alignment with MARAM and understanding of family violence.
- Justice and police for young people who are using violence or displaying problematic behaviours, to better support them in identifying these behaviours as a coping mechanism
- Schools and other education providers who so often see the signs a young person is experiencing family violence but can have difficulty working with that young person and have limitations about where they can be referred.
- Community legal supports who can help clarify and advise young people in their rights and capacity to exercise agency.
- AVITH programs given their practice expertise in working with young people and the intersection of AVITH and experiencing family violence.

### Tailoring the response

As well as working across different sectors, responses need frame services in ways that recognise a young person's perception of their safety, and adapt to the ways in which young people are more likely to engage in services.

This means:

- Where safe and with the consent of the young person, a whole-of family approach that extends or enables supports to their family to recognise the often-protective role young people play, and to their partner in the context of intimate partner violence to help manage their risk.
- A trusted adult that acts with the young person to help them manage their risk and to model what a respectful relationship can look like.
- Having access to information and support that is designed by young people in places they are more likely to see it.
- Being seen as a survivor in their own right and provided with agency about how they engage in the service, even when that agency might be constrained due to reporting or other requirements.
- Being safe at home by being able to better manage violence in the home and improving access to safe alternative accommodation.





## Enabling choice

There are a range of ways in which young people will access services. This requires:

- Online approaches that allow young people to self-assess their risk, provide them with information about their rights, and can activate support when needed.
- One-on-one supports that establish safety planning and linkages with other services.
- Peer-to-peer and group work which helps address power imbalances that exist between workers and young people and provide healing pathways for young people out of violence.
- Enabling the young person to go 'in and out' of family violence conversations and have other non-family violence frames to engage.
- Adopting a range of practice frameworks including therapeutic, trauma-informed, strength-based and structural, underpinned by a healing approach

## Developing enabling tools

Tools that require developing in order to support better responses for young victim survivors of family violence include:

- Support for organisations to integrate with MARAM with a youth lens.
- An adaptation of MARAM and practice guidance to support the better identification and management of family violence risk to young victim survivors.
- Worker capabilities underpinned by an adapted Family Violence Capabilities Framework to support non-specialist family violence workers to manage family violence risk.

### Services for young victim survivors Recommendation 5

Options for a youth-specific, family violence case management and support program be considered which includes the elements as outlined in MCM's Youth Family Violence Support Scaffold.

# Support scaffold

## Where they are

- **Community services** such as child protection, family services, and family violence services, who already have the skills and frameworks to identify family violence risk that could be strengthened with an additional youth lens, particularly the Orange Door.
- **Youth and housing services** that are already working with young people and have this expertise but are not necessarily trained or are experts in managing family violence risk.
- **Mental health services** for those young people presenting with mental health concerns, suicidality, depression and anxiety, who adopt a recovery lens and could be better supported in their alignment with MARAM and understanding of family violence.
- **Justice and police** for young people who are using violence or displaying problematic behaviours, to better support them in identifying these behaviours as a coping mechanism
- **Schools** who so often see the signs a young person is experiencing family violence but can have difficulty working with that young person and have limitations about where they can be referred.
- **Community legal supports** who can help clarify and provide guidance for young people in their rights and capacity to exercise agency.
- **AVITH** programs given their practice expertise in working with young people and the intersection of AVITH and experiencing family violence.

## Identifying safety

- **Protective of family** - Many young people take on role of protector in family
- **Trusted adult** - Someone who the young person can trust and who acts as their advocate
- **Being seen** - Having their needs recognised in their own right, being seen as an individual
- **Addressing power imbalance** - Recognising the power imbalance between workers and young people contributes to feeling unsafe
- **Agency** - Being given a voice, being provided with choices, the opportunity to make those choices and to have those choices respected
- **Safe housing** - Being able to live in a home without violence

## Flexible approaches

- **Working with family or partner** to enable safe
- **One-on-one** supports that establish safety planning and linkages with other services
- **Online** approaches that allow young people to self-assess their risk, provide them with information about their rights, and can activate support when needed
- **Peer-to-peer and group work** which helps address power imbalances that exist between workers and young people and provide healing pathways for young people out of violence
- Enable the young person to go **'in and out'** of family violence conversations and have other non-family violence frames to engage.
- Access to **safe and affordable housing**

### Supporting tools

Family violence capabilities framework    Adapted MARAM tools

### Practice Frameworks

Trauma informed    Therapeutic    Family violence informed    Youth led    Strengths-based

### Underpinning

Healing focused

## 4.4 The way forward

There is no question that Victoria is better placed than many other jurisdictions in Australia and indeed globally when it comes to family violence reform. Over \$3 billion has been invested into reforming the family violence system, with 204 of the 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence being implemented.

However, there remains gaps for young victim survivors of family violence that are not using violence in the home, in particular those young people 15-19.

A substantial amount of work has gone into to laying a strong foundation. MARAM and

information sharing provide a solid starting point, and work done by Department of Education can be leveraged to inform a youth-specific response.

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



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