

***Submission to the
Social Development Committee
of SA Parliament Inquiry into
Domestic and Family Violence.***

January 2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Junction Australia (JA) is an independent, community based organisation that has been providing a wide range of services to disadvantaged communities across South Australia since 1979. Junction and Women's Housing Limited, is the largest non-government provider of specialist housing for women led households, with a focus on provision of housing for women who have experienced domestic violence. In addition, JA provides a specialist Domestic Violence service for the Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island.

This submission is to the Social Development Committee of the South Australian Parliament's inquiry into Domestic and Family Violence. The submission was prepared by a cross section of Junction Australia staff with expertise in working with the issues associated with the domestic violence sector and respectfully makes the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Junction Australia recommends that the State Government commits to dedicated funding to provide evidence based programs at all levels of intensity and complexity of behaviour perpetrated by men. In addition, this funding should not be provided at the expense of existing women's services.
- 2** Junction Australia recommends that Family Safety Framework (FSF) information be shared with non-participating organisations that are known to be supporting women and children referred to the FSF meetings.
- 3** Multi-Agency Protection Service establishes partnerships with non-government agencies, in particular the domestic violence sector.
- 4** Junction Australia recommends that State Government advocates with Federal Government for the introduction of a National Intervention Order scheme and uniform policing laws across Australia.
- 5** Junction Australia recommends that Intervention Order training for Magistrates be provided by the domestic violence sector.
- 6** Junction Australia recommends that information about Intervention Orders received by Housing SA is shared on a daily basis with the homelessness sector.
- 7** Junction Australia recommends that dedicated funding be made available for evidence based, age appropriate educational programs on negotiating healthy relationships and conflict resolution skills and such programs are embedded in the State curricula for Years 1 -12.
- 8** Junction Australia recommends that the achievements of the White Ribbon Campaign are advertised and promoted more widely.
- 9** Junction Australia recommends that a media campaign be undertaken to raise community awareness of domestic violence and how community members can take action in their social groups and workplaces.
- 10** Junction Australia recommends that the State Government advocates strongly with Federal Government in regard to Federal legislation and initiatives that are impacting on the safety of women and their children.

BACKGROUND

Junction Australia (JA) is an independent, community based organisation that has been providing a wide range of services to disadvantaged communities across South Australia since 1979. These services include Social and Community Housing, Homelessness, counseling, supported accommodation for homeless young people and residential care for young people under the Guardianship of the Minister. Following a merger in 2014, our Registered Community Housing Provider, Junction and Women's Housing Limited, is the largest non-government provider of specialist housing for women led households, with a focus on provision of housing for women who have experienced domestic violence. In addition, JA provides a specialist Domestic Violence service for the Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island. In the provision of these services, Junction Australia regularly interacts with women and children experiencing Domestic Violence and staff see the devastating effects of this on a daily basis.

In the past Junction Australia successfully delivered a program called 'Turning Point' that worked with perpetrators of Domestic Violence who recognised the need to take responsibility for their violence and change their attitudes and behaviours. Approximately 40% of Turning Point's clients were Indigenous men. Through the various streams of this work, Junction Australia has developed experience and expertise in working with the dynamics of Domestic Violence at a community level. In addition, through participating in State level networks and reference groups including the Coalition of Women's Domestic Violence Services, the State Homelessness Strategic Group and the Safe and Together Australian Alliance, JA has developed a high level of understanding of the policy issues that affect those experiencing and working with Domestic Violence.

This submission to the Social Development Committee of the South Australian Parliament was prepared by Sue Phillips, General Manager of Community Services; Liz Hillyer, Portfolio Manager, Outer Southern Specialist Homelessness Services; Jess Stevens, Regional Manager Fleurieu and KI (DV outreach service); Adrianna Burnes-Nguyen, Manager of Tenant Services and John Smith, Strategic Projects Manager. As part of the framework for this response, Junction Australia refers to The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022.

The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010 -2022 specifies 6 national outcomes. They are as follows:

- National Outcome 1 – Communities are safe and free from violence
- National Outcome 2 – Relationships are respectful
- National Outcome 3 – Indigenous communities are strengthened
- National Outcome 4 – Services meets the needs of women and children experiencing violence
- National Outcome 5 – Justice Responses are effective
- National Outcome 6 – Perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.

It is our opinion that out of all the National Outcomes, only National Outcome 4 is being achieved at a reasonable level. Nevertheless, the ongoing bilateral commitment of State and Federal Governments to the plan is acknowledged. The plan has survived changes in governments and service restructuring and provides a useful framework for moving forward in the future.

RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The effectiveness of current services in supporting the prevention of domestic and family violence.

The latest roadmap of the South Australian homelessness system published in September 2014 by Specialist Homelessness Services and Housing SA makes no specific reference to Domestic and Family violence, yet this impacts heavily on the delivery of services by the homelessness sector including Junction Australia. Nationally, 33% of all homelessness clients have experienced domestic violence (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, December 2014). This percentage, 38%, is slightly higher in South Australia (Housing SA Homelessness Strategy, August 2014). Consequently, the current service model focuses overwhelmingly on crisis responses.

Junction Australia would suggest that in relation to domestic and family violence responses, few resources are directed towards prevention. Prior to the implementation of the McCann report (2012), generalist homelessness services relied on community health services to develop educational and community development programs that focused on the prevention of domestic and family violence. The subsequent withdrawal of health services from Primary Health Care removed the focus from family and domestic violence as a health issue. This, in turn, removed some of the intervention services and family health services available to women and children experiencing domestic violence. It also removed a significant number of primary prevention services. Health services will continue to play a role in some aspects of service provision to families affected by domestic and family violence, however it is less likely that the connection with non-government Homelessness services in developing preventative strategies will be maintained.

As women and children have the right to live free from violence, services addressing their needs in times of crisis are essential. However, when women are removed from the violence and given the tools to avoid abusive and violent relationships, it is common for perpetrators to continue the cycle of violence and abuse with future partners. For this reason, it is equally essential to have services available that interrupt the cycle of violence and address the behavior of the perpetrators of violence towards women and children.

One such program currently running in South Australia by OARS is the **Moral Reconation Program**. This program was implemented after the Intervention Orders (prevention of Abuse) Act 2009 was passed in the South Australian parliament. The program was originally met with skepticism because it uses a workbook that required men to be literate. Whilst this is still how the program is delivered in the majority of cases, it appears that adaptations have been made and groups are now available to non-literate men. The program responds to men who have come in contact with the criminal justice system and who have been assessed by the Courts Administration Authority as suitable candidates for the program.

Although it is too early to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the program, initial reports are suggesting that it is successful in changing the thinking of the participants. However Junction Australia, and the broader domestic violence sector, has reservations about the effectiveness of this program. These include:

- the program is currently metro based and inaccessible to men from regional areas
- there appear to be few, if any, penalties enforced when men do not participate and no consequences if participants breach their intervention orders

- if men fail to continue with the program, the support that is provided through the Women's Contact Officers is withdrawn from the women partners leaving them vulnerable to further abuse and reliant on support from overstretched domestic violence services.

There are very limited options available for men who are ineligible for the Moral Reconciliation Program to address their behavior or make changes. There are also no gender based behavior change programs available for men who are incarcerated as result of their violent behaviour. According to Danny Blay (No to Violence Victoria), failure to provide change programs in prison significantly increases the danger these men pose to women when they are released back into the community.

There is currently a scarcity of voluntary perpetrator programs in South Australia. Those programs that do exist are often personality driven, rather than working with an evidenced based framework, or are dependent on the availability of dedicated workers within already overstretched services. In addition, most of these programs target men who have already perpetrated violence in the relationships, rather than focusing on a preventative approach which could be undertaken with young people.

Evidence suggests that men who show a willingness to change have a higher success rate than those who participate in mandated programs. There is a lack of non-mandatory programs in South Australia for men who recognise that their behavior is abusive and who volunteer to change. Groups are needed that build men's capacity to challenge models of masculinity that disrupt healthy relationships. Such groups depend on the availability of skilled workers and evidenced based practice. Unfortunately, there is no State government funding available to services for the provision of these programs nor for the development of the specialised workforce that would deliver them.

Recommendation 1

Junction Australia recommends that the State Government commits to dedicated funding to provide evidence based programs at all levels of intensity and complexity of behaviour perpetrated by men.

In addition, this funding should not be provided at the expense of existing women's services.

2. The effectiveness of current initiatives in supporting the prevention of domestic and family violence.

Junction Australia's response is framed across five areas:

1. Government Frameworks
2. Justice responses
3. Education
4. Peer programs
5. Media

2.1 Government Frameworks

The Family Safety Framework (FSF) was implemented by the Office for Women as part of the Women's Safety Strategy. Led by SAPOL the FSF is designed to ensure that high risk families where violence is imminent receive integrated, coordinated service responses and resources. An evaluation conducted in 2008 by the Office of Crime statistics and Research (Attorney General's Department) showed 75% of referrals to the program had no SAPOL record of re-victimisation. Not surprisingly, as the priority of the program is the safety of women and children, the evaluation showed no improvement in the agencies' responses to men. It was unclear whether perpetrators are held accountable, or if they face any consequences for their behavior, even when the danger to women is evident. This was attributed to a lack of a legislative base to support interventions with perpetrators. The research also showed that while the FSF improved collaboration between individual members of the groups that met, this did not necessarily result in increased collaboration between or across the participating agencies. There are still no systems in place to coordinate the information participating agencies have to prevent further incidences of violence or to share that information with other organisations that support the women and their children. The Family Safety Framework has good basic principles and values but these foundations need to be built on, and embedded into organisational structures, to inform coordinated and collaborative responses to domestic violence across all government and nongovernment agencies who work with people who have experienced domestic violence, not just those who attend the meetings.

The **Multi-Agency Protection Service** (MAPS), introduced after the murder of Zahra Abrahamzadeh, is promoted as an early intervention service (*Taking a Stand*, SA government, 2014). MAPS, led by SAPOL, holds regular mandatory Family Safety meetings across the State with staff from 6 key government agencies. The aim is to review and respond appropriately and quickly to high risk, complex domestic violence cases before they escalate into violence. While this service is being held up as a model in preventing further violence to women and children, currently there is confusion in the broader domestic violence sector about how the service works. There is little connection with the non-government homelessness and domestic violence agencies that provide services to women and children. MAPS appears to be an isolated program that is not drawing on the expertise of the domestic violence sector to support its intended outcomes. Decisions about individual cases are not conveyed to the non-government agencies that are supporting the woman concerned, or that could potentially provide them with support. MAPS outcomes will be improved if government and non-government agencies work in partnership.

Recommendation 2

Junction Australia recommends that Family Safety Framework (FSF) information be shared with non-participating organisations that are known to be supporting women and children referred to the FSF meetings.

Recommendation 3

Multi-Agency Protection Service establishes partnerships with non-government agencies, in particular the domestic violence sector.

2.2 Justice Responses

The introduction of Intervention Orders (IO) was intended to prevent further violence towards women, however it is still the case that they are not always reliable or effectively acted upon. When IO are issued, they are often varied or watered down at the request of the perpetrator. This is particularly the case when children are removed from the orders because of Family Court access arrangements and this increases the danger for women as abusive men often use their access to children to further control partners or ex-partners.

There is a lack of communication between State courts and the Family Court that needs to be addressed to ensure the safety of women and children. At present Federal Family Court rulings override State court rulings. The result of this is that State magistrates are often reluctant to endorse interim IO, especially when children are involved, in case they are overturned in future by a Family Court ruling. There are also issues in relation to information sharing between police and other Australian States.

This situation could be alleviated by the introduction of standardized laws across all States governing domestic violence and policing of IO. This could take the form of a National Intervention Order scheme and uniform policing laws across Australia. The Second Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women also endorses the need for a National scheme and the Office for Women in South Australia has been active in advancing this issue. Junction Australia stresses the need for this to be advanced as a matter of priority.

It is imperative that State magistrates are given the power to impose greater penalties when an intervention order is breached. Breaches of IO are often not taken as seriously and, in experience has shown, Magistrates can show a bias against women. One particular anomaly is if a man breaches an IO, and the woman does not report this, the woman can be charged with aiding and abetting the breach. This response does not demonstrate an understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and why women may feel unable to make the report. This is another example of how the system that is intended to protect women and children can, in practice, blame the victim.

A further concern is the lack of adequate communication between the Family Court and State courts. For example, the Family Court often makes interstate retrieval orders in relation to children, despite the Family Safety Framework having identified the perpetrator as high risk.

A positive initiative of the State Government was to require perpetrators of Domestic Violence to leave the property when in State government housing. This included removing the perpetrator from the lease, if the lease was held in his name. Whilst this is a positive initiative and strongly supported by the sector an issue of concern is that tenancy orders requiring a perpetrator of domestic violence to move from a property are rarely acted on. Housing SA receives daily updates on Intervention Orders but this information is not passed on to the Homelessness sector, putting women and children at risk.

Recommendation 4

Junction Australia recommends that a State Government advocates with Federal Government for the introduction of a National Intervention Order scheme and uniform policing laws across Australia.

Recommendation 5

Junction Australia recommends that Intervention Order training for Magistrates be provided by the domestic violence sector.

Recommendation 6

Junction Australia recommends that information about Intervention Orders received by Housing SA is shared on a daily basis with the homelessness sector.

2.3 Education

Effective prevention of domestic and family violence begins with education. Equipping young people with the skills to build and maintain healthy, respectful relationships provides them with a good foundation to make positive choices later in life. Although there are a range of evidence based programs promoting healthy and respectful relationships made available at a local level in the Southern Fleurieu region, their delivery is once again dependent on individual or organisational commitment to them.

Relationship Violence No Way, was a successful peer education program previously delivered by Marion Youth Health that addressed the prevention of domestic violence, looked at healthy relationships, safe partying and cyber citizenship. This program was offered free to schools across the state, however the program ceased with the implementation of the Mc Cann Report (2012). This has left a service gap as, whilst other privately funded education programs are available to schools, these are often too costly for public schools to access.

Recommendation 7

Junction Australia recommends that dedicated funding be made available for evidence based, age appropriate educational programs on negotiating healthy relationships and conflict resolution skills and such programs are embedded in the State curricula for Years 1 -12.

2.4 Peer programs

It is now widely accepted that men who neither condone nor use violence play a vital role in preventing domestic and family violence. Perpetrators are often more willing to listen when another man challenges cultural notions of masculinity that create and maintain the power imbalance between genders, or when their peers hold them accountable for their violence.

The White Ribbon Campaign, a global organisation that originated in Canada and came to Australia in 2003, is the only male led organisation that campaigns against domestic and family violence. This organisation began the 16 Days of Gendered Violence Against Women that runs every year between November 25th and December 10th. In South Australia, the Office for Women coordinates this campaign Statewide. The White Ribbon Campaign has a number of strategies that raise awareness and challenge cultural norms around men's violence towards women and children and it offers many opportunities for men to become involved in the prevention of violence towards women. However, these are not widely known at a grass roots level. JA recognises that *men who make a public commitment to this campaign are well positioned to actively participate in leading peer led programs and should therefore be provided with opportunities to further develop skills that challenge attitudes around violence towards women and children.*

Recommendation 8

Junction Australia recommends that the achievements of the White Ribbon Campaign are advertised and promoted more widely.

2.5 Media

A whole of community response is required to change attitudes towards domestic and family violence. The current response from the media and the broader community when domestic violence is reported, is to focus on the perceived shortcomings of the victim and to over-sensationalise the abuse. There is generally either a complete lack of response in relation to accountability of the perpetrator or they are portrayed sympathetically, through the previously mentioned 'victim blaming' mentality. Changing the attitude of media towards women in general, and to victims of domestic and family violence in particular, is not an easy task. However, this is highly important to enable communities to speak out against domestic violence and have input into community driven responses that prevent it.

True prevention requires evidence based, empirically researched peer related programs that challenge attitudes towards gender roles and bring a shift in cultural responses to violence in the home. This requires a discussion about a systems response to the prevention of family and domestic violence, which addresses gender equality. This conversation is not taking place and until it does, women and children will not really be safe.

3. How current services could be supported by improving collaboration, capacity building and the sourcing of relevant funding to enhance programs.

Collaboration between specialist domestic violence services and other agencies is strong in South Australia. This is evidenced in local strategies that Junction Australia actively participates in such as the Onkaparinga Collaborative Approach to the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence. At a State level, Junction Australia is an active member of the Coalition of Women's Domestic Violence Services, the State Homelessness Strategic Group and the Safe and Together Australian Alliance. All of these bring together a broad range of organisations that collaborate to affect policy and enhance service delivery. These collaborations ensure that government and non-government organisations develop empirically based strategies to decrease and prevent violence towards women and their children.

An inter-ministerial - 'whole of system' approach works best when those participating demonstrate a combination of good collaboration, good will and good underpinning values and no one organisation claims ownership. To this end, a coalition of nongovernment agencies of which Junction Australia is a founding member and significant driver, has established the **Safe and Together Australian Alliance** in South Australia. The Safe and Together tool developed by David Mandel holds considerable promise as this model works in the context of men as fathers, exploring the nexus between domestic violence and child protection. In this model domestic violence is viewed as a parenting choice men make that has inevitable effects on the children of the relationship. Amongst other outcomes, the model will enable Families SA to work with fathers to improve their parenting skills and to make them accountable for, and change, their behaviour. In March 2014, two hundred and fifty service providers from across the State attended training and participated in subsequent training webinars to support this emerging 'community of practice'. This has demonstrated significant commitment made from across a wide range of sectors to advocate for implementation of this practice framework.

There is a need to further strengthen collaboration between the homelessness and domestic violence sectors. It is often difficult for a homelessness service to refer clients into domestic violence services, especially when clients have high and complex needs. The homelessness gateway service employs specialized domestic violence workers and there are definite benefits to this arrangement. An extension of this could be to employ specialist domestic and family violence workers within the individual homelessness services, however, this would require additional funding. An example of where this is already working is in some regional areas where homelessness and domestic violence workers job share so knowledge and skills are transferred between workers.

Domestic and family violence is a whole of community responsibility that requires a long-term commitment from all levels of government. Stable ongoing State and federal funding for current services is vital. Prevention and perpetrator intervention programs require additional funding.

4. How work places and industry can further support the prevention of domestic and family violence.

Workplaces and industry can play key roles in the prevention of domestic and family in a number of ways including:

- provision of work place training that educates employees on the impact of domestic and family violence on industry and the community
- running awareness programs within local businesses on how to deal appropriately with the issue
- ensuring measures to prevent domestic and family violence and that support victims are embedded in their workplace safety policies. As an example, Telstra recently announced implementation of a Domestic Violence policy providing employees with an additional 10 days of paid leave to attend appointments with their GPs and domestic violence support services and courts.

Workers in government and non-government organisations undergo regular mandated criminal history screening processes. Employees who perpetrate domestic violence and who are charged and convicted would be unlikely to maintain their employment in this sector. Private workplaces and industry should be encouraged to take the same approach with their employees.

Previously, long-term community education campaigns on issues such as smoking, heart disease and road safety have targeted employers. This approach could be used to provide employers, and workers, with information and skills to identify and respond appropriately to perpetrators and victims of family and domestic violence. Similar campaigns addressing gender equality, gender stereotyping and victim blaming are also warranted.

Partnerships between community service groups and industry groups have a role to play in raising awareness and providing funding for specific programs and could be extended. One example is the current partnership between Zonta and BankSA that focuses on raising money for local domestic and family violence services.

The White Ribbon campaign offers excellent opportunities for work places and industry to develop domestic violence policies and to challenge unhelpful gender stereotypes. Workplaces can make a cultural commitment by attaining White Ribbon accreditation and can encourage their male workers to take the pledge. Department of Communities and Social Inclusion and the Homelessness Strategy Unit have strong White Ribbon ambassadors who promote the White Ribbon Campaign principles. A suggestion is that all organisations that receive government funding commit to attain White Ribbon accreditation.

Recommendation 9

Junction Australia recommends that a media campaign be undertaken to raise community awareness of domestic violence and how they can take action in their social groups and workplaces.

5. How current Federal Government legislation, initiatives and measures could affect the provision of domestic and family violence services, and women and children escaping domestic violence.

A number of Federal Government activities are currently impacting on domestic and family violence initiatives.

1. Federal Government has recently announced defunding of important advocacy bodies funded under the Department of Social Services grant funding. Defunding Homelessness Australia will threaten the survival of the Women's Services Network (WESNET) and the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA). These organisations ensure that women have input into policy at a Federal level and if they cease to operate the voices of women into policy decisions, particularly those of marginalized women, will be lost.
2. Federal and State governments have not committed core funding to homelessness services beyond 2015. This has now been the case since 2013, making it difficult to formulate long-term strategies to address and prevent domestic and family violence.
3. The Indigenous Advancement Strategy funding provided by the Federal government has been substantially reduced and this is likely to impact on positive intervention strategies within Indigenous communities.
4. The Federation White Paper discussion on homelessness raises questions about future funding of homelessness services and, in turn, on support for women and children experiencing or at risk of experience domestic violence.
5. Clear evidence based strategies that are applicable across the whole of Australia are needed to:
 - a. decrease the incidence of domestic and family violence
 - b. increase consistency in responses to both women requiring assistance for safety
 - c. ensure perpetrators are held accountable for their behaviours.
6. Junction Australia endorses the work of Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and the importance of ANROWS having a voice in the development of evidenced based policy at State and Federal levels.

Recommendation 10

Junction Australia recommends that the State Government advocates strongly with Federal Government in regard to Federal legislation and initiatives that are impacting on the safety of women and their children.

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