

A Joint Effort – Practice Partnerships for Children Affected by Family Violence

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Family Violence and Child Abuse

- Research now clearly demonstrates the co-occurrence of family violence and child abuse and the impact of violence on the developmental needs and safety of children and young people
- Children witnessed the abuse of their mothers in as many as 85% of cases (*Minnesota Program Development, 1997*).
- 65% of family violence incidents recorded by police in each of the years 1999-2000 and 2003-2004, there were records of at least one child present. (*Victorian Family Violence Database, 2008*)

Impact of Family Violence on Children and Young People

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- Infants and small children who are exposed to violence in the home experience so much added emotional stress that it can harm the development of their brains and impair cognitive and sensory growth
- Personality and behavioural problems among children exposed to violence in the home can take the forms of psychosomatic illnesses, depression, suicidal tendencies, and bed-wetting
- Later in life, these children are at greater risk for substance abuse, juvenile pregnancy and criminal behaviour than those raised in homes without violence
- Some children lose the ability to feel empathy for others.
- Socially isolated, unable to make friends as easily or confusion over what is acceptable.
- Many studies have noted that children from violent homes exhibit signs of more aggressive behaviour, such as bullying.

Seeing Double

	Child Protection*	Women's Services
Priority	Protection of Child Preservation of Family	Empowerment of Women Safety of Women
Initiation	Usually not voluntary	Voluntary
Control	State has coercive power Court involvement if needed	No coercive power*
Organisation	Government Bureaucracy Professionalised	Grass Roots Democratic

Anne Fleck Henderson 2000

Seeing Double

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“Child protection workers often see “leaving” as the best solution for children’s safety... “Pushing for safety” probably always increases the risk of violence, but not intervening may do so as well. Child protection workers learn in training that violence may escalate if women take action to protect themselves and their children...in itself [this] is a double bind, as they are required to intervene, and their involvement is already an intervention... Women’s advocates are inclined to trust the battered women as the best judge of her own and her children’s safety...Often there is tension between these perspectives, and it is exactly that tension which is valuable in practice. Child protection workers are kept mindful of woman’s judgement and her rights, and the women’s advocates must attend to the safety of the children”

Anne Fleck Henderson 2000

The Partnership Agreement

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- High level State-wide Core Agreement
- One key strategy in the Victorian Integrated Family Violence Strategy
- Local agreement to be developed to describe specific local arrangements in each DHS region (3 Metro and 5 Rural)

Who are the Partners?

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- Child Protection and Child FIRST/Family Services
 - Every child every chance reforms
 - Best Interests Case Practice Model and Principles
- Family Violence Services
 - Integrated Family Violence Reform Agenda
 - Common Risk Assessment Framework
 - New legislation – Family violence Protection Act 2009

Key Components

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- An understanding of the different service systems
- Shared vision and approach
- Joint practice approaches
- Referral pathways/entry points
- Dispute resolution
- Local Agreement

Overarching Aims

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- Safety, protection and well-being of children
- Safety and empowerment for survivors of violence
- Responsibility and accountability of those who use violence

What are we hoping to achieve?

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- Collaborative working relationships
- Strengthen relationships
- Clarify roles and responsibilities
- Embed common language and principles
- Identify opportunities for joint, place based training
- Identify and promote good practice

The Need for Partnership and Collaboration

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“the practice responses of the domestic violence and child protection sectors have developed independently of each other, and often operate with relatively little integration...histories, philosophical underpinnings, and mandates have created tensions...has been described as “distrust” between the... sectors...this is problematic, because separate service provision for women...and children (child protection) implies that the needs of mothers and their children can be addressed relatively independently”

- Potito, Christine, Day, Andrew, Carson, Ed and O'Leary, Patrick (2009) 'Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Partnerships and Collaboration', Australian Social Work, 62: 3, 369 — 387,

Implementation

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- Regional Working Groups established with cross sector representation
- Agreements to be developed from State-wide Template by December 2009
- Representation on working groups also included Victoria Police and Indigenous Organisations
- From signed agreements to cross sector work plans..... Recognition of an ongoing process

Building Practice Partnerships

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- Mapping current service provision and pathways at a local level.
- Cross sector forums to promote understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- Reflective forums between service providers e.g child protection and men's behaviour change
- Combined regional training calendars across sectors
- Shadowing and cross sector agency induction
- Regional forums to develop understanding of frameworks to assess and work with children affected by family violence.

Building Practice Partnerships

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- Consideration of co-location of specialist family violence knowledge in Child FIRST agency.
- Early case conferencing at child protection intake with police and specialist family violence services
- Inclusion of children services contact details where police have attended family violence incidents
- Mapping and building secondary consultation between the three sectors.

Learning and Reflections:

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A Change Process

- Joint practice approaches and partnerships between services and agencies is worth pursuing. There is continued good will.
- Partnerships are critical for best outcomes for children, young people and their families.
- Platform to build shared understanding across sectors of assessment/case management frameworks
- Partnerships in practice can be small events and easily missed.
- Developing shared understanding of commonalities and difference takes time and is ongoing.
- To build trust between services clear expectations of what is to be delivered is required. Need to consider how to sustain this over time.
- Require ongoing forums/opportunities to promote conversations and sustain practice partnerships across the service sectors at a practice, service and systems level.

Next Steps

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- Develop common language to build a shared understanding of risk assessment and case management
- Documenting good practice approaches
- Support and review the implementation of regional work plans
- Learning from implementation of partnerships to inform the Victorian reforms in responses to children and young people.
- Consider stronger links to needs of Indigenous children and young people.
- Consider training and practice development within Child Protection
- The message – the building of partnerships and joint practice approaches is an ongoing process – need to respect the differences and build on shared knowledge.

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Thank you and contact details

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Thank you again to Regions, agencies and individuals who are involved in this work across the State of Victoria.

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