

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

11th November 2022

waes.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: PARENT'S NEXT

Thank you for affording Full Stop Australia (FSA) an opportunity to provide a submission to this Inquiry on Parent's Next.

About Full Stop Australia (FSA)

FSA is an accredited, nationally focused, not-for-profit organisation which has been working in the field of sexual, domestic, and family violence since 1971. We offer expert and confidential telephone, online and face-to-face counselling to people of all genders who have experienced sexual, domestic, or family violence, and specialist help for their supporters and those experiencing vicarious trauma. We also provide best practice training and professional services to support frontline workers, government, the corporate and not-for-profit sector and advocate with governments, the media, and the community to prevent and put a full stop to sexual, domestic and family violence.

FSA, as a national service, draws upon the experiences of our counsellors supporting people impacted by sexual, domestic and family violence in different jurisdictions, as well as our clients and other survivor advocates who are part of our [National Survivor Advocate Program](#), to advocate for victim focussed laws and consistency of approaches to family, domestic and sexual violence nationally.

Our response

FSA supports and endorses the submission by the National Council of Single Mother's and their Children to this Inquiry and their call for a complete overhaul and rebrand of the program, and for any program developed in its place to be voluntary and more responsive and supportive to single mothers that would in turn encourage employment (where possible).

FSA are particularly concerned about the impact of the mandatory nature of the program on single mothers who are victims of domestic and family violence.

As the committee is no doubt aware, the report, *The Choice: Violence or Poverty*¹, by eminent journalist and UTS Business School Professor Anne Summers AO, made clear the strong links between single motherhood, poverty and violence.

¹ [Violence or poverty: A dire choice for many Australian women | University of Technology Sydney \(uts.edu.au\)](#)

Indeed, the headline finding from the Summers research was that domestic and family violence did not cause poverty but poverty was caused by domestic and family violence. So, women leaving violence, did not start out in financial disadvantage but were driven into poverty after separation.

The other key and pertinent findings from the report include:

- 185,700 women with children aged under 18 were living as single mothers after leaving violent relationships. **They represent 60 per cent of all single mothers, a far higher rate of violence than for any other group of Australian women.** (The average rate is 1 in 6 women, or 17.3 per cent). It is important to note that these women were married or in de facto relationships when the violence occurred and are single now because of the violence.
- 67 per cent of these now single mothers had children in their care at the time of the violence and 88,000 women said their children saw or heard the violence.
- Although 60 per cent of the women who left are employed, their earnings are insufficient to support their families and 50 per cent of them rely on government payments as their main source of income. The ABS data shows that 48 per cent of these single mothers' income was in the lowest quintile, meaning they earned \$460 or less a week in household income.
- The data shows many could not pay their bills or heat their houses or register their cars. More than 17,000 women went without meals.

The Summers report is evidence for the need for drastic policy change in Australia's response to poverty, domestic and family violence and single mothers. The overhaul of Parent's Next would be consistent with such an approach.

After leaving violence, many victims face a chaotic existence having to leave their home (and children's home) to find safety. After separation many are required to have extensive engagement with numerous systems including but not limited to, the domestic and family violence sector (counselling sessions for themselves and their children), finding refuge or housing and the engagement with services around this, Centrelink, legal services, obtaining legal protection by applying for a civil protection order, family law proceedings, child protection agencies, immigration, and possibly criminal proceedings. Perpetrators of violence can be highly litigious and use systems against victims especially post separation. The idea of also facing other overt obligations under Parents Next and harsh financial penalties impacting on themselves and their children, is simply unjust.

Victims of DFV need support not punitive measures

FSA knows from our daily contact with clients who are predominately women impacted by sexual, domestic, and family violence that service responses that place a further burden on survivors, at a time when they need support and understanding can have a victim blaming effect and lead to re-traumatisation.

The very nature of sexual, domestic, and family violence is that the victim has had their power taken away from them in the most visceral way. A trauma-informed approach should be empowering, strength-based and self-determinative, rather than compliance-based and punitive.

Survivors of violence and abuse need to be supported to heal and recover from the physical and psychological trauma they have experienced, and to build social engagement and connectedness, before being compelled to take actions to seek employment. Once they get to this stage of their healing and recovery, there is often a desire to re-engage and build economic security through education,



training, enterprise, and employment, but this needs to be offered in a supportive way, and not placed upon them as an obligation.

A consideration might be a partnership approach between services like ours and education, training and employment mentoring and support service agencies.

Once again, we fully endorse the recommendations for change suggested by the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children, who are the experts in this area

We thank you again for the opportunity to provide evidence before the committee. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

Hayley Foster
Chief Executive Officer
Full Stop Australia