
Dear Fiona and Rebecca, many thanks for facilitating this opportunity for Sam and I to present to the Committee.

As discussed, see below for the information sought by the Committee on notice:

1/ September edn of the VAADA newsletter; see page 4 for reference to the issues and subsequent programmatic activity relating to at risk young people.

https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/arc-vaada/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/08084005/NEW_VAADA_September_18092018.pdf

2/ With reference to justice reinvestment in NSW: <http://www.justreinvest.org.au/>

All the best with this inquiry.

Please feel free to contact us for any further information.

Cheers,

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I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and pay respect to Aboriginal culture and elders past, present and future.

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Disrupting the pathway from vulnerable young girl to criminalised woman

15-year-old Carly started displaying risk factors in primary school, having long periods of absence from school and difficulties with peer relationships. Her behaviour continued to decline when she was first reported missing at 11 and she started using alcohol and associating with older males. Voluntary services tried to support Carly and her family however their transience and complex needs made engagement challenging. By the time voluntary services were exhausted, Carly was completely disengaged from school, using substances and had come to the attention of the justice system for offending behaviour. Child Protection were in and out of the family however interventions would occur and services put in place, only for them to fall by the wayside after a few months. Carly is now receiving support through the Living Free Program and has embraced the flexible outreach model of care, utilising it to access specialist services, engage in school and recreation. Unfortunately this support wasn't available when Carly first started displaying these risk taking behaviours at age 11. Carly's story is not uncommon.

Girls as young as ten are being reported missing and engaging in risk taking behaviours and the current service system seems to be at a loss on how to respond. In the Frankston Mornington Peninsula (FMP), Victoria Police have indicated an urgency to support these girls, recognising that the risk factors seen for criminalised women are observable in the young females reported missing. These risk factors include early onset substance use, association with older criminalised males and disengagement from education however the current voluntary service system is unable to respond in a manner that manages their complexity.

Funded by the Victorian Legal Services Board Grants Program, the Living Free Project was established in December 2017 to work on improving system responses to females at risk of or in contact with the justice system whilst piloting direct service approaches that can disrupt a women's pathway to offending. Led by Stepping-Up Consortium and delivered in partnership with Peninsula Health, Frankston Mornington Peninsula (FMP) Primary Care Partnership, Youth Support and Advocacy Service, Mentis Assist, Victoria Police, Victoria Legal Aid, Peninsula Community Legal Centre and Frankston Magistrates' Court, this project presents a unique approach to supporting our most vulnerable and at risk young women. For young girls reported missing aged 10-17 or females aged 18-30 in the FMP, a component of the Living Free Project is filling a gap in service delivery by providing flexible access and engagement. The project leverages off strong partnerships established in the catchment to ensure

the young women and their families access the right support at the earliest possible time and to re-direct them away from statutory involvement.

Although the female imprisonment numbers continue to be much lower than for males, the female rate experienced more growth between 2006 and 2016 (45%) than the male rate (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2016). Women in the justice system often present with unique needs and distinct pathways to offending such as trauma, mental health, substance use and often have a history of relationships marked with violence and abuse. Women's substance use is believed to be a defining factor for their offending with a greater percentage of females incarcerated for drug related offending than males (14% compared to 9%). Upon reflection, many women in the justice system presented with identifiable early risk factors that went unaddressed from early childhood and throughout adolescence.

The project co-ordination aspect of the Living Free Project delivered by FMP Primary Care Partnership seeks to develop a more detailed understanding of the patterns young women who enter the justice system as adults, including any barriers that are common with accessing services to support their often multiple and complex needs often beginning in childhood.

Since the project commenced taking referrals in April 2018, 55 referrals have been made, some as young as 10 years of age. Many of the women and their families have had some level of service involvement prior to Living Free however eligibility criteria and inflexible models of service entry have created barriers to engagement. Many of the women, youths and adults, present with intergenerational histories of substance use, violence and engagement in the system. Most have made attempts to engage with services however for a myriad of reasons they have continued to flail through the system until their needs escalate and statutory services or the justice system have become involved.

The Living Free Project is looking to change the narrative relating to females involved in the justice system by addressing the underlying causal factors to their offending through a client centred recovery framework that is utilised across the health services. Supporting young women reported missing through a flexible, evidence-based outreach model of care seeks to highlight the importance of funding early intervention activities in order to disrupt the trajectory for women at risk and re-write their pathways with new narratives of hope and purpose.