

Your submission

Please provide a brief summary of your experience and any relevant issues. Your submission should respond to one or more of the terms of reference.

You may also wish to include any solutions, suggestions, or recommendations you have corresponding to the terms of reference.

Please note that content from this page onwards may be published.

Uniting Country South Australia (UCSA) is the largest not for profit provider of Domestic and Family Violence (D&FV) Services in rural South Australia. Last year we worked with 580 women and children escaping domestic violence and worked with 20 male perpetrators wishing to change their behaviour. We have offices in Coober Pedy, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Peterborough, Clare and Kadina. UCSA has also commissioned two research projects into aspects of violence in order to keep women and children safe and contribute to the body of evidence that informs practice

The agency has developed a wealth of knowledge and practise wisdom over the last thirty years that has assisted us to identify the following issues for discussion.

- **Funding**

Current funding comes from the homelessness sector and is short to medium term. It has been 3 years at the most in the last 15 years and predominantly 2 years or less. This impacts on staff retention and recruitment. We lose staff due to a lack of security of employment as we near the end of a contract and find it even more difficult to recruit when we can only offer short term contracts. In order to provide high quality services, it is essential that our staff are highly trained. In a frequent staff turnover environment, the time it takes to recruit and train staff has direct implications on service capacity to assist clients. The lack of certainty of funding also has a negative affect on the ability of a service to plan for the future. We would like to see funding cycles of five years.

This would have a direct affect on efficiency and ensure the best possible quantity and quality of service delivery for the funding provided.

Currently in South Australia, the success of Domestic Violence programs is predominantly measured on homelessness indicators rather than Domestic violence indicators. It is recommended that national key performance indicators for Domestic and Family Violence services are introduced at a national level.

- **Perpetrator Program**

UCSA has been working with men to reduce violence against women for more than 12 years. The major purpose of the program is to keep women and children safe. We aim to change men's behaviour through a strengths based intervention and believe everyone has the capacity to change. UCSA published our first article on working with male perpetrators from a strengths perspective in April 2008. One on one counselling, support, small groups and camps have been provided. Each year we work with about 20 men in the Port Pirie and Coober Pedy areas. There are few qualified experienced workers to take up vacant positions. In this area, we train and guide new staff and the skills required take time to develop. There is no specific training readily available.

The general community does not see the benefits of working with perpetrators and allocates resources largely to victims or to men as a whole through information programs. At a past White Ribbon day event, 3 men attended that had DV related convictions. Many of the community were outraged that they were there. Rather than see this as part of a journey to change their behaviour it was seen as unacceptable. If we are to significantly reduce DV we need to not only involve men we need to involve perpetrators. Most men are not violent towards women, to make a difference we need to target those that are.

Many of our referrals come from the legal profession with solicitors suggesting to their clients that it will be to their advantage to seek counselling. We are often ask for reports for court by clients, the Department of Child Protection and solicitors which can be a huge drain on resources.

In small country towns DV services are aware of perpetrators and see them move from relationship to relationship. The male perpetrator intervention program aims to break the cycle and stop the abuse of repeated partners.

Services to assist men to reduce violence lack coordination. They are provided by a range of not for profit agencies and government departments and are funded through a range of funding providers and are not consistently provided across geographic areas. In order to improve services for perpetrators that in turn reduces violence against women

and children, we would like to see more services for perpetrators and a better co-ordinated sector with more training opportunities available.

- **Research Projects**

UCSA has a research partnership with The Australian Alliance for Social Enterprise (TAASE) that has completed ten research projects over the last five years. The two projects listed below have the most direct link with Domestic and Family Violence.

Hearing their voices

Perceptions of women and men on reducing men's perpetration of domestic violence

This research gained insights from interviews with 20 women who had experienced domestic violence, 20 men who had perpetrated domestic violence, and 4 specialist men's workers on what they perceived could help stop men's violence. Interviewees were from rural and metropolitan South Australia.

Voices informing this research provided key messages on the need to increase supports for men, including over the longer-term, via a multidimensional approach. This includes supporting existing interventions with violent men, targeting at-risk groups of men for early intervention based on socio-demographic and multiple morbidity indicators, engaging men in early intervention by injecting specialist men's violence initiatives into other organisations and service sectors, and increasing prevention strategies with children, young people and others.

Prevention and early intervention, alongside intervention responses with perpetrators, is essential for breaking the intergenerational cycle of domestic violence. This is supported by a growing evidence base on the benefits of maximising opportunities for social change, which is critical for building a stronger future for Australia's next generations that is free from violence.

Women and men who shared their experiences and insights informing the findings of this study consistently advised that men need more help. This message was pervasive, but the service sector cannot currently respond as there are insufficient specialist interventions. While the findings from this research are not exhaustive, and nor are the recommendations, they are a starting place to commence conversations on increasing efforts towards reducing men's violence and increasing women's and the children's safety.

Young country women's perceptions of intimate partner violence

Australia-wide studies indicate that higher proportions of rural women have experienced intimate partner violence than urban women. However, most research has sought the accounts of women living in urban environments and policy and funding allocation is therefore skewed toward the needs of urban women (Dillon, Hussain & Loxton, 2015). While some studies have investigated rural intimate partner violence from the perspective of service workers (e.g. Wendt, 2010) few have reported on the perspectives of women (for examples, see Campo & Tayton, 2015; Ragusa, 2017). This project addresses this important gap by aiming to understand young country women's (16-24 years) perceptions and experiences of intimate partner violence to inform Uniting Country SA (UCSA) Youth and Domestic Violence Service worker practices. The project also aimed to provide evidence to assist UCSA coordinate their work across internal and external services and with their local communities to actively reduce violence against women in current and future generations. Interviews were conducted with young country women aged 16-24 years and country women who had experienced intimate partner violence when they were aged 16-24 years, to provide data that would meet project aims.

Key findings

Young country women experience similar types of intimate partner violence to those reported by women in urban environments, including non-physical but deeply traumatising types of abuse such as internet-based abuse. The young women described forming intimate partner relationships in similar ways as young urban women, for example through social media, dating apps and messaging apps, leading to 'hooking up' rather than dating in person first. Young women who experienced intimate partner violence described not recognising it at the time, particularly if the violence was non-physical, and reported being unsure where to seek support. Further, some of the young women did not receive helpful support when sought.

Almost a decade on from the launch of *The National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010-2022* intimate partner violence is not showing signs of reduction in prevalence while violence-supportive attitudes remain unacceptably high (VicHealth, 2015; Tarzia, Humphreys & Hegarty, 2017). Prevention resources have been directed towards individual behaviour change while funding for services and broader social change has been sporadic (Tarzia, et al., 2017). There is clear evidence that prevention strategies that focus only on individual behaviour change, particularly if these are short-term or once-off, are not enough to bring about lasting change (Fellmeth, et al., 2013). A whole-of-community approach that applies a socio-ecological model that addresses the drivers of violence against women is needed to support long-term behaviour change (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth, 2015). There is an opportunity for agencies to collaborate across the geographic footprint with both internal and external services, young country women and with the broader community to use a socio-ecological model to work towards reducing intimate partner violence and its impacts among young people. Being smaller in population than urban centres, country communities are well placed to work collaboratively by drawing on place-based, service sector (e.g. government and non-government agencies), community and organisational knowledge and networks to develop and implement local solutions toward ending intimate partner violence in future generations.

With violence against women currently receiving unprecedented attention in the media and public policy, there is an opportunity to drive change in country communities to enable future generations to flourish. The recommendations outlined below are informed by the findings in this report and provide a starting point for this important work. The recommendations are framed using a socio-ecological model to work towards change at all levels of the social ecology

These research projects are available in full, along with our entire suite of our research projects at www.uksa.org.au.

- **Rural Service Delivery**

UKSA has been delivering services in rural South Australia for over one hundred years. We deliver Domestic and Family Violence services with the knowledge and experience developed in that time. Service delivery in the rural context has peculiarities that require specific responses.

Service delivery in rural areas is highly visible. The general community knows who the D&FV workers are and where the service outlets are. This means that it is difficult for a client to receive a service without it being known. If a person wants to know where the Womens Safe accommodation is in a rural town, they just have to go to the hotel and ask and someone will know. The risks to staff are higher in a rural area as they go about their day to day business. Going to the supermarket for groceries is an opportunity to meet a perpetrator with an axe to grind. Workers also are very aware of the ongoing impacts of D&FV as they are aware of perpetrators developing new relationships and see the effects on the children as they grow up in the community. This knowledge provides many opportunities for assertive outreach. The lack of services in rural areas requires a more generalist approach to intervention than most metropolitan services provide. Service providers need to have responses to a wide range of needs such as migration issues, basic needs, Mental health needs etc that would be provided by specialist services in the city. There is also rural aspects to policing and transport that will be discussed in later points. When commissioning services in rural areas it is crucial for the process to highlight the need for specialist knowledge of and experience in rural service delivery.

- **SAPOL in Remote Areas**

Responses and accessibility to specialist family violence units in small rural communities and more remote towns such as Coober Pedy / Peterborough are limited. This means that all police that respond in these communities need a high level of knowledge in dealing with D&FV. This is not always the case as staff turnover in local SAPOL offices is high often with small contracts of 12-24 months provided. Originally, transitional properties for D&FV were only located in areas that had a 24 hour police response to support our workers and clients. Unfortunately, reductions in 24 hour policing has meant that the level of police support is not as responsive. It would be useful for police agencies to develop 24 hour risk management plans to respond to the needs of safe accommodation complexes in small towns and remote areas and expand where appropriate.

- **Transportation across large geographical footprint**

Many smaller rural communities have very limited or no public transport options and no taxi services. Residents that can not access a motor vehicle have difficulties obtaining basic necessities such as food and health care. This also impacts on the ability to leave an abusive relationship. Not only is it difficult to leave the family home but also it is difficult to leave the community if there is limited or no public transport. In Coober Pedy there is only one bus that leaves the town on a daily basis and the bus departs outside office hours. The perpetrator will know where and when the bus leaves and can easily ambush the victim and any support people: there is no 24 hour policing. The distances involved in rural/remote service delivery impacts on staff. The travel has a physical impact on workers and increases risk as isolation grows. The time spent travelling to and from clients detracts from the time that can be spent with clients. Rural service delivery funding models need to include all associated costs for transport and staff driving.

- **Crisis Housing**

There is a shortage of crisis housing for women and children experiencing D&FV in rural areas. Smaller communities have no options and larger communities have a limited supply but operate with consistent waiting lists. Crisis housing is supplemented by using motels and caravan parks where possible. Seasonal work and industry maintenance regularly books out all available short term accommodations. School holidays also impact on availability of crisis housing in tourist towns. Several caravan parks cap the amount of time people can stay eg no stays beyond a week. Some accommodation outlets will not house any clients referred by particular services. In rural communities, the local support network and connections for a family directly impact on the ability to recover from trauma. Leaving their community can have a detrimental impact on women and children escaping Domestic Violence. Increasing the availability of crisis housing in rural areas is an essential part of the response to D&FV

- **Children**

Minimising the impacts of witnessing DV for children is necessary to prevent generational perpetration of violence. Specific children's services are available in metropolitan areas of South Australia only. There is limited training for rural workers in reducing the effects of witnessing D&FV. Travelling to Adelaide for specialist services for children is an expensive and time consuming exercise that is usually required at a time when families are operating in crisis mode. We would like to see funding for children's domestic violence specialist case managers in rural communities. We would also like to see an increase in the availability of specialist training for rural workers.

- **COVID 19 Pandemic and Bush fire Responses**

Working in an environment post Covid 19 has influenced the quantity, style and response to D&FV in rural areas. Self-isolation and quarantine have lead to overcrowding, anxiety and increased opportunity for D&FV to occur. It has been more difficult to access face to face assistance in many cases. The need for social distancing has required more versatility in meeting clients. Some UCSA interview rooms have been too small to accommodate the number of people required in many instances. The use of telephone and video conferencing has increased as well as meeting in a range of places other than an office. Home visits were limited to only in extreme circumstances. Case conferencing with other professionals has been more difficult and attention has been provided to ensure remaining communication systems work at their best. The effects of lack of technological access to computers and phones and

lack of skills has disadvantaged many rural people. Public transport in rural and regional areas was delayed and cancelled limiting options to escape violence further.

On the flip side many people are much more comfortable with seeking and providing assistance via video conferencing now. Medical assistance via phone has been extremely welcome and much more training is available via the internet now rather than face to face. There have also been examples of people seeking assistance to leave a violent relationship as they seek assistance for other emergencies. In the recent bush fires a women approached the relief centre to seek financial assistance and opened up about her violent relationship. This resulted in the provision of immediate assistance to move to safety. It is important to learn from the recent crises and look to keep the changes that actually lead to better intervention and safety for women and children in rural areas.

**If there is insufficient room above to summarise your experience and relevant issues,
please attach additional pages to this submission as required.**