Can I Trust You?

Improving our service design and response to people from Aboriginal Communities.

July 2017

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About our heritage

Domestic Violence NSW Service Management (DVSM) was created as a non-profit company registered under the Australian Charities and Not For Profits Commission Act 2012.

DVSM recognises the many years of important work already established and achieved through the NSW Women's Refuge Movement since 1974. DVSM also recognises that there are many organisations working diligently and proactively to prevent, respond to and redress violence in society.

About our values and principles

DVSM has an established set of values and principles which are outlined on our website. The headings for our principles are outlined below:

- Violence is never acceptable or exclusive or excusable.
- Our approach is person centred.
- We uphold an individual's dignity.
- Respect and equality is critical.
- We are committed to the design and delivery of effective services.
- We respond justly.
- We collaborate.
- We work with integrity and excellence.
- We foster a supportive environment for staff wellbeing.
- It is necessary for all of us to take responsibility for making change happen.

About this Resource/Document

DVSM is committed to continuously learning and improving its work through enquiries that draw from communities, professionals and organisations to gather insight and to build new understanding. We capture and document our learning wherever we can for our own self-reflection and for the purpose of contributing to wider conversations that could assist in improving system and service design over time.

DVSM would like to acknowledge NSW Family and Community Services as a key funder of the programs through which this learning has been explored. The views, information, or opinions expressed within this resource are solely those of the individuals involved and do not represent those of NSW Family and Community Services.

We recognise that the work recorded in this resource represents only our 'point in time' knowledge and understanding which will grow and move through further learning and the contributions from others. The information contained in this resource is provided on an "as is" basis and is provided with no guarantees.

The purpose of making this resource available to others is to share our learning as a contribution toward wider progress and planning in addressing complex social issues. None of the authors, contributors, administrators, or anyone else connected with DVSM, in any way whatsoever, can be responsible for your use of the information contained in or linked from this resource.

Contact Us

Domestic Violence NSW Service Management (DVSM) welcomes interest and enquiries about this thinking and resources. To get in touch please contact us on (02) 9251 2405 or via our website www.dvnswsm.org.au.

Executive Summary

This report prepares Domestic Violence NSW Service Management (DVSM) for the next steps on the journey towards building a respectful partnership with Aboriginal communities, families and organisations in Western Sydney and beyond.

The project was undertaken to build DVSM's understanding of the impact of; and response to family violence for Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney. Through this work DVSM aimed to build an understanding of:

- What contribution (if any) DVSM could make as a mainstream organisation working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address issues of family violence;
- How to work effectively with Aboriginal communities, and what is needed to resource this response; and
- Who to work with to do this.

For a number of reasons, the journey of this project has taken a different route. A key reason for this shift in direction was that trust was consistently identified as an important element of working with Aboriginal families and communities. There are barriers to access that are personal, institutional and historical and they are part of the different lived experiences of Aboriginal families everywhere and including Western Sydney. Building trust so that these barriers can be identified, understood and where possible overcome takes time.

The Importance of Context

The project drew on the existing evidence base on family violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and particularly the work of SNAICC – A National Voice for Our Children and the National Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Forum. Interviews were also conducted with key DVSM staff and managers and stakeholders with understanding of Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney.

The term 'family violence'[1] assists in understanding how cultural connections to family and community can inform the range and impact of violence. This is distinct from the term 'domestic violence'. Understanding family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities requires recognition of the intergenerational trauma. This trauma has come from dispossession of land and identity, the loss of language and culture and the fracturing of families and communities. This trauma continues to today for Aboriginal communities.

Despite many years of efforts to address family violence, misconceptions as to effective practice continue. Mainstream approaches often fail to engage with the issues surrounding the cultural trauma that underpins much of the violence experienced by Aboriginal communities; and Domestic Violence Services are not always culturally responsive and adaptive to community contexts.

[1] Blagg, H. (2000) *Crisis Intervention in Aboriginal Family Violence: Summary Report*, Crime Research Centre, University of Western Australia.

Culturally responsive services enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to remain engaged in support through developing relationships based on trust. Trust in the people who work there, and that the service is culturally safe. The onus is on mainstream services to create culturally-safe places of welcome and trust, so that Aboriginal communities have the services that they need at the time they need it.

There is not a quick fix that will gain trust. The challenge of gaining trust is rooted in the ongoing effects of colonisation, trauma, racism and lived experience.

Mainstream services need to firstly answer the question: Can I trust you?

This question prompted a change in direction for this project. And as a result a greater focus has been placed on the consideration of how DVSM would need to 'be' for Aboriginal people to feel that its services are accessible, culturally safe and trustworthy.

The Journey Ahead For DVSM

Cultural proficiency takes time, and requires focus at all levels - individual, practice and organisation - to ensure that it is embodied within the mind-set, structures and practices of the organisation, and goes beyond individual practitioners.

This report identifies three phases to building trust: *becoming informed*, *taking a stance*, and *reaching out*. The first two phases (*becoming informed* and *taking a stance*) are largely internally focussed, during which DVSM could lay the foundation for trust, demonstrating a willingness to adapt, and the desire to be trusted. While the work to build trust is influenced and shaped by Indigenous voices, it is important that DVSM takes the first steps.

Becoming informed will require DVSM to ask itself:

- What do we need to do to be culturally proficient at all levels of the organisation? What do we need to learn and understand that we don't know, and who can we engage to do that? *(Becoming Informed)*

Taking a stance will require DVSM to ask itself:

- What structures and practices do we need to put in place so that we have a culturally-safe, welcoming service for women, children and their families? (*Taking a Stance*)

The third phase of reaching out to the local Aboriginal community should only be done when DVSM can demonstrate significant effort to becoming informed which is reflected through organisational practice.

Reaching out will require DVSM to ask itself:

- Who do we need to reach out to in the local community, and what can we offer them? What does an effective partnership look like? (*Reaching Out*)

Only after *becoming informed, taking stance and reaching out* will DVSM have the trust required to enable the organisation to work together with Aboriginal communities, organisations and women to support them in their efforts to address violence (*Working Together*).

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- National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum
- NSW Department of Family and Community Services

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About DVSM

Domestic Violence NSW Service Management (DVSM) is a registered charity (ABN: 26-165-400-635) which aims to prevent and support recovery from domestic and family violence (DFV) and homelessness. DVSM also provides professional services to the community services sector and client service delivery.

Our Vision is a world where women, families and communities live free from violence, have equal rights, opportunities, and the freedom to reach their potential.
Our Purpose is to empower clients to make positive, permanent changes that improve their safety and wellbeing.
Our Values are demonstrated in our day-to-do work. These values are:

Person Centred	Excellence	Respect	Integrity
We listen and embrace diversity to support our clients to achieve their self-defined goals.	We exceed expectations with our professionalism and evidence based products, programs and services.	We remain open minded and non-judgmental.	We are ethical, transparent and accountable.

DVSM Client Services

Wilcannia Safe House
Wilcannia Safe House supports people who are experiencing DFV and/or experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The service operates in Wilcannia and has these priority target groups:

- Young People between 16 and 25
- Women over 25
- Families with children including those escaping DFV
- Aboriginal clients

Wilcannia Safe House provides crisis accommodation at the safe house, and supports clients in transitional properties and provides outreach support.

Moving Out Moving On (MOMO)
MOMO supports women with or without children in the City of Sydney who have/are experiencing DFV and who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

MOMO is a mobile service which is located in different areas across the inner city of Sydney providing mobile outreach support.

Refuge Outreach Action Response (ROAR)
ROAR supports people who are experiencing DFV and/or experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The service operates in Blacktown and the Hills area and has these priority target groups:

- Women with children who are escaping or experiencing domestic and/or family violence
- Women with children who are leaving institutions
- Fathers with accompanying children

- Other family groups

ROAR provides crisis accommodation at the refuge, and supports clients in transitional properties and provides mobile outreach support.

Domestic Violence After Hours Service (DVAHS)
DVAHS provides a 24/7 response for women, and women with accompanying children who are escaping DFV.

DVSM Shared Services

Organisational Services
The Organisational Services team provide the cross-organisational infrastructure and supports relating to Finance, Human Resources, Quality Assurance and Compliance, Projects and Administrative Supports.

Sightlines Professional Services
Sightlines is the Professional Services division of DVSM. The Sightlines team work across DVSM's services supporting a culture of continuous quality improvement. The team contribute to the development of frameworks, policies, projects and tools and build workforce capacity. They build and test evidence through reflective practice and facilitate staff members, clients and community participation in service design.

Sightlines also provides consultancy services to other Specialist Homelessness Services peers through contracts and/or Joint Working Agreements, and to the sector more broadly.

Project background

The purpose of the Project is to support DVSM (and ROAR in particular) to build a better understanding of the impact of and response to family violence for Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney.

Through this work DVSM aims to build an understanding of:

- What contribution (if any) it could make as a mainstream organisation working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address issues of family violence;
- How to work effectively with Aboriginal communities, and what is needed to resource this response; and
- Who to work with to do this.

Overall the intent is to refine DVSM's understanding of family violence, wellbeing and safety which will inform practice and service design.

The original intent was that this would be achieved by building a picture of the lived experience of family violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Western Sydney; and the existing response from indigenous and mainstream organisations working in Western Sydney.

For a number of reasons, the journey of this project has taken a different route.

The picture of Western Sydney for Aboriginal families experiencing family violence has not yet been painted through this project. One of the key reasons for taking a different approach emerged in the early stages of the project while listening and reading. Trust was consistently identified as an important element of working with Aboriginal families including as part of the process of ensuring that there is understanding and respect. There are barriers to access that are personal, institutional and historical and they are part of the different lived experiences of Aboriginal families everywhere, including Western Sydney. Building trust so that these barriers can be identified, understood and where possible overcome takes time. More time than this project allows.

The second key reason relates to the issue of who needs to build trust. Ultimately this work is the responsibility of DVSM as a whole because it is DVSM and its representatives who must build and maintain the relationships that will ground its partnership with Aboriginal families and communities. Finally, there was the recognition that this work has already begun. Staff engaged in service delivery, managers, partners (and clients) are already learning, sharing and developing relationships necessary for building trust and improving work practice.

Instead this project has focused on what is needed by DVSM to build better understanding and practice. This calls for more listening and learning about history and context. It requires a degree of self-reflection and may require the development of additional skills and knowledge, or at least the sharing of existing skills and knowledge more broadly across the organisation. This is a journey for the organisation. There are those in the organisation who have already embarked on that journey who may act as guides.

The goal remains the same – a respectful partnership with Aboriginal communities and families and organisations in Western Sydney and beyond.

Project methodology

The project's methodology has been based on action learning and collaborative listening with staff and key stakeholders. The project has drawn on the existing evidence base on family violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and particularly the work of SNAICC – A National Voice for Our Children and the National Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Forum, as well as papers that considered the role of mainstream organisations in working with Indigenous peoples. The community development research and insights of Margot Rawsthorne at the University of Sydney have been influential.

Interviews have been conducted with key DVSM staff and managers and stakeholders with understanding of Aboriginal communities in Western Sydney. For reasons which will be discussed in the report, clients and other services have not been interviewed. This report prepares DVSM for the next steps on the journey towards building a respectful partnership with Aboriginal communities, families and organisations in Western Sydney and beyond.

Report overview

- **Section 1** introduces the Project and its aims.
- **Section 2** shares the understanding of the experience of family violence for Aboriginal communities.
- **Section 3** sets out what was heard from staff and stakeholders about working with Aboriginal Communities.
- **Sections 4 and 5** examine the underlying principles for the approach and the different opportunities and challenges that exist for DVSM in developing its understanding (becoming informed) and taking a stance.
- **Section 6** sets out recommendations and some possible next steps and reflects on the journey so far.

Family Violence and Aboriginal Communities

1. Why the term 'Family Violence'?

The use of the term 'family violence'[2] assists in understanding how cultural connections to family and community can inform the range and impact of violence – including amongst extended family, kinship networks and communities. This is distinct to the term 'domestic violence'.

Family violence is also not limited to interactions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience violence from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and non-Indigenous men.

Understanding experiences of discrimination and marginalisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also involves recognising lateral violence. This includes bullying, backstabbing, gossiping and family feuding. Not all family violence involves lateral violence, and not all lateral violence involves family violence, but the intersection of the two can limit the impact of any prevention or response to family violence.

> *The range of violence that takes place in Indigenous communities including the physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that may be perpetuated within a family. The term also recognises the broader impacts of violence; on extended families, kinship networks and community relationships. It has also been used… to encompass acts of self-harm and suicide, and has become widely adopted as part of the shift towards addressing intra-familial violence in all its forms.*
>
> **The Gordon Inquiry Report (2012), Western Australia**

2. The impact of family violence on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

The impact that family violence has on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is complex and widespread. It can be seen in all areas of disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience – from incarceration, to child protection, mental health, homelessness, health, employment and education. And although overall rates are high, family violence does not impact different communities equally. Some communities may have high levels of family violence and others may have very little.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience significantly higher rates of family violence than non-Indigenous women. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are more likely to be the victim of assault than other Australian women: 4.2 times more likely in NSW in 2013. In 2012-2013 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were 34 times more likely to be hospitalised from injuries caused by family violence. Homicide deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were 15 times the rate for non-Indigenous women across five jurisdictions from 2008-2012. A domestic violence incident was identified as the setting for 83.3% of homicides of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in 2011-2012.[3]

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[2] Blagg, H. (2000) *Crisis Intervention in Aboriginal Family Violence: Summary Report*, Crime Research Centre, University of Western Australia.

[3] *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators Report 2014,* Section 4.93; 4.92; Table 4A.11.31; 4A.11.37 Productivity Commission

The reality may in fact be worse, as official statistics under-represent the level of violence in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In some settings, up to 90% of violence may not be disclosed. Many Aboriginal women do not report for fear of reprisal or of having children taken away; lack of confidence in police or community support; language and cultural barriers and lack of awareness of support services.[4]

22% of people who used homelessness services in 2012-2013 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, with family violence given as the second most common reason for accessing the service.[5]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are at greater risk of being exposed to family violence than other children.[6] The Victorian Commission for Children and Young People reviewed all current cases of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in that state and found that 88% of children had experienced family violence. The greater the risk of violence towards the mother the more likely violence will be directed at the children and the more likely there will be lack of supervision and neglect.

And so, children's experience of family violence is often linked to their entry into the child protection system. The impacts on children include the immediate trauma of separation from their parents and kin, and the potential permanent separation from their families, communities, kin and culture.[7]

Between 40 and 70% of child sexual abuse occurs against the backdrop of family violence.[8] In New South Wales, Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and young people are 6.6 times more likely to be victims of a sexual assault than non-Aboriginal children.[9]

[4] Willis, (2011) *Non-disclosure of violence in Australian Indigenous communities*, Canberra, Australian Institute of Criminology
[5] *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators Report 2014,* Section 4.95 Productivity Commission
[6] Cripps et al 'Victims of violence among Indigenous mothers living with dependent children'(2009)MJA 191 481-485;
[7] "*Always Was Always Will be Koori Children*": Commission for Children & Young People, Victoria
[8] Laing & Humphreys, 2013 p.81
[9] NSW Ombudsman, 2013

3. Understanding family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Understanding family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities requires recognition of the intergenerational trauma that continues to today. This trauma has come from dispossession of land and identity, the loss of language and culture and the fracturing of families and communities.

Family violence is not part of Aboriginal culture. However, the disadvantage, dispossession and attempted destruction of Aboriginal cultures since colonisation have meant that family violence has proliferated in Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, (2015)
Submission to Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence

The legacy of colonisation and oppression is still seen today in the complexity and prevalence of family violence. It has been perpetuated and extended by the forced removal of children from their families and the racism of social and economic exclusion. Added to this are experiences of entrenched poverty and political marginalisation, high rates of substance abuse and the loss of traditional male and female roles,[10] which all influence the prevalence of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The factors contributing to family violence are complex and do not exist in isolation from each other. It is a common misunderstanding of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to only view a limited set of factors as influencing violence – particularly substance abuse. But as Cripps and Adams describe, "to ignore the first group of factors [colonisation; dispossession and cultural dislocation; dislocation of families through removal] and the role they have played and continue to play in families is tantamount to not understanding the violence as it occurs in Aboriginal communities."[11]

This section draws on and acknowledges the work of two key Aboriginal organisations: SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children and the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum. These two organisations in partnership with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are calling for better responses to the experiences of family violence for Aboriginal families. Their research and policy work have guided the development of this section and their concerns provide a framework for DVSM to become informed and to take a stand in support of Aboriginal communities.

Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is at epidemic levels. It will cost the nation $2.2 billion by 2021-22. Its moral cost – which sees lives lost and communities destroyed - is unquantifiable.

Antoinette Braybrook, CEO, Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services

[10] Blagg (1999) *Intervening with Adolescents to Prevent Domestic Violence: Phase 2: The Indigenous Rural Model,* pp.5-6. Memmott, Stacy, Chambers & Keys. (2001) *Violence in Indigenous Communities*, National Crime Prevention, Attorney-General's Department

[11] *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice,* Chapter 23 p. 405

4. Key concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations

Understanding Cultural and Social Contexts

Despite many years of efforts to address family violence, misconceptions as to effective practice continue. Mainstream approaches to family violence often fail to engage with the issues surrounding cultural trauma that underpins much experience of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Traditional approaches to domestic violence that are centred on removing women and children from situations of violence are not always possible or appropriate. Removing or isolating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children from their community can compound cultural trauma and increase vulnerability.[12]

It is recognised that policing plays a key role in responding to family violence. However, there may be significant barriers in access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have current or historical experiences of distrust and fear of police and the criminal justice system.

Barriers of Access to Services

Domestic violence services are not always culturally responsive and adaptive to community contexts.

Cultural safety is critical and for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are survivors of family violence. As emphasized by the Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Forum, seeking support will often only occur when a culturally responsive service is available.

Culturally responsive services enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to remain engaged in support through developing relationships based on trust. The historical and current experiences of racial discrimination may also present barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in seeking support.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency outlines cultural safety in the context of family violence as "…re-claiming cultural norms and creating environments where Aboriginal people transition; first from victimhood to survivors of oppression, through to seeing themselves and their communities as achievers and contributors. Through this transition Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can reclaim their culture.

The delivery of culturally responsive family violence responses also requires navigating the privacy and safety concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children in interconnected communities.

Shame is identified as one of the biggest barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait women in reporting family violence and accessing support.[13] Overcoming the barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face around the fear or shame of reporting family violence requires an

[12] http://www.indigenousjustice.gov.au/briefs/brief012.pdf

[13] Matthew Willis, 'Non-disclosure of Violence in Australian Indigenous Communities' (2011) Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice no. 405

understanding of community and cultural dynamics to ensure that a culturally safe service can be provided for victims and survivors.

Ensuring Early Interventions - family support services

Despite the incidence of family violence, there is often a lack of appropriate access to targeted family support services, and key preventive universal services, such as early childhood education and care. Early intervention encompasses both the prevention of future problems, and the promotion of a child's healthy development. These services are critical to address risk and stress factors that contribute to family violence. For example, while early childhood services provide opportunities to identify concerns and provide supports to families with young children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are half as likely to access support.[14]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable when starting school.[15] Only 1.4% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attended a family support service addressing complex needs in 2014-15, despite 14.6% receiving a child protection service in the same year.[16]

These early intervention supports strengthen families and improve children's health and education outcomes, reducing incidences of family violence and exposure to child protection and criminal justice systems.[17]

Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have been active in developing responses to family violence in their own communities. The establishment of women's centres, services focused on children and lobbying for alcohol restrictions are examples of the responses. Yet, the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in their communities have often been absent from policy debates and formal decision making. For example, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were dying from alcohol-related homicide than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men from deaths in custody during the period examined by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.[18]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have increasingly claimed leadership roles and the involvement of women in decision making has improved. However, there is often still a lack of attention to hearing and addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

[14] "Joining the Dots: Program & Funding Options for Integrated Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children's Services" (2013) SNAICC at p 12
[15] Productivity Commission (2013)
[16] Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (2016)
[17] "Better Systems, Better Chances: A Review of Research and Practice for Prevention and Early Intervention" (2015) Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
[18] http://www.ilc.unsw.edu.au/sites/ilc.unsw.edu.au/files/AILR%2016-1%20MD%20Naarm%20Lecture.pdf

Funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled responses

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations continue to face threats to funding sustainability and viability. The policy environment has often failed to create a recognised space for Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence identified ongoing funding pressures for Aboriginal service providers in Victoria as inefficient and preventing the promotion of successful best practice approaches.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled sector holds extensive expertise and professional knowledge that can drive innovative and effective responses to family violence.

Supporting these organisations to design, develop and implement policy, interventions and services is central to enabling culturally safe and respectful responses to family violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

[Our] communities are perceived consistently as not having the capabilities to overcome the challenges confronting them. Governments see these challenges as problems that they are required to fix through active intervention. Of course, governments do have a role to play in delivering services so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can live in conditions equal to all other Australians, but the problem is that this approach is not necessarily undertaken in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, or built on the ethos that those in communities are best placed to develop and implement the solutions.

Mick Gooda (2011) Social Justice Report

DVSM and Aboriginal Communities

All DVSM services are offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children experiencing DFV. Each service has had a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. There are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and managers across the organisation. The sharing of experience across services for staff and managers has clearly been a benefit to the services themselves as well as for staff and clients.

This Project's focus on Western Sydney has not been interpreted narrowly. The view that has been taken is that; building relationships with Aboriginal communities is the responsibility of the entire organisation. There is already considerable knowledge, insight and experience in developing and maintaining those relationships. This Project has examined how these assets can be developed and used to establish a consistent and reliable foundation for the organisation. This will be a journey and will be built on the journey so far with learnings and lessons and mistakes and stumbles.

Staff and managers from all services across the organisation have been interviewed about their experience in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. In this section, a few selected highlights from those interviews have been included to acknowledge the work that has already been undertaken and the opportunities for further development in skills and experience and relationships.

Moving on Moving Out (MOMO) – Inner Sydney

This service is funded to provide a Rapid Rehousing Response Service for women experiencing DFV in Inner Sydney. Aboriginal women affected by DFV are a priority client group within the target client group for this service. The service is expected to ensure that approaches (for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients) are culturally appropriate. However, currently there are no specific reporting requirements or required outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women for the service.

Data collected by the service indicates the following figures for the proportion of clients who identify as Aboriginal:

- 2014/2015 – 17 (17.5%)
- 2015/2016 – 36 (19%)
- 2016/2017 – 20 (13%)

The Service Coordinator observed that the service seeks to have a presence in the local Aboriginal communities. It is a small service with only two case managers. The service does not currently have a designated Aboriginal case worker position. Outreach is provided at the Redfern Community Centre once per week. She noted that at these outreach sessions, Aboriginal women rarely drop in or self-refer for housing assistance. Her honest assessment is that this is because our service may not be viewed as culturally competent and culturally safe by the local Aboriginal community.

However, the service data suggests that the service is effective in providing services to Aboriginal women through formal referral pathways from other service providers. There remains the opportunity to build better relationships with the Aboriginal communities. It is likely that in those circumstances Aboriginal women would be more likely to 'self-refer' and seek assistance directly from MOMO.

Wilcannia Young People, Women's & Families Homelessness & Housing Support Service – Far West NSW

This service is funded to provide support to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people, women and families including those escaping DFV, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Aboriginal people are the key client group and priority is given to women and families experiencing DFV. In practice, this work is undertaken through the running of a Safe House. The Safe House is a focal point for a range of services including a refuge and crisis accommodation, support and outreach services and program activities.

The service data paints a clear picture of the needs of the key client group in the Wilcannia community.

These are the figures for the proportion of clients who identify as Aboriginal:

- 2014/2015 – 167 (97.7%)
- 2015/2016 – 75 (97.4%)
- 2016/2017 – 97 (95.1%)

The Manager of the Safe House was interviewed for this Project and her insights and her stories of building relationships within the Wilcannia community have been pivotal for understanding the opportunities that DVSM has, through developing its engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Manager is a Kamilaroi Aboriginal woman whose land includes Lightning Ridge and Tamworth in Northern NSW. The Safe House in Wilcannia is on Barkandji land and the women and families who use its services come from at least seven surrounding communities in the Western NSW region. During the interview, she describes the challenges that she has faced in building relationships with these different communities. Her efforts were underpinned by a strong sense of the need for respect and patience. She emphasised the importance of building trust particularly with the elders of the communities. The values that she has drawn on include persistence, commitment to community, creativity and transparency in her dealings with others. She described a pivotal scene for her in using her musical abilities in joining the local choir and singing to the long-term residents of the local hospital in her efforts to demonstrate her respect and commitment to service for the elders of the community.

These stories sit alongside the skills of an experienced manager who supports her staff to learn and develop their own relationships. They are complemented by the practice of key values already articulated by DVSM and understood by its workers – being flexible and inclusive, being person-centred, being trauma informed and being respectful and aware of the importance of cultural safety as part of a safe and healing environment.

Western Sydney – including ROAR and DVAHS

This service is funded to provide support to women escaping domestic violence and other family groups in Blacktown and the Hills Shire and an after-hours support service for Western Sydney. The service description in its funding agreement refers to a target of 10% of Aboriginal clients although Aboriginal clients are not defined as a priority client group.

Data collected by the service indicates the following figures for the proportion of clients who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander:

- 2014/2015 – 36 (21.82%). This included 10 female clients over the age of 19 (6.06%)
- 2015/2016 – 107 (19.35%). This included 29 female clients over the age of 19 (5.24%)
- 2016/2017 – 67 (11.55%) This included 24 female clients over the age of 19 (4.14%)

Of those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, most were aged 18 and under.

- 2014/2015 – 67.7% were aged 18 and under
- 2015/2016 – 65% were aged 18 and under
- 2016/2017 – 61.2% were aged 18 and under

A more detailed analysis of the available disaggregated data would be of benefit.

The Team Leaders at ROAR and the DVSM Operations Manager were interviewed for this Project, and shared valuable insights into what is working, what could be improved and how that might happen.

Both the Team Leaders and the Operations Manager described the importance of approaching decisions with flexibility, based on understanding of culture and individual client needs. For example, there are several times when they have kept an Aboriginal woman's bed for her, so that she could attend to family matters outside the refuge. The need to understand the wider environment and culture also came up in decisions around reporting. It was felt that this understanding was not consistent amongst all staff, and some further training or skills development was needed. The Team Leaders already integrate training opportunities into everyday conversations and team meetings. They find this to be a good way of approaching it, as it avoids the label of "training", and is immediately relevant on the job.

The Team Leaders spoke of existing practices of working with other case managers to support clients, and the process of referring clients to other services. They saw opportunities to strengthen this work by forming stronger partnerships with other organisations in the area. Marrin Weejali was identified as a key potential partner. While there has been some connection with them in the past through a Sightlines project, the importance of also developing relationships at the practice level was seen as important.

One of the Team Leaders expressed some surprise that there were not more clients who identified as Indigenous, given the local Indigenous population. The Team Leaders identified opportunities to work with the Aboriginal community members, including approaching the Aboriginal Medical Service

and reaching out to local Elders. Reaching out to Elders and Aboriginal organisations was also identified by others interviewed for this project, a range of people and organisations to connect with has been included at the end of this report (see Section 5.3).

Others who contributed to this report highlighted the importance and challenge of supporting the contribution of Aboriginal staff. Having Aboriginal people involved at all levels of decision-making is crucial to creating culturally-safe spaces. This could be done through the active recruitment of Aboriginal Board members and staff, which would have the additional benefit of being invited to attend spaces that are reserved for Aboriginal workers. It was observed that Aboriginal staff can face dual pressures – being seen as the source of cultural knowledge in the organisation, and being the person others from the local community come to for help. It can feel like they never leave work. This observation was supported by the Projects reading. If Aboriginal staff recruitment becomes a focus, it is important that there are also support structures and policies in place to address the pressure that can come from being an Aboriginal worker in a mainstream organisation.

The Team Leaders and Operations Manager are good role models for the mindset and practice of working with Indigenous clients. This report seeks to understand how to embed that in the organisation, so that it exists beyond individual practitioners.

The recent DVSM session on Conversational Intelligence suggests a solid foundation to build from.[19] Staff described the spirit of DVSM as **brave**, **curious** and **caring**, and other characteristics, such as **shared learning**, and **growth without losing what the organisation is about**.

[19] Glaser, Judith E., 2014, *Conversational Intelligence: How great leaders build trust & get extraordinary Results*, Bibliomotion Inc.

Principles – to be based on practice and theory

1. Culturally-safe and trusted mainstream services

While Aboriginal-controlled organisations are crucial, mainstream services have an important role in responding to Indigenous family violence (at least within the system as it currently stands). Some people experiencing violence may prefer to access services where there's less chance of family or community connections, yet, as demonstrated in this Project Report, not all mainstream services are accessible to Aboriginal peoples.

Project research has found that women will use mainstream services when they have trust – in the people who work there, and that the service is culturally safe. The onus is on mainstream services to create culturally-safe places of welcome and trust, so that Aboriginal communities have the services that they need at the time they need it.

Durie differentiates between cultural safety and cultural competence in a health setting: "cultural safety centres on the experiences of the patient, or client, while cultural competence focuses on the capacity of the health worker to improve health status by integrating culture into the clinical context."[20]

Taking a person-centred approach links the two, and challenges mainstream services to consider how they need to be for an Aboriginal person to feel culturally safe, not judged and understood; how they can earn trust.

Project reading and interviews found that a person-centred approach involves practice and structures that are underpinned by:

- Trauma and racism-informed cultural proficiency at all levels of the organisation
- A Human Rights Based Approach and Community Development principles
- Wider eco-system awareness and understanding.

[20] Durie, M., 2001, Cultural Competence and Medical Practice in New Zealand, School of Māori Studies Massey University Palmerston North, p 2

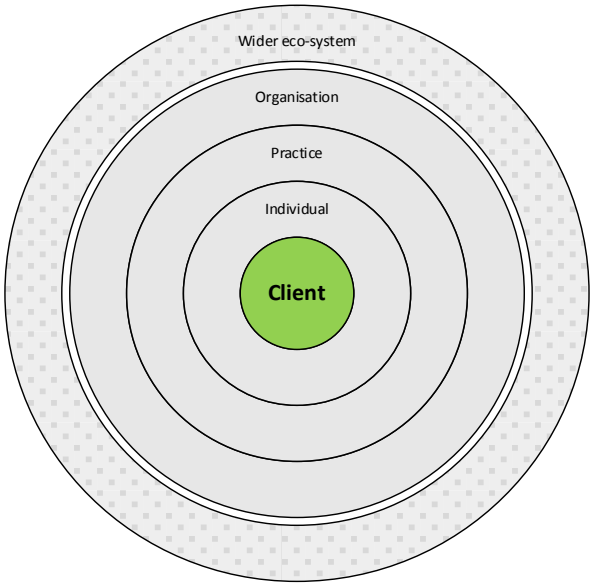
A person-centred approach[21]

Trauma and racism-informed cultural competence

Understanding of familial connections and cultural practices

Understanding of intergenerational trauma and its impact

Understanding of the experience and impact of structural and everyday racism



Wider eco-system awareness and understanding

Understanding the wider family violence system

Understanding the other systems that women interact with

Understanding the impact of cultural norms

Some suburbs of Western Sydney, women live in areas of locational disadvantage, adding to the complexity of the issues in their lives, owing to the correlation between factors of disadvantage

Human Rights Approach and Community Development principles

Human rights principles of Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and equality, Empowerment, and Enforcement

"*When working with Indigenous communities a range of community development principles are relevant, including: being informed about, and responsive to, local knowledge and cultural processes; drawing on both informal and formal Indigenous leadership; establishing trust; demonstrating flexibility, particularly the ability to respond to changing circumstances through listening; demonstrating a willingness to leverage resources and influence; and actively building in processes and structures that enable sustainability of the intervention over time*"

Trauma and racism-informed cultural competence / proficiency

Cross et al describe cultural competence as "*a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations*".[22]

Some mainstream services offer cultural awareness training, which covers some of these elements. The lessons, however, can easily be forgotten at the conclusion of the training, if not consciously embedded into practice. In addition, cultural awareness training tends to focus on one aspect of cultural competency – understanding of familial connections and cultural practices.

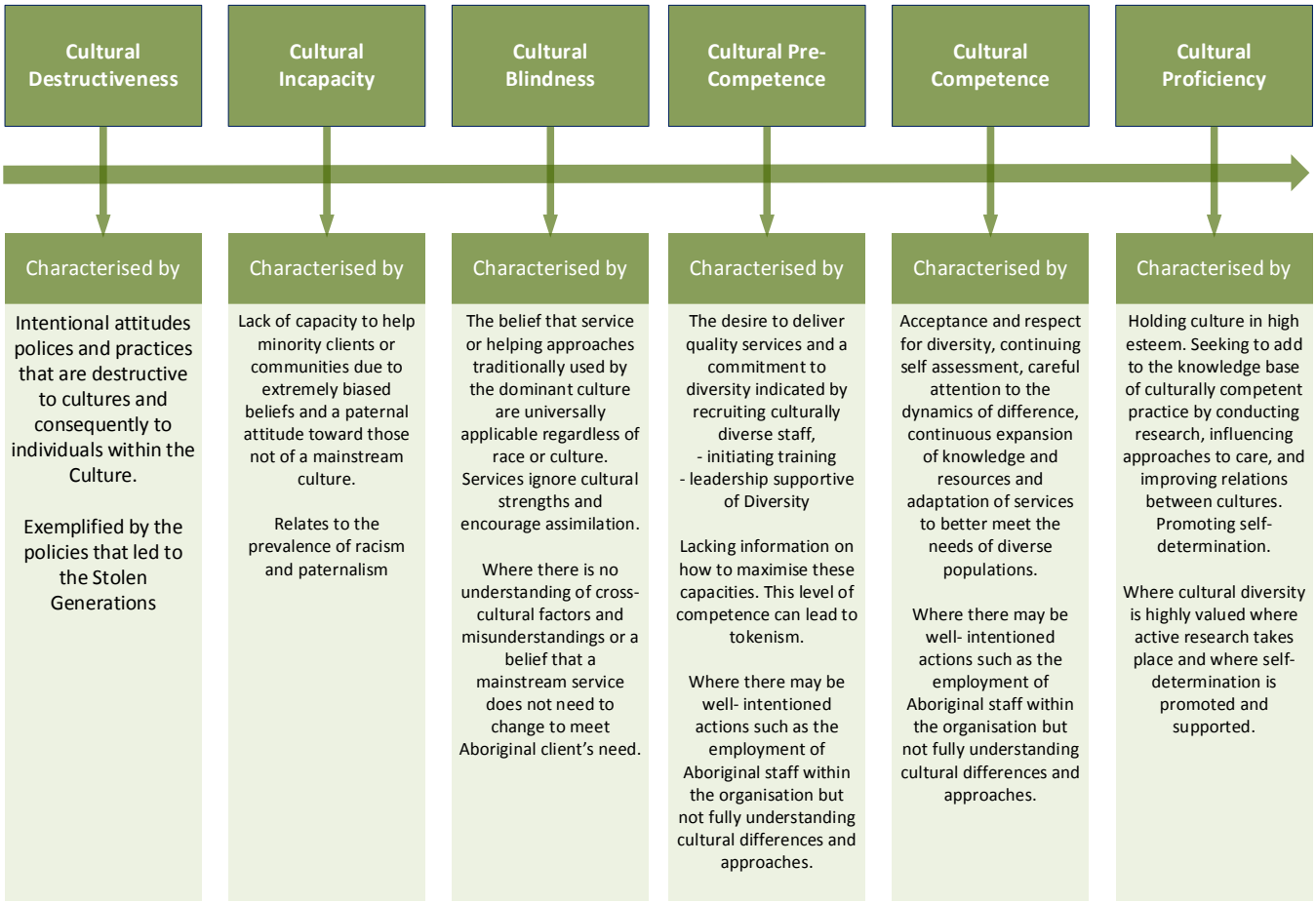
Trauma and racism-informed cultural competence incorporates a more holistic understanding of cultural competence, incorporating: familial connections; cultural practices; the impacts of intergenerational trauma; the experience and impact of structural and everyday racism in the lives of Indigenous people.

[21] Rawsthorne, M., 2014, "Helping Ourselves, Helping Each Other": Lessons from the Aboriginal Women against Violence Project Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education, Volume 16, No.1, 2014, 7-21, p 9

[22] Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs, M. 1989. Towards a culturally competent system of care, Volume 1. Washington DC: Center for Child Health and Mental Health Policy, Georgetown University Child Development Center, p iv

Cross et al suggest that cultural competency can be measured on a continuum, from Cultural Destructiveness to Cultural Proficiency. This Continuum has been adapted to an Australian context by The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, and adopted by other organisations, including SNAICC and Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Kaiela Institute, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative (see image below).

Cultural competence Continuum[23]



Cultural proficiency takes time, and requires focus at all levels - individual, practice and organisation - to ensure that it is embodied within the mind-set, structures and practices of the organisation, and goes beyond individual practitioners.

Cultural proficiency becomes embedded in an organisation in a number of ways, including:

- Relationships with Aboriginal communities and organisations that are focussed on deep listening, respect for culture and, as Rawsthorne challenges, asking "how can *we* support Aboriginal women?"[24];

[23] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care ,2014, *Safe for Our Kids: A guide to family violence response and prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*, p 21 and Tynan, M., Smullen, F., Atkinson, P., Stephens, K., Garling, T, 2011, *Aboriginal Health Cultural Competence Framework*, Hume Region Victoria, Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Kaiela Institute, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative, pp9-10

[24] Rawsthorne 2014, p 20

- Enabling structures, such as recruitment and training processes, policies and procedures, and employment practices that give time for relationship building and community development; and
- The stance taken, externally, to promote and support Aboriginal-controlled organisations and Aboriginal-led initiatives.

It is reflected at a practice level in the inclusiveness and accessibility of the service, outreach and community engagement.

Human Rights Approach and Community Development principles

Adopting a human rights approach and community development principles furthers person-centred practice in a number of ways.

- **Individualised focus**: While trauma-informed cultural competency is important, focussing on that alone risks treating all people from one culture as the same. By actively engaging Aboriginal people in the decision-making process, and building on their strengths and knowledge about their lives, a human rights approach and community development principles enable an individualised focus in the context of culture.
- **Improved outcomes for women**: Seeing women as experts in their own lives and supporting local leadership enables community driven, culturally relevant responses.
- **Builds trust and confidence**: When Aboriginal people feel culturally safe, that their voices are heard, and that they are not judged, they begin to trust that mainstream service.

Rawsthorne also points to the importance of fostering social capital and social cohesion, particularly in areas of locational disadvantage, including some parts of Western Sydney. Referring to longitudinal research looking at disadvantage by postcode, she states:

> *"In those communities which exhibited high levels of social cohesion (in which there was a sense of trust, volunteering, participation in local events, ability to receive help from neighbours, feeling valued and feeling safe) the adverse affects of social disadvantage were minimized."*[25]

Wider eco-system awareness

Wider eco-system awareness requires that a person's experience of violence is understood not only with the context of their relationship or family situation within which the violence occurs. But more broadly within the family violence system, other systems and cultural norms that people experiencing violence must interact with.

Awareness of how these systems impact people's lives creates a better understanding of their situation. It adds to the understanding enabled by trauma and racism-informed cultural competency, by looking at other aspects of people's lives, and why some people may respond in a particular way. E.g. in some areas of Western Sydney, such as Mt Druitt, women also face the challenges and impacts of locational disadvantage.

Wider eco-system awareness also provides insights into how these systems influence the impact of

[25] Rawsthorne 2014 p 6

actions and decisions at a practice and organisation level. One example given during the research was the impact of reporting on child safety and wellbeing. When the wider eco-system is not taken into consideration, reporting can actually make the situation less safe.

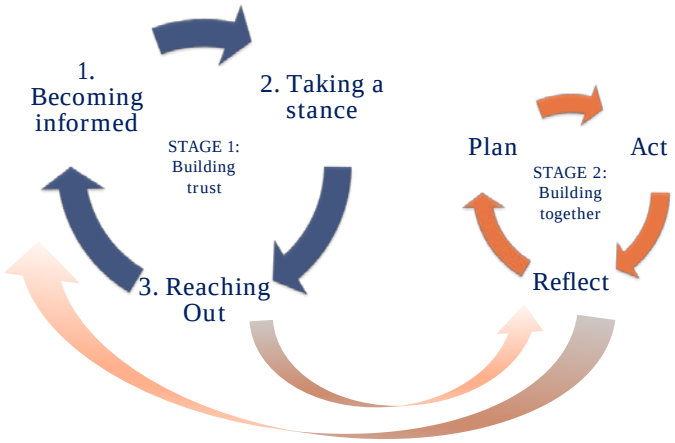
At an organisational level, awareness and understanding of the wider eco-systems creates the foundation for structures and policies that enable effective decisions. Furthermore, it places organisations in a better position to use their influence to advocate for change.

2. Translating into practice: Building from a foundation of trust

> "*Trust was a repeated theme throughout the project, highlighting the importance of time to establish relationships and earn trust. It may be that through this type of slow work that mainstream services can overcome the historic and ongoing tensions between Aboriginal women and the white service system.*"[26]

A consistent theme in the literature and interviews was the importance of building and maintaining trust. As Herring et al suggest, women are "waiting for some trust" before they engage with mainstream organisations.[27] There is not a quick fix that will gain trust. The challenge of gaining trust is rooted in colonisation, trauma, racism and lived experience. Mainstream services need to firstly answer the question: Can I trust you?

While recognising that trust is not something that can be achieved and forgotten about - it's ongoing – demonstrating trustworthiness is a crucial first step. Mainstream services need to put the effort in to show that they can be trusted.



Stage One: Building Trust - by becoming informed, taking a stance and reaching out (Herring et al).

Stage Two: Working together - once trust has been established, mainstream organisations can then begin the important process of working together with women and Aboriginal communities.

[26] Rawsthorne 2014, p 18

[27] Herring, S., Spangaro, J., Lauw, M., & McNamara, L. (2013). Waiting for trust: The intersection of trauma, racism and cultural competence in effective work with Aboriginal people. Australian Journal of Social Work, 66(1), p 115

Stage One: Building Trust

In their paper looking at responses to Aboriginal people by mainstream service providers, Herring et al proposed a three-phased approach that organisations could use to adopt a trauma and racism-informed cultural competence framework. This Project has expanded their focus on trauma and racism-informed cultural competency to a broader definition of person-centeredness, including a human rights approach, community development principles and practice, and wider eco-system awareness.

The three phases to building trust are: *becoming informed*, *taking a stance*, and *reaching out*. While a cyclical process with the overarching purpose of being person-centred, **this report focuses on what it takes to build an initial foundation of trust**.

The first two phases (*becoming informed* and *taking a stance*) are largely internally focussed, during which the mainstream organisation lays the foundation for trust, demonstrates their willingness to adapt, and their desire to be trusted. While the work is influenced and shaped by Indigenous voices, it is important that mainstream services take the first steps.

The third phase of reaching out to the local Aboriginal community should only be done when mainstream organisations can demonstrate that they have made significant effort to become informed, and have reflected that in organisational practice. In reaching out, the focus should be to build strong relationships over time with local Aboriginal people and communities.

Each of these three phases should be done at each level of the organisation. Suggestions of what this could mean in practice are outlined on the following pages.

Organisation level

The organisation level focusses on the creation of structures that enable person-centeredness.[28] [29]

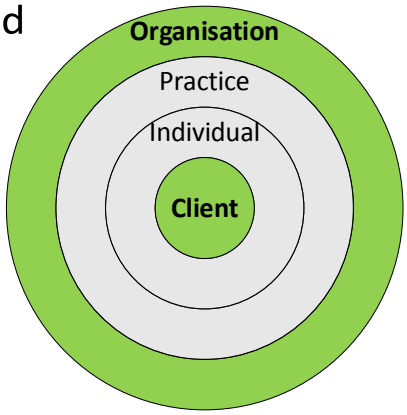
Becoming Informed

Ensuring staff cultural proficiency

Analysing service use by Aboriginal clients

Identifying organisational policies for engagement of Aboriginal voices

Understanding & mapping the wider ecosystem



Taking a Stance

Developing structures and processes that embed and enable trauma and racism-informed cultural proficiency

Creating enabling structures for relationship building and community development

Laying the foundation to use influence to externally advocate for, promote and support Aboriginal-controlled organisations

Reaching Out

Reaching out to local elders & cultural brokers "to allow respectful engagement with the local community" (Herring)

"Giving before asking": Identifying what can be offered to Aboriginal communities and organisations (Herring)

Taking time to build relationships with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal-controlled organisations: deep listening, respect for culture. Ask "how can *we* support Aboriginal women?" (Rawsthorne, 2014)

[28] Herring et al, p 114

[29] Rawsthorne 2014, p 20

Practice level

The practice level is the active demonstration of person-centeredness. While practice is enabled by the structures at the organisation level, it should also influence those structures.[30]

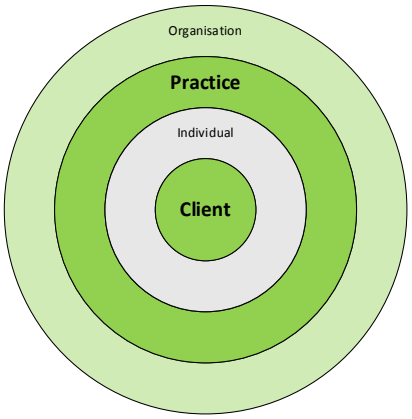
Becoming Informed

Actively pursuing cultural proficiency

Understanding barriers to access including the impact of trauma & racism

"Learning about local Aboriginal communities; their history, cultural practices, local organisations, and spokespersons"

Understanding the impact of the wider eco-system



Taking a Stance

Recognising that access and safety is reflected in the number of Aboriginal clients, relative to the local Population

Demonstrating that the service is a safe place, where culture is recognised, and women are not blamed for their situations

Involving women in the decision-making, as experts in their lives and situations

Ensuring that practice reflects this deeper understanding of culture and other systems that impact women's lives

Reaching Out

Focussing on relationship building and taking time to do so

Reaching out to local Elders and cultural brokers. Spending time with community members, asking & listening to what they want from local services. Shaping practice to reflect community needs

Engaging with clients in culturally appropriate ways

[30] Herring et al, p 113

Individual level

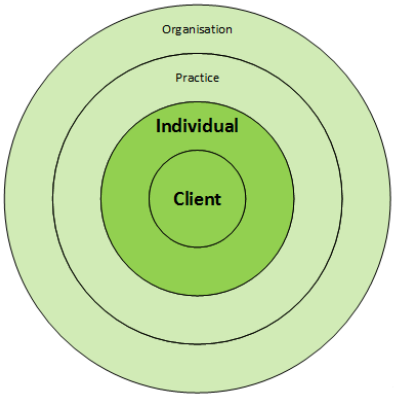
While the individual level is the personal work of each staff member, the organisation and practice can influence this through employment practices and the provision of training and coaching.[31]

Becoming Informed

"Understanding how one's personal and cultural identity have been shaped by colonisation is a fundamental starting point in effective work with Aboriginal people"

Becoming informed "about the full history of Aboriginal people, both pre invasion cultural richness, post invasion onslaught, and become alert to the existence and importance of living cultural practices."

Understanding "the covert and overt racism that Aboriginal people experience"



Taking a Stance

For non-Indigenous workers, understanding how white privilege impacts areas such as choices and assumptions

"Willingness to name and confront racism towards Aboriginal people"

Reaching Out

"White guilt is paralysing and unhelpful because it maintains Aboriginal people as ''other'' and apart" (Herring)

"Reaching out can include small acts such as reading the work of Aboriginal writers, supporting Aboriginal cultural events, responding to racist media reporting, and taking the initiative to engage with Aboriginal colleagues and acquaintances"

[31] Herring et al, p 112

Stage two: Working together

The cycle of becoming informed, taking a stance and reaching out continues its focus on person-centeredness. It both informs and is informed by the work together in community.

Underpinned by community development principles, working together involves mainstream organisations continuing to take up Rawsthorne's challenge: "how can *we* support Aboriginal women?". While the focus of the work together will differ from community to community, there are some key guiding principles:

- Aboriginal communities and women at the centre – as experts and leaders
- Working in true partnership with local Aboriginal communities and organisations, where the role of the mainstream organisation is to support people from the community and other community organisations to lead change. A good example of this is the Aboriginal Women Against Violence project, which is the focus of Rawsthorne's evaluation.[32]
- Taking the time to build trust and relationships
- Flexibility and allowing response to be "continually evolving rather than being rolled out".[33] An action learning approach, supported by developmental evaluation would be useful practices to employ
- Using influence in the wider system to advocate for change and perhaps be a bridge.

[32] Rawsthorne, M. (2010) *Aboriginal Women Against Violence Project Evaluation report*, Social Work & Policy Studies, University of Sydney, and Rawsthorne, 2014
[33] Rawsthorne 2010, p 18

Opportunities and challenges

1. Funding Environment

One aspect of the eco-system that DVSM shares with many of the other community organisations that work with Aboriginal people experiencing DFV is the funding environment. The changes to funding arrangements and the lack of certainty of continuity in funding have significant impact at an organisational and practice level. Community organisations will seek to shield the impact of these factors from staff, clients and community. But this is not always possible. And the impact can be devastating.

There was clear evidence in the interviews obtained during the Project with both staff and external stakeholders of the impact of such factors in the relatively recent past. There was also a clear commitment to move on: to plan and build resilient workforces and to seek to ensure that service delivery to clients and communities is not affected. However, these factors cannot be ignored particularly in the context of building trust with clients and communities. The impact on clients and communities and on staff (either directly or vicariously) can compound experiences of trauma or discrimination.

There is some evidence that the loss of experienced staff with established relationships with communities may have had an impact on the referrals of Aboriginal women to the service. This may be related to increased levels of mistrust or simply the loss of valuable institutional knowledge and relationships. In any event there is undoubtedly the opportunity to refresh relationships with community partners and to build new relationships.

One challenging opportunity for DVSM is to examine its values in the context of the funding environment; to become informed about the impact for Aboriginal community organisations and to consider taking a stance as to the principles that would underpin its own behaviour as another community organisation working in the same or similar funding environment.

This Project offers for consideration a set of principles that have been developed to guide a partnership approach between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community organisations working in the Northern Territory[34]. These principles reflect the aspiration that Aboriginal controlled community organisations should play a key role in the design and delivery of services to Aboriginal peoples and are based on an understanding of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They include the following that may have relevance for DVSM:

- **Recognise existing capacity:** Non-Aboriginal organisations will recognise the existing capacity and strengths of Aboriginal NGOs and identify how they can contribute to further developing this capacity.
- **Research existing options:** Non-Aboriginal organisations shall thoroughly research existing Aboriginal service providers and development agencies before applying for service delivery contracts.
- **Seek partnerships:** Where there is an Aboriginal NGO willing and able to provide a service, non-Aboriginal organisations shall not directly compete with the Aboriginal service provider, but will seek, where appropriate, to develop a partnership in accord with these principles.

[34] http://www.amsant.org.au/apont/our-work/non-government-organisations/apo-nt-ngo-principles/

- **Approach to partnership:** Partnerships will be based on building and strengthening, rather than displacing, Aboriginal organisational capacity and control.
- **Ensure Aboriginal control, not just consultation:** Non-Aboriginal organisations agree that Aboriginal organisations need to have control of services and programs delivered to their communities.
- **Cultural competency and appropriate development practice:** Aboriginal organisations and non-Aboriginal organisations will seek to work together to share learnings and establish effective development practice and cultural competency standards for projects and service delivery initiatives.
- **Where appropriate, develop a clear exit strategy:** Where non-Aboriginal organisations have supported while capacity is built, then have a clear path for handing control back to Aboriginal NGOs or communities.

In most contexts, a partnership approach can enhance the service delivery options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a community as it will enhance coordination and enable people to choose to access a non-Indigenous service if they are more comfortable with that option for reasons of privacy or safety.

2. Policy and Advocacy

This report has as its principal focus what DVSM needs to do in terms of reflection, planning and learning to build its capacity and its credibility to connect and work effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address issues of family violence.

It is a journey with the goal of respectful partnership with Aboriginal communities and families and organisations in Western Sydney and beyond.

But those reflective and learnings steps are to be taken alongside the building of relationships and partnerships. And the respect and support for Aboriginal empowerment and self-determination do not mean that DVSM should always stand silently alongside Aboriginal communities and partners – although sometimes that will be the most appropriate action.

Building trust and partnerships will create opportunities for projects and programs and for shared work on policy development and advocacy. It is expected that DVSM will continue to learn from its Aboriginal staff and partners and there will be a place for the sharing of that learning with the sector and the community. Some of these policy opportunities have already been developed.

It is hoped that DVSM can demonstrate the benefits of culturally proficient practice to the wider community sector. And that there will be shared causes and campaigns that DVSM can join or develop in partnership with Aboriginal communities and partners. Sometimes it will still be important to hear mainstream voices speak of the ongoing trauma, discrimination and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. DVSM may have access to power and influence that it can share with its Aboriginal partners.

There are already a range of policy and advocacy campaigns and statements that have been developed by Aboriginal voices that DVSM could learn from and support.

Some key examples include:

- The Uluru Statement From the Heart (May 2017) – The Statement of the First Nations Constitutional Convention that sets out the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples for recognition of their ancient and ongoing sovereignty. [35]
- The Redfern Statement (June 2016) – A call from National Aboriginal Peak Service Organisations for acknowledgment and support by Government for the solutions held by Aboriginal communities to address generational disadvantage.[36]
- Family Matters (November 2016) - Family Matters: Strong Communities. Strong Culture. Stronger Children is Australia's national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture – coordinated by SNAICC Our Voice for Our Children. [37]

These are some of the opportunities available through being informed, taking a stance and reaching out.

[35] https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/event/uluru-statement-from-the-heart
[36] http://nationalcongress.com.au/about-us/redfern-statement/
[37] http://www.familymatters.org.au/about-us/

3. Communities and organisations

Those engaged through the course of this Project suggested a number of key people and organisations that DVSM could connect with. The Project Team made the decision not to contact these people when it became clear that the focus for this project should be internal. Once DVSM has gone through the first two stages of building trust (*Becoming Informed* and *Taking a Stance*), these organisations could be potential future partners (although this will be established during the first two phases). The descriptions below have been taken from relevant websites.

Aboriginal Communities and Organisations in Western Sydney

Description	Contact details
Marrin Weejali provides a range of alcohol and other drug services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to non-Indigenous clients, particularly in Western and South-Western Sydney. Their model of service is based upon a spiritual and cultural healing approach. The ROAR Team Leaders said that they refer people to Marrin Weejali. In addition, DVSM worked with Marrin Weejali for a previous Sightlines project.	Tony Hunter Chief Executive Officer 9628 3031 Tony.hunter@marrinweejali.org.au
Ngallu Wal is an Integrated Child and Family Centre providing childcare services to children up to four, and support services to children up to eight and their families. Based in Doonside, they deliver services to communities from Riverstone through Doonside and out to Prospect and beyond.	Dianne Chapman Centre Manager 9672 4173
Yenu Allowah Aboriginal Child and Family Centre is an integrated centre offering services and support for both children and their parents or carers. This includes an early learning centre for children from birth to five years of age; supported playgroups in the centre and in the community; parent education, information, referrals to services when required, and transport for most activities; a dedicated family centre where agencies can provide health and other services to our families, for example health checks. They also have one-off events throughout the year.	Christine Foreshew Centre Manager 9625 6357
Butucarbin Aboriginal Corporation contribute to the social, economic, emotional and cultural development of the Aboriginal community in Western Sydney. This is achieved through a range of group and individual community development and adult education programs and activities.	9832 7167 koori@ozemail.com.au
Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation was founded by five Aboriginal Elders from Western Sydney. Their purpose is to connect with individuals and families in a welcoming environment, providing them supports and links to services that help them heal from the past and nurture their sense of confidence and pride in the future. The group has strong knowledge of the community and has built contacts within and outside the community.	0400 967 727

Michael Maher, who runs the Western Sydney Men's Group, which has been running for over 15 years and meet on the last Friday of each month.	Michael.Maher@facs.nsw.gov.au
Cheryl Jackson, who runs the Aboriginal Family Support Workers Group and the Aboriginal Family Planning circle. The Aboriginal Family Planning circle brings together workers from a range of services to support Aboriginal families with complex problems. The clients and workers meet together get support from a range of services. An example of how the circle operates can be found at https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/reforms/children,-young-people-and-families/shining-a-light-on-good-practice/circle-of-hope	Cheryl.Jackson@facs.nsw.gov.au

Additional people, organisations and networks

Description	Contact details
The WASH House was established by a group of local women and workers from Essie's Women's Refuge. Based in Mt Druitt, it offers a range of programs and activities for all women.	Debra Coulson Manager 9677 1962
Aboriginal Controlled Health Organisations The ROAR Team Leaders mentioned the existence of a number of Aboriginal Controlled Health services in the Western Sydney area that they could connect with.	
Interagency networks There are several interagency networks in the region. An opportunity exists to attend networks that aren't connected to family violence services, as they will include people who work with the same clients or offer referral pathways. The Koori Interagency Network is open to non-Indigenous people by invitation only, and usually involves a presentation to the group.	

4. Management – skills, employment and policy

Adopting a person-centred approach - underpinned by trauma and racism-informed cultural competence, human rights and community development principles, and eco-system awareness – has implications for management. It requires a range of specific skills and attributes, along with supportive structures, policies and procedures.

Policies

The Principles section of this Report suggests ways in which an organisation can create enabling structures that will further the development of person-centred work that creates culturally safe spaces for Aboriginal people. These include resourcing, enabling policies and procedures, staff recruitment and training processes, employment contracts that give time for relationship building and community development.

Aboriginal representation

A key decision is how DVSM will ensure that Aboriginal people are involved at all levels of decision-making. If this involves the recruitment of Aboriginal Board members and staff, it is important that there are policies and procedures in place to address the pressure outlined earlier in this Report: being seen as the source of cultural knowledge in the organisation, and being the person others from the local community come to for help.

There are also opportunities to explore Aboriginal representation through strong partnerships.

Skills Audit

The skills required to implement this are extensive. In interviews with staff, it was clear that there is a solid foundation for this work – in terms of spirit, attributes and skills. It is not yet understood how widely these exist within the organisation. Conducting an audit of existing skill levels within the organisation would give a sense of where the strengths and gaps are in the following areas:

- Racism and trauma-informed understanding and practice
- Community development
- Developmental evaluation
- Systems thinking

Training and employment

A skills audit will identify skills gaps to inform training and employment needs. Identifying the most suitable cultural competency training is a priority. The work of Felicity (Flic) Ryan has been recommended as a possible starting point for building cultural competency (http://felicityryan.com.au/). In addition, throughout the project, a number of guides were identified that were developed to assist mainstream organisations to develop cultural competency. (See Appendix I: Further Reading).

There are also opportunities for ongoing, on-the-job training, as the DVSM ROAR Team Leaders already do this. If this is seen as a viable means of training, it needs to be properly resourced.

It is not possible to identify specific employment needs, as these will emerge throughout the process of "*Becoming Informed*" and "*Taking a Stance*". There are, however, certain characteristics that DVSM could look for in recruitment of staff – the values identified by DVSM staff of brave, curious and caring, along with the openness to work on the individual level of "*Becoming Informed*, *Taking a Stance* and *Reaching Out*".

5. Relationships, clients and service delivery

There are practice implications of / for adopting a person-centred approach that:

- Recognises the impact of trauma and racism on communities;
- Utilises human rights and community development principles; and
- Is aware of the impacts and influences of the broader social and the service systems within which it operates.

In particular, there will be implications for the development of relationships and partnerships, working with clients and service delivery.

Taking the time to build relationships and trust is key, and as an initial step, involves the internal work of "*Becoming Informed*" and "*Taking a Stance*". Once this has been done, organisations are then able to reach out to Aboriginal elders, organisations and communities in the spirit of giving before asking.

True partnership with local Aboriginal communities and organisations shifts the role of the mainstream organisation to supporting people from the community and other community organisations to lead change. Western Sydney has some opportunities for such partnerships, through the potential partners listed above, particularly Baabayn and Marrin Weejali.

Findings, Recommendations and Reflections

Findings

1. In seeking to understand the relationship between DVSM and the Aboriginal communities that it is likely to deal with, an immense amount has been learnt from a number of existing staff. The skills and experience of these staff represent an extraordinary resource for DVSM.

2. The key opportunity and challenge for DVSM is to consolidate the learnings of staff and this research. This will form an organisational platform for developing and maintaining meaningful relationships with communities and clients.

3. History (including personal stories) is a critical component of building respect and trust.

4. **Mainstream Services have an important role to play in the current system**. Some people do not wish to attend Aboriginal services, because of the close family and community connections. Yet mainstream services do not always feel accessible and culturally safe to Indigenous people.

5. Through the course of this project a greater focus has been placed on the consideration of **how mainstream services such as DVSM would be seen from the perspective of Aboriginal women and communities**. Readings and discussions undertaken have sought to answer the following questions. For people to feel that a mainstream service is accessible, culturally safe and trustworthy:

    - How does a mainstream service provider need to "be", how does it need to operate, and, within that, what does it need to offer (including partnerships and the way it works with clients)
    - What are the characteristics of accessible mainstream services - from individual practitioner level through to organisation? And what are the structures that support and enable this?
    - What role do trust, cultural competence and relationships play? (themes that had already come up in Project discussions)

6. A key theme to emerge was the importance of people feeling that they can trust the mainstream services, that they are culturally safe. It is the responsibility of mainstream services to show that they can be trusted.

7. The process of building trust and strong relationships challenges mainstream organisations to ask themselves:

    - What do we need to do to be culturally proficient at all levels of the organisation? What do we need to learn and understand that we don't know, and who can we engage to do that? (Becoming Informed)
    - What structures and practices do we need to put in place so that we have a culturally-safe, welcoming service for women, children and their families? (Taking a Stance)
    - Who do we need to reach out to in the local community, and what can we offer them? What does an effective partnership look like? (Reaching Out)
    - How can we work together with Aboriginal communities, organisations and women to support them in their efforts to address violence? (Working Together)

8. The answers to these questions cannot be found outside of the context of the relationship between the organisation (and its workers) and the communities that its clients come from.

9. It is critical for DVSM as an organisation to answer these questions in order to develop and maintain relationships with the Aboriginal communities it seeks to work with. There are tools that exist that can support DVSM through this process.

Recommendations for DVSM

1. Focus initially on "becoming informed" and "taking a stance". This should be undertaken through the development of a process that fosters internal reflection and action which is underpinned by the following principles and practices.

   Principles

   - Building on the foundation of existing practice, strengths and abilities
   - Being able to adapt to a changing environment and conditions, which are sometimes outside of DVSM's control
   - Recognising that the answers aren't yet clear and will emerge through collective understanding and action
   - Relationships are central to building trust, which takes time and investment.

   Practice

   - Participative - a co-creative process that involves people from across the organisation, who bring different perspectives and experience, and external people as required
   - Emergent - through understanding and action, DVSM will continue to build its learning. An action learning approach will help in this way
   - Resourced - ensuring sufficient resourcing (time and money) to enable full participation.

2. Acknowledge and support the existing work of building trust and developing relationships that is already underway across the organisation.

3. Build on staff and the organisations existing resources. This could include further developing:

   - The skills and experience in relation to cultural proficiency, understanding of family violence, and the history of trauma for communities and clients;
   - The skills and experience for building relationships with Aboriginal people and communities;
   - Understanding of the barriers to access for Aboriginal clients and what DVSM can do to overcome these barriers;
   - The principles and strategies which will inform DVSM's engagement with and support for communities;
   - The stance it would like to take as an influential player in the family violence system.

4. DVSM considers incorporation of the principles (recommendation 1) and strategies (recommendation 3) into its practice framework and program logics and as part of the organisations next Strategic Plan.

5. Involve the DVSM Board in the development (and endorsement) of the agency's stance on engagement with Aboriginal communities.

Reflections

James McDougall – Sightlines Associate
DVSM is well placed to partner with and learn from Aboriginal communities throughout its work.
Staff from DVSM have profound learning and experience and are already sharing and influencing to good effect.
Cultural awareness in case management of families is a crucial tool for the development of family support strategies that can prevent child protection interventions.

Nicole Endacott – Sightlines Associate
There is a need for mainstream organisations to offer services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are experiencing family violence, as this provides women with choice.
Mainstream organisations need to provide a culturally safe service in order to be truly accessible to Aboriginal women.
Building trust is an essential foundation of this work. Trust develops over time and through focus on relationship building in the spirit of giving before receiving.
While deep listening and relationship building are central to trust, first mainstream organisations need to demonstrate that they have taken the time to understand and incorporate that understanding into practice.
DVSM has a solid foundation for this work – through the existing skills and experience of staff, and partnerships with other organisations. The spirit and culture of DVSM is central to this.

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Appendices

Further readings relating to the community connections project can be found below:

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