

The Beyond DV Framework for Recovery and Healing from Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence



██████████ *and* ██████████

Deakin University

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of our lands and waterways. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging as well as the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which we learn, teach, and carry out our work. We support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' calls for self-determination, and a 'Voice, Treaty and Truth Telling' through the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Recognition of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence

We acknowledge the important contributions of people with a lived experience in all aspects of research, practice, and policy. We recognise their contribution to further the understanding of various disciplines without which we would not have a thorough understanding of the application of our research and practice to the community.

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Executive Summary

Domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) is a public health issue that requires extensive, concerted, long-term, well-funded and evidenced-based interventions to reduce its impacts. In Australia, there are few models of care that provide holistic, trauma-informed and long-term support that aid the recovery and healing of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. Beyond DV is an organisation in Brisbane, Australia that focuses on supporting prevention and recovery and healing after domestic abuse. This project evaluated the holistic recovery framework of Beyond DV. In particular, we examined the effectiveness of the Beyond DV Recovery Pillars framework at improving women-survivors' social connection, legal support, health support, housing support and financial rebuilding as part of their recovery and healing journey after being abused. Through a triangulation of data from surveys and focus groups and interviews with victim-survivors and practitioners, we examined the experiences of those who had received services and those who provided them at Beyond DV. This evaluation found that the Pillars of Recovery in the Beyond DV framework are effective to support the intervention, recovery and healing of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence in all areas of their lives. The unique model of care is successful because it provides support in accordance with a survivor's needs and for as long as they require it. This is different to other models of care that are limited in the extent and duration of care they provide. It is recommended that the Beyond DV and the DFSV sector more broadly be supported through consistent, ongoing funding and the creation of a collaborative working framework to have the greatest impact on the community. With the positive impacts of the Beyond DV Recovery Pillars Framework on various aspects of survivors' lives, it is imperative that such a transformational framework be implemented widely to promote the long-term recovery and healing of victim-survivors everywhere.

Introduction

Domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) is one of the most common forms of gender-based violence that occurs globally (World Health Organization, 2021). There is extensive evidence about the adverse consequences of DFSV. The impact of DFSV on a victim-survivors life is multifaceted, with challenges experienced in domains of mental health, physical health, interpersonal relationships, financial status, housing, navigating criminal justice systems,

amongst other things (Campbell, 2002; Meyer, 2011; White et al., 2024). Most preventative and interpretive responses have also tended to focus on symptom reduction and distress alleviation. In doing so, the long-term recovery of victim-survivors has largely been under researched.

Recovery from DFSV is multidimensional and complex, encompassing various dimensions and pathways. The goals, processes and facilitators of recovery are likely to differ amongst individuals (Satyen & Sharda, 2024; Williams et al., 2024). We therefore require tailored, individualised and holistic recovery support.

We know through sector knowledge that the pathway to healing or recovery from DFSV includes immediate and practical support such as health, housing, advocacy and/or crisis counselling assistance. In the moderate and long- term, victim survivors require support to navigate the trauma of DFSV, which includes changed perceptions of self, difficulty in social connection, somatic concerns, hypervigilance, avoidance, depressive and anxious symptoms, amongst other things. Notably, housing, legal and financial needs are likely to be chronic and continuous. The recovery interventions should therefore be holistic, wrapped around and offer multiple points of entry for emerging needs.

About Beyond DV

In Australia, one such model is the Beyond DV Recovery Pillars framework. Beyond DV is a registered charity with the Australian Charity and Not-for-profits Commission and community focused organisation in Queensland, Australia that provides free psychosocial support to women, children and non-binary persons who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence. It operates as a one-stop-shop hub of three Recovery Centres and a Hope Hub in Brisbane, Queensland Australia. The Beyond DV model stands on five pillars including: social connection, legal support, health support, housing support and financial rebuilding as depicted in Figure 1 (<https://www.beyonddv.org.au/>). Under the pillar of social support, Beyond DV aims to foster peer support, remove social isolation, rebuild familial relationships and build confidence, resilience and hope. Legal support entails affordable, high quality legal representation and support from the police and ongoing legal advocacy. The pillar of health includes trauma-informed counselling, group therapy, wellbeing programs and access to women's health services including dental health. Housing support provides short-term housing options, support with tenancy, and proximity to wrap around services. Finally, financial rebuilding, as a pillar, consists

of financial counselling, debt minimization, financial literacy and financial independence. The programs that support each Pillar are listed in Table 1. Beyond DV also offers ongoing support to women through their initiatives such as regular meetups and online counselling groups. This long-term engagement is to accommodate any further emerging needs that victim-survivors may have even after they have completed programs. Other supports offered at Beyond DV include survivor advocacy, training programs and preventative programs such as a podcasts, teen relationship apps and information awareness campaigns. Finally, Beyond DV recognises that women are often the primary carers for children and their holistic recovery must therefore include children. Beyond DV's programs for children and young people have included social activities, individual and group therapy sessions, weekly homework clubs and a community play group.

The objectives of this study were to evaluate the effectiveness of the Beyond DV Recovery Pillars Framework on the mental, social, and overall wellbeing of adult victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. Specifically, we examined the nature of a multi-level intervention on the recovery and healing of victim-survivors of abuse.

Figure 1

Beyond DV Pillars of Recovery and Healing for Adult Victim-Survivors

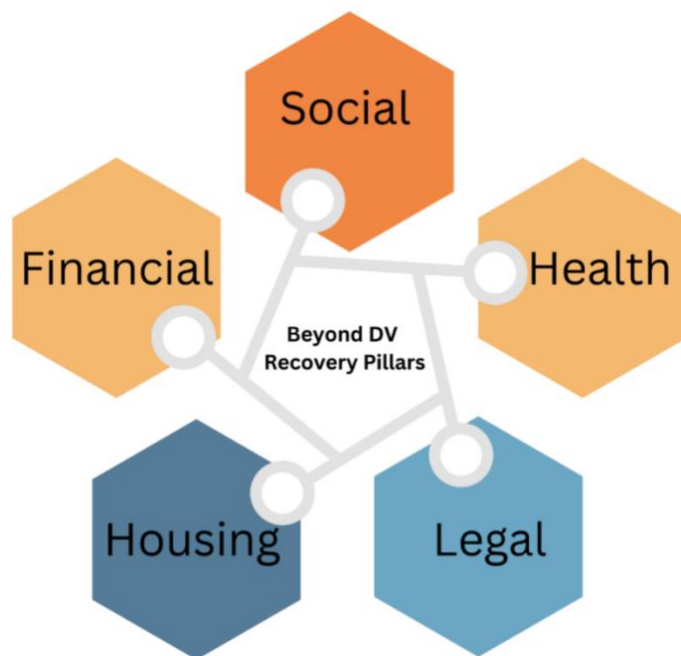


Table 1*Programs under the Beyond DV Recovery Pillars framework*

Social support	Health support	Legal support	Housing support	Financial rebuilding
Weekly Time Out peer support morning teas with guest speakers	Five free individual trauma-informed counselling sessions	Pro bono legal advice	Hannah's Sanctuary- transitional housing complex for women and their children that can be accessed for a maximum of 18 months	First Steps New Skills – eight-week program targeting job readiness and IT* skill development
Community Connect- online support group	Pathways to Wellbeing – four-week strengths-based group therapy	Question and answer session with legal practitioners	Short term accommodation	Reach into Retail- seven-week program training women who want to work in retail
Organised social activities – e.g., sewing, book club, art workshops, dance classes	Shark Cage framework- eight-week group therapy focusing on boundary setting	Visits by Queensland police	Advocacy and letters of support	Bridging the IT Gap- four-week foundational program for training in Microsoft Office
	Allied health support such as dental and women's health services	Advocacy and court support	Collaborations with external housing providers	Build your Own Business- Cert 4 small business and entrepreneurship
	Trauma-informed yoga	Partnerships with Legal Aid and Victim Assist	Visits from tenancy support services	Barista training- two-day training
	SOS self-defence classes			Pathways to Hope- additional wrap-around support

*IT- information technology

Method

Objective

The overall objective of this project was to evaluate the holistic recovery framework of Beyond DV. In particular, we examined the effectiveness of the program at improving victim-survivors' social connection, legal support, health support, housing support and financial rebuilding as part of their recovery and healing journey after domestic, family and sexual abuse. The specific aims were:

Aims

1. To understand the experience of victim-survivors who had participated in the recovery support programs at Beyond DV.
2. To examine the effectiveness of the recovery framework on victim-survivors' social connection, legal support, health support, housing support, psychological and emotional wellbeing, and financial rebuilding.
3. To examine the perspectives of practitioners and program developers at Beyond DV regarding their experiences of creating and delivering the support programs.
4. To assess which aspects of the Beyond DV support programs are particularly successful in promoting positive outcomes for victim-survivors.
5. To explore areas for program improvement by identifying barriers from victim-survivor and practitioner perspectives.

This program evaluation used a mixed-methods approach for data collection that included interviews, focus group discussions and an online survey. The project was conducted across three phases after obtaining ethics approval from the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee: (a) Phase 1: Online survey with victim-survivors; (b) Phase 2: Focus groups with victim-survivors, and (c) Phase 3: Interviews and focus groups with practitioners and program developers.

The phase 1 survey was completed by 74 women who had accessed or were still accessing services at Beyond DV. In phase 2, 19 victim-survivors participated in the in-person and online focus groups, while Phase 3 consisted of focus groups with six practitioners and program developers at Beyond DV.

Main Findings

Findings from phase 1: Online survey with victim-survivors

The majority of participants had been subjected to multiple types of violence (such as physical, sexual, psychological/ emotional, verbal and financial). In relation to participants' engagement and experience at Beyond DV, majority of them (58.11%) had been supported by the organisation for more than two years. 83.78% of the participants found the Hub model helpful and reported improvements in hopefulness (84.93%), mental and emotional wellbeing (78.38%), and peer support (78.08%). Gains in self-confidence (75.34%) and coping abilities (71.62%) were also widely endorsed. On the other hand, the financial domain revealed mixed outcomes with 60.81% reporting improved financial literacy, and 50.68% indicating that their financial situation had improved.

Findings from phase 2: Focus groups with victim-survivors

The findings presented in this section represent the themes generated from the interviews and focus groups with victim-survivors who have accessed the services of Beyond DV. The results are also illustrated in Figure 2.

1. Lack of initial knowledge about domestic, family and sexual violence

Participants' lack of awareness of their abusive experiences is reflected in this quote: *"I hadn't realised I was in a DV [domestic violence] relationship until after I had got out and I found an article and here [content of article] was my life sitting in front of a paper."*

2. Biopsychosocial-economic impact of domestic, family and sexual violence

The chronic, complex and multifaceted impact of DFSV was reflected upon by the participants. They highlighted the impacts of DFSV on their physical and emotional health, social connections and employment opportunities- with all of them being compromised.

"It [DFSV] was so hard. It was literally so hard to come back from that. I didn't want to live anymore....I know that sounds really harsh, but it was hard to deal with everyday life..... So, I barricaded myself in my home and I didn't come out. I didn't talk to anyone. I was isolated. I moved away to start a new life..... And I felt paranoid..."

3. Prior help-seeking experience

Participants recounted their history of help-seeking and engagement with formal services. These could be further delineated into accounts of successful interactions, unhelpful instances of support and their referral to Beyond DV.

“I still am very sceptical of a lot of services because nobody had helped me.... I couldn't ask people for help either because he had isolated me from old friends and, you know, like, even people that I thought [could help] that I went for help, but [they] couldn't help me. So, I just [felt], nobody wants to help you. Like as if I was a disease.”

4. Legal system and wellbeing

While describing their history of help-seeking, a majority of the women discussed the challenges they experienced in navigating the legal system; some also shared a few positive experiences, especially when children and the High Risk Teams were involved.

5. The program pillars that facilitated recovery and healing

a. Holistic and person-centred interventions

The women had accessed multiple services and programs at Beyond DV. These included housing, social support, legal referrals, goal-setting, counselling, self-esteem development, and financial empowerment programs. Specific services such as housing support, mental health counselling and legal counselling were perceived to be pivotal by many women, especially because Beyond DV was one of the only organisations where they could access this support. Describing the housing service as *“supportive and accommodating”*, some women shared that they *“feel safe staying there”* and *“if you ask for something they were there to help you”* illustrating the readiness of the Beyond DV staff to assist.

b. Inclusive care for children and young people

Participants discussed the reasons for seeking help and the wrap-around care for themselves and their children. *“Beyond DV doesn't just look at women. It looks at the whole unit”* and *“the Christmas party is absolutely beautiful, and just going there and having the kids having a good time...it's very important because they [otherwise] feel very isolated. They don't realise other people are in the same scenario, so I think to connect with that makes a huge difference.”*

c. Long-term, consistent support

Women shared that Beyond DV services and programs can be accessed by victim-survivors regardless of their phase of recovery and the support is not limited to crisis interventions. The women explained that the services have multiple entry points, and they provide holistic, ongoing

and long-term support. They clarified that the nature of recovery and healing is not linear and that there are emerging and ongoing needs. One participant remarked, *“I know we go through rolling circumstances...we're doing well one month and in the next month you're not doing well.”*

d. Caring attitude of practitioners

The importance of feeling safe and valued at Beyond DV services was emphasised by participants. They recounted that they felt seen, respected, and welcomed at Beyond DV. The majority of the victim-survivors reflected on their experiences of receiving personalised support and feeling cared for, even in group settings. They highlighted: *“You feel like an individual who matters. There are hundreds of women, but I feel like an individual”* and *“I said to [name of Beyond DV worker] that she believed in me, and she made me believe in myself.”*

6. What recovery looks like

a. Restoration of self-worth

Many women shared that their journey with Beyond DV played a pivotal role in rebuilding their sense of self-worth and confidence, which had been impacted by the harms they endured. They reiterated that, *“It has been absolutely transformational in terms of what they've [Beyond DV] done and the confidence that I've been given back. I'm eternally grateful and thankful. I don't know that I would still be here if it wasn't for the services that they provide.”*

b. Sense of community and belongingness

For many participants, the social connections formed through their involvement with Beyond DV were perceived to be integral to their recovery and healing journeys. These connections not only provided practical support such as that leading to employment, education, and social security, but also created a sense of community. Being surrounded by compassionate, understanding individuals fostered a sense of belonging, collective strength, and solidarity.

We are eternally grateful for where we are today for the help. It was like someone just listened to us and then it just escalated from there. It's like lifelong friends. I can see myself being friends with these ladies until we're old.

c. Financial and educational empowerment

Participants highlighted that the programs and interventions offered by Beyond DV played a significant role in enhancing their confidence in their abilities, which empowered them to pursue and secure employment opportunities. The supportive social networks formed through the program also facilitated professional connections and job prospects.

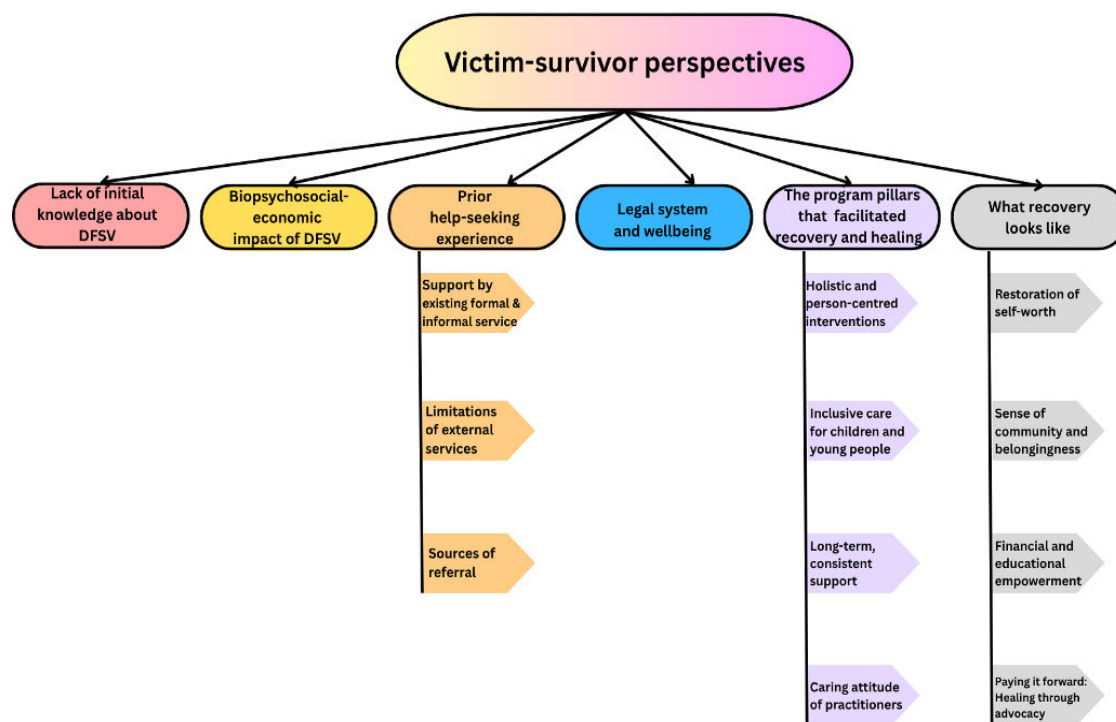
I was very uncomfortable with my English. I still struggle a lot to speak in public. I still giggle a little bit when I'm talking in professional settings. It's something that I have to deal with every time, but I feel like it has been a massive, massive impact that Beyond DV has had on my career. I owe what I have at the moment to Beyond DV. I couldn't do it without them.

d. Paying it forward: Healing through advocacy

Many women shared the importance of advocacy and supporting others as a meaningful aspect of their recovery and healing journeys. Most of them expressed a strong desire to use their experiences to help others facing similar challenges, often describing this process as both empowering and restorative.

I can pay it forward because I come away feeling empowered. And you know, that whole bucket full kind-of-analogy and worth, and that's something. I think that it is really hard to capture and understand without having dealt with [Beyond DV practitioner]...And it's really nice to be part of such a [group of] women who feel really driven to.. not just have been through what they've been through, but come out the other side and want to change.

Figure 2: Themes generated from the focus groups with victim-survivors



Findings from phase 2: Interviews/ focus groups with practitioners

The practitioners and service providers who participated in this project perform varied roles at Beyond DV. These include program development and management, strategy and communication, impact management, performance as ambassador and program coordination. The findings in this section represent the themes generated in the focus group discussions and interviews with them. The findings are also illustrated in Figure 3.

1. Impact on victim-survivor wellbeing

a. *Processing of trauma, self-esteem and confidence*

Practitioners observed that the women had become less vigilant, more relaxed, and more socially interactive after engaging with the Beyond DV support services. The program was also perceived to help women overcome intergenerational trauma. For example,

One of the reasons that I continue to be involved in any way I can is because it is so evident that the women really benefit. I mean, even in such a short period of time, from seeing someone from coming in on the first day to even by week three, it is extraordinary. Like the first thing I notice is that people are using eye contact more. They feel comfortable.

b. *Healing spaces and connection*

The Beyond DV programs are aimed at encouraging and building connection amongst the women and the practitioners emphasised that this sense of community had been integral to women's recovery journeys. For instance, *"one of the strengths of the Beyond DV model is that it's very focused on peer support and community driven."* The collective strength derived from the group and the social connections at Beyond DV carried women forward. Practitioners stated the importance of these social bonds with both themselves and other women in the program: *"We're focused on what happens from now, like I feel like they [victim-survivors] really believe and know that we are there walking alongside them, that we care about them, that the sisterhood and the wider community care about them."*

c. *Economic independence*

Practitioners indicated that the women-survivors had demonstrated the positive impacts of the employment-related support (such as Resume writing workshops) provided at Beyond DV. They explained: *“I heard a lady even bought her first house”*.

2. Conceptualisation and practice of holistic recovery and healing programs

The Beyond DV program principles and structures that the practitioners emphasised as key to success included the holistic orientation to recovery. They clarified that this orientation involved a wide array of programs (including the pillars), the continued and responsive model of care, and the provision of peer support. While describing recovery, the practitioners shared that:

I feel like recovery is lifelong. It's almost like, you know Jenga [the block-building game] where we have to know which blocks we can start to pull out away...it's almost like stepping back as opposed to adding more support - because the women actually really want to be independent. They want to move forward. They want to take their children, they want to help. And so, I guess for me, I find that sometimes it's like just trying to gauge how much we can kind of step back without everything falling.

A key part of the program was perceived to be the programs for children and young people, which increased women's motivation to keep engaging with the other programs. In line with this, some practitioners shared that holistic recovery involved family restructuring as a major component for many women. They reflected, *“I think they [victim-survivors] found a connection with each other and the kids have found a connection with each other as well.”*

3. Innovative and responsive practices

In contemplating factors that contributed to the success of the program, practitioners were of the view that the programs and practitioners' commitment to innovation, flexibility and intentional design were key factors. They surmised:

I think also the 5 pillars has allowed flexibility between what Beyond DV might be going for, so, again, understanding what the community that we support, want, and then seeing how that looks in terms of those pillars...But there's been a lot of innovation. I think that has been able to take place because of how the framework has been set up and it's

continuing to happen.. we're continuing to innovate. And we're able to do so because of that framework

4. Positive attitude and skills of practitioners

Common amongst the narratives shared by the practitioners was their passion towards helping women in their recovery journeys and a genuine compassion and care. Most of them reflected that:

I think that all the staff, the staff that are here, we all care...it's not about us, it's about the bottom line - the women and their journey, and how we support them in whatever way we can. I definitely believe that.. the staff care.

Practitioners also felt privileged to work in an area where they could support victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence, indicating: *“the women are...incredible and courageous and resilient, and all of those things; they don't actually need very much. A lot of them.”*

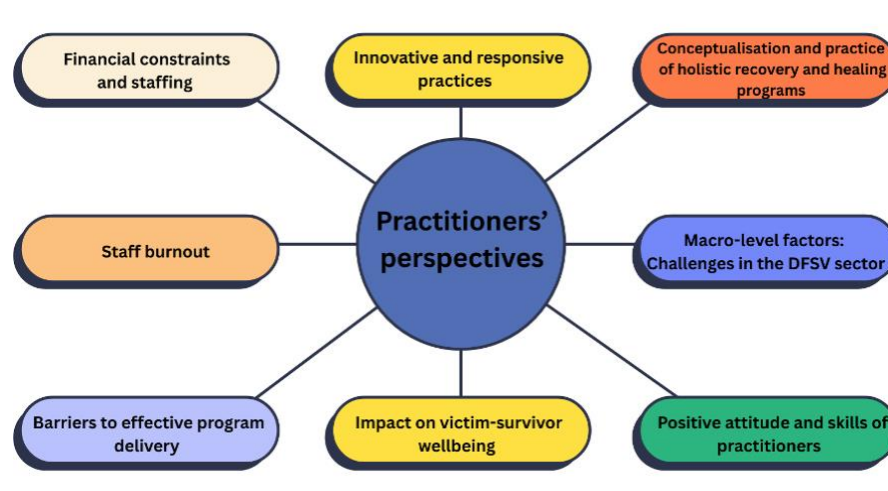
5. Macro-level factors: Challenges in the domestic, family and sexual violence sector

Practitioners explained that there were various factors that were beyond, Beyond DV at the macro-level that contributed to the functioning of the organisation. They reflected that most DFSV services were limited to offering crisis support, further enhancing the burden for long-term care and creating greater counselling demands.

The lack of services for children was identified as another systemic factor. They shared that, *“I feel like we do include the children more than anyone else, but I feel like everybody just assumes that children are little robots and they'll get on with it.”* Finally, the DFSV sector was perceived to be competitive, that was further exacerbated by the limited funding within the field: *“I feel like the [Beyond DV] Pillars could do so much more if they had wider support and really more people in the sector kind of joining together.”*

Figure 3

Themes generated from the focus group with practitioners at Beyond DV



Discussion and Conclusion

This evaluation has led to the examination of the efficacy of the Beyond DV Recovery Pillars framework. The findings demonstrate that the Pillars of Recovery in the Beyond DV framework are effective to support the intervention, recovery and healing of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. The unique model of care is successful because it provides support in accordance with a survivor's needs and for as long as they require it. This is different to other models of care that are limited in the extent and duration of care they provide. The extant literature did not reveal another program for women and children anywhere in Australia or the world that is as comprehensive and holistic as the Beyond DV framework of recovery-based support. There are some services and programs that offer multi-component support that include a combination of counselling, cognitive-behaviour therapy, nature-based therapy or physical exercise or housing support (for example, Kubany et al., 2003; Trabold et al., 2020; Warsaw et al., 2013); however, no single program offered the different pillars of support provided by Beyond DV.

The triangulated data from the survey responses, focus groups and interviews with victim-survivors and practitioners indicate that the Beyond DV Framework provides holistic support to aid ongoing recovery and healing for victim-survivors and their children who are subjected to

domestic, family and sexual violence. The key aspects that led to these positive impacts are the long-term, consistent support provided by Beyond DV, the “open-door” policy that allows any service user to engage with the services when and for as long as they need it, and the holistic, person-centred approach to care. The victim-survivors’ perceptions are corroborated by the practitioners within the organisation who also reiterated the flexible, survivor-driven approach of care that led to their observations of survivors’ transformation in their sense of self, their self-esteem, their sense of agency and empowerment.

The findings from this evaluation demonstrate that holistic, multi-level, trauma-informed, ongoing care is possible to be delivered by service providers within the DFSV sector, as demonstrated by the Beyond DV Recovery Pillars framework. To support the delivery of such services, organisations should receive adequate, long-term funding, with a focus on collaboration amongst them to achieve the best possible outcomes for the community. Adequate staff training and staff support should be provided to avoid job burnout and to enable practitioners to deliver trauma-informed care. With the crucial role staff play in supporting victim-survivors of abuse, organisations and government funding policies should create effective mechanisms that foster staff motivation, job satisfaction, safety, and job security.

There is an urgent need to upscale effective and holistic care to facilitate recovery and healing for all survivors of DFSV. With over 736 million women and girls over the age of 15 years being subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or family member (WHO, 2022) across the world, it is essential that service systems across the world implement evidence-based, trauma- and violence-informed, culturally-relevant frameworks to support their recovery and healing.

It is recommended that Beyond DV and the DFSV sector more broadly be supported through consistent, ongoing funding and the creation of a collaborative working framework to have the greatest impact on the community. With the positive impacts of the Beyond DV Recovery Pillars Framework on various aspects of survivors’ lives, it is imperative that such a transformational framework be implemented widely to promote the long-term recovery and healing of victim-survivors everywhere.