

SECOND ACTION PLAN

CONSULTATION SUBMISSION

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge that we live, work and deliver services, primarily on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong Peoples of the Kulin Nation.

We honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the First Peoples and acknowledge their ongoing connection to Country, Land, Language, Lore, Stories, sea, sky and waterways. We pay our respects to all First Nations Peoples, Ancestors as well as Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and families continue to be disproportionately affected by domestic and family violence due to the ongoing impacts of colonisation.

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

When people feel heard, valued, validated and understood, they can safely interact, engage and collaborate. We strive to provide safe, diverse, inclusive and accessible programs, services and experiences for all. We recognise we have a leadership role to play in championing diversity, equity and inclusion.

We support all victim-survivors of diverse abilities, ages, genders, bodies, sexualities, relationships, faiths, and cultures; committing to our vision of a community free from family violence, where everyone is safe.



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Note on language

This submission aligns with the terminology used in the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*. Unless otherwise specified, the term *violence* is used to refer collectively to domestic, family and sexual violence, including intimate partner violence. This reflects the overlap between these forms of violence in the experiences of many victim-survivors. Where discussion relates specifically to FVREE's services, practice and expertise, we use the term **domestic and family violence**, reflecting our role as a specialist domestic and family violence service while recognising that many victim-survivors also experience sexual violence.

Note on terminology

Specialist domestic and family violence services: services whose primary role is responding to domestic and family violence and providing support to victim-survivors.

Universal services: services accessed by the broader population, such as health, education and early childhood services.

Adjacent services: services that are not domestic and family violence-specific but regularly work alongside specialist services and may support people experiencing or using violence, including youth, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, homelessness, legal, sexual assault, family services, disability services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, LGBTIQ+, culturally and linguistically diverse, and multicultural services.

ABOUT FVREE

FVREE is a specialist domestic and family violence organisation delivering evidence-based prevention, early intervention, crisis response and recovery support. Our vision is for a community free from family violence, where everyone is safe.

Our deep expertise is grounded in intersectional feminist practice, guided by lived experience and informed by human rights frameworks for preventing and responding to violence. We recognise and uphold the rights of children and young people and acknowledge them as victim-survivors in their own right.

We work with all victim-survivors and have recognised capability in specialist responses for marginalised communities: LGBTIQA+, First Nations People, people with disability and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This approach ensures our work reflects an understanding of the diverse experiences of violence and systemic exclusion, and aligns with best practice in inclusive, trauma-informed responses.

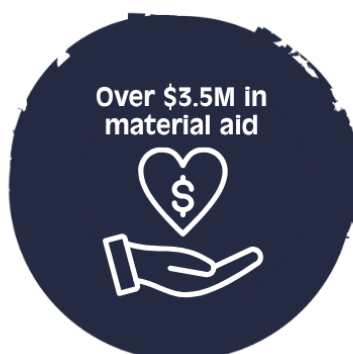
We employ approximately 180 staff, most of whom are specialist practitioners providing direct support to victim-survivors on Wurundjeri and Bunurong Country. Our services operate across the diverse local government areas of Boroondara, Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse and the Shire of Yarra Ranges in Eastern Metropolitan Naarm/Melbourne. These areas span multicultural inner city communities, established middle suburbs, outer urban areas with pockets of social disadvantage, and semi-rural communities with social isolation and limited local services.

FVREE is the specialist domestic and family violence service provider within The Orange Door support and safety hubs in the Melbourne Eastern Metropolitan Region. The Orange Door is Victoria's statewide integrated service model for people experiencing or using violence, or who need support with the care and wellbeing of children and young people. This was a landmark reform following recommendations from the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2016. This collaborative multi-agency model brings together specialist domestic and family violence services, child and family services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, services for people using violence, and statutory partners within a shared access, assessment and response framework to enable coordinated approaches that support the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors.

We have established and mature networks across adjacent sectors that support victim-survivors, including mental health, youth services, schools, homelessness, alcohol and other drugs, specialist services supporting marginalised cohorts, as well as strong working partnerships with Victoria Police and Child Protection.

We deliver prevention and early intervention initiatives to stop violence before it starts and educate the community to recognise and safely respond to disclosures of violence. We are the Australian partner for YSL Beauty's global campaign 'Abuse is not Love', with the goal of reaching 2 million young people worldwide by 2030 to recognise the signs of intimate partner violence.

Our Annual Impact



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia has made significant progress in recognising that ending violence against women and children requires action across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. Yet significant gaps remain. Many victim-survivors, children and young people still struggle to access support that reflects their needs and circumstances, while responses to people using violence remain insufficient to the scale and complexity of harm.

FVREE welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*. We support the Priority Areas outlined in the Consultation Paper and recognise that the next phase of reform will require integrated and coordinated action across the whole service system.

This submission draws on FVREE's experience as a specialist domestic and family violence service supporting more than 13,000 clients annually, alongside our work in prevention, early intervention, lived experience engagement and cross sector partnerships. It identifies two related challenges and opportunities.

First, violence is increasingly being identified and responded to in schools, health settings, housing, disability, youth, and other community services. These settings provide important opportunities for prevention, early intervention and support, but they often lack access to the specialist expertise needed to respond safely and effectively.

Universal and adjacent services are often where people first seek help, while specialist domestic and family violence services provide the expertise needed to ensure responses are safe, effective and grounded in victim-survivor safety. The opportunity is to connect these strengths so that specialist expertise supports earlier identification, safer responses, better coordination and improved outcomes across the whole service system.

Second, Australia must strengthen accountability and develop more effective responses to people using violence. These responses must be informed by the lived experience of victim-survivors, as well as the experiences of people who use violence. Through their sustained engagement with victim-survivors, specialist domestic and family violence services hold a unique and currently untapped source of intelligence about coercive control, risk profiles, systems abuse and patterns of perpetration. This intelligence can improve responses, reveal patterns of repeat perpetration and inform the development and evaluation of new approaches for accountability and behaviour change.

The opportunity for the Second Action Plan is to extend the reach and impact of specialist domestic and family violence expertise beyond direct service delivery, and to draw on the knowledge and risk intelligence generated through specialist practice to strengthen accountability, build the evidence base and shape more effective responses to people using violence.

The recommendations in this submission are not intended to represent the entirety of the reform agenda. There is much more that can and must be done across prevention, justice, housing, economic security, health, education, disability, child and family services, and broader social policy. FVREE's contribution is deliberately focused on areas where our practice expertise, partnerships and engagement with victim-survivors and lived experience perspectives can add value to the national conversation.

Drawing on these insights, FVREE recommends three priorities for the Second Action Plan. Together, these reforms can capitalise on specialist expertise, translate knowledge and intelligence into action, and deliver earlier, safer and more effective responses for victim-survivors, children and young people, families and communities.

1. Children and young people

Invest in dedicated responses that recognise children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right and provide earlier, developmentally appropriate support in the settings where they live, learn and seek support. Responses should be flexible, inclusive and capable of addressing the diverse experiences and needs of young people, including young people who are experiencing and using violence.

2. Addressing the source of harm

Draw on the expertise and risk intelligence of specialist domestic and family violence services to strengthen accountability and improve responses to people using violence. This includes using specialist intelligence to strengthen risk assessment and intervention planning, identify patterns of perpetration that may otherwise remain hidden, and inform the development and evaluation of a broader continuum of responses. Lived experience expertise must be embedded in the design, implementation and evaluation of future approaches.

3. Scaling evidence-informed innovation

Support the evaluation, refinement and scaling of promising approaches emerging from specialist domestic and family violence practice, including prevention and early intervention, workforce capability building, integrated responses and service system innovation. This includes extending the reach of specialist expertise through practice leadership, consultation, partnership and capability-building models.

Ultimately, ending violence requires more than individual programs or service responses. It requires a coordinated system in which victim-survivor voices shape reform, specialist domestic and family violence expertise strengthens responses across universal and adjacent services, and every part of government contributes to prevention, early intervention, accountability, recovery and healing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION #1

Invest in the development, implementation and evaluation of dedicated responses for children and young people affected by violence, including approaches that strengthen early intervention, build capability in trusted settings, and address the needs of young people who are both experiencing and using violence.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Draw on the expertise and risk intelligence of specialist domestic and family violence services, together with lived experience expertise, to strengthen accountability and inform the development, implementation and evaluation of more effective responses to people using violence.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Support the evaluation, refinement and scaling of promising approaches emerging from specialist domestic and family violence practice, enabling innovations that strengthen broader systems and improve outcomes for victim-survivors, children and young people.

SECTION 1 – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE: CREATING DEDICATED RESPONSES ACROSS THE SERVICE SYSTEM

RECOMMENDATION

Invest in the development, implementation and evaluation of dedicated responses for children and young people affected by violence, including approaches that strengthen early intervention, build capability in trusted settings, and address the needs of young people who are both experiencing and using violence.

ALIGNMENT WITH SECOND ACTION PLAN PRIORITIES

Priority Area 2 – Prevention and early intervention

- ✓ Strengthens prevention, early identification and intervention for children and young people impacted by violence.

Priority Area 3 – Children and young people in their own right

- ✓ Improves recognition, safety and recovery and direct access to support

Priority Area 4 – People who use violence

- ✓ Supports development of evidence-informed responses for young people who are experiencing and using violence

Priority Area 5 – System integration and workforce

- ✓ Builds workforce capability and strengthens coordination across services supporting children and young people.

INSIGHTS FROM SEEN SAFE SUPPORTED

CURRENT SYSTEMS ARE NOT DESIGNED AROUND HOW YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE, SEEK HELP OR ENGAGE WITH SUPPORT

The Second Action Plan consultation paper highlights the need for responses that better address the experiences and needs of children and young people affected by violence. FVREE's *Seen Safe Supported* project explored the experiences of young people aged 12-25 impacted by violence and confirmed many of the gaps and barriers identified in the consultation paper and evidence base.

Drawing on the perspectives of young people with lived experience, specialist domestic and family violence practitioners and stakeholders across education, youth, mental health, housing, legal and community services, a consistent message emerged: young people feel invisible within existing responses and excluded from decisions affecting their safety and wellbeing.

Many also struggled to recognise their experiences as violence or know where to turn for support.

“No one asked me. I had no help. They accessed me through my mum.”

Young person

Trust emerged as a critical factor in help-seeking, with young people describing how previous experiences of being dismissed, excluded or not believed often reinforced reluctance to seek support.

“Everyone knew what was going on, but no one reported it. The people, the systems, let me down. Adults around me let me down.”

Young person

The project also highlighted a misalignment between existing service models and the way young people engage. Current responses frequently prioritise short term intervention, throughput and crisis management, while young people consistently described needing trusted relationships, flexibility, continuity and time.

“Young people don't fit in the current adult system, we keep trying to make them fit and wonder why it's not working.”

Practitioner

Importantly, *Seen Safe Supported* consultations found that the challenge extends beyond the specialist domestic and family violence system. Young people are far more likely to seek help through trusted adults and settings already present in their lives, including schools, youth services, mental health services, sporting clubs, housing services and community organisations, than they are to present directly to specialist domestic and family violence services. At the same time, universal and adjacent services increasingly find themselves responding to the impacts of violence without access to the specialist expertise, or the consultation and referral pathways required to respond safely and effectively.

YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING AND USING VIOLENCE ARE POORLY RECOGNISED AND SERVICES ARE STRUGGLING TO MEET THEIR NEEDS

There is a significant gap in current responses for young people who are experiencing and also using violence. Responses principally focus on victimisation and accountability separately, with few approaches capable of addressing safety, accountability, recovery and healing at the same time. This can leave young people's experiences of harm unrecognised, create barriers to support, and reduce opportunities for early intervention, behaviour change and healing.

A key barrier to integrated responses for young people who are both experiencing and using violence is the gap in established practice frameworks that support practitioners to respond to young people's experiences of violence whilst also holding young people accountable for their use of violence. Integrated responses that provide holistic support are crucial to ensuring that young people don't fall through the cracks or get directed to perpetrator programs that fail to address their victimisation.

“Services refuse to engage with young people who are deemed as violent, even if they are also victims.”

Stakeholder

FVREE has commenced development of a practice framework to support practitioners responding to young people who are experiencing and using violence. Drawing on specialist expertise, lived experience and emerging evidence, the framework will equip practitioners to recognise both victimisation and accountability and respond in ways that promote safety, recovery, behaviour change and healing. Developed to address this identified gap, we anticipate the framework will have applicability beyond specialist domestic and family violence services and contribute to practice development across the service system and jurisdictions.

Practice example: Holding both victimisation and accountability lenses

FVREE works directly with young people who are experiencing violence, and who are now starting to use violence in intimate partner relationships, at home or in the community.

Practitioners start from a place of curiosity and trust building. They listen deeply to understand the young person's experience, safety needs and lived reality. This enables practitioners to foster healing and understanding of the young person's own experiences of violence and support needs, while also exploring accountability for the harm they are causing to others.

From this space, practitioners can work with young people to understand what is driving their violence and learnt behaviours, build emotional regulation skills and identify any additional supports they may need to address the harm they are causing. Alongside this, we work with young people to strengthen their self-belief and hope so that a different future identity can form.

PRINCIPLES FOR REFORM

1. Recognise young people as victim-survivors in their own right

Young people need direct access to support that recognises their distinct experiences, rights, safety needs and recovery journeys. They should be actively engaged in decisions affecting their lives rather than being supported solely through adult family members. As well as acknowledging young people in policy, this requires new service models, practice frameworks and investments that enable direct, age appropriate support.

2. Bring specialist domestic and family violence expertise to trusted settings

Young people rarely seek help through specialist services as a first point of contact. Instead, they disclose to trusted adults and seek support in schools, youth services, health services, housing providers, sporting clubs and community organisations.

Effective responses must build on these trusted relationships and bring specialist expertise to the places and spaces where young people already are. This requires more than referral pathways. It requires development of workforce capability, secondary consultation, outreach and co-location, as well as integrated responses and specialist support that strengthens the confidence and capacity of universal and adjacent services to identify and respond to violence safely and effectively.

3. Provide integrated, relationship based and healing focused support

Safety and trust are built over time. Young people need flexible engagement options, continuity of support and responses that recognise and reflect their developmental stage, identity, relationships and individual circumstances. Services must prioritise relational practice, integrated and practical wrap around support and healing focused responses, rather than requiring young people to navigate fragmented and linear adult systems.

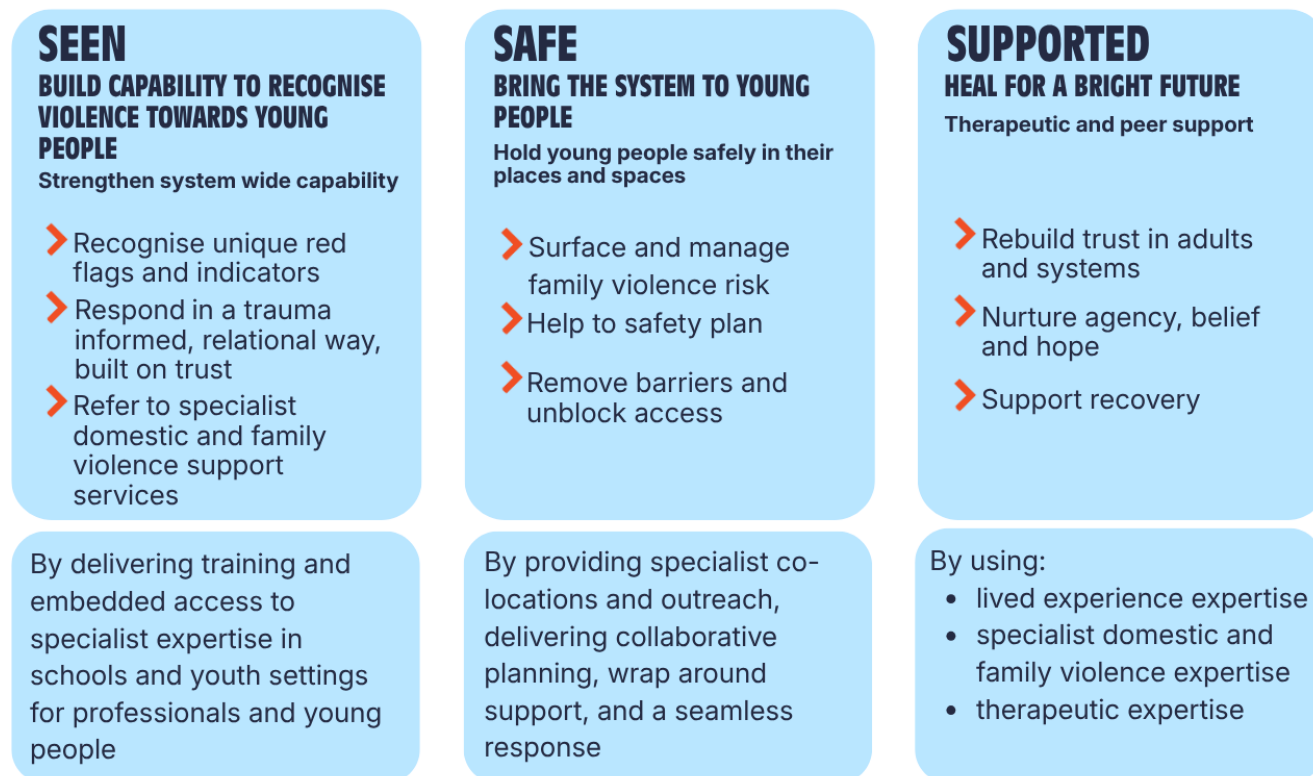
Effective responses must also be capable of supporting young people who are experiencing violence and also using violence. These young people require approaches that can hold safety, accountability, recovery and healing together, rather than treating them in isolation.

KEY INSIGHT:

Young people are best supported through dedicated responses that recognise them as victim-survivors in their own right, are built on trusted relationships, and bring specialist domestic and family violence expertise into the places they already seek help.

SEEN SAFE SUPPORTED: A SERVICE BLUEPRINT

A NEW WAY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE



SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE IN COLLABORATION WITH UNIVERSAL AND ADJACENT SERVICES

Health services, schools, Child Protection, Victoria Police, youth, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, homelessness, legal, youth justice, sexual assault, family services, disability, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, LGBTIQ+, culturally and linguistically diverse, and multicultural services.

FVREE's *Seen Safe Supported* service blueprint demonstrates how these principles can be translated into practice. Developed through co-design with young people and informed by specialist domestic and family violence expertise, the model focuses on three interconnected pillars:

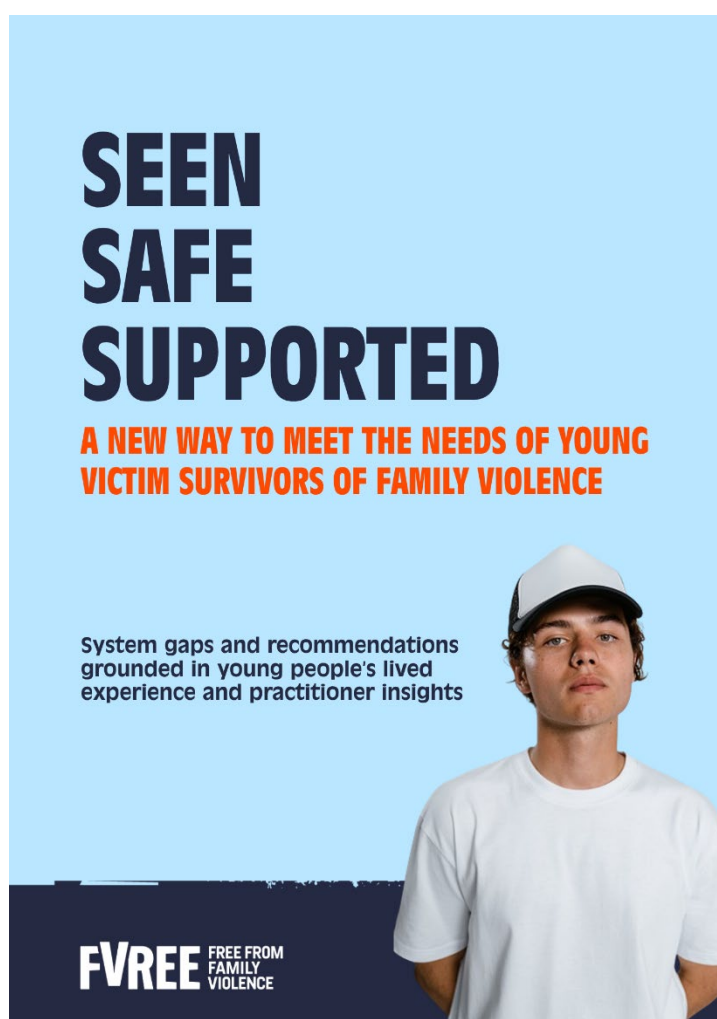
- The **Seen** pillar strengthens system wide capability to recognise violence affecting young people and understanding of the unique ways violence presents in young people's lives, while also building young people's knowledge of violence, healthy relationships and pathways to support. This helps young people recognise violence earlier and know how to access support.
- The **Safe** pillar improves access to support by connecting young people with specialist domestic and family violence expertise through trusted settings they already engage with. It strengthens identification, safety and coordinated responses while reducing barriers to help-seeking.
- The **Supported** pillar responds to the longer term impacts of violence through recovery and healing focused support, including support delivered by a peer workforce, that strengthens wellbeing, connection, relationships and future opportunities beyond violence.

This blueprint seeks not only to improve outcomes for individual young people but also strengthen the capability of broader service systems to recognise and respond to violence affecting young people. It demonstrates how specialist domestic and family violence expertise can be leveraged to strengthen universal and adjacent service systems while maintaining direct support for young people experiencing violence.

The blueprint and well-established partnerships with headspace providers, the Victorian Department of Education and schools across Melbourne's Eastern Region provide a strong foundation to pilot and evaluate this approach.

Further, interest from headspace National in the training and capability building developed through *Seen* shows the appetite to scale and embed this approach within existing service infrastructure.

Seen Safe Supported presents a promising opportunity to pilot, evaluate and build evidence for approaches that embed specialist domestic and family violence expertise within trusted settings, with potential for broader implementation across the service system.



Further information

This submission draws on findings from FVREE's *Seen Safe Supported* consultation project, which explored the experiences of young people impacted by violence and opportunities for service system reform. The full report is available at: ffree.org.au/seen-safe-supported/

SECTION 2 – ADDRESSING THE SOURCE OF HARM: ENDING VIOLENCE REQUIRES ACCOUNTABILITY AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

RECOMMENDATION

Draw on the expertise and risk intelligence of specialist domestic and family violence services, together with lived experience expertise, to strengthen accountability and inform the development, implementation and evaluation of more effective responses to people using violence.

ALIGNMENT WITH SECOND ACTION PLAN PRIORITIES

Priority Area 1 – Victim-survivors of violence against women and children and other forms of gender-based violence

- ✓ Improves victim-survivor safety
- ✓ Strengthens identification and response to escalating risk

Priority Area 4 – People who use violence

- ✓ Improves responses to people using violence through specialist expertise and risk intelligence

Priority Area 5 – System integration and workforce

- ✓ Strengthens the evidence base for responding to people using violence
- ✓ Embeds lived experience expertise in future reform

THE NEXT PHASE OF REFORM MUST FOCUS ON PEOPLE USING VIOLENCE

Many victim-survivors continue to experience repeated violence despite police involvement, court processes, intervention orders and other efforts to hold people using violence to account. If Australia is serious about ending violence, reform must focus on strengthening accountability and on responding more effectively to people using violence.

Over the longer term, this will require a broader range of evidence-informed interventions and more integrated responses across systems. There are also immediate opportunities to strengthen accountability by drawing on the expertise and risk intelligence already held by specialist domestic and family violence services.

Specialist domestic and family violence services engage with tens of thousands of victim-survivors each year and hold unique intelligence about patterns of coercive control, repeat victimisation, systems abuse and escalating harm. Through sustained engagement with victim-survivors, these services develop a detailed understanding of how violence is perpetrated, experienced and presents over time.

Many forms of violence never come to the attention of police, courts or statutory systems. Victim-survivors may disclose threats, stalking, technology-facilitated abuse, financial abuse and escalating safety concerns only to the services supporting them. This intelligence provides critical insights into patterns of perpetration and risk that are often not visible through individual incidents or isolated service interactions.

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH SPECIALIST RISK INTELLIGENCE

The intelligence held by specialist domestic and family violence services creates significant opportunities to strengthen accountability and improve responses to people using violence. Information gathered through sustained engagement with victim-survivors provides rich insights that can support more informed risk assessment, intervention planning, safety planning and accountability responses.

FVREE's experience demonstrates how intelligence gathered through victim-survivor service delivery can be used for this purpose. One example is the use of linked profiles within our client management system. Linked profiles surface cases where people using violence are connected to multiple victim-survivor records, enabling practitioners to identify repeat perpetration that may otherwise remain hidden and patterns of harm spanning multiple relationships, households and service systems.

By connecting information across multiple service interactions, linked profiles enable a richer understanding of patterns of violence, victim-survivor experiences and opportunities for intervention, including the potential to identify repeat and prolific offenders earlier and inform more targeted responses involving justice, specialist perpetrator interventions and other services.

Practice example: One perpetrator, seven adult victim-survivors, seventeen children

Through linked person using violence profiles in FVREE's client database, we identified an individual whose violence impacted seven adults and seventeen children. Four of the adult victim-survivors were actively receiving services from FVREE at the same time.

The linked profiles revealed a significant pattern of repeat perpetration. Bringing this information together provided a more complete understanding of the individual's behaviour, strengthened risk assessment and safety planning for victim-survivors, and supported a more coordinated accountability response.

USING SPECIALIST INTELLIGENCE TO BUILD BETTER RESPONSES

Beyond strengthening accountability in individual cases, specialist domestic and family violence services and services working with people using violence hold valuable intelligence that can help Australia develop more effective responses to perpetration.

Specialist family violence services work with tens of thousands of victim-survivors each year and hold deep knowledge of patterns of coercive control, risk indicators, tactics of abuse and pathways of escalating harm. Similarly, services supporting people using violence develop important insights into accountability, help-seeking and behaviour change.

A partnership approach: Building the evidence base through collective intelligence

Recognising the value of this collective knowledge, FVREE, No to Violence and Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand are exploring opportunities to draw on our respective intelligence sources to better understand perpetration patterns and inform future responses. Driven by a shared goal of improving the safety of women and children, this collaborative research project aims to strengthen understanding of how violence is used, sustained and interrupted, and to inform the development of more effective interventions.

KEY INSIGHT:

Specialist domestic and family violence services are not only responding to the impacts of violence, they also hold unique intelligence that can identify repeat and prolific offenders, strengthen accountability and help prevent future harm.

CURRENT RESPONSES ARE NOT REACHING ENOUGH PEOPLE

Ending violence requires responses that reduce future perpetration. However, current responses do not match the scale and complexity of harm.

No to Violence has estimated that less than 3% of Australia's estimated 2.5 million men using violence receive any form of behaviour change intervention, and less than 1% of domestic and family violence research focuses on perpetration. These gaps limit Australia's ability to reduce future violence and improve long term safety.

Government investment has expanded specialist perpetrator interventions, but access remains limited relative to need and important evidence gaps remain. While men's behaviour change programs play an important role, they cannot meet the full range of needs presented by people using violence, nor the scale of the challenge.

Strengthening the evidence base is critical to understanding which interventions are most effective in achieving sustained behaviour change, reducing repeat perpetration and improving long term safety for victim-survivors.

A BROADER RANGE OF RESPONSES IS NEEDED

Future reform must support the development, implementation and evaluation of a broader suite of evidence-informed responses, including earlier intervention options that engage people using violence before harm escalates. This requires a continuum of interventions that can respond to different levels of risk and need, rather than relying on a small number of intensive responses.

Many people using violence experience complex and intersecting issues. For example, a person may be engaged in a men's behaviour change program while also experiencing problematic alcohol and other drug use, gambling harm, untreated mental ill-health, housing instability or social isolation. These factors do not cause or excuse the use of violence but can influence the frequency, severity or persistence of harm and affect a person's capacity to engage in intervention.

Further, it is important to recognise that violence is a systemic issue that requires a coordinated, whole-of-system response, with all parts of government and the service system contributing to prevention, early intervention, accountability and behaviour change. Stronger collaboration across specialist domestic and family violence, alcohol and other drugs, mental health, housing, gambling, justice and community services is also needed to ensure responses are holistic, well-coordinated and attuned to victim-survivor safety.

There can sometimes be concern that responding holistically to the broader needs of people using violence may dilute accountability or risk collusion with the person using violence. However, addressing factors that affect a person's capacity to engage in behaviour change is not inconsistent with maintaining accountability and prioritising victim-survivor safety. In many cases, it may strengthen opportunities for sustained behaviour change and reduce the likelihood of future harm.

“Providing holistic, wrap around services for people using violence is not collusion.”

FVFREE family violence practitioner

LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERTISE MUST SHAPE FUTURE REFORM

As governments invest in new approaches to engaging people using violence, lived experience expertise must be central to their design, implementation and evaluation.

The expertise required to strengthen accountability and develop more effective responses to people using violence is not held solely within research, policy, justice and service systems. It is also held by victim-survivors, people with lived experience of using violence and behaviour change, and the specialist domestic and family violence workforce.

Victim-survivors bring critical insights into safety, accountability and what meaningful change looks like in practice. Their expertise can help ensure that responses remain firmly grounded in their lived realities and maintain a clear focus on safety.

People with lived experience of using violence and engaging in behaviour change processes can also provide valuable perspectives on service engagement, barriers to change and the factors that support accountability and sustained behaviour change.

The specialist domestic and family violence workforce is also an important source of this expertise. Many practitioners draw on lived or living experience of family violence alongside their professional knowledge and qualifications, bringing a deep understanding of victim-survivor safety, coercive control, recovery and system responses. This represents a significant capability that should be recognised and drawn upon in future reform efforts.

While these lived experiences are distinct, each has an integral role in shaping more effective responses.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND SYSTEM REFORM

The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity to shift from a response that primarily reacts to violence after it occurs to one that more effectively identifies, responds to and prevents future harm. This will require policies that recognise:

- **Specialist domestic and family violence services must play a central role in strengthening accountability and informing responses to people using violence.** Through sustained engagement with victim-survivors, specialist services hold unique expertise and risk intelligence that can strengthen risk assessment, identify patterns of perpetration, improve safety planning and inform more effective responses to people using violence
- **Australia needs a broader and better evidenced continuum of responses for people using violence.** Current responses reach only a small proportion of those using violence and do not reflect the scale or complexity of the challenge. Greater investment is needed in the development, implementation and evaluation of evidence-informed responses, including earlier intervention, integrated support models and approaches tailored to different cohorts and varying levels of risk.
- **Future responses to people using violence must be informed by specialist domestic and family violence expertise, risk intelligence and lived experience expertise.** These perspectives are critical to designing, implementing and evaluating approaches that strengthen accountability, support sustained behaviour change and improve victim-survivor safety.

Together, these reforms would strengthen accountability, expand opportunities for sustained changes in behaviour, and support a more effective long term response to reducing violence.

SECTION 3 – BUILDING ON WHAT WORKS: SCALING EVIDENCE-INFORMED APPROACHES ACROSS THE SERVICE SYSTEM

RECOMMENDATION

Support the evaluation, refinement and scaling of promising approaches emerging from specialist domestic and family violence practice, enabling innovations that strengthen broader systems and improve outcomes for victim-survivors, children and young people.

ALIGNMENT WITH SECOND ACTION PLAN PRIORITIES

Priority Area 1 – Victim-survivors of violence against women and children and other forms of gender-based violence

- ✓ Improves access to support, safety, wellbeing and recovery

Priority Area 2 – Prevention and early intervention

- ✓ Strengthens prevention and early intervention capacity in universal settings

Priority Area 3 – Children and young people in their own right

- ✓ Supports earlier intervention, safety, recovery and wellbeing for children and young people.

Priority Area 5 – System integration and workforce

- ✓ Strengthens workforce capability, service integration and the scaling of evidence-informed approaches.

FROM INNOVATION TO SYSTEM WIDE IMPACT

The domestic and family violence sector has a long history of identifying emerging challenges, responding to system gaps and developing innovative practice responses. Many of the approaches that now form part of the service system originated within specialist services and have been strengthened through partnerships with government, researchers, communities and adjacent service systems.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to refine, scale and evaluate promising approaches emerging from specialist practice. Supporting innovations developed on the ground to build an evidence base and achieve broader system reform would accelerate improvement across the service system and extend the benefits to more victim-survivors, children and young people.

This includes investing in partnership models that combine specialist domestic and family violence expertise with the reach, infrastructure and influence of adjacent and universal systems, enabling effective approaches to be adapted, embedded and sustained at scale.

The examples below illustrate three approaches that are already demonstrating positive outcomes. While each respond to a different challenge, together they demonstrate how specialist expertise can be used to strengthen broader systems through capability building, service integration and prevention and early intervention capacity. They also highlight the value of collaboration and partnerships across sectors in extending the reach and impact of evidence-informed practice, creating benefits that extend well beyond individual programs and organisations.

EXAMPLE 1: STRENGTHENING SERVICE SYSTEMS THROUGH SPECIALIST PRACTICE LEADERSHIP

WHAT IS IT?

A specialist practice leadership model that embeds domestic and family violence expertise, cohort specific knowledge and lived experience perspectives across the domestic and family violence and adjacent services systems. At FVREE, this includes practice leadership focused on disability inclusion, LGBTIQ+ communities, and children and young people.

Rather than creating separate specialist services, the model builds capability within existing organisations and across service systems, helping to reduce barriers and ensure diverse and marginalised communities can access safe, inclusive and effective responses.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Practice Leads provide workforce development, secondary consultation and service improvement, and facilitate sector connections and partnerships. Drawing on specialist domestic and family violence expertise, cohort specific knowledge and lived experience perspectives, they strengthen responses to priority cohorts including diverse and marginalised communities. They contribute to communities of practice, deliver specialist training across domestic and family violence and adjacent sectors, support organisations to strengthen inclusive policies and processes, and provide expert input to research, policy and service development activities.

Through secondary consultation and capability building activities, Practice Leads provide specialist advice and support to practitioners and services, strengthening risk assessment, safety planning, accessibility, referral pathways and coordinated responses. It builds capability at three levels:

- **Practitioner capability** by strengthening knowledge, confidence and skills to work effectively with diverse communities.
- **Organisational capability** by embedding inclusive practice, improving service design and supporting organisational change.
- **System capability** by strengthening partnerships, improving referral pathways, supporting coordinated responses, contributing to sector learning and influencing practice across settings.

By building practitioner, organisational and system capability simultaneously, the model helps ensure specialist expertise influences practice well beyond a single role, program or organisation.

The Federal government has already invested in this approach through the Family Violence and Disability Practice Leader Initiative, a regional capability building role designed to strengthen disability inclusion across the services system and reduce barriers to access for victim-survivors with disability. This investment provides a foundation for extending similar capability building approaches to other communities who face barriers, including children and young people, LGBTIQ+ communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

BENEFITS OF THIS APPROACH

- Strengthens workforce confidence and capability.
- Improves accessibility, inclusion and responsiveness for priority cohorts.
- Builds organisational and system capability, not just individual practitioner capability.
- Strengthens collaboration, referral pathways and coordinated responses across systems.
- Delivers broad and sustainable system benefits from relatively modest investment.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED TO DATE

Across disability inclusion, LGBTIQ+ communities, and children and young people, FVREE Practice Leads have strengthened practitioner capability, improved accessibility and inclusion, supported workforce development, and contributed to more tailored and responsive violence services.



Capability building in action: Eastern Melbourne Disability Inclusion and Safety Forums

Delivered through a cross-sector partnership auspiced by FVREE and co-designed with lived experience experts, the forums bring together domestic and family violence, disability, health, housing, justice, child and family services, local government and community organisations to strengthen responses for people with disability who are experiencing violence.

- 11 forums delivered between January 2024 and June 2026.
- 983 participants from across Victoria.
- 99% of participants reported increased confidence to respond appropriately to people with disability experiencing violence.

Practice example: From capability to practice change

A hospital social worker participated in a Disability Inclusion and Safety Forum focused on the intersection of migrant and refugee community experiences of violence and disability. The social worker subsequently sought a secondary consultation from the Disability Practice Lead about a patient who was non-verbal and from a migrant background.

Insights the social worker gained from the forum about gaps and barriers to access had prompted flags about possible violence that had not been identified by the hospital. The patient's husband was the communication intermediary and decision maker for her healthcare, yet the social worker had noticed a look of alarm in the patient's eyes during discharge planning conversations.

In liaison with the Disability Practice Lead, the hospital implemented independent communication aids and facilitated engagement with the patient without her husband. This led to the identification of significant violence including abuse, isolation, and control of access to supports through her NDIS plan. The patient was referred for specialist domestic and family violence case management with FVREE, and comprehensive risk assessment and safety planning was undertaken. A multi-service care team was established to coordinate a safe transition from hospital to supported accommodation and ensure ongoing support and strategies to meet safety needs.

EXAMPLE 2: INTEGRATING SAFETY AND RECOVERY THROUGH FREE TO GROW

WHAT IS IT?

Free to Grow is an integrated service model piloted by FVREE and recently expanded in partnership with the Australian Childhood Foundation. The model is focused on supporting children and young people and their protective parent or caregiver by concurrently delivering domestic and family violence case management and therapeutic support for each family member.

The model was developed in response to a recognised gap in the service system, where families experiencing violence often face delays in accessing therapeutic support while violence risks are being actively managed.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The model brings together domestic and family violence practitioners and therapists to deliver coordinated support through collaborative care planning, shared risk assessment, real-time information sharing and joint responses.

Rather than requiring families to wait until risks have stabilised before accessing therapeutic support, *Free to Grow* enables safety planning, risk management and therapeutic intervention to occur concurrently.

BENEFITS OF THIS APPROACH

- Supports safety, recovery and healing for children, young people and their protective parent or caregiver.
- Supports healing and repair of parent-child relationships impacted by violence.
- Improves continuity of support and engagement with therapeutic services.
- Reduces service fragmentation through more coordinated responses.
- Builds on existing partnerships and infrastructure rather than creating new service systems.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED TO DATE

Early pilot findings suggest *Free to Grow* is improving access to and engagement with therapeutic support while demonstrating the value of addressing safety and recovery concurrently, rather than through separate service responses.

Preliminary data indicates engagement with therapeutic support increased from approximately 40 per cent when offered post case management to near 100 per cent when therapy is delivered concurrently. Practitioners have also reported stronger collaboration, more coordinated responses and improved continuity of support for families experiencing violence.

Importantly, these outcomes are being achieved through a relatively short term intervention, typically delivered over sixteen weeks, demonstrating the potential for meaningful impact within a time limited service model.

Practitioners have described the approach as a "gamechanger", highlighting that families do not experience safety, recovery and healing as separate or linear needs. They also report noticeable improvements in outcomes for children and young people.

An evaluation is currently underway to further test and verify outcomes for children and families involved in the pilot. This will strengthen the evidence base for integrated approaches to response and recovery to inform future policy.

Practice example: Concurrent support for safety and recovery

FVREE supported a mother and her two teenage children to manage current violence risk from the biological father. The mother had left the father, but years of gaslighting and undermining of her parenting was continuing to negatively impact family dynamics, and the children still had periodic contact with him. The son was experiencing aggressive outbursts towards his mother, and the daughter routinely blamed mum for her father's situation. Both children were struggling to engage at school.

Through providing therapeutic support alongside case management, practitioners gradually built trust with the children who initially did not want to engage. The mother and children were supported with strategies to help manage heightened emotions and de-escalate conflict. This support helped strengthen and repair relationships between the mother and children and deepen their insight about violence.

By the end of the program, the teenage children had developed a stronger understanding of what violence is, and what behaviour is not acceptable. They set clearer, healthier boundaries that enabled safer ongoing relationships with their father. The son was regularly taking himself into another room away from mum and his sister when agitated, showing meaningful progress in regulating and managing aggressive behaviour. All three family members reported stronger relationships with one another, and both children were engaging more consistently at school.

"I understand emotions, my dad, and all our relationships more now. I understand what dad is doing is not normal – it is family violence."

Child, aged 13

EXAMPLE 3: SCALING PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION THROUGH EDUCATION SETTINGS

WHAT IS IT?

A prevention and early intervention approach that provides age appropriate education and support across childhood and adolescence while building the capability of educators and other trusted adults to recognise, prevent and respond to violence.

At FVREE, this begins in early childhood by providing gender equity resources, professional development for early years educators and play-based workshops for children and families. It is strengthened in primary and secondary school through initiatives that build children and young people's knowledge, skills and agency, and is reinforced through workforce development that strengthens educators' capacity to recognise and respond to disclosures of violence.

The approach recognises that prevention must start early, be reinforced across developmental stages, and be supported by adults who have the confidence and capability to respond to difficult conversations, disclosures, emerging concerns and indicators of harm.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Education settings provide one of the few universal platforms capable of reaching children and young people at scale. The approach delivers age appropriate learning across different stages of childhood and adolescence, building knowledge, skills and protective factors over time.

Children and young people are supported to develop an understanding of concepts such as gender equality, body safety, respectful relationships, healthy masculinities, consent, online safety and bystander action, with content becoming more sophisticated and responsive to developmental stages and emerging risks. As young people mature, we create increasing opportunities for youth voice, leadership and agency, recognising that meaningful participation strengthens engagement, reinforces learning and supports longer term behaviour and attitudinal change.

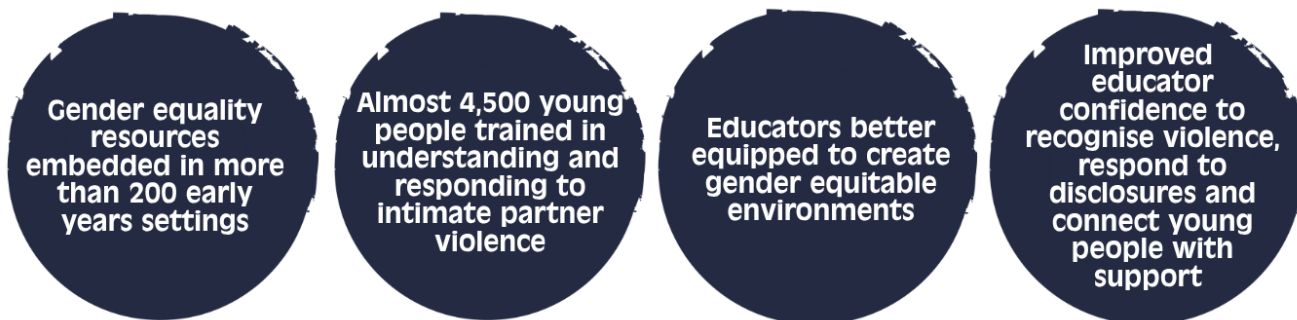
Alongside this, workforce capability building supports educators and other trusted adults to create gender equitable learning environments, facilitate age appropriate conversations about respectful relationships and violence, respond appropriately to disclosures, and connect children and young people with appropriate support.

The approach provides a platform to respond proactively to emerging forms of harm, including technology-facilitated abuse, image based abuse and the growing prevalence of sexual violence in young people's relationships.

BENEFITS OF THIS APPROACH

- Starts prevention earlier and reinforces learning across key developmental stages.
- Combines prevention, early identification and early intervention within a single approach.
- Builds the capability of educators and other trusted adults alongside direct engagement with children and young people.
- Creates opportunities for earlier help-seeking, disclosure and support.
- Provides a scalable platform for responding to emerging issues such as technology-facilitated abuse and sexual violence in young people's intimate relationships.
- Strengthens prevention and early intervention capacity within universal settings where children and young people can be reached at scale.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED TO DATE



Practice example: Building capability to prevent and respond to violence

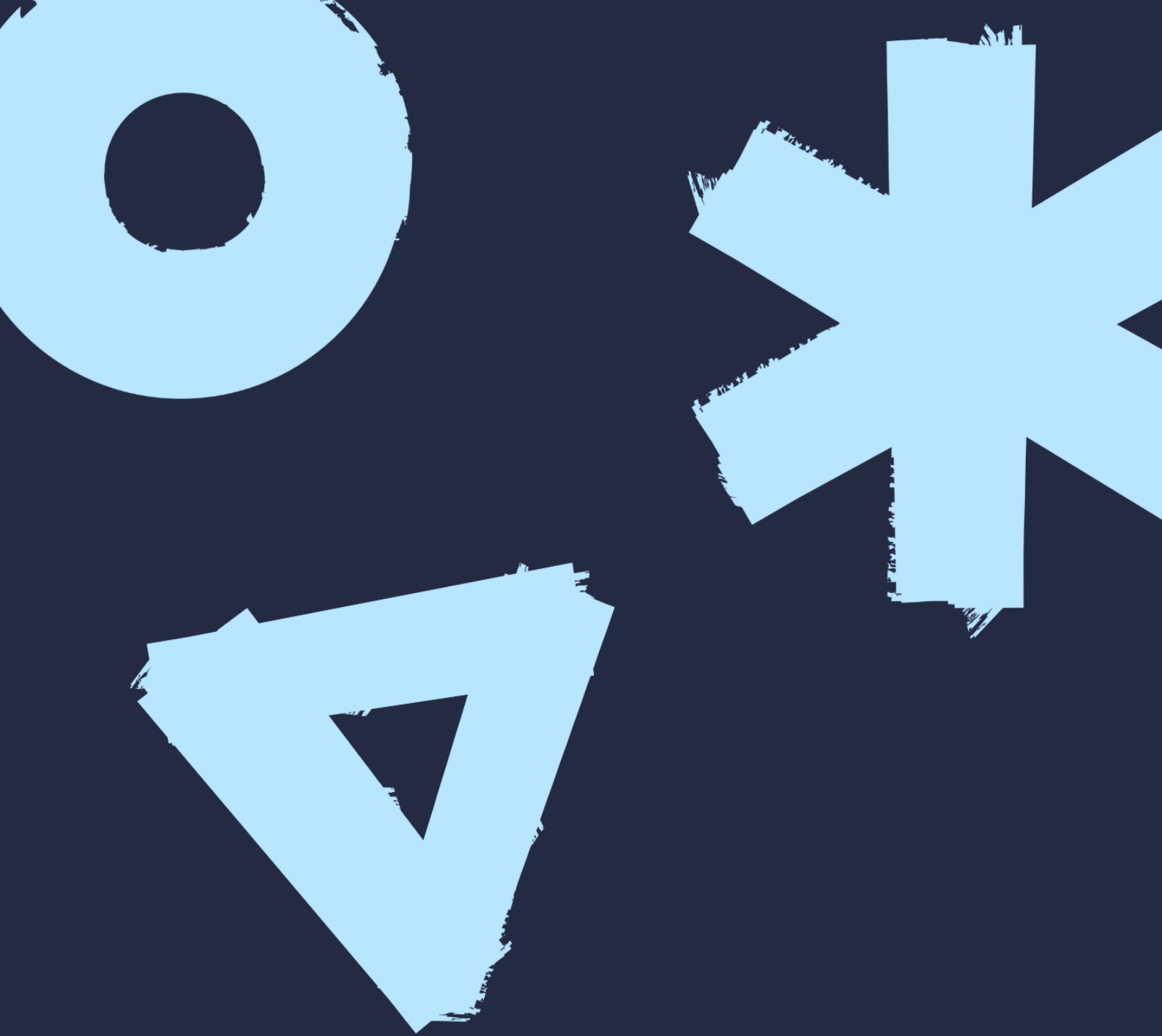
FVREE delivered a prevention and early intervention initiative for the Mandarin speaking community in the city of Monash in Victoria. The project translated gender equity resources into Mandarin and delivered professional development for early years educators and play based workshops for children and families.

In line with a whole-of-setting approach, the work in early years settings was reinforced through additional training to support educators and community members to recognise and respond to violence disclosures.

Together, these activities reached more than 300 educators and community members, building capability to promote gender equality, recognise signs of violence, and respond safely to disclosures.

"The resources are thoughtful, practical and beautifully designed. They build educators' confidence, encourage meaningful conversations with children and provide exceptional support for engaging families."

"Well done on the training! Gives practical and applicable information. I liked the direct/indirect examples."



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