

Creating a system to work for her

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand's
submission to the Second Action Plan

July 2026



Thank you

We also acknowledge and thank our staff and colleagues across our organisation, who generously gave their time to share their ideas, reflections, challenges and practice wisdom with us. The robust discussions were valuable, insightful and evidenced their deep commitment to their clients, their work and the broader sector. The information gathered has directly informed our position in this submission.

Statement of Recognition

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters throughout Australia. We pay our respect to Elders, past and present, acknowledging their continuing relationship to land and the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across Australia. We recognise that the perspectives and voices of First Nations peoples should be at the forefront of conversations about family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia.

Executive Summary

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (Good Shepherd) 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* (The Plan).

The Second Action Plan will be delivered in a markedly different context to the First Action Plan. There is now:

- broader public recognition of family, domestic and sexual violence (DFSV) and an increasing evidence base on coercive control, economic abuse and cumulative trauma
- increased service demand
- intensified housing and cost-of-living pressures
- a more complex digital, social and global environment shaping perpetration and help-seeking.

Despite significant national investment, broader community awareness and expanded prevention activity, women and children continue to be killed, harmed and entrapped by DFSV. The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity to build on the successes and lessons learnt from the first and stop ineffective approaches, scale effective ones and create the conditions for effective, coordinated responses across the system.

We acknowledge that the government is seeking practical, high-impact actions to shape the direction and focus of the Second Action Plan. These should align across related national action plans, recognising that people affected by violence often move through multiple overlapping systems including health, justice, housing, child protection and community services.

Good Shepherd's submission is grounded in specialist family violence practice, lived and living experience insights, and our long history of working alongside women, children, young people and families across the DFSV response continuum.

Good Shepherd's work and context

Good Shepherd supports women, girls, children and families to be safe, well, strong and connected. Our work spans specialist family violence services, refuge and crisis accommodation, financial counselling and capability, economic recovery, child and family services, therapeutic programs, education support, community development and programs responding to people using violence.

In 2025–2026, Good Shepherd supported more than 14 500 victim survivors including children and young people. We provided over 2,000 refuge bed nights and delivered over 23,000 hours of case management support. We have provided specialist DFSV programs, and a range of programs which support recovery for people who have experienced DFSV. We have nation-wide reach through our network of community partners and use of online tools and platforms. We partner with governments, community organisations, corporates and philanthropy to deliver specialist, family, individual, group or community-based programs and supports through our shopfronts, online services, and community partners. This includes our design and delivery of the integrated, nation-wide Financial Wellbeing Hub, which saw over 4900 clients in 2025 – 2026 and our management of the nation-wide No Interest Loans and associated financial wellbeing support program, which saw over 28,000 loans approved to people flagged as experiencing DFSV during the same period. This equates to over \$58 million in financial support. In all our work seeks to support women and children to be safe, well and connected.

Good Shepherd's contribution is informed by integrated practice experience. We work across safety, recovery, financial wellbeing, parenting, child and youth engagement, housing-related support, education disruption and perpetrator accountability. This gives us practical insight into where systems are effective, where they fail, what the workforce needs, and how best to support adult and child victim survivors in the next phase of national reform.

Our call to action for the Second Action Plan

Our central position is:

The Second Action Plan must create the environment to support the recovery for women and children by ensuring the system holds and manages navigation and risk, keeps people who use violence (PUVs) accountable and visible, and actively records and responds to children and young people as victim survivors in their own right with distinct needs and experiences.

Good Shepherd calls for the Second Action Plan to prioritise five national system shifts and implement the following recommendations:

- **Shift 1: Build integrated systems that share responsibility for risk and service navigation and uphold perpetrator accountability**, through relational contracting and requirements for partnerships, place-based responses, and increased perpetrator visibility and leveraging of suitable digital solutions, to reduce burden on victim survivors
 - **Recommendation 1.1:** establish national commissioning and funding settings that reward integration, shared accountability, place-based and ecosystems responses, using relational contracting and co-investment, and seeking scalable solutions
 - **Recommendation 1.2:** establish national shared-risk infrastructure including nationally consistent approaches to risk assessment, perpetrator tracking, information-sharing and high-risk case coordination, such as RAMP
 - **Recommendation 1.3:** create a nationally-consistent DFSV data and information-sharing framework that reduces duplication, improves risk visibility, and enables cross-jurisdictional risk management, reducing the burden on victim survivors to monitor their perpetrators or retell their story.
- **Shift 2: Strengthen DFSV capability across specialist and universal services and elevate lived experience leadership** by embedding suitable safeguards, leveraging existing relevant frameworks, creating standards of practice and implementing consistent national definitions and approaches for identifying, defining and responding to risk
 - **Recommendation 2.1:** create nationally consistent family violence-informed workforce capability standards for universal and specialist services, supported by effective training and implementation of core DFSV expertise in relevant tertiary qualifications
 - **Recommendation 2.2:** ensure that lived experience leadership is supported by suitable standards, recognition and safeguarding to continue to inform policy, sector-wide practice, evaluation and research.
- **Shift 3: Connect prevention, response and recovery**, ensuring women and families can achieve recovery to live safe, well, strong and connected lives, disrupting cycles and perpetrator tactics and recognising that healing and recovery are core to prevention and safety
 - **Recommendation 3.1:** recognise recovery and healing as core prevention infrastructure and reflect this within funding, commissioning, outcomes measurement and national policy settings
 - **Recommendation 3.2:** require prevention activities, public campaigns and education initiatives to be informed by specialist DFSV practice expertise, lived experience and recovery evidence to ensure relevant, targeted and effective messaging
 - **Recommendation 3.3:** develop a national prevention effectiveness framework that measures behavioural change, perpetrator accountability and safety outcomes, as well as increased awareness

- **Shift 4: Move from recognition to implementation for children and young people** by treating children and young people as victim survivors in their own right across service design, funding, data and practice by requiring specialist practitioners and piloting innovative solutions, then scaling what works.
 - **Recommendation 4.1:** recognise children and young people as victim survivors in their own right by requiring DFSV systems, funding, data, practice and outcomes frameworks to identify, respond to and measure their distinct needs, experiences and recovery
 - **Recommendation 4.2:** require dedicated child and youth practitioners in specialist family violence responses, including refuge, crisis accommodation, case management and recovery programs, rather than relying on adult case managers to hold children's needs as an additional responsibility
 - **Recommendation 4.3:** require family law, child protection, education and health systems to apply a specialist family violence lens to how they interact with children, interpret their behaviour and in what they request of them to reduce systems abuse by perpetrators and risk of re-traumatisation or reduction of safety for children and young people.
 - **Recommendation 4.4:** invest in piloting dedicated recovery pathways for children and young people, and then embed what works, with specific attention to education continuity as part of recovery, reducing the impact of dislocation and trauma and for prevention.
- **Shift 5: Recognise economic security as a core component** of DFSV prevention, response and recovery, acknowledging financial and systems abuse as key challenges, and trial suitable responses early in a women's crisis and recovery journey.
 - **Recommendation 5.1:** recognise economic security and economic recovery as national safety outcomes under the Second Action Plan, with expanded access to services for victim survivors and dedicated outcomes measures applied nationally
 - **Recommendation 5.2:** invest in integrated economic recovery models that combine financial counselling, financial wellbeing, navigation, therapeutic recovery and practical relief
 - **Recommendation 5.3:** embed family violence capability across financial and consumer systems and implement national practice guidance on systems abuse and safety-by-design requirements

The development of the Second Action Plan is an important aspect of Australia's response to addressing DFSV. We are happy to contribute further as needed through submission of additional evidence or by participating in further discussions. We are happy to support government to create a grounded action plan which instigates the required national shifts to create an integrated system that works for her and her children.

Shift 1: Build national infrastructure for shared risk and perpetrator accountability

A system that requires victim survivors to coordinate their own safety and adopt responsibility for their perpetrator's behaviour is not an integrated system; it is shifting risk back onto them.

Victim survivors should not have to integrate the system themselves

Victim survivors live whole lives, not piecemeal sections that can be simply divided into program streams. Women, children and families experience violence, separation, recovery and parenting as interconnected parts of one reality and manage housing, finances, legal proceedings, child wellbeing, schooling, health, and wellbeing as part of that. Yet the systems designed to support them remain organised around jurisdictional boundaries, program eligibility, geographic catchments and funding streams. The result is that victim survivors are too often required to integrate and navigate the system themselves.

Fragmentation reduces system efficiency, lessens the likelihood of positive, sustained outcomes, increases risk and may mean potential opportunities to identify, manage or disrupt perpetrator tactics can be missed. When victim survivors are required to repeat their story, prove their credibility, manage conflicting requirements, and carry risk that should be held collectively by the service system, it can reproduce the dynamics of coercive control.

Full systems integration will not be achieved through service-to-service partnerships alone. Under the First Action Plan, we have seen increased collaborative practice across the specialist DFSV sector and improved links to and increased awareness within universal services. What we now need is the supportive national policy infrastructure that shifts risk management from the woman and her children to the system and keep perpetrators visible and accountable.

The Second Action Plan needs to:

- drive system integration by responding to ecosystems not services, using relational contracting, co-investment across sectors, requiring partnerships and suitable information sharing between stakeholders, and piloting, promoting and scaling integrated service models and place-based family violence alliances and regional integration
- build national consistency through uniform risk identification, definition and management processes

Effective mechanisms that drive information sharing and integrated service models

From Good Shepherd's practice, we can draw lessons of what effective information sharing between specialist DFSV and universal services can look like and evidenced examples of integrated service models. These are summarised in the below table.

Mechanism	Example in practice
Shared risk mechanisms that bring together specialist family violence services with other universal services	Risk Assessment and Management Panels (RAMPs) which bring together specialist services and others such as, police, corrections, child protection, mental health, alcohol and other drug services, housing providers to assess and manage the highest-risk family violence cases. These work because they do not leave one practitioner or service holding risk alone; they create a structured mechanism for shared information, planning, authority and accountability.
Integrated service models that are more than wrap-around supports	Financial Independence Hub demonstrate how specialist family violence support, financial counselling, group and individual financial coaching, service navigation, tangible financial relief can be combined around the person, not as disconnected programs. It shows how co-investment between corporates, philanthropy and government can amplify impact and reach.

	Changing Ways demonstrates how specialist family violence practice, victim-survivor safety, perpetrator engagement, intensive case management and multi-agency risk management can be integrated to keep perpetrators in view while strengthening safety and support for victim survivors.
Place-based family violence alliances and regional integration	As chair of the Bayside Peninsula Area integrated family violence alliance, as part of Victoria's Family Violence Regional Integration Committees and regional alliances , we see how regional structures can bring specialist family violence services, police, child protection, justice, health, housing, community services and prevention partners together to strengthen local coordination, identify system gaps, support workforce capability and improve shared understanding of risk. These alliances move beyond networking forums and help translate and implement statewide and national reform into local practice.

Practice example: Financial Independent Hub uses integration to create autonomy for clients to choose supports to keep them on their recovery pathway

The Financial Independence Hub (FIH) is a national recovery service model that supports women who have experienced or are experiencing financial abuse to rebuild safety, independence and wellbeing. Since its introduction in 2019, FIH has supported 17,535 participants and is delivered through co-investment between Good Shepherd, government, philanthropy and corporates.

FIH was established to address a persistent gap in Australia's recovery system. While significant investment has focused on crisis intervention and immediate safety, many victim survivors continue to experience the long-term impacts of violence through financial abuse. This includes housing insecurity, reduced workforce participation, social isolation, and ongoing trauma.

FIH was co-designed with lived experience and a living lab. The service principles recognise that recovery is not linear and establishing financial independence following financial abuse requires flexible and tailored support.

FIH provides:

- integrated service navigation and specialist case support to help women access the right supports at the right time.
- group financial wellbeing sessions, financial coaching and financial counselling to rebuild confidence, capability and choice.
- practical financial assistance, including access to No Interest Loans, to support immediate stability and longer-term recovery.
- therapeutic and recovery-focused support to help women heal from trauma and rebuild safety, confidence and connection.

By helping women address debt, access safe credit, navigate complex systems and recover from financial abuse, FIH reduces the conditions perpetrators exploit to maintain control. It strengthens financial wellbeing, choice and self-determination, supporting women and children to move beyond crisis towards recovery, participation and sustained safety.

"FIH works at the critical nexus of family violence and financial wellbeing. It recognises that safety after crisis is shaped by access to money, housing, service system navigation and specialist recovery practice. By bringing these supports together, FIH helps reduce the financial and systemic conditions perpetrators exploit and creates stronger pathways to sustained safety."

— FIH practitioner reflection

Work with an ecosystems approach

Emerging place-based research argues that complex social issues such as child wellbeing and preventing family violence require investment beyond a service-system lens and into the broader local ecosystem including the previous experiences, relationships, informal supports, community knowledge, cultural, economic and social capability, and local leadership that shape how people seek help and sustain safety.¹ This moves beyond place-located services, which seek to be based in and adapted to local communities, to responses which ensure that services connect and strengthen the ecology of formal and informal supports already present in place. It opens

A demonstration project in Logan showed how providing accessible funding, legal supports, culturally specific awareness-raising, training and education in language, and structured supports for self-care and skill development improved outcomes for women, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse background, when facing or recovery from DFSV.²

At Good Shepherd, we seek to adopt an ecosystems approach in all our work. From recent practice, we have learnt that:

- working through and supporting capability development for local organisations and communities accelerates opportunities to have positive impact and leverages diversity of strengths. In our **Financial Health and Wellbeing Place Based Responses** we invest in and connect social and community infrastructure to reconfigure how this operates alongside formal services to create new and effective approaches to respond to needs of the local community. By investing in strengths based collaborative partnerships, trust is built and enables the co-creation of holistic responses that support people needing help from both formal services and informal community-led help. This is particularly relevant for DFSV work where relationships, trust and security are important to victim survivors.
- by delivering with an ecosystems approach we can engage with stakeholders who may not otherwise recognise their role addressing certain complex social issues, such as DFSV. An example of this is our **Financial Inclusion and Action Plans** and **Social Impact Plans** which work with corporates and institutions to design, develop and implement responses that build financial health and wellbeing across their workforce, clients and local communities. These plans have also supported victim survivors into recovery through the design of corporate policies and delivery of new practices.

"From crisis, intervention, emergency accommodation, refuge, case management, therapeutic, we've actually got that whole journey."

Good Shepherd practitioner.

Increase perpetrator visibility

Support provision linked to geographic boundaries, limited information sharing between services and systems, and no consistent standard of risk identification and management across jurisdictions has created system in which perpetrators can hide, exploit, not be held accountable or miss out on suitable behaviour change or other relevant support. To effectively address DFSV we need perpetrator visibility, to hold them accountable for their behaviour, and to effectively monitor their compliance. Our practitioners tell us responsibility and burden for a PUV's behaviour, consequences, and compliance often falls to victim survivors as the structures that should support her avertedly make her responsible.

A practitioner's insight: working with a mother and her children leaving a serious DFSV situation, a practitioner recalled child protection asking the mother to encourage the father to engage with them as they were unable to get ahold of him.

¹ [Investing+in+Place+-+From+Service+System+to+Ecosystem_Dec25.pdf](#)

² Ibid.

More information about perpetrator patterns is needed to equip us with the knowledge and understanding to make change before crises occur. Good Shepherd is currently working in a number of ways to generate and gather insights on perpetrator behaviour and tactics.

We are a current research partner, along with Queensland University of Technology, The Equality Institute, the University of New South Wales and ANROWS, in the *Domestic, family and sexual violence perpetration in New South Wales: who uses violence, how and why* study.³ In this study, we are supporting the design and analysis of a 2,000 response count survey that seeks to understand the extent and patterns of perpetration and its drivers. Expanded studies like this are needed to ensure we fully understand perpetration in today's context.

We are also scoping a joint research project with Free From Family Violence and No To Violence that aims to unlock the rich intelligence we hold on perpetrator behaviour gathered through case management of victim survivors.

Digital solutions provide a new avenue for victim survivors to record and collate their own primary evidence, distribute it to relevant services, and for large scale, de-identified exploration and coding, which could generate valuable insights into abuse and escalation patterns, and flag early risk markers. We are currently exploring options for piloting ways to utilise technology to generate, protect and share victim survivors' primary data to support their recovery journey, enhance our evidence base on perpetrator behaviour and inform service design gaps and opportunities.

Practice example: Changing Ways Pilot

The Changing Ways Pilot demonstrates how specialist family violence responses can be integrated with perpetrator-focused interventions while maintaining victim-survivor safety at the centre of practice. Delivered in Bayside Peninsula through a partnership between Good Shepherd and Peninsula Health, the program works with people using violence who present with serious family violence risk, often alongside co-occurring mental health, alcohol and other drug, housing or other complex needs.

The model combines:

- specialist family safety advocacy for victim survivors
- intensive case management and behaviour change work with people using violence
- coordinated information sharing
- shared risk assessment and management
- collaboration across family violence, health and other service systems.

"It brings together specialist family violence services with specialist men's services in a way that we've never done before."

— Good Shepherd Practitioner

The preliminary evaluation found that collaboration between family safety and case management practitioners was a key strength of the model and enabled a coordinated response to high-risk people using violence while improving support and safety outcomes for victim survivors. The evaluation also found that the model increased system visibility of people using violence who might otherwise remain disconnected from services or be considered too complex for traditional responses

³ [Domestic, family and sexual violence perpetration in New South Wales: Who uses violence, how, and why – ANROWS – Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety](#)

Shift 1: Build integrated systems that share responsibility for risk and service navigation and uphold perpetrator accountability, through relational contracting and requirements for partnerships, place-based responses, and increased perpetrator visibility and leveraging of suitable digital solutions, to reduce burden on victim survivors

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- **Recommendation 1.3:** create a nationally-consistent DFSV data and information-sharing framework that reduces duplication, improves risk visibility, and enables cross-jurisdictional risk management, reducing the burden on victim survivors to monitor their perpetrators or retell their story.

Shift 2: Strengthen DFSV capability across specialist and universal services and elevate lived experience leadership

Leverage specialist DFSV service providers expertise to strengthen workforce capability with national standards of practice and capability requirements for universal services

Universal services are often the first point of disclosure for victim survivors and provide an opportunity for risk identification and referral. Many universal services have increased their knowledge and response to DFSV under the First Action Plan, but more is needed.

These services must be equipped to recognise DFSV, respond safely, validate disclosure and connect people to appropriate support. Without this capability, even well-intentioned responses can minimise risk, miss coercive control or perpetrator tactics, provide unsafe advice, misidentify victim survivors, or leave women and children feeling disbelieved and unsupported.

“If everyone was able to be on the same page across society and all the service providers out there, so that they could identify coercive control earlier, they could validate women rather than doubt them, that would be a massive change.”

Good Shepherd practitioner.

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence recognised that family violence capability cannot sit only within specialist services and that specialist DFSV education is required for relevant tertiary courses, such as social work. The Commission's broader reform agenda included strengthening the capacity of health, workplaces, faith communities and other community settings to identify and respond to family violence. Victim survivors may disclose to trusted people in everyday settings long before they contact a formal service. With an estimated 4 in 10 women never seeking formal or specialist support for the DFSV they are experiencing, equipping universal services is about creating equitable access, as well as an integrated system. Initiatives such as training hair and beauty workers to recognise, respond and refer to disclosures of DFSV are important mechanisms to support this.

Even when a victim-survivor is connected with a specialist family violence service, they will usually continue to move through mainstream systems including health, income support, police, courts, legal services, child protection, housing, education, financial institutions and employment services. If these systems are not DFSV-informed, they may not share information safely, understand risk consistently and recognise perpetrator tactics. Structures within these systems can inadvertently undermine the safety of women and children. The burden of coordination then falls back onto the victim-survivor and the specialist practitioner supporting them.

This can elevate risk and create further system fragmentation.

It also creates significant pressure on our workforce, increasing their workload, jeopardising positive outcomes they have made with their clients, and contributing to burn out and heightened worry and stress about their clients and work.

Victim survivors and practitioners need to be able to trust that the system, the roles and the functions designed to support them and provide them with the safety and protection they deserve.

"Generally, most parts of the service system are trauma informed where they can be. But I don't know that they are all family violence informed."

Good Shepherd practitioner.

Lived experience should be involved in governance, design, implementation and evaluation of DFSV responses

Lived experience should not be treated as an optional consultation activity after policy has already been designed. It should be embedded in governance, design, implementation, evaluation and workforce development, with paid roles, supervision, safeguarding, training and clear boundaries.

"Often people who choose to share their lived experience are doing so because they do not want what happened to them to happen to other people. It is an act of courage and an opportunity to make the changes they want to see. To be trusted with their knowledge and confidence that Good Shepherd can make change informed by their insights is a position of privilege that we cannot take for granted"

Good Shepherd's Lived Experience Framework

Good Shepherd’s Lived Experience Framework provides a practical model for engaging lived and living experience ethically and safely. Lived experience leadership strengthens policy and service design because it helps identify what systems miss, where opportunities lie and what elements still present risk or safety concerns.

Evidence from across the sector shows that including lived and living experience can be done so safety and suitably. Results from TACSI’s recent quasi-experimental evaluation of demonstrated how a peer and Lived Experience workforce can successfully engage families at risk and result in positive outcomes, without negative impacts to the workforce or participants.⁴ When a Lived Experience workforce is provided with suitable structure, clear role boundaries, supervision and appropriate debriefing, and supported by and integrated with professional systems, they can effectively engage people with complex needs, improve trust and service engagement, reduce isolation and support recovery-oriented outcomes, with risks of re-traumatisation mitigated.

Shift 2: Strengthen DFSV capability across specialist and universal services and elevate lived experience leadership by embedding suitable safeguards, leveraging existing relevant frameworks, creating standards of practice and implementing consistent national definitions and approaches for identifying, defining and responding to risk

- **Recommendation 2.1:** create nationally consistent family violence-informed workforce capability standards for universal and specialist services, supported by effective training and implementation of core DFSV expertise in relevant tertiary qualifications
- **Recommendation 2.2:** ensure that lived experience leadership is supported by suitable standards, recognition and safeguarding to continue to inform policy, sector-wide practice, evaluation and research.

⁴ [Just released: BetterStart report about Family by Family – TACSI](#)

Shift 3: Build prevention into the entire DFSV system

Ongoing effective campaigns and education are needed to support prevention

Australia has invested heavily in DFSV awareness and education and there has been increased public attention, policy focus and investment in addressing this complex issue. However, research shows that 42% of Australians still have low awareness of coercive control, with many unfamiliar with the term or its meaning.⁵

Our practitioners told us that some victim survivors delay seeking specialist support when feeling their experiences were disregarded or invalidated by friends, family or universal services.

Continued effective education and community campaigns are needed. These need to:

- be delivered through a range of avenues, not just schools, to ensure messages reach people in a variety of ways
- include information about diverse forms of DFSV, including financial abuse and how technology can be a tool to further abuse
- be created with lived experience otherwise messages risk being too broad, too abstract or disconnected from the realities of coercive control, economic abuse, post-separation abuse and systems abuse
- draw directly from DFSV crisis, recovery and response expertise and experience to ensure alignment with emerging trends and patterns and behaviours of PUVs as observed and experienced by victim survivors
- be accessible, hold people who use violence accountable, and create a space for dialogue to avoid ostracising people, which may lead them to adopt stronger negative views
- have effectiveness assessed against behavioural changes for PUVs, and improvements in safety and access to support for victim survivors, not just increased awareness.

“Prevention work needs to engage boys and young men in a constructive way. A focus on women and girls is central to our purpose, but if boys experience prevention messaging as blame or exclusion, there is a risk that harmful online narratives fill that gap.”

GSANZ practitioner.

The scale and severity of DFSV in Australia demonstrates that awareness alone is not enough to improve safety for women and children. Increased awareness must be matched by accessible crisis and recovery responses that have the capacity and capability to respond as needed.

Conceptualise crisis, recovery and healing as prevention

Adequate crisis, recovery and healing are prevention. Future harm is reduced when victim survivors can access the right mix of supports over time, rather than being moved through disconnected crisis responses. Ensuring a woman and her family can launch successfully out of crisis reduces the risk they may be forced to return to unsafe situations.

⁵ Del Pizzo, S., S. J. Watson, S. Lagdon, et al. 2026. “Public Awareness in Australia About Coercive Control in the Context of Intimate Partner Relationships.” *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 61, no. 1: 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.70074>.

“The therapeutic space is such a big part of recovery. But it's also part of prevention ... [it gives victim survivors] the feeling they've got the capacity and strength in themselves to continue and move on.”

GSANZ practitioner.

Recovery and healing take many victim survivors continue to experience the impacts of violence long after a crisis phase has ended. Services and systems remain largely crisis-orientated despite recovery often requiring support over many years.

“We know that the impacts [of DFSV] can be long-standing and long-lasting. The violence can end today, but the impacts can go on for many, many years. And yet our responses are often time-limited, crisis-driven, short-term.”

GSANZ practitioner.

At GSANZ we see every interaction with a child, young person, adult or family as an opportunity to strengthen their safety as an act of prevention. Examples of this in our practice include:

- our **Financial Independence Hub (FIH)**, as described above, because it enables victim survivors flexible access to the suite of supports. Financial counselling and coaching help increase financial capability, and therapeutic counselling helps maintain a victim survivor so they can access and utilise the support. Each one of these elements reinforces the potential positive impact of the others
- our management of the crisis accommodation service, **Bridget House**, which services women, children and young people from culturally, linguistically and faith diverse backgrounds. Our practitioners and a recent evaluation showed us that Bridget House is an effective crisis response option over alternative models including motel or single-space crisis accommodation, because of the communal spaces, opportunities for connection with other families and access a range of supports focused on transition and commencing recovery well
- using **our family services** as a pathway to additional supports. Our practitioners told us, when appropriate, they introduce men's behaviour change concepts and training, or provide warm referrals to men's services when working with families. This approach leverages trusted relationships between clients and staff, and families' motivation to meet their child's needs. We are able to do this because our family services are DFSV-aware and work closely with our specialist DFSV staff. We also deliver an adapted Parenting Under Pressure program (described below) as an early intervention service, helping to prevent children's entry into child protection and disrupt intergenerational patterns of DFSV.

Rich knowledge and data on perpetrators' patterns of behaviour, means of control and risk indicators sits within specialist DFSV organisations

Specialist DFSV and Men's Behaviour Change programs are both rich sources of intelligence on the behaviours of people who use violence. These services work with tens of thousands of victim survivors annually and hold deep and nuanced understanding of perpetrators' patterns of behaviour, means of control and risk indicators. At Good Shepherd, through our case management, service delivery, therapeutic supports, and PUV programs, our practitioners collect rich data from women, children and young people about their experiences. Within these stories and case notes is an array of rich data and intelligence on the behaviours, patterns and tactics and drivers of PUVs.

Free from Family Violence (FVREE), Not To Violence and Good Shepherd recognise the value of this vital intelligence we hold. Driven by a shared goal of improving the safety of women and children, we are scoping a joint research project that aims to unblock their respective intelligence sources to better understand perpetrator behaviours and inform improved responses that centre the safety of women and children and will lead to a co-designed response pilot.

Case study: Early Intervention Parenting Under Pressure to disrupt patterns of engagement with child protection and strengthen families

Good Shepherd has been delivering the evidence-based Parenting Under Pressure (PUP) program since 2018. During 2024 and 2025 we piloted an early intervention program for families with no prior engagement with child protection, but who were identified as being at risk.

The evaluation⁶ of the pilot saw significant improvements over time across parental wellbeing (depression, anxiety and stress), mindful parenting, parental affect recognition, overall family functioning and child behaviours, and a downward trend in use of alcohol by caregivers. There were five notifications made to child protective services which were all closed at intake due to the families' engagement in the project. Four of these related to children's exposure to DFSV.

This pilot shows the value of investing in recovery and family strengthening as prevention. PUP works with families *before* a crisis escalates and provides structured support that reduces the need for engagement with child protection. It also shows the importance of supporting caregiver wellbeing and parenting capacity to strengthen a child's safety, development and recovery outcomes.

The independent evaluation recommended the scaling of Early Intervention PUP noting the strength of delivery from the pilot and the wealth of evidence which supports the model more generally, including randomised controlled trials.

Peer work is also an important aspect when delivering effective crisis, recovery and healing interventions as prevention. Peer work in DFSV responses enable connection, validation and shared learning for victim survivors and the workforce. This is evidenced through our practice:

- our decision to include a range of communal spaces in our emergency accommodation, Bridget House, which provides short-term accommodation to women, children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. While refuge models moved away from communal living over shared-trauma concerns, the Bridget House evaluation and client feedback shows that communal accommodation is therapeutic when combined with private family suites, specialist support and trauma-informed practice. Women reported reduced isolation and a greater sense of belonging. Children gained opportunities for play, friendship and social development.
- increased engagement and improved outcomes for participants when therapeutic counselling is offered alongside group coaching as part of our Financial Independence Hub.

"It is critical to acknowledge the importance of funding immediate risk and response services for victim survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. However, our responsibility doesn't end there, victim survivors have a right to move on from their harmful experiences of the violence and recover to enable fullness of life and freedom from the violence and its impacts on them and their wellbeing. 4.0 per cent of funding dedicated to therapeutic interventions reflects a lack of commitment to healing and recovery."

GSANZ Senior Leader

Shift 3: Connect prevention, response and recovery, ensuring women and families can achieve recovery to live safe, well, strong and connected lives, disrupting cycles and perpetrator tactics and recognising that healing and recovery are core to prevention and safety

- **Recommendation 3.1:** recognise recovery and healing as core prevention infrastructure and reflect this within funding, commissioning, outcomes measurement and national policy settings

⁶ Hatzis, D., & Dawe, S. (2025). *Parents under Pressure (PuP) program: Evaluation of a pilot early intervention service*. School of Applied Psychology, Griffith University.

- **Recommendation 3.2:** require prevention activities, public campaigns and education initiatives to be informed by specialist DFSV practice expertise, lived experience and recovery evidence to ensure relevant, targeted and effective messaging
- **Recommendation 3.3:** develop a national prevention effectiveness framework that measures behavioural change, perpetrator accountability and safety outcomes, as well as increased awareness

Shift 4: Move from recognition to action for children and young people as victim survivors in their own right

Children and young people cannot be recognised as victim survivors in policy while remaining dependants in funding, data and practice. The Second Action Plan should ensure that we meet their distinct safety, developmental, therapeutic, educational and recovery needs and not treat them as adjuncts to adult victim survivors. There is broad acceptance of this across DFSV responses and organisations, but the systems infrastructure limits this translating in funding, data capture and practice.

Children and young people make up a large number of victim survivors, but are often still not adequately supported

At Good Shepherd, children and young people make up more than 50% of our specialist family violence clients. In the 2025–26 financial year, Good Shepherd worked with more than 1,100 children and young people through family violence counselling, after-hours support, case management, emergency and refuge accommodation, and youth-specific complex trauma and sexual violence support programs. We engage with a further 1000 children each year through delivery of our education programs designed to lift aspirations and provide meaningful education experiences, and are currently piloting an approach to supporting education access for children in emergency accommodation. This experience gives us insight into the gaps and limitations of the current system and approach.

Across DFSV responses, the design of systems can limit practice responses because:

- service design and delivery are not being built around the distinct needs and voices of children and young people, reducing effectiveness
- children are often not counted in reporting, but rather listed as dependents connected to a parent or caregiver, limiting our full understanding of their presence and experience
- there is no nationally consistent approach and practice standards, inconsistent application of existing or relevant frameworks, such as Best Interest of the Child, and a lack of specific risk management tools, such as the children's MARAM used in Victoria
- few DFSV service delivery contracts require child-specific practice, dedicated child practitioners or child and youth capability as a core requirement
- outcome measurement approaches remain adult-focused, measuring life and therapeutic outcomes relevant to an adult stage of life.
- children's trauma responses can be misidentified as problematic behaviour or pathologised by family law, child protection, education, health and mental health systems. Specialist family violence lens must be applied by these services to ensure a full understanding of the child and young person is applied and suitable risk management is maintained
- orders from Family Court may compromise safety mitigations put in place by state and territory protections (e.g. Intervention Orders) or preference perpetrators over the needs of children and young people, enabling further abuse or violence.

“There needs to be more transparency between family law court and actually taking all of the family violence into consideration before giving access to fathers that have been found to be perpetrators.”

Good Shepherd practitioner.

Targeted approaches are required to meet the needs of children and young people

Our practice experience shows that the most effective DFSV responses for children and young people include:

- utilising dedicated child and youth practitioners with specific training and capability whose role is to hear their voice, identify and respond to the child or young person’s needs, recognise trauma behaviours, support safety planning, maintain connection to education and community, and work therapeutically with the child and family system
- using developmentally appropriate ways of working and non-verbal tools to support engagement and as part of a therapeutic responses for children and young people recognising play, art, body language, behaviour and discussion as valid forms of communication
- meaningful social connections through supported access to education, social supports or other children and young people, including family-friendly emergency accommodation, such as Bridget House, which includes a range of communal spaces to support connection and reduce isolation
- innovative solutions and approaches which can then be expanded built on when they have been appropriately evidenced. Often, child and youth-specific work is funded under short-term, pilot or limited funding approaches, reducing the opportunities to achieve scale.

“One of the things that I’ve seen that’s made a really big difference as well is having children’s practitioners that specifically look at children’s needs and the trauma behaviours that children display and recognising them as such [...] is having a language and an understanding of these as trauma behaviours. Having that common language amongst us is really helpful.”

Good Shepherd practitioner.

We encourage the Second Action Plan to provide an implementation plan to operationalise the recommendations from the Human Rights Commission’s “We’re talking about stopping violence before it begins: supporting quality engagement with children”⁷ 2025 report, specifically:

- improving coordination across government on child safety and wellbeing, both within and outside of the DFSV sector
- embedding genuine child and youth participation in all relevant national strategies
- delivering nationally consistent, age-appropriate respectful relationships education. This sort of education should be extended and delivered across a variety of avenues, including through sporting and social clubs, and social media.

⁷ [Report: Stopping violence before it begins. Supporting quality engagement with children.](#)

Practice example: dedicated specialist to work with children and young people are essential

Good Shepherd has chosen to invest in specialist child and family capability beyond what is required in funding contracts. This has enabled dedicated child and youth practice capability, including child-focused staffing, specialist supervision, developmentally appropriate practice tools and outcomes reporting.

This matters because children and young people do not experience family violence in the same way as adult victim survivors. Their relationship to the PUV may be different, their developmental stage shapes how they understand and communicate harm, and their experiences can be missed if services rely only on adult-focused assessment and support.

Practitioners reflected that working across both adult and child victim-survivor cohorts requires specific capability. While many practitioners are expected to respond to the needs of both adults and children, they do not always feel they have the necessary specialist training, tools or experience to do this confidently. In practice, this means workers can be required to move between adult-focused risk and recovery work and child-centred engagement without the developmental lens, supervision or practice resources needed to do that work safely and well.

Dedicated specialist children and young people capability enables our services to:

- hear and respond to the child's voice and perspective, not only the adult victim-survivor's account
- understand how trauma may present through behaviour, play, withdrawal, distress, education disruption or relationship difficulties
- recognise that children may minimise or conceal what they have seen or experienced to protect a parent or caregiver or they may not know that a family or relationship should or could look different if that's all that they have experienced
- support protective parents who may also minimise children's exposure because they are trying to shield them from harm or be fearful of child protection involvement
- understand the child's relationship to the person using violence, including the complexity of fear, attachment, loyalty and disrupted caregiving
- provide developmentally appropriate tools, consultation and therapeutic responses
- strengthen the protective parent-child relationship as part of safety and recovery.

The impact of DFSV on children's and young people's social, emotional, developmental, educational and physical wellbeing is well documented. For children escaping violence, engagement with a service may create a brief window of opportunity to identify risk, restore safety, provide therapeutic support and psychosocial education, prevent longer-term harm and disrupt potential intergenerational patterns of violence.⁸ This can only occur with targeted services for children and young people.

⁸ Øverlien, C., Selvik, S. Fifteen Years of Children in Domestic Violence Shelters – A Journey of Progression and Lost Opportunities. *J Fam Viol* 41, 509–520 (2026). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-00818-z>

Education continuity is safety infrastructure

Education disruption is a significant but often under-recognised consequence of family violence crisis and displacement. For children in refuge or crisis accommodation, school disruption can mean loss of routine, peer connection, trusted adults, learning continuity and a sense of normality. Education continuity should therefore be treated as safety infrastructure for children escaping violence.

Good Shepherd is currently launching a virtual education pilot for children and young people living in crisis accommodation and refuges due to family violence. The program creates a structured, safe and accessible pathway for children and young people to remain engaged in learning during periods of significant disruption, while supporting smoother transitions back into mainstream educational settings where appropriate. The findings from this pilot will help build the evidence base for education provision to children in crisis accommodation and demonstrate how family violence services, education systems and government departments can work together around a child's safety, learning and recovery. The Second Action Plan should create pathways to pilot, evaluate and scale models that maintain children's connection to education during family violence crisis and recovery.

Shift 4: Move from recognition to implementation for children and young people by treating children and young people as victim survivors in their own right across service design, funding, data and practice by requiring specialist practitioners and piloting innovative solutions, then scaling what works.

- **Recommendation 4.1:** recognise children and young people as victim survivors in their own right by requiring DFSV systems, funding, data, practice and outcomes frameworks to identify, respond to and measure their distinct needs, experiences and recovery
- **Recommendation 4.2:** require dedicated child and youth practitioners in specialist family violence responses, including refuge, crisis accommodation, case management and recovery programs, rather than relying on adult case managers to hold children's needs as an additional responsibility
- **Recommendation 4.3:** require family law, child protection, education and health systems to apply a specialist family violence lens to how they interact with children, interpret their behaviour and in what they request of them to reduce systems abuse by perpetrators and risk of re-traumatisation or reduction of safety for children and young people.
- **Recommendation 4.4:** invest in piloting dedicated recovery pathways for children and young people, and then embed what works, with specific attention to education continuity as part of recovery, reducing the impact of dislocation and trauma and for prevention.

Shift 5: Economic recovery supports sustainable recovery

DFSV is not caused by economic insecurity or hardship. However, economic insecurity can be weaponised through family violence and limit a victim-survivor's realistic options for leaving, seeking help and sustaining safety. Financial hardship can also mask financial abuse, making coercive control appear to services, organisations or systems as poor budgeting, relationship conflict or ordinary debt stress. Financial abuse, as a core tactic of coercive control, can also cause economic insecurity.

At Good Shepherd 82% of our specialised family violence case management clients have experienced financial instability. Practitioners observe a direct relationship between economic abuse and a profound sense of hopelessness for victim survivors, particularly where debt, housing insecurity, legal costs, child support, damaged credit or lack of income are used to maintain contact and control.

The pillars of effective economic safety work

Good Shepherd's supports economic security for victim survivors and as part of prevention through:

- **direct support:** No Interest Loans, securing debt reductions, DFSV-informed financial counselling, and individual and group financial coaching
- **systems reform:** facilitating safety by design and ecosystem work, including FIH (explained above) and piloting AI-related projects which leverage technology to gain deeper data insights and improve service navigation and integration
- **institutional capability:** providing financial, banking, insurance and retail institutions with DFSV-informed training, lived experience-led campaign or service design advice, and strategic support to advocate for national systems change.

Universal services do not have the DFSV understanding to appropriately identify, respond or refer clients, and system fragmentation means current structures prevent suitable information sharing between organisations. This reduces visibility on PUVs, means some services may unintentionally perpetuate further trauma or be vulnerable to manipulation by PUVs, and places increased burden and responsibility on victim survivors.

"Systems not only perpetuate injustice but allow PUVs to manipulate and utilise the very design of systems and structure to continue their power and control, even once a victim-survivor leaves, often for years to come."

Good Shepherd practitioner.

Practical actions that support economic safety and recovery

Practice evidence from Good Shepherd shows that these pillars can be embedded practically through programmatic responses including:

- provision of brokerage that can be accessed quickly and tailored to individual circumstances. Even relatively small amounts can be effective because they can give a victim survivor opportunity and autonomy to relocate, prevent escalation, or reduce forced contact with a PUV
- family violence-informed financial counselling, debt management, budgeting support and access to safe credit options, including No Interest Loans where appropriate
- safe credit pathways, including No Interest Loans, that help victim survivors replace essential goods, repair a car, meet education or employment costs, or stabilise day-to-day living without being pushed toward high-cost credit, buy-now-pay-later debt or unsafe borrowing from family members or perpetrators

- targeted and fit-for-purpose DFSV training, policy consulting and process/product safety by design advice provided to financial, insurance, retail and banking organisations to support a whole of organisation approach to identifying, responding and supporting DFSV disclosures.

By scaling these approaches to ensure national reach and access, we will see improved outcomes for women and children leaving and recovering from DFSV.

Economic safety is also contingent on other sectors and is significantly impacted by housing, cost-of-living and employment markets. While outside its scope, the Second Action Plan should remain mindful and seek to respond to policy directions and opportunities within these other areas.

Practice example: lived experience insights driving nation-wide messaging and organisational capability

Good Shepherd and CommBank work in a cross-sector partnership to collaboratively seek to address financial abuse and negative economic circumstances facing women and families as they leave and recovery DFSV.

CommBank support our delivery of FIH enabling **direct support** for clients. We deliver DFSV-specific training to their bankers to help them recognise, respond and refer to DFSV disclosures, supporting **institutional capability**. Our partnership also seeks **system reform** as we support CommBanks Next Chapter program, delivering a year-long co-design program, and most recently collaborating with them on the 2026 [Next Chapter](#) marketing campaign, ensuring it was ethical, trauma-informed and grounded in lived experience insights. Good Shepherd applied its organisational Lived Experience Framework and engaged advisors with lived experience of financial abuse to inform the campaign's development, including messaging, content and creative decisions.

Financial abuse has many layers. For me, it was not just about money it was about trying to make decisions in survival mode while carrying family responsibility, cultural obligations and the pressure of systems that are not always safe to navigate. Lived experience should never be extracted; it should be held with care, followed up with respect, and used to address the wider ecosystem of violence that allows this harm to continue

– Karina Hogan, lived experience advisor and person with lived experience of partner and family violence.

Shift 5: Recognise economic security as a core component of DFSV prevention, response and recovery, acknowledging financial and systems abuse as key challenges, and trial suitable responses early in a women's crisis and recovery journey.

- **Recommendation 5.1:** recognise economic security and economic recovery as national safety outcomes under the Second Action Plan, with expanded access to services for victim survivors and dedicated outcomes measures applied nationally
- **Recommendation 5.2:** invest in integrated economic recovery models that combine financial counselling, financial wellbeing, navigation, therapeutic recovery and practical relief
- **Recommendation 5.3:** embed family violence capability across financial and consumer systems and implement national practice guidance on systems abuse and safety-by-design requirements