

DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE
VICTORIA



THE FAMILY VIOLENCE
EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE FRAMEWORK

Executive Summary July 2020



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

PROJECT AIM

THE FAMILY VIOLENCE EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE FRAMEWORK AIMS TO ENHANCE THE ABILITY OF SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SURVIVOR ADVOCATES TO INFLUENCE POLICY DEVELOPMENT, SERVICE PLANNING AND PRACTICE.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Ensuring the centrality of victim survivor voices and responding to the needs and experiences of clients from different communities and client groups was a key message delivered by the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (Recommendation 201).

Following the Victorian Royal Commission, the Family Violence Philanthropy Collaboration Project (FVPCP) was established at Domestic Violence Victoria to bring together representatives from the specialist family violence sector, philanthropic and government sectors to support a coordinated response to the implementation of the Royal Commission's Recommendations.

This group worked with the family violence sector to identify a range of strategic areas for philanthropic investment to address some of the emerging needs of the specialist family violence sector. One of the projects funded was the development of a Lived Experience Framework for specialist family violence services.

The project was supported by Domestic Violence Victoria as part of the Family Violence Sector Capacity Building Program and generously funded by Gandel Philanthropy, the William Buckland Foundation, Give Where You Live Foundation, State Trustees Australia Foundation, the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust and the Johnstone Gumption Fund and the Jump Start Fund, sub-funds of Australian Communities Foundation.



OUR TEAM

The University of Melbourne, supported by Domestic Violence Victoria developed the Framework. Key Safer Families Centre researchers on the project were Professor Kelsey Hegarty, Dr Katie Lamb and Dr Rhian Parker supported by Kitty Novy.

The research was co-produced with Amanda, Cina and Fiona who are survivor advocates from the University's WEAVERS (*Women and children who have Experienced Abuse and Violence: Advisors and Researchers*) lived experience group.

An Advisory group oversaw the development of the framework and included victim survivors from a range of services supporting people experiencing family violence as well as a number of survivors.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This project has co-produced with victim survivors a framework for the Specialist Family Violence Sector to enhance collaborative work with survivor advocates.

AIMS

The Family Violence Experts by Experience Framework aims to enhance the ability of specialist family violence services to provide opportunities for **survivor advocates**¹ to influence policy development, service planning and practice by:

- Encouraging sharing knowledge and experience gained from services and survivor advocates who have been engaged in collaborative work
- Providing guidelines around best practice for engaging survivor advocates of family violence in collaborative work
- Providing resources to support survivor advocates and organisations become ready to engage in collaborative work

This framework complements the Domestic Violence Victoria (2020) Code of Practice: *Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services for Victim-Survivors*.

¹The term *survivor advocate* has been used throughout this document to refer to victim survivors of family violence who are engaged in formal co-production activities and mechanisms to influence policy development, service planning and practice.

FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

The development of the Framework was co-produced by researchers from the University of Melbourne Research Alliance to End Violence to Women and their Children (MAEVe) with victim survivors from the MAEVe WEAVERS Victim Survivor Group. The project was also guided by an Advisory group comprised of victim survivors and organisations who work with people who have experienced family violence which met three times between September 2019 and February 2020.

ACTIVITIES

The development of the Framework was supported by three forms of data collection:

- A Literature review
- Mapping existing initiatives
- Consultation with key stakeholders

A number of victim survivors, practitioners and organisations were also consulted as part of the Framework development.

Consultation methods included:

- Surveys (of victim survivors and practitioners)
- Focus groups (in person and via zoom) with practitioners and victim survivors
- Interviews with victim survivors and practitioners

More detail about the consultation findings and development of the framework can be found in the Research Report. The online version of the framework and its resources can be found at dvvic.org.au/members/experts-by-experience

FAMILY VIOLENCE EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE FRAMEWORK

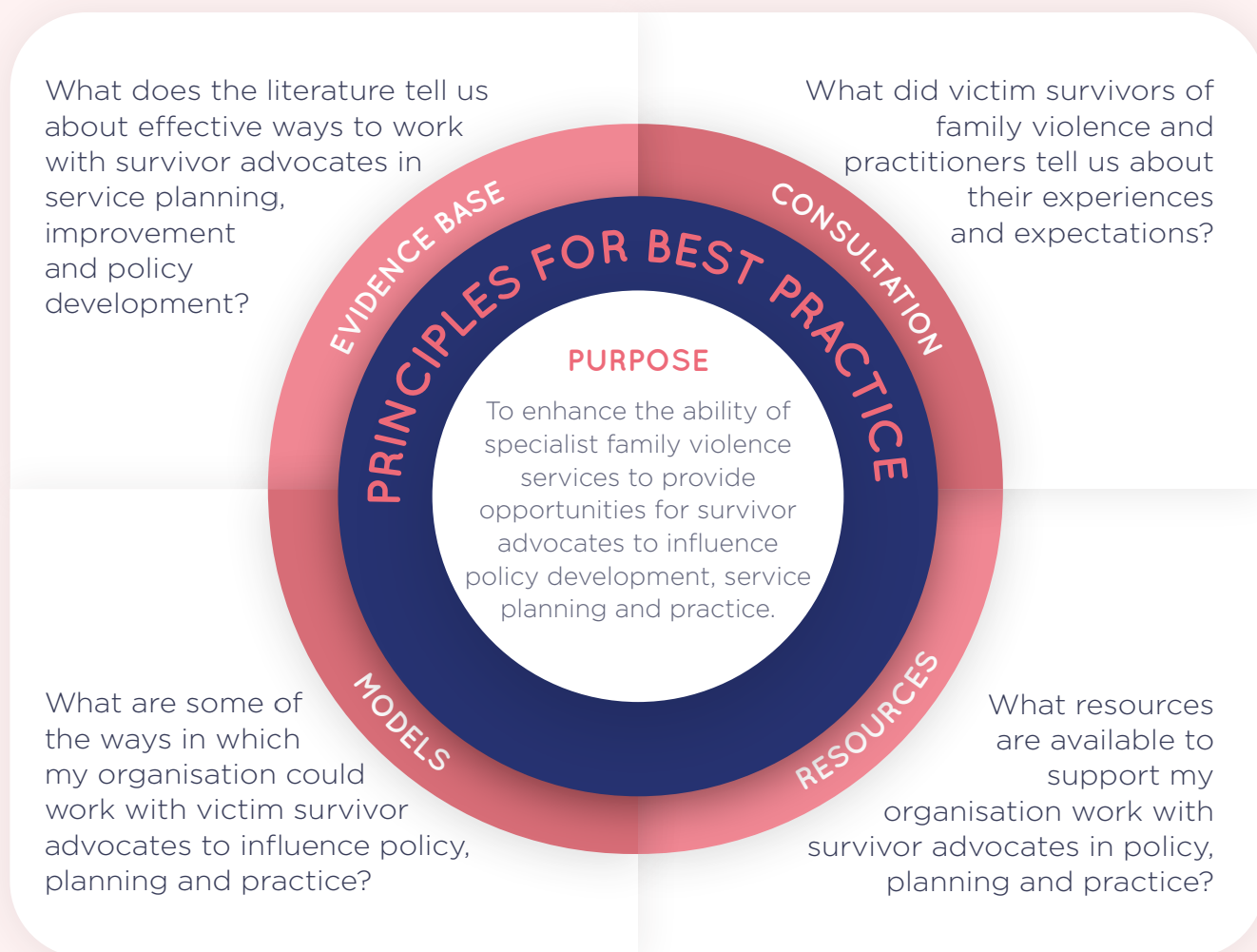


Figure 1: The online version of The Family Violence Experts By Experience Framework

he Framework is available as a research report or can be accessed online and includes:

- A set of best practice principles
- Information about the evidence base on which the Framework has been built
- Consultation summary
- Examples of models and initiatives
- A set of useful resources including:
 - An organisational readiness checklist
 - Victim Survivor self-reflection questions
 - A remuneration rates template
 - Power imbalances video resource

PRINCIPLES FOR BEST PRACTICE

The Experts by Experience Framework is based on the belief that responses to family violence will be most effective and safe if they are informed and developed in partnership with victim survivors. The following principles have been developed to guide formal collaborative processes for engaging survivor advocates by specialist family violence services. They have been developed based on consultation with victim survivors and key organisations as part of the development of the Framework and are consistent with the *Domestic Violence Victoria Code of Practice (2020)*.

RECOGNISE

Victim survivors are acknowledged as holding valuable knowledge and expertise about family violence which is reflected in organisational policies and governance structures.

SAFETY

Issues relating to legal, physical, emotional and cultural safety of survivor advocates are carefully considered but not used as a mechanism for exclusion.

VALUE

In addition to being provided with recognition for their expertise, survivor advocates will be financially remunerated for their time, contributions and expenses when they provide significant input into policy and practice.

TRANSPARENCY

There is clarity of purpose and information to support survivor advocates to make participation decisions, including the degree of influence, nature of engagement and time commitments. Feedback will be given to survivor advocates about how their contribution influenced change.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Engagement with survivor advocates is subject to regular review, evaluation and accompanied by clear complaints and feedback mechanisms.

SUPPORT

Options for trauma-informed support and appropriate supervision are made available to enable survivor advocates to participate in collaboration.

TRUST

Relationships between services and survivor advocates will be collaborative and built on trust. Power imbalances are addressed by reducing traditional barriers and by genuinely involving survivor advocates in decision-making.

RECIPROCITY

Engagement with survivor advocates will promote mutuality and will be governed by shared information exchange and learning.

INCLUSION

In order to gain insight into family violence from a broad range of perspectives, efforts will be made to look for and engage diverse victim survivor voices that might not usually be heard.

SUSTAINABILITY

Formal engagement with survivor advocates is adequately resourced to allow longer term work, for partnerships to be built and key learnings to be shared across the family violence sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been developed based on a review of the literature consultations with victim survivors and practitioners across Victoria and with input from the project advisory group. It is also important to reiterate that these recommendations should be viewed in the context of acknowledging that the Victorian specialist family violence sector has developed and been underpinned by the lived experiences of victim-survivors of family violence since its inception. These principles support the adoption of a more formalised approach to the engagement of survivor advocates into the future.

PRIORITISE CO-PRODUCTION

There is general agreement in the literature and amongst key stakeholders that there is scope and support for greater priority to be given to engaging survivor advocates at the strategic level across the specialist family violence sector. The literature suggests that this can be most effectively achieved when organisations are adequately resourced to do this work, and embed the value of lived experience in strategic planning processes and documents.

SECURE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Specialist family violence services report increasingly being expected to engage survivor advocates by government and other funders. Consultations with key organisations and practitioners suggested that while there is support for this approach, these requests are not being accompanied by the additional funding needed. With resources stretched

meeting serviced demand, this is described as a key barrier to the establishment or sustainability of initiatives longer term. A number of the co-production initiatives engaging survivor advocates identified in the literature and consultation which were rated highly by those in our stakeholder discussions, were only funded as short term pilots and were inactive at the time of the study due to a lack of continuous funding.

MORE CONSISTENT APPROACH

Throughout the development of this framework, mechanisms being used by the specialist family violence sector to engage survivor advocates were found but were not supported by a statewide framework or standards. The lack of a unified approach has led to a degree of inconsistency in terms of the support, remuneration and conditions survivor advocates are receiving across the sector. There is a need to learn from the specialist family violence

services who have been engaging survivor advocates for some time to build our knowledge base and better support innovation and sustainable engagement of survivor advocates more broadly.

ACKNOWLEDGE SPECIALIST FAMILY VIOLENCE PRACTITIONER'S OWN SURVIVOR EXPERIENCE

It is known that a significant number of specialist family violence workers have experienced family violence. Some practitioners who were consulted for this framework development described feeling reluctant to disclose their own lived experience of family violence to their workplace for fear of negative consequences for their career. Further discussion about how to value and harness the strengths and insights of the workforce's lived experience is an area identified for future discussion and exploration.

VALUE ALL FORMS OF EXPERTISE

There is more work to be done to establish an authorizing environment that supports the understanding and valuing of different forms of experience, expertise and perspectives.

This includes workplace discussions about how different forms of expertise on family violence can come together to improve outcomes. Implementing this framework re-iterates and builds on the principles and standards of the DV Vic code of practice and origins of the family violence sector valuing the lived experience voice.

ESTABLISH A SURVIVOR ADVOCATE INDUSTRY OR REPRESENTATIVE BODY

One of the key recommendations to emerge from this project is the need for a unified approach to how survivor advocates are supported, engaged and remunerated when they are engaging in contributing to service, policy and practice. It is therefore recommended that a Victim Survivor Industry or Representative Body be established.

It is recommended that this Representative body be led and run by survivor advocates and should:

- Act as the peak organisation for survivor advocates
- Set minimum standards around payment and conditions

- Provide learning and development opportunities
- Provide emotional support
- Connect programs and services to survivor advocates who are interested in being involved
- Play a role in advocacy
- Represent a broad range of survivor advocates of family violence and look for opportunities to better engage survivor advocates with diverse backgrounds and experience
- Support the development of a Peer Support workforce
- Coordinate responses to submissions and inquiries
- Establish a consulting model of fee for service
- Act as a point of dissemination of examples of best practice

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