



OUR HISTORY

SAFE+EQUAL



This is a story of two organisations: Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) and the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV), which began as small groups of courageous, passionate and visionary feminists whose spirit of activism and advocacy contributed to Victoria's changing social and political landscape, as domestic and family violence transformed from something seen as a personal, private issue to being recognised as a gendered social problem that is everyone's business.

IN THE BEGINNING: THE REFUGE MOVEMENT IN VICTORIA (1970s – 1980s)

Family violence has long affected our community, extending trauma and loss across every level of society.

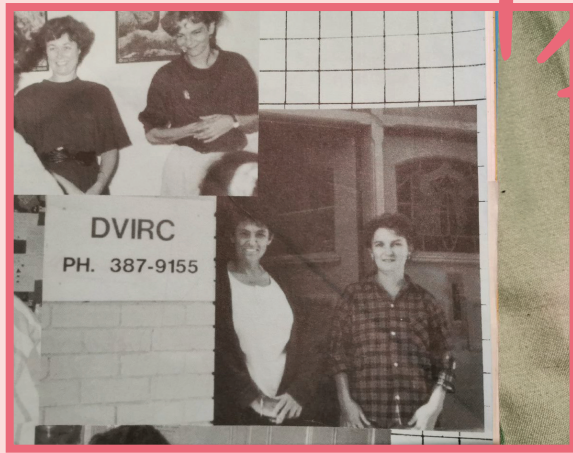
For most of the last century, family violence was mostly hidden, deemed shameful and seen as an individual or family problem.

It was not recognised as a crime until 1975, and before this there were no dedicated services or support for victim survivors. During the 1960s and 1970s, amid the growing women's liberation movement, feminist activists were shaping and defining understandings of gender and politicising women's oppression, inherently tied to patriarchy.

Against this backdrop, the refuge movement was born as a direct response for women who were experiencing family violence, and facing homelessness, poverty and social stigma. These activists worked long and hard, mostly as unpaid volunteers, to shine a light on the women and children who were being abused and murdered.

Victoria's first refuge, the Women's Liberation Halfway House, was established in 1974. By 1979, sixteen refuges had been established – including the Aboriginal Women's Refuge (now known as Elizabeth Hoffman House), and dedicated services for





We lived in a crisis environment. We kind of thrived on the challenge but we were limited by it. The work we did with clients was critical to help allow them to achieve agency in their lives. From a broader systemic perspective, it was still a band-aid, a very important band-aid because it changed that person's life, but it didn't change the system.

Italian women. By the late 1980s, there were more than thirty refugees. In 1987, *The Crimes (Family Violence) Act* was passed in Victoria, expanding options for family violence victims to seek Apprehended Violence Orders.

This swell of collective action was driven by courageous and visionary women working to dismantle patriarchal power and create a safer world. A core group of leaders within this movement came together to form the Victorian Women's Refuge Group in 1976, later known as Victorian Women's Refuges and Associated Domestic Violence Services (VWRADVS).

In 1985, VWRADVS received a small \$50,000 grant to fund an advocacy centre. The Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre was born.

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM: THE ACTIVIST YEARS (1980s – 1990s)

One woman and a typewriter

The Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (DVIRC)'s humble beginnings were fuelled by fierceness and informed by a radical feminist perspective that viewed sexual assault and family violence as crimes arising from a gendered power imbalance in society.

The understanding of violence against women was different ... you were seen as 'ratbag feminists' if you said things about gender inequality and sexism, so everything had to be toned down.



With the support and backing from VWRADVS, Lynne

Burgoyne was employed as the inaugural sole worker of DVIRC. Equipped with her typewriter, Lynne worked tenaciously in the corner of another small feminist organisation, the Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE), centering child sexual abuse and family violence in DVIRC's advocacy agenda.

In 1987, DVIRC formed the Women's Coalition against Family Violence, a network which launched the 'Domestic Murders Campaign' – the first major public campaign to recognise family violence deaths. A boost of funding in 1989 provided the opportunity for DVIRC to expand grassroots community activities, with a focus on refugee and migrant women.

Formative years

The early to mid-1990s saw huge shifts in the family violence and sexual assault sectors across legislation, policy and advocacy. In 1991, *The Crimes (Rape) Act* passed, making significant changes to Victoria's rape laws including clarifying legal definitions of consent. In this same year, the High Court of Australia confirmed the legal right of women to refuse sex within marriage, and Victoria Police released their Code of Practice for the Investigation of Sexual Assault. The first 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign was held in 1991, and the Telephone Services Against Sexual Assault was established providing a state-wide, after-hours service to victims of sexual assault.



We were quite powerful in that time. Government would come to our great, big meetings. It was hysterical because we'd have 60 to 80 women around the room and they would literally come and sit in the middle. Like going into the lions den.

DVIRC's work in the 1990s was mostly focused on creating support groups, collecting and sharing information, developing a referral database and a library, acting as a resource for survivors and workers and providing community education. In 1991, DVIRC delivered Australia's first major professional domestic violence

training program and established a multilingual telephone service, as well as a telephone counselling and referral service for lesbian women experiencing domestic violence. In 1994, the collective published the book *Blood on Whose Hands?*, leading to more intense focus on domestic homicides, and 1998 saw the release of DVIRC's first discussion paper, *What's in a Name?*, establishing a common language for family violence.

Within a short period of time, DVIRC had become the go-to group for family violence legislation or policy – despite limited resources and funding.

Meanwhile, VWRADVS – the collective of family violence professionals who had won the grant to establish DVIRC – had become the unofficial peak for the specialist family violence sector in Victoria, agitating for family violence reform throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

These formative years were shaped by activism, collectivism and radical feminism, much to the discomfort of government and bureaucrats.

It was about demonstrations and going into the streets with placards or occupying the Department of Health offices when we had demands that weren't being met. It was about turning up for meetings with the Minister with 20 people instead of the delegation of four that had been invited.



EXPANDING REACH AND BUILDING IMPACT: THE ADVOCACY YEARS (2000s)

It was so important that we collectively came together and could say, 'This is not just me saying this, I'm representing this on behalf of the entire sector, because we've had these discussions.' It was a strong, powerful group even before it was funded.

From a collective to a peak body

In 2001, family violence was identified as a top priority for Victoria Police by Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon, resulting in the *Victoria Police Code of Practice for the investigation of Family Violence*. In 2004, a VicHealth and Department of Human Services study identified intimate partner violence as the leading burden of disease for Victorian women aged 15 to 44, followed a few years later by VicHealth's first survey of community attitudes towards violence against women. One of the most significant statistics to emerge in Australia during this time came from the second *Personal Safety Survey* conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics which showed that one in three Australian women had experienced violence from a male partner. This was a shocking number, and one that pushed conversations around family violence into the collective consciousness.

During this time, the Victorian Government was beginning to listen and take action. The State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence was established, the first *Women's Safety Strategy* was launched, and VWRADVS was working to establish a policy position within the family violence sector. This work paved

the way for the transition of VWRADVS from a grassroots collective to an official peak body for specialist family violence services, known as Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic). Janine Bush was the first paid employee, as DV Vic's Policy Coordinator from 2002. In 2005, Fiona McCormack was appointed as DV Vic's first CEO.

This was a period of enormous change, as the coordinating collective became a Board of Management. Prior to this, VWRADVS met regularly but had no public profile – Fiona was tasked with establishing DV Vic's voice and visibility in a way that would represent the sector effectively.

A very small but influential lever for advocacy, DV Vic drove systemic changes and established a key role within statewide coordination, specialist practice development and policy reform.

This period was a huge change – we managed to keep some of the very best parts of the collective – involving staff and community members, listening, using consensus and feminist ideologies and ways of doing things – and at the same time being more efficient with clear governance principles.

In 2006, DV Vic developed the first *Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services Responding to Victim-Survivors in Victoria*. This was an important moment in DV Vic's history, requiring the family violence sector to come together and find consensus on practice principles and standards. This was followed two years later by the introduction of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* from the Victorian Government.

During these advocacy-focused years, DV Vic solidified its position as a key voice of family

violence expertise, convening the EVA Media Action Group to improve media reporting on family violence from 2012, and presenting on Victorian family violence reforms to the United Nations NGO Parallel Event on the Convention of the Status of Women in New York and at the Roundtable for United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. This coincided with state government developments, including the release of *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children*.

DVIRC becomes DVRCV

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, DVIRC utilised the online space to support victim survivors and family violence professionals, launching their first website in 1997. This was followed in by *When Love Hurts* (later renamed *Love: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*) and *Bursting the Bubble*, both innovative sites designed for children and young people.


In 2001, DVIRC became a Registered Training Organisation, delivering the first accredited family violence training in the country. By 2007, DVIRC was delivering statewide training on the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (often referred to as the Common Risk Assessment Framework, or CRAF, working to support a consistent approach for assessing and managing family violence risk across Victoria.

From its earliest days of one worker and a typewriter, DVIRC had grown its impact and reach to become a hub for family and gender-based violence resources, research and workforce capability building. In 2009, the collective opted to become an Incorporated

Association, changing its name to the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV), and appointing its first Executive Officer, Vig Geddes.

In 2013, DVRCV partnered with DV Vic to launch *The Lookout* website, a single source for specialist family violence practice information and resources. In the same year, DVRCV launched the *SmartSafe* website, based on Australia's first research into technology-facilitated abuse. This later led to the development of *SmartSafe+*, a smartphone app that would go on to win the Premier's iAward for Public Sector Innovation in 2016.

During these years, there were several key state and federal reforms in the family violence space. In 2009, the Commonwealth Government appointed the first National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, and the second National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey was undertaken, including Aboriginal and culturally



I can remember getting our first computer when we were located on Sydney Road...It was very exciting. Soon we were plugged into the internet. Then we got two new computers and a new 'computer room'. We took turns to use them.

and linguistically diverse communities for the first time. In 2011, the national sexual assault and domestic violence counselling service 1800RESPECT was launched, and in 2013, both *Our Watch* and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) were established as initiatives out of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.

In spite of all these changes, ongoing family and gender-based violence across all communities continued to fuel both DV Vic and DVRCV's commitment to advocacy and education activity. Between 2010 and 2014, there were several high-profile sexual assaults and homicides that left the community shocked and demanding change.

BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE: THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE, AND BEYOND (2014 – 2018)

Rosie Batty took the lid off the volcano that had been furiously bubbling for years and years...the message had been loud and clear for a very long time, and she was brave enough to do it at a time of high crisis.

A watershed year

On 12 February 2014, Luke Batty was murdered by his father in broad daylight, on a suburban cricket pitch in Melbourne. Following years of family violence perpetrated against Luke's mother Rosie Batty, the system ultimately failed to protect Luke and Rosie. In the aftermath of this unthinkable tragedy, Rosie stood up and joined the calls of many strong advocates



Leading up to the Royal Commission, DV Vic were very effective in bringing the sector together on a whole range of levels, so people's voices were heard... without being further damaged by what could be a very confronting process.

before her. Her and Luke's story struck a chord with Australians, helping to change the national conversation about family violence, leading us to a point of no return.

In this same year, DV Vic, DVRCV and No to Violence (the Victorian peak body for services and practitioners that work with men who use family violence) were funded to manage the rollout and training of Risk Assessment and Management Panels (RAMPs): formally convened meetings comprised of key agencies and organisations to share information and take action to keep people at the highest risk from family violence safe. DV Vic and DVRCV also worked together to establish the No More Deaths alliance, calling for family violence to lead the agenda in the 2014 Victorian state election. This was a year of unprecedented media and community focus on family violence, marking the beginning of enormous changes within the sector. This included the appointment of a new ministerial portfolio for the Prevention of Family Violence, held by Fiona Richardson MP – the first such position in Australia.

In the months following Luke's death, DV Vic's CEO Fiona McCormack accompanied Rosie to meet with Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews to demand change. Rosie's advocacy was instrumental in his decision to call a Royal Commission into Family Violence, a watershed moment that led to unprecedented investment and reforms within the Victorian family violence system for years to come.

A reform agenda

The Royal Commission into Family Violence was held in 2015. DV Vic and DVRCV were key contributors to the proceedings, developing multiple submissions and providing testimony across the 25 days of public hearings. In 2016, the Royal Commission released its report, with the Victorian Government committing to

implement all 227 recommendations, followed by an investment of \$2.7 billion to support this.

We had a wonderful time along the way, but day to day it was a grind. The changes were really incremental, and it wasn't until the Royal Commission finished and I kind of stood back and thought, "Well hang on a sec, what has changed from 1978 when I first became involved?" And you could just see the little bits, the little wheels turning, and then they'd go backwards, then they'd turn again."

Focus on the family violence sector was at an all-time high, resulting in dramatic organisational shifts for both DV Vic and DVRCV.

During this time, DVRCV tripled in size. Under the leadership of a new CEO, Emily Maguire, the organisation's strategy focused on building capability across sectors, positioning DVRCV as the go-to voice on workforce development for the family violence and primary prevention sectors. The time had come to re-focus DVRCV's strategic direction, which meant closing the organisation's library.

In the 90s that library was crucial. It was where you went to get information because there was no internet. And I think we forget some of that stuff, because we're so used to Google now, but for victim survivors and for sector, DVRCV was like a drop-in... It was a resource centre; it was a resource hub.

2016 saw the release of Victoria's first gender equality strategy *Safe and Strong*, followed by *Free from Violence*, the State Government's strategy to prevent all forms of family violence and violence against women, placing the spotlight on primary prevention. Post-Royal Commission, the expansion of DVRCV saw the

establishment of a dedicated prevention team, expanding the Partners in Prevention program established back in 2007 to support the delivery of respectful relationships education initiatives in schools.

Our prevention work went from a three day a week role, doing a project on the smell of an oily rag, to having an entire team, an element of our strategy dedicated to prevention, and winning two major state-wide tenders.

In 2018, DVRCV hosted the first primary prevention conference on 'Achieving Generational Change'. Rebranded as PreventX, the conference grew and evolved in 2019 and then online in 2020, demonstrating a shift in Victoria from a nascent prevention sector to one that was becoming more established and resourced.

During this time, the culture of DVRCV was one of feminism, hard work and camaraderie – going above and beyond to create opportunities for lightness and positivity to help make the heavy work sustainable for staff.

The sorts of people who worked at DVRCV, even though we had lots of different people, there is a kind of commonality – being conscious of this space that you're in, being conscious of each other and having fun. It felt important to our work to prioritise those sorts of things that create personal relationships.

DV Vic also grew exponentially in the years following the Royal Commission, establishing a practice development unit in 2017 to ensure members were appropriately resourced to sustain and strengthen their specialist family violence practice.

More broadly, the sector was becoming more professionalised. In 2016, the Victorian Government established both the Family Violence Steering Committee (with DV Vic's CEO and the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence as co-chairs) and the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council, to place people with lived experience of family violence at the centre of reforms. 2017 saw the release of *Building from Strength: 10 Year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response*, as well as the establishment of Family Safety Victoria to lead the implementation of the government's family violence reforms. The Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF) was reviewed and re-developed, becoming what is now known as the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM).

In 2019, DV Vic published the Second Edition of the *Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services Responding to Victim-Survivors in Victoria*. Building on a significant resource that informed the development of Victoria's family violence sector over many years, the second edition of the Code of Practice retained a specialist, intersectional feminist lens on family violence work as the sector became more joined up with the mainstream Victorian human services system.

A UNITED VISION (2019 – 2021)

For more than three decades, DVRCV and DV Vic (and their previous iterations) have been two key organisations within a broader social movement working to push family violence into the public domain. In partnership with member services, victim survivors, community leaders, and government partners, both organisations have led the establishment and coordination of the specialist family violence sector in Victoria,

frequently sharing positions in advocacy and campaigning. Informed by each other's skills and expertise, the respective roles in the Victorian family violence system held by DV Vic and DVRCV have always been complementary.

In 2019, as the sector moved into a new phase of systemic reforms, the Boards of DV Vic and DVRCV identified that a merger would grow the capacity of the peak to listen to and support the work of frontline services, reflect members' experience, and embed the voice of lived experience in policy, advocacy and systems reform work.

Following a robust consultation process, their Boards and members voted in favour of an organisational merger in 2020, with Tania Farha appointed as the CEO of the new entity soon after.

Combining strengths, energy and resources for greater impact, this merge represented a new chapter in the long histories of two well-respected organisations, further widening the lens of the family violence sector to ensure all voices and experiences are understood and included.

In 2021, Safe and Equal launched as the new peak body for specialist family violence services responding to victim survivors in Victoria. With a new name and united vision, Safe and Equal will work towards a world beyond family and gender-based violence, where women, children and all people from marginalised communities are safe, thriving, and respected.

Safe and Equal exists because of the activism, leadership and expertise of victim survivors, practitioners, and leaders who have come before us demanding safety and equality.

To them, we say thank you.

SAFE + EQUAL

DV Vic and DVRCV merged in 2021 to form Safe and Equal

We pay thanks to current and former DV Vic, DVRCV, DVIRC and VWRADVS staff, Board members, and members for their commitment and work over the decades. Thank you to everyone who shared reflections with us for this project.

To learn more about the history of the family violence sector and refuge movement in Victoria, we recommend reading *From the Margins to the Mainstream: The domestic violence services movement in Victoria, Australia, 1974–2016* by Jacqui Theobald, Suellen Murray and Judith Smart.

Our work is dedicated to all people who have experienced family violence and we acknowledge the ongoing advocacy and leadership of generations of victim survivors and passionate supporters which has built this sector.

Safe and Equal acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We recognise the loss of lands and culture, knowing the consequences for people, communities and nations. We pay our respect to First Nations Elders both past and present, and acknowledge that sovereignty over these lands and waters has never been ceded.

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