

# No To Violence NSW Far West & Upper West NSW Consultation Report

## 1 Introduction

No To Violence is the peak body for organisations and individuals working with men to end family violence in Victoria and New South Wales. No To Violence NSW (NTV) is funded by Women NSW undertakes peak work and supports the NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network in their delivery of the programs, and safe and sustainable growth of the men's behaviour change (MBC) sector.

The Bureau of Crime Statistics marks the far west and upper west regions of NSW as having the highest reported incidents of domestic and family violence in the state.<sup>1</sup>

The *Dropping Off The Edge 2015* report measured and compared postcodes in Australia by levels of disadvantage. Disadvantage was measured by a combination of factors including, but not limited to, employment rates, crimes rates, number of domestic and family violence (DFV) incidents, and educational outcomes. Most of the postcodes in the far west and upper west regions are in Band 1 and Band 2, representing the most severely disadvantaged. These postcodes have not moved out of their bands in the 15 years since the *Dropping Off The Edge* report was commissioned.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 Background

In 2017, NTV's collaboration with KPMG on the supply and demand project highlighted the immense need for men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) in the far and upper west regions of NSW.

Mission Australia was accredited under the NSW Department of Justice MBCP Minimum Standards in 2016 and in partnership with NSW Community Corrections Domestic Abuse Program (DAP) have run one program in Dubbo. The accreditation process for Mission Australia took over 30 months to complete. Achieving the 50 hours of supervised practice requirement to become an entry level experienced facilitator was only achieved through the collaboration with Community Corrections.

For rural and remote services, reaching 50 hours supervised practice where there were no existing programs who could provide supervision is very challenging. Similarly, the expansion of Mission Australia's MBCP to other rural and remote towns would incur significant costs due to expenses relating to staff travel and accommodation

<sup>3</sup>At the invitation of Mission Australia, and in furtherance of their sector development priorities, NTV organised and completed a week long excursion to the far west of NSW in November 2017.

NTV travelled to the following areas:

- Dubbo
- Broken Hill

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 'Domestic violence statistics for NSW', 2016  
<[http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar\\_pages/Domestic-Violence.aspx](http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_pages/Domestic-Violence.aspx)>

<sup>2</sup> Tony Vinson, Margot Rawsthorne, Adrian Beavis and Matthew Ericson, 'Dropping Off The Edge 2015', *Jesuit Social Services* and *Catholic Social Services*

- Wilcannia
- Coonamble
- Walgett
- Lightning Ridge
- Brewarrina

The intention was to consult with communities and services about the unique challenges facing rural and remote towns, their responses, and their needs, and to raise the profile of NTV and MBC work in NSW.

Mission Australia generously contributed their time and staff to host NTV and make the appropriate introductions to relevant services and community leaders.

At meetings, NTV relayed a brief outline of NTV's history and vision before explaining in depth the nature of MBCPs, how they operate, and their place in working with women and children.

Common challenges were pervasive in all of the towns visited include:

Distances between communities and main centres

High cost of service delivery

Services availability and/or lack of integration

Unemployment

Alcohol and other drug abuse (AOD)

Impacts of colonisation/Intergenerational trauma

Poor police responses

The intersection of these challenges lead to poor outcomes for clients and communities. NTV concluded that due to the vast distances between townships and the remoteness of communities, services struggle to adequately meet client need.

## 2 Common weaknesses and gaps

### 2.1 Service provision

Due to the great distance between centres and towns, delivery of services to community is expensive and carries a high cost for staff in long distance travel. One staff member estimated driving up to 2,000km a week between communities. Others talked of the prohibitive costs of flights between Dubbo and Broken Hill, as well as the additional cost of overnight accommodation (\$1,300 approximately). This was noted as a major barrier in setting up an MBCP in Broken Hill, as such a process would require a staff member to complete the required 50 supervised hours by flying to Broken Hill on a weekly basis for 16 weeks (altogether, the cost of travel and accommodation alone would amount to approximately \$20,800).

Several services stated the need for an integrated approach utilising a case coordination and/or case management model for working with families focusing on men who use violence. Men presented with complex needs that interfered with their participation in programs - AOD, normalisation of use of violence within community, unemployment, distance to service, and mistrust of services.

While some services work very well together and have a strong history of collaborative practice, some work in isolation and do not actively engage in interagency meetings, and are seen as drive/fly in-drive/fly out. Community members talked of new services coming to town in their 'flash 4 wheel drives and laptops' to deliver service on short term contracts. These services were often underutilised and further fed community mistrust. Some service providers talked of losing funds to 'outside' providers, sometimes from interstate, who had no local knowledge or relationships.

## 2.2 Funded Programs

Services expressed concern about the duration of short-term projects and programs e.g. two-three years. Evaluations often occurred too early for services to firmly establish programs in the community that would result in meaningful participation, and solid outcomes. It is difficult for services to justify innovative and unorthodox deliveries of programs that were the result of community requests and/or service experience. Services also stated that funding criteria did not take into account the lived experiences of men and families with high levels DFV and lateral violence. For change to be sustainable funders must be prepared for long term slow progress within individuals, families and communities.

## 2.3 Training

Services reported that the causes of DFV were commonly misattributed to drugs and alcohol, poor mental health, unemployment and financial strain. There is a poor understanding of DFV in the wider community and amongst some workers in small localised services. Bystander training in community organisations and to community groups could raise understanding awareness and safe interventions.

## 2.4 Unemployment

Unemployment was unanimously nominated as the primary aggravating factor of DFV in all towns visited. Examples such as when there were years of strong harvest correlated with a significant decrease in reported DFV-related incidents.

Services relayed accounts of multiple existing employment services where only two jobs were made available to clients in a twelve month period. There were an adequate number of jobs training and education programs running, and in some cases a perceived surplus, but no roles to move into once training had finished. Additionally, men who had been convicted of a DFV-related offence were automatically precluded from employment as many jobs in the area were in public or social services sector.

## 2.5 Alcohol and Other Drugs

Services requested an increase in the number of detox and rehabilitation centres and programs in the far and upper west. Many clients are from small communities have never travelled far from home or been apart from their families. Extreme distances to the available centres in Dubbo, and for Broken Hill, Adelaide, meant that clients felt isolated from their families and communities, and this was often a critical element in their participation into the centres. This was particularly difficult for mothers with young children with no alternatives for their care.

NSW Juvenile Justice staff reported that children were presenting with drug and alcohol issues at younger and younger ages. Aboriginal children were especially vulnerable to methamphetamine (Ice) addiction due to direct and deliberate targeting by drug dealing individuals or gangs into their communities. Children are often targeted and used as runners with the community in exchange for Ice.

## 2.6 Colonisation and Intergenerational Violence

Services reported that Aboriginal families presenting to services for assistance present with multiple and complex intergenerational traumas as a result of the impact of colonisation. Services believed that targeting only one member or one age group was not useful, as the violence and tolerant attitudes towards violence was often pervasive within a family and in the broader community. Local workers talked about community 'leaders' being known perpetrators of DFV and how this made it difficult to take a stand on DFV and lateral violence within the community.

It was suggested that cultural healing programs and grief and loss counselling be made available to men, regardless of whether they were participating in a men's behaviour change program. Importantly they spoke this work being undertaken before MBCP's are brought into community. Aboriginal workers and Elders strongly advocated for community led identification of individual communities cultural and program responses to family and community be considered. That 'off the shelf' programs would not address the specific needs of each community. For the community to support men attending programs the whole community needs to be involved. Community development projects that build community capacity address broader safety needs and raise awareness of DFV are essential for the long term change needed.

## 2.7 Police responses

While there were mixed remarks around police responses to DFV (Wilcannia and Brewarrina police engaged in the consultation and appeared to be well connected and understanding of community needs), some service workers spoke of police being stretched (one DVLO to cover large area including Walgett, Coonamble and Lightning Ridge). Others spoke of police seeming to be overwhelmed and de-sensitised by the high number of incidences of DFV and not responding respectfully to people during call outs.

### 3 Key findings

**Momentum behind engaging with men:** services engaged openly with NTV staff and were keen to see services for men in their communities. There is a demand for services targeting men and for wrap around service/case co-ordination in order to address clients with complex needs.

**Collaboration with local Aboriginal communities and leaders** in the creation of programs is essential for any program to work.

**Innovative approach to programs:** in all towns, services worked to tailor their programs and delivery to suit the needs of the community to increase participation. In one instance, Mission Australia incorporated picking the male participants up from their home or work in a bus, feeding them at the venue, and then transporting them back home. This made the programs more accessible, and allowed for more emotional engagement and debriefing. In another instance, an employment training program gradually taught workplace culture in addition to skills, such as punctuality, respectful team building and work ethic.

Elsewhere, a group of male community leaders established a community initiative to engage men who had completed a Probation and Parole. The project, a local men's group in Dubbo known as the *Gagamin Men's Group* consisting of 30 men has revitalised the community gardens and carried out a number of community 'clean-ups'. The group assisted five men to find full time employment and reduced all reported DFV-related offences by 100%. NTV recognises that such groups are attached to significant risks and lack the structure and safeguards of formally organised groups and accredited MBCPs, such as partner contact.

**Inter-agency cooperation:** areas that demonstrated the most effective services and programs had notably strong inter-agency cooperation. Most organisations attributed this to the community spirit, but also to the need for cooperation in order to adequately assist clients in the face of poor resources and funding.

**Employment and social enterprise:** community leaders discussed the need for locally driven employment opportunities. Many talked of the negative impact of losing CDP programs. There was enthusiasm around developing local social enterprises, particularly cultural tourism projects.

**Collaboration with sports team and events:** much of the community spirit centred on the local sports clubs in towns. While there are existing DFV education programs that focus on sports clubs and their players (e.g. Talking Violence), community members talked about wanting more programs that used sport as an engagement tool. Information on Bystander training and ongoing leadership support was well received.