

Office of the Interim Victims' Commissioner



Office of the Interim Victims'
Commissioner
Level 23, State Law Building
50 Ann Street
Brisbane City
Queensland 4000

Dr Amanda Beem
Committee Secretary
Youth Justice Reform Select Committee
youthjustice@parliament.qld.gov.au

19/12/2023

Dear Ms Beem,

Re: Office of the Interim Victims' Commissioner Listening Workshops

I refer to [REDACTED] correspondence with yourself of 23 November 2023. I thank the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee (the Committee) for their interest in a series of recent listening workshops hosted by the Office of the Interim Victims' Commissioner (OIVC). As advised, the workshops invited services supporting victims of crime and criminal justice agencies to share their knowledge and promotion of the charter of victims' rights, how they navigate information and support services and their knowledge of and access to trauma informed approaches and training.

I trust that the **attached** summary of observations arising out of the OIVC's listening workshops is of assistance to the Committee in its inquiry into ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime.

Should the Committee require further information or wish to meet, please contact [REDACTED], Executive Director, Office of the Interim Victims' Commissioner on [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Jon Rouse APM
Interim Victims' Commissioner

Enc (1)



Office of the Interim Victims' Commissioner



Briefing to Youth Justice Reform Select Committee

Background

Three separate recent inquiries recommended the appointment of an independent Queensland Victims' Commissioner, including the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, the Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police Service responses to domestic and family violence and the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee Inquiry into Support provided to Victims of Crime.

On 31 August 2023 Mr Jon Rouse APM was appointed as the Interim Victims' Commissioner. On 28 September 2023 the Palaszczuk Government announced \$18 million to establish the office of the Queensland Victims' Commissioner (OVC). The appointment of the permanent Victim Commissioner is anticipated in mid-2024. The Office of the Interim Victims' Commissioner (OIVC) has been established to support Mr Rouse until the permanent Victims' Commissioner is appointed.

As Interim Victims' Commissioner, Mr Rouse is engaging with victim-survivors of crime, families of victim-survivors, victim support services and criminal justice agencies to hear about victims' experiences in the criminal justice system. This is assisting the Interim Victims' Commissioner to:

- raise awareness of the rights of victim-survivors of crime and the services available;
- identify, develop and provide additional resources for victim-survivors of crime to understand their rights, the criminal justice process and how to access support and assistance;
- identify the training needs for government agencies to interact with victim-survivors in a trauma informed manner;
- establish capacity for the permanent Victims' Commissioner to function effectively upon appointment; and
- increase confidence and trust that the establishment of the OVC will meet the intent of relevant inquiry recommendations.

There is no legislative framework with respect to the Interim Victims' Commissioner. Legislation to establish a permanent Victims' Commissioner is expected to be introduced in early 2024. The Interim Victims' Commissioner has no power to compel co-operation or engagement with any government or non-government agency and it does not have a systemic inquiry function. The Interim Victims' Commissioner does not have the power to assist and manage individual victim's complaints about their treatment by government or non-government agencies. However, the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009* contains the Charter of Victims' Rights which sets out the rights for victims of violent crime, including domestic and family violence, that government and non-government agencies need to uphold. Victims can complain directly to the agency or the Victim Services Coordinator, Victim Assist Queensland if they believe the service they received is inconsistent with the Charter.





Listening Workshops

In November and December 2023, Mr Rouse hosted eight state-wide listening workshops. The purpose of these workshops was to gain information from stakeholders about the knowledge, understanding and promotion of the Charter of Victims' Rights, the needs of victim-survivors with complex trauma and high support needs, and trauma-informed training.

Workshops were hosted in Brisbane, Toowoomba, Mount Isa, Townsville, Cairns, Logan, Gold Coast and the Redlands. Participants were invited guests who interact with victim-survivors, including victim support services and criminal justice agencies. Close to 150 participants attended the listening workshops.

The OIVC is pleased to share a summary of what was heard from the listening workshops with the Committee. While these workshops were not focussed on any particular cohort of victim-survivors, it may be of interest to the Committee in examining victim support and communication in the context of youth justice.

Charter of Victims' Rights

The Charter of Victims' Rights was recognised by participants as being important to promote. It can empower victim-survivors, provide them with the expectations that those interacting with them should be meeting and provides a mechanism in which to raise concerns. Promotion of the Charter to agencies was as important as promotion to victim-survivors. The Charter provides agencies with the expectations of treatment of victim-survivors and can be a tool for changing perceptions surrounding victim-survivors.

The OIVC heard that victim-survivors have limited knowledge of their rights and the Charter and that there are several barriers to promotion and understanding. This includes: accessibility of the Charter and rights, the impacts of trauma on retaining information, and the necessity to prioritise a victim-survivor's needs which may not involve the Charter. The role of support services, resourcing, capacity and capability were also highlighted by support services as affecting Charter promotion. Agencies promoting the Charter within their organisation often did so through training and visual materials. Participants identified the need to embed the Charter into practice.

There were many suggestions by participants as to how promotion of the Charter could be improved. The OIVC clearly heard that improved accessibility of the Charter and greater clarity surrounding its operation, application and enforcement would help people feel more confident in its promotion. Many participants, particularly those in regional Queensland, also emphasised the need to view the Charter with a cultural lens.

Accessibility was interpreted differently by participants, but many suggested an Easy English Charter, the Charter being available in languages other than English, and the Charter being broken down into stages according to the criminal justice process.

The OIVC heard that better understanding of how the Charter operated, including which agencies were responsible for certain rights, and how the Charter applied in contexts such as the youth justice system could improve participants' participants confidence in promoting the Charter.





Across Queensland, the OIVC heard that understanding how agencies were accountable for the Charter, how compliance with the Charter was enforced, and how complaints were handled were essential to improving Charter promotion and confidence. The potential for greater transparency regarding the resolution of complaints was identified by many participants as being able to improve confidence in Charter promotion.

Participants also highlighted that engagement tools or resources and training would be of assistance. Regional participants emphasised that addressing capacity and capability concerns of services to promote the Charter was needed. Across Queensland, the office heard that the Charter should be embedded into community and through other sectors, with specific consideration of strategies for promotion in remote and diverse communities.

Responding to victims with complex trauma and high support needs

While workshop participants generally found it easy or okay to find information, many thought that it was difficult or very difficult for clients to find information on services, support and remedies. Participants stressed that navigating the criminal justice system and the victim experience was challenging for victims. The possibility of a single source of truth and information was raised in the context of Charter promotion and for responding to victim-survivors with complex trauma. Regional participants recognised the success of local initiatives and emphasised the need for collaboration, connection and co-ordination between services and agencies for responding to people with high support needs. Participants across Queensland identified the opportunity for improved case management for victim-survivors through their recovery and justice journey. The need for “victim-survivor navigators” and navigation tools were raised by participants across Queensland.

Several key principles were raised when responding to victims with complex trauma and high support needs. Frequently mentioned principles included: responding in a trauma-informed way, providing victim-survivors with options, understanding their multiple needs, having different accessible resources and using various modes of communication. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors, having information provided by trusted community members or through their communities was important. The capacity of services, especially in regional Queensland, limited the options available to victim-survivors.

Trauma-informed practice and training

Workshop participants identified several specific service providers as providing valuable training and information. Participants received training in both face-to-face and online formats, usually at induction and covering a range of topics, including trauma-informed practices, vicarious trauma and cultural awareness and competence. The need for local and solution-focused approaches were highlighted by participants in regional Queensland. Participants highlighted the need for training to be available for everyone, including those working as volunteers, in management, as policymakers, or on the front desk.

For all workshop participants, trauma-informed practices went beyond “just training” and included mentoring, debriefs, and internal or external supervision. The impacts of vicarious trauma and the importance of looking after one’s self and each other was emphasised throughout the workshops. Vicarious trauma was recognised as affecting staff and volunteer wellbeing, retention of talent, and service quality.

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Many participants, and especially those in regional Queensland, highlighted the value of communities of practice and sharing information between internal and external networks. Across Queensland, the OIVC heard that trauma-informed practice needed to be embedded into organisations. Particularly successful training was recognised as training which translated theory into practice, was delivered by experienced and engaging facilitators, was targeted and tailored to organisations, and was accessible. To learn more about best practices in trauma-informed practices, participants repeatedly recognised the value of learning from victim-survivors and people with lived experience. Internal and external peer networks also play a valuable role in operationalising best practice.

Next Steps

The Interim Victims' Commissioner plans to conduct further workshops in discreet and remote communities in 2024 to better understand the challenges and barriers that these communities face.

The Interim Victims' Commissioner has also launched a survey which seeks information from victim-survivors of violent crime, their support networks and people interacting with victim-survivors. The survey is open now until 31 January 2024. Findings from the survey will complement the feedback collected from the listening workshops and will help to inform strategies to raise awareness of the rights of victim-survivors of violent crime and services available and the development of resources for victim-survivors to understand their rights, the criminal justice process and how to access support and assistance.

Arising out of the listening workshops, the Interim Victims' Commissioner is also progressing work to deliver an Easy English version of the Charter of Victims' Rights in 2024.