

Youth Justice Reform Select Committee inquiry into youth justice reform in Queensland

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DVCONNECT

Be heard. Be safe.



SUBMISSION

Youth Justice Reform Phase 2
Youth Justice Reform Select Committee

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Chief Executive Officer
DVConnect
PO Box 10575 Adelaide Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

Email: ceo@dvconnect.org
Phone: 07 3156 2323
Website: www.dvconnect.org

DVConnect receives funding from the Queensland Government

DVConnect respectfully acknowledges and celebrates the Traditional Owners/Custodians throughout Australia and pays its respects to Elders, children and young people of past, current and future generations. We are committed to helping anyone experiencing domestic, family and/or sexual violence. This includes the LGBTIQ+ community, people of all ethnicities, religions, ages, abilities and pets.

For information about this Submission, please contact:
Michelle Royes, Director Clinical Governance, [REDACTED]
Megan W, Clinical Supervisor, [REDACTED]



About DVConnect

DVConnect provides several national and state responses to people who have experienced violence and offer support and pathways to safety and healing.

Queensland wide:

Domestic, family and sexual violence response services:

- DVConnect Womensline
- DVConnect Mensline
- Sexual Assault Helpline
- Forensic Support Helpline (in response to historical DNA matters raised in COI)
- Pets in Crisis
- Bella's Sanctuary

Victims of crime service:

- VictimConnect
- Victims of Crime Coordinated Community Response (Pilot)

Nationally:

- National Sexual Assault, Domestic & Family Violence Counselling Service, 1800RESPECT.

DVConnect's driving ethos is respect and safety, the right of people to live without violence, in the home or in the community. We are a not-for-profit organisation, with primary funding streams from Department of Justice and Attorney General, Office for Women and Violence Prevention (Queensland); Department of Justice and Attorney General, Victim Assist Queensland (Queensland) and Department of Social Services (Australia).

DVConnect was established in 1980 and is Queensland's state-wide crisis response service for domestic, family and sexual violence. DVConnect helps Queenslanders find pathways to safety 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. Annually, DVConnect takes in excess of 100,000 calls across all lines and provides crisis intervention across a number of key services. Womensline receives one call for help every five minutes (across a 24 hour period). Crisis support is provided in the form of emergency telephone support, emergency crisis accommodation placement and transport for families affected by abusive relationship, counselling for men, women and victims of sexual assault, education and support for men, community education, and care for pets of families experiencing domestic and family violence. DVConnect also operates Bella's Sanctuary a 5-unit medium-term accommodation residence that exists to provide women and children with a safe housing option after leaving a shelter/refuge.

DVConnect provides Australia's national sexual assault, domestic and family violence support service, 1800RESPECT. This service provides information, referral and counselling 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. DVConnect are subcontracted by Telstra Health to provide specialist counselling across the country.



VictimConnect is the state-wide response for victims of crime that fall under the *Victim Of Crime Assistance Act 2019* (Queensland). VictimConnect provides a state-wide 24/7 helpline and multi-session counselling and case management support service. Delivering this service expands DVConnect's experience with those who experience domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) to now include those who experience violent and personal crime across Queensland.

DVConnect operates from an intersectional feminist framework, acknowledging that DFSV is gender-based violence. This gendered analysis is supported by research, evidence and data, and indicates that DFSV is most often perpetrated by men against women, and that perpetrators of this violence are fully responsible for their actions. This framework acknowledges and responds to the intersectional experience of DFSV.

While the experience of those impacted by violent and personal crime is more broad reaching than DFSV, we build upon our intersectional, trauma-informed expertise to offer recovery-based counselling and case management.

The clinical services provided by DVConnect are inclusive and trauma-informed. We are guided by the diverse voices of survivors and recognise our clients as the expert in their own lives. The abilities, strengths, goals and needs of people living with disability are respected, as are individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. DVConnect acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know best what their communities need and want. Importantly, the intersectional approach of DVConnect considers and responds to how overlapping forms of discrimination may impact a client's experience of DFSV and other violent and personal crime.

Through operating multiple state-wide services DVConnect has unique insight into the experience of both violence and relevant services systems across Queensland. This combines with our national program which furthers our appreciation and practice-based evidence about geographic diversity and its impact on how DFSV and ability to access safer and supports.



Key points raised in this submission.

- Young people are victim/survivors of DFV in their own right and as such need to be met with culturally appropriate, anti-oppressive and dignified avenues for support such as peer support, community development and therapeutic models of care.
- The belief that social issues are best met with social solutions that consider the collective needs of community.
- That for young people, their experience of social exclusion is exacerbated by race, ability, gender and socio-economic status and that social exclusion has devastating consequences on young people, their families, and the broader community.
- The importance for the collective service systems to adopt trauma informed, anti-oppressive and dignity driven practice responses.
- That dignified social responses to violence and abuse are central to healing and recovery.
- That for young people who offend, violence and abuse are a familiar part of their story and experience of walking in the world.
- That DVConnect supports transformative justice practices.
- That each community is unique and supports localised community consultation when formulating responses to community needs.



Opening Statement.

For young people who offend, violence and abuse are a familiar part of their story.

Children and Young People are victim/survivors of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) in their own right and will resist violence in ways that preserve their dignity, Richardson & Bonnah (2015). The ways in which young people resist and respond to violence will vary, however, the social responses that met young people's disclosures of abuse and violence must not. All intersecting service systems coming into contact and working with young people, inclusive of youth justice, policing, courts, health, child protection and the DFV sector, are urged to respond consistently with violence informed, culturally appropriate, anti-oppressive and dignity driven approaches, if we are to prevent incursions on young people's wellbeing.

DFV is a prevalent social issue that has the potential to result in devastating consequences to the immediate and long term social, relational, emotional, and physical health and wellbeing of children and young people, AIHW (2024). Distinguishing DFV as the intentional and ongoing use of power and control over another, reinforced through the perpetration of various forms of violence, the consequences go beyond individuals- reverberating into local communities, and the broader society at large.

Acknowledging that violence and abuse regularly precede youth offending, it is crucial that professional responses to young people (in any setting) must not replicate the environment which made abuse possible in the first place. It is essential that all who form part of the collective service system; including the youth justice system, are resourced with the necessary skills, training, and support to uphold violence informed, anti-oppressive and dignity driven responses.

The role of Intersectionality.

It is of equal importance that the service system recognises the way in which young people's intersecting identities amplify their experience of oppression, particularly within systems, and how oppression creates fertile grounds for violence to occur in tandem to creating barriers to receiving appropriate supports.

The nuance of gender as an intersecting form of oppression cannot be ignored in the context of young women's experience of violence. Women are significantly more likely to be subjected to increased forms of gendered violence throughout their lifespan in comparison to their male counterparts.



Furthermore, young people's experiences of social exclusion are exacerbated by their race, religion, culture, ability, gender, and socio-economic status. Social exclusion has devastating consequences for young people, their families, and the broader community.

For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Young People, we must acknowledge the contemporary impacts of colonisation, intergenerational-trauma and how those impacts are reinforced through systemic oppression.

Acknowledging intersectionality and what that means for a young person's experience, is an initial step towards meaningful responses.

Importance of specialist DFV support services.

To promote healing and recovery for children and young people impacted by DFV. Violence informed work is integral to combatting the consequences of DFV. When we fail to address violence through appropriate forms of support, we fail to support the healing and recovery of children and young people.

DVConnect supports *a holistic approach that deals with the effects of children's exposure to domestic violence and other maltreatment will help prevent the intergenerational transmission of violent attitudes and behaviours and/or subsequent victimisation*, Morgan et al. (2009).

To recognise working with men who perpetrate violence as core violence and abuse work.

DVConnect recognises the need to work with men who perpetrate violence in a manner that upholds dignified practice responses and supports accountability if we are to create safer communities for women and children.

Working with boys and adolescents.

Young people who have been subjected to DFV, are more likely to use violence themselves within the home, ANROWS (2022). Coupled with the socio-political contexts whereby children and young people are socialised in rape culture and misogyny, work deeply rooted in the principles of social justice and the recognition of interesting identities as amplifiers of oppression must occur across service systems if we are to engage in work that supports violence free environments for women and children.



Supporting mother/child relationships within and beyond the youth justice system.

Men who perpetrate violence intentionally rupture the mother/child relationship. It is integral to supporting the relational healing of young people that the youth justice system is DFV informed and resourced be able to support and foster positive mother-child relationships free from coercion and abuse, Katz, (2015). Provision of service offerings within the youth justice setting that look to support non-offending parent/mother and child relationships in context of their individual and collective experience of DFV can contribute to young people's wellbeing by laying the groundwork for supportive relationships to continue well past youth justice's involvement.

Responses to violence that acknowledge the many ways non offending parents/mothers, children and young people resist and respond that the hands of men/father who perpetrate violence, are central to healing and promoting optimal outcomes for children and young people.

Recommendations.

- Offering specific non-offending parent/child programs within youth justice settings that support relational healing by working with the mother and child or young person around their responses and resistance to DFV.
- Prioritising DFV counselling and therapeutic supports for children and young people-as early as possible. Recognising that therapeutic work can be done in a variety of ways through a variety of models that meet the unique needs of children and young people.
- Working with male young people within the youth justice system through social political lens by offering specific programming in response to:
 - *The harmful nature of the social constructs of masculinity*
 - *Violence in relationships*
- Whilst DVConnect is not an expert in the field of youth practice, we are experts in the field of DFV work. From our long history of working alongside families impacted by violence we have witnessed the positive impact that self-determination, dignity driven, and violence/ trauma informed responses can have on victim/survivors.



In line with our expertise around the socio-political contexts which allow gendered violence to occur, we are supportive of the following recommendations:

- *Transformative justice practices.*
- *Increased pathways into vocational opportunities that combat social exclusion.*
- *Drawing on whole of community approaches to develop collective responses to young people's social inclusion and wellbeing drawing on principles of community development and belonging.*
- *Training and resources for the broader youth justice workforce around culturally appropriate, anti-oppressive and dignity driven responses to violence.*

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