

Evaluation of the Family Violence Integration Project Stage 2

FINAL REPORT | NOVEMBER 2014

Prepared by Effective Change Pty Ltd
for the Eastern Community Legal Centre

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Acronyms used in this report

| | |
|--------|--|
| ATSI | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander |
| CALD | Culturally and linguistically diverse |
| ECLC | Eastern Community Legal Centre |
| EDVOS | Eastern Domestic Violence Service |
| ERFVP | Eastern Region Family Violence Partnership |
| FCLC | Federation of Community Legal Centres |
| FVIP | Family Violence Integration Project |
| IFVRAG | Indigenous Family Violence Regional Advisory Group |
| IOSS | Intervention Order Support Service |
| LSB | Legal Services Board |
| RAJAC | Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee |
| RMC | Ringwood Magistrates' Court |
| VCAT | Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal |
| VOCAT | Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal |

1. Introduction

About the Family Violence Integration Project

The Family Violence Integration Project based at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court (RMC) commenced in 2011, with the aim of improving the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence through the partnership and collaboration of agencies working at the RMC. Funded by the Legal Services Board (LSB), and led by the Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC), the project is supported by the RMC and the agencies, who work together to provide the Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS) at the RMC.

Partners

The organisations that together form the FVIP partnership are:

- ◆ the Ringwood Magistrates' Court
- ◆ Eastern Community Legal Centre
- ◆ Victoria Police
- ◆ Eastern Domestic Violence Service (EDVOS)
- ◆ Victoria Legal Aid Ringwood
- ◆ Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program – EACH Social and Community Health
- ◆ Eastern Men's Behaviour Change Consortium
- ◆ Court Network
- ◆ Eastern Metropolitan Regional Family Violence Partnership
- ◆ Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT)
- ◆ The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)
- ◆ Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service
- ◆ the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (RAJAC).

History of the FVIP

Supported by funding from the LSB in 2011 and 2013, the FVIP has retained its vision to *'instill trust and confidence in the most vulnerable of victim/survivors that their safety and support needs will be upheld through their interaction with the legal components of the family violence system'*, primarily around the Ringwood Magistrates' Court. At the same, with continued funding, the project has been able to embed its initial aims, set new goals and enlarge the partnership. Funding received in 2013 enabled expansion of the partnership to include VOCAT, VCAT, Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service and the Eastern Metropolitan RAJAC.

FVIP Stage 2 Project Priorities

The FVIP Stage 2 was funded to continue the project's aim to improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court and to expand its focus on other areas of the justice system and raise broader systemic issues in the family violence response based on the partnership's growing expertise.

Purpose of the evaluation report

With the conclusion of the project's funding, this report aims to document:

- ◆ the work of the FVIP partnership and the successful features of this work,
- ◆ the FVIP partnership's achievements and
- ◆ the key lessons emerging from this important project which may have broader application in the field.

The evaluation has been on-going since the project's commencement in 2011. This work is based on a compilation of the previous evaluation and progress reports, an analysis of FVIP documents, access to FVIP records, attendance at FVIP Steering Committee meetings, observations of Information Sessions and interviews with key stakeholders.

2. What the FVIP did and why it works

Created the FVIP Partnership

Context and rationale The FVIP Partnership formed because partners had a strong belief that the victims/survivors' experience of applying for an intervention order at the RMC could be improved. While most of the partnership organisations already collaborated around court processes for intervention orders, they acknowledged that there was scope to improve the co-ordination and integration of services for court users. They also recognised that informally structured partnerships are unlikely to improve without imperatives, such as formal agreements, explicit goals, clear roles and responsibilities, resourcing and accountability processes.

What the FVIP did

- ◆ Built on the existing Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS)
- ◆ Developed a role for the FVIP Partnership that was different, but complementary, to the existing IOSS
- ◆ Created the partnership
- ◆ Created a range of structures and accountabilities for the operation of the partnership:
 - ◆ governance involving all relevant CEOs
 - ◆ working groups involving operational staff
- ◆ Set clear goals and developed a workplan
- ◆ Monitored and reviewed the workplan
- ◆ Monitored and regularly reviewed how partners perceived the partnership was functioning
- ◆ Continued to 'raise the bar' and set new challenges
- ◆ Invited new partners in when the partnership was ready

Why this works

- ◆ Partners are motivated and committed to a common purpose
- ◆ The partnership has a sound governance structure
- ◆ The partnership is resourced with a coordinator position
- ◆ Partners are accountable for their actions and commitments
- ◆ Partners attend meetings regularly, listen and share information
- ◆ Partners review and suggest strategic changes
- ◆ Partners are prepared to compromise and change
- ◆ The partnership has evolved and expanded over time

Focused on safety

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Context and rationale | <p>Enhancing and improving safety and support for victims/survivors is the central principle of the FVIP project. The FVIP is predicated on ensuring that the justice and court systems offer applicants a safe environment in which to come forward, and an environment which avoids re-traumatising those who have experienced violence.</p> <p>This requires more than an emotionally safe environment, it also means that applicants are protected from the potential or actual threat of harm or intimidation while attending court.</p> |
| What the FVIP did | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The partnership fixed their sights on enhancing safety and support for victims/survivors |
| Why this works | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ By asking a simple question - <i>‘Will this improve the safety of victims/survivors?’</i> - every proposed action of the partnership can be assessed, decided and prioritised ◆ The clarity of this principle provides the partnership with a device that simultaneously supports goal setting, decision-making, monitoring and review. |

Created better access to support services and improved coordination

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Context and rationale | <p>Victims/survivors’ enter the family violence system through a variety of pathways and may have little or no knowledge of the range of services available to support them. While there has been a steady focus in Victoria on creating a more ‘joined up’ family violence service system over the past decade, concerns about fragmentation and lack of coordination of services continue to surface in research and public comment from agencies such as the Victoria Police.</p> <p>For this reason, one of the FVIP’s goals has been to improve coordination of services and ensure better access to services for people in the system. The FVIP has been guided by the principle that being linked in to the appropriate services should not rely on the victim knowing what is available – people should receive the same access to services, irrespective of the doorway by which they enter the system. Effective referral processes are also a goal of the FVIP as they work in the best interest of both the client and the agency, by ensuring that the right person gets to the right agency as quickly as possible and, at the same time, ensuring that agencies’ time is not wasted with inappropriate referrals.</p> |
| What the FVIP did | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Created a Support and Referral Working Group, reporting to the FVIP Steering Committee ◆ Held Morning Coordination meetings on family violence sitting days with all members of the IOSS attending |

- ◆ Co-located services in the Protected Persons' Space on family violence sitting days
- ◆ Developed the IOSS Guide, documenting all agencies, services, their eligibility criteria and referral requirements
- ◆ Reviewed and improved referral protocols
- ◆ Developed standardised referral tools for the partnership
- ◆ Enlarged the FVIP partnership to ensure that a wider range of agencies / organisations were represented
- ◆ Provided information and training for generic agencies which includes advice about referring into support services
- ◆ Encouraged informal as well as formal networking between services
- ◆ Resourced the work of the FVIP through the FVIP Coordinator role

Why this works

- ◆ The partnership identified gaps and barriers to effective referrals, and addressed these issues.
- ◆ The partnership enables partners to maintain their focus on reviewing and refining referral processes.
- ◆ The combined effects of meeting regularly, improved communication and more familiar and mature organisational relationships, ensure that partners are better positioned to coordinate the services that are delivered to clients.
- ◆ As the partnership has access to the networks of each partner agency, there is greater opportunity for better coordination of services across a wider network.

Provided education and training for the broader service system

Context and rationale

The family violence sector needs to work with the broader community. Links are required with agencies beyond the family violence sector – from schools, hospitals, community health services to council services and beyond, so that any agency which comes in contact with someone experiencing family violence can make an appropriate referral if required. Equally, private sector organisations, such as private legal providers, should be able to make an appropriate referral. In order to achieve this, this broader network of organisations needs to understand the services available to which those experiencing violence can be referred.

What the FVIP did

- ◆ Provided information sessions at the RMC, using a panel format with a range of partner agencies presenting.
- ◆ Included question and answer segments.
- ◆ Provided targeted workshops to share information relating to ATSI and CALD communities
- ◆ Distributed resources to accompany the information sessions.

Why this works

- ◆ Naturally extends the networks of the partners.
- ◆ Distributes accurate information to the community.
- ◆ Allows participants to meet representatives of the FVIP agencies.
- ◆ Provides the experience of meeting in a court facility, which is often a new

experience for participants.

- ◆ Contributes to improving the appropriateness of referrals.
- ◆ Widens the reach of services.

Improved the legal response to victims/survivors of family violence

Context and rationale The FVIP's foundation research around victims / survivors' experiences at the RMC found that their experiences, and levels of satisfaction varied considerably. There were no clear reasons for why one person could have a positive experience, and another's experiences were negative, but those who had had a negative experience were disappointed to some degree with the response of the legal system. Reasons for this also varied, but included factors such as not feeling safe in the space, a lack of coordination across services, lack of information and lack of follow-up. These results therefore framed the FVIP's vision to improve the legal response to victims/survivors of family violence.

What the FVIP did

- ◆ Work closely as a partnership to:
 - ◆ identify deficiencies in the legal and support responses and
 - ◆ develop remedies to these responses.
- ◆ Enlarge the original partnership to include:
 - ◆ tribunals where family violence is a key contributor – VCAT, especially in relation to tenancy issues, and VOCAT.
 - ◆ community support agencies, including the local Aboriginal Healing Service
 - ◆ relevant local networks, including the regional Family Violence partnership and the RAJAC
- ◆ Establish a legal clinic for those living in the outer regions of the court's catchment area. This takes in semi-rural communities where access to legal support services is limited and people could be at higher risk due to physical isolation.

Why this works

- ◆ All partners are involved in formulating ways to improve the legal and support responses.
- ◆ Involving RMC staff, the magistracy and the police in the discussions, as well as legal service providers is vital to the success of improving legal responses.
- ◆ Involving a wide range of support services in the discussion with police, courts and legal services ensures that there is an analysis of problems that lie at the intersections between the legal and community sectors, and can take a holistic point of view.
- ◆ Support from executive levels of all partner agencies allows decisions to be made and implemented.

Advocated for further improvements

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Context and rationale | <p>Continued growth in the reporting of family violence matters means that this issue is an on-going community priority. Through the FVIP model, partner agencies have had the opportunity to implement and reflect on innovative ways of workings. The partnership has generated learnings about new ways of working that are replicable and of strategic value to the relevant sectors. The FVIP has therefore taken the approach that learnings from their experience should be shared more broadly with government, funders and relevant sectors, in order to inform public policy.</p> |
| What the FVIP did | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Share information through various forums and advocate for the needs arising. |
| Why this works | <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Advocacy on the basis of real world experience, enables replication of success and potentially allows others to avoid pitfalls, as well allowing successful strategies to be further extended.◆ Sharing information with government, funders and relevant sectors enables the experience of the FVIP to inform policy considerations and developments. |

3. Key achievements of the FVIP

The most enduring legacy of our work is the commitment to work together to make the experience less traumatising for victims of family violence and I think that is what this project has achieved.

FVIP member agency

A dynamic and evolving partnership of organisations with a shared commitment

The history of the FVIP is that of a long-term relationship between partner agencies sustained by their shared commitment to the partnership's vision to *'instill trust and confidence in the most vulnerable of victim/survivors that their safety and support needs will be upheld through their interaction with the legal components of the family violence system'*. The partnership has been both durable and adaptable. All founding members have remained with the partnership over that time despite the challenge of insecure funding, and they remain committed to its continuation. Over time, new agencies have joined the partnership by invitation.

With these new members, the partnership's scope has deepened to include Indigenous-specific services and networks and widened to include tribunals, such as VCAT and VOCAT. While these tribunals can lack strong connections to the family violence service system, they are often dealing with matters where family violence is a direct or indirect factor.

The FVIP partnership has reflected on its partnership over its operation, using a Partnership Analysis Tool. This tool is predicated on the notion that *"If partnerships are to be successful they must have a clear purpose, add value to the work of the partners, and be carefully planned and monitored."* Among the tool's components is a partnership checklist which provides a range of statements relating to the key features of a partnership, categorised as:

- ◆ determining the need for the partnership
- ◆ choosing partners
- ◆ making sure partnerships work
- ◆ planning collaborative action
- ◆ implementing collaborative action
- ◆ minimising the barriers to partnerships
- ◆ reflecting on and continuing the partnership.

FVIP partners were surveyed using this checklist on three occasions: 2011, 2012 and 2014. The results show the interesting progression of the partnership. With the third administration of the survey in 2014, the majority of members (five out of seven respondents) 'strongly agreed' that:

- ◆ *The perceived benefits of the partnership outweigh the perceived costs*
- ◆ *The action is adding value (rather than duplicating services) for the community, clients or agencies involved in the partnership*

Across the three survey periods, these were the only statements that attracted strong agreement from the majority of respondents.

Statements where the majority of respondents (five or more) 'agreed' are provided in Table 1.

Partnership Analysis: Areas of most frequent* agreement

| Beginning (2011) | After 12 months (2012) | After 3 years (2014) |
|--|--|---|
| Determining the need for the partnership | | |
| | Willingness to share ideas, resources and power | Perceived need for the partnership in terms of common interest and complementary capacity |
| | | There is a clear goal for the partnership |
| Choosing partners | | |
| History of good relations | Core business seen as partially interdependent | Partners share common ideologies, interests and approaches |
| | | History of good relations |
| | | Partnership brings added prestige to partners individually and collectively |
| | | There is enough variety among members to have a comprehensive understanding of the issues |
| Making sure partnerships work | | |
| | Management support | Management support |
| | Partners have the skills for collaborative action | Partners have the skills for collaborative action |
| | Roles, responsibilities and expectations clearly defined and understood | Administrative, communication and decision-making structure is as simple as possible |
| | Administrative, communication and decision-making structure is as simple as possible | |
| Planning collaborative action | | |
| Partners have the task of communicating and promoting the partnership in their own organisations | | All partners are involved in planning and setting priorities for collaborative action |
| | | Lines of communication, roles and expectations of partners are clear |
| | | Participatory decision-making system that is accountable, responsive and inclusive |
| Implementing collaborative action | | |
| | | There is an investment in the partnership of time, personnel, materials or facilities |
| Minimising the barriers to partnerships | | |
| | There are informal ways for sharing information and resolving disputes | There are formal structures for sharing information and resolving disputes |
| Reflecting on and continuing the partnership | | |
| | | There are processes for recognising and celebrating collective achievements and/or individual contributions |
| | | The partnership can demonstrate or document the outcomes of its collective work |

* Five or more respondents out of six respondents (2011, 2012) or seven respondents (2014)

These results show changes in the investment of effort and focus over the years. For example, in the middle years, members clearly perceived the focus of effort was on ‘making sure the partnership works’. The results also show that the partnership commenced with a ‘history of good relations’ but by the time of the final survey, the majority of members agreed that the FVIP partnership was achieving benchmarks of good partnership practice across most areas and categories.

Management literature stresses the challenges that organisational partnerships need to overcome to succeed. The FVIP partnership confronted many of the standard challenges – problems over demarcation, decision-making, maintaining momentum, sharing responsibilities for action, differing work methods and philosophical paradigms. In the face of these challenges, the FVIP partnership has not only survived but thrived, sustained by members’ sense of common purpose, strong and committed management, and the belief that the partnership has added value for clients, the community and agencies. In addition to the partnership model itself, key achievements of the FVIP nominated by member agencies through the 2014 survey included:

- ◆ *the strength of relationships, particularly with ‘partners outside of the court environment’*
- ◆ *improved networking between court, legal services, police and ancillary services.*

The (enduring legacy of our work) is the FVIP model as a benchmark for others to follow.

What a partnership delivers: improved quality and integration of services

As the Partnership Analysis Tool highlights, partnerships need to have a purpose. Analyses of the family violence system have long identified lack of coordination, lack of integration and poor communication as key deficiencies in the system. Over the past decade, family violence reforms in Victoria have focused on addressing these issues (amongst a raft of other issues).¹ The introduction of the Regional Family Violence partnerships is an example of an initiative aiming to improve service integration. What distinguishes the FVIP from broader regional and sub-regional initiatives is the project’s localised approach and highly specific focus.

The FVIP has gathered together services/agencies, including some services that would not otherwise sit at the same table, to focus very specifically on practices and processes at the Ringwood Magistrates’ Court. Member agencies, including those participating in regional partnerships, have highlighted the integration of services, better coordination of services and improved communication at, and around the processes at the RMC, as key achievements of the FVIP. Members also highlight the ‘wholistic approach’ to family violence at the RMC made possible through the range of participating services and the fact that improved integration on the micro level flows over to improved integration and ‘better management of family violence services in the eastern region.’

The work undertaken by the FVIP to achieve improved coordination (see Section 2) includes:

- ◆ a combination of formal and informal forums for discussion around referral and coordination, allowing for planning and delivery of day-to-day services, as well as consideration of issues around coordination of services and legal responses, at a strategic level,

¹ http://www.easternfamilyviolencepartnership.org.au/Family-Violence-Reforms_C27

- ◆ development of tools and resources to support better coordination, and
- ◆ the support of a dedicated project coordinator to assist the FVIP's work on service integration.

What do you think are the key achievements of the last 4 years of work?

A coordinated process enabling all professionals an opportunity to work together, identify any potential issues and clarify any questions amongst the team so the women who are supported receive an efficient service.

FVIP member agency

What integrated services deliver: improved safety for women and children

Integrated and coordinated services deliver service efficiency, but in the family violence context, the prime importance of service integration is that it greatly improves the safety of women, children and other victims/survivors of family violence. Member agencies report that the FVIP '*links partners to work together in a seamless way to support women through the court process and maximise safety*'. The FVIP consultation reports² show that over the years, there has been a marked improvement in applicants' sense of safety and increased reports of feeling protected and supported while at court. Member agencies also reported that they receive positive feedback from clients about the service they receive.

Applicants derive a sense of safety from a combination of features that include both their physical and psychological safety. The FVIP has continually monitored and reviewed safety procedures at court, to ensure that from the moment the applicant arrives, and sometimes, from the point when the applicant is leaving their home, processes are in place to support their safety.

Through the coordination of services at RMC, safety considerations and risk management strategies are continually being addressed. Applicants will not always be aware of the steps taken to provide for their safety. All agencies review the Family Violence list the day prior to hearings, in order to plan for all cases, but with a special focus on cases of higher risk and/or complexity. For example, the Victoria Police Family Violence Coordinator may contact the applicant prior to the hearing day to ask if they need support, such as being accompanied to court. However, in consultation with the FVIP partners, it may be decided that it would be safer for an agency such as EDVOS to contact the applicant rather than the police. Services may notify new court users about the Protected Persons' Space available to them, their support people and if needed, their children, in order to reduce anxiety prior to court and on the day of the hearing. The Morning Coordination Meeting, held on sitting days, addresses risk management issues and responsibilities for the hearing days. This could include matters that should be brought to the attention of security, or ensuring that a Court Network volunteer is available to support an isolated person if needed.

As the Morning Coordination Meeting is part of a hierarchy of meeting structures, this meeting can focus on the immediate issues of the day, while systemic and practice issues, emerging trends, or

² FVIP Consultation Reports, 2011, 2012, 2013

new ideas can be referred to the FVIP meetings, one of the FVIP Working Groups, or the Court Users Meeting, for more in-depth consideration and recommendations.

What an integrated service model can potentially achieve is necessarily linked to the role and scope of the agencies participating in the partnership. With VCAT and VOCAT's membership of the FVIP for example, the horizons of the partnership have expanded and the platform for delivering integrated services is extended. VOCAT's membership derived from the observation that there was a limited number of applications for victim of crime assistance from those who had participated in an FVIO process. Through VOCAT's membership a number of systemic changes were implemented, including Victoria Police making referrals to VOC at the point of a family violence incident, VOCAT attending the RMC on family violence hearing days and VOCAT joining the panel presentations at IOSS information sessions.

Member agencies report that key achievements of the FVIP's integrated service approach, include:

- ◆ *better safety outcomes for women and children*
- ◆ *an improved pathway for applicants attending court for hearings*
- ◆ *improved access for applicants to ancillary services including family violence support and mental health support.*

More people making sure I'm safe

A young girl in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne feels safe and protected from the grandfather who sexually abused her as a result of the cooperation of the Intervention Order Support Services operating at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court.

Legally this case was considered 'difficult', made more so when the abuser contested the intervention order. The young girl and her mother were required to attend five hearings over six months to reach their final order.

While the court hearings were stressful, both mother and daughter felt positive about their experiences at court. From her first contact with the Registrar, the mother felt that their story was listened to carefully and respectfully. The Registrar highlighted her concerns to the Magistrate, which the mother felt made a critical difference to the case. The Magistrate reviewed the supporting evidence and ensured that the Final Intervention Order responded to the mother's concerns, preventing the grandfather from being within 500 metres of the young woman, wherever she may be. The Final Order was also put in place until the girl reached the age of 18.

This experience brought the mother and her daughter in contact with most of the supports and services that make up the RMC IOSS - court staff, magistrates, lawyers, police and victim support services. Despite the fact that her grandfather was released from jail during this period, the young woman felt safer with the Final Intervention Order than when he was in jail because *'there were more people making sure she was safe.'*

Providing culturally-specific support for Aboriginal clients

With Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service and the Eastern Region RAJAC joining the FVIP partnership in its second stage, considerations around safety and improved legal responses for Aboriginal clients can be informed by Aboriginal cultural knowledge and expertise, including cultural safety within a court and legal setting. Boorndawan Willam provides a Koori Support Worker at the RMC, one of only a handful of such support workers in place at magistrates' courts in Victoria. This worker, in attendance at the RMC on Tuesday and alternate Friday FVIO sitting days, can:

- ◆ provide culturally-specific advice and support to people who are applying for or responding to a family violence intervention order or family violence safety notice
- ◆ provide information about court processes
- ◆ make referrals to legal services, family violence support and other ancillary services, such as mental health support
- ◆ conduct risk assessments and give information about how to keep safe from further family violence.

With Boorndawan Willam in the FVIP partnership, the pathways for referrals across and between agencies are strengthened for Aboriginal clients. At the system level, Boorndawan Willam is able advise member agencies about culturally safe and respectful policies and practices. Boorndawan Willam has also participated in the IOSS Information Sessions, and provided specific workshops on *Supporting Indigenous clients through the Intervention Order process*, thus reaching a wider range of community agencies with Indigenous-specific information.

The first Protected Persons' Space in a Victorian court

'He (ex-partner) made an application to get back at me. I really didn't want to come to Court. I didn't feel safe and this is just putting me in further danger. I just want to give up but my family and friends are forcing me to keep going. There is nothing they can do stop him. I kept repeating to myself all morning 'I'll be ok in that room (the PPS)'. I wouldn't have come if I knew I wouldn't be allowed to sit in that room...' FVIP Consultation Report, March 2013

The 'Protected Persons' Space' at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court is a separate waiting area for applicants of Intervention Orders. It is one of the first designated waiting areas for FVIO applicants in Victoria. It was established in August 2011 and was officially launched by the then Victorian Attorney-General, Robert Clark in November 2012. Protocols have been developed for use of this space (which was previously used as office space for another organisation) and are included in the IOSS Guide. Clients who choose to wait in the Protected Persons' Space are monitored to enhance their safety. The space is reasonably large, has a self-serve kitchen and chairs and desk space, where services can quietly consult applicants. There are toys provided for children and pamphlets and information available for applicants. All agencies inform their clients about the Protected Persons' Space prior to their hearing date. This has been reported as a factor in supporting and encouraging people to attend Court. All applicants are routinely asked if they wish to use this space when they present at the registrar's desk. Victims/survivors using the Protected Persons' Space have indicated that the room's existence shows them that the Court considers it important to provide for and respect their safety.

In addition to ensuring safety at court, the Protected Persons’ Space functions as a ‘de facto’ one-stop shop. Staff from support services, such as the domestic violence service and victims’ assistance can talk privately to applicants while they are waiting. As the Attorney-General observed in his official launch speech ‘...from the point of view of the person looking for help there is a seamless transition – they can move with help and support from one agency to another as needed rather than feeling like they are passed on and left to their own devices...’ Applicants who have not had any prior contact with support services can observe how workers interact with other clients, and can be casually introduced. This creates an environment where clients, particularly vulnerable and isolated clients, can gain trust in agencies and build the confidence to ask questions and link in with support services. At the same time, by virtue of being in the one space, agencies and court staff can effectively and efficiently monitor applicants. They can gently approach clients and check on their needs. They can provide information and answer spontaneous questions.

Fundamentally, though the function of the Protected Persons’ Space is to provide safety. The foundation research for the Family Violence Integration Project showed that the experience of waiting at court in the same physical space as the perpetrator of violence, caused distress and risks to safety for the applicant. As the Family Violence client advocate observed of the Protected Persons’ Space ‘In this space you can quite simply breathe – put your thoughts together – with no fear of repercussions.’ The space also improves safety for people arriving and leaving the Court premises. As a monitored space, applicants can discuss concerns for their safety with any of the service providers in the Protected Persons’ Space. Through the Morning Coordination Meetings, police and service providers are conscious of applicants at risk and monitor their arrival and movements during their time at court. Court staff can alert Protective Services of concerns for safety of clients or the court.

More than half of the member agencies nominated the Protected Persons’ Space as one of the FVIP’s key achievements and most important legacies.

Information Sessions and Education

Over three years (2012, 2013 and 2014), the FVIP has provided seven information sessions and six workshops, reaching 453 participants. Well over 100 organisations were represented across the participants. These sessions, held at the RMC, provide a broad range of organisations with exposure to the court, an understanding of the Family Violence Intervention Order process, and most significantly, an understanding of the various services in supporting people through this process and how to refer their own clients to these services and some basic information to distribute to clients.

| | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | Total |
|---------------------------|------|------|------|-------|
| Information sessions | 2 | 3 | 2 | 7 |
| Workshops | - | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| Participants | 200 | 147 | 106 | 453 |
| Organisations represented | 60 | 50 | 44 | 154 |

Continued advocacy

Throughout its lifespan, the FVIP partnership has continued to advocate for improvements to court processes relating to family violence. The importance of this work is that the perspectives and knowledge of this unique partnership are added to the broad range of family violence advocacy work. In addition to communications with the Attorney General and the Shadow Attorney General (particularly in the lead up to the November 2014 Victorian election), the FVIP has undertaken this work by contributing to the strategic planning of the Eastern Region Family Violence Partnership and the knowledge base of the Federation of Community Legal Centres. Based on the FVIP partnership's experience and knowledge, the key advocacy messages are the need for:

- ♦ courts to provide the lead in providing a strong and consistent approach to family violence, particularly in terms of delivering an integrated response to family violence
- ♦ a funded Family Violence coordinator at every court, in order to resource and support the coordination of services and the partnership
- ♦ a funded Applicant Support Worker and a Respondent Worker at every court to provide the links between applicants and support services and respondents and appropriate services, such as Men's Behaviour Change programs.

In 2014, the RMC received funding from the Department of Justice for the positions of a Family Violence Registrar, an Applicant Support Worker and a Respondent Worker.

4. What can be learnt from the FVIP?

Courts and DOJ can see how valuable external services are to the smooth and efficient running of the court. Courts can maintain a focus on safety and risk for women and children. Women and children's safety has been the focus...

FVIP member agency

The partnership

Membership

From the experience of the FVIP, it is evident that a court-based partnership structured around the notion of providing safety for women and children experiencing family violence, is a vital mechanism. The partnership, while crucial, is, however, a means not an end in itself. The FVIP partnership found it was important that the partnership started small, with a narrow and specific focus, and expanded as the partnership matured and gained confidence in its workplan. With funding over four years, the FVIP partnership was sufficiently well-established to increase its membership in 2013, thus enlarging its scope to focus on Indigenous clients and referral pathways to VOCAT and VCAT. Each of these additions helped the project maintain momentum and added to the achievements of the partnership.

Coordination and support

One of the less visible but essential factors contributing to the success of the FVIP has been the work of the FVIP Coordinator. The FVIP Coordinator resourced the partnership, undertaking initial research in the courts to identify concerns about court processes and safety, consulting with member agencies, supporting the various committees and working groups, suggesting strategies, resolving issues, developing resources, organising and contributing to the Information Sessions, ensuring that the partnership worked through the actions it had committed to, reporting back to the funding body, identifying future funding options and ensuring that information flowed accurately to members. The FVIP Coordinator participated in the majority of meetings, including the Morning Coordination meetings. She maintained a consistent presence in the court, observing and talking to women applying for FVIOs and keeping in touch with service providers, so that she had an up to date knowledge of issues and concerns. When this work is done well, it supports the well-oiled running of the partnership – done badly, it would have the potential to derail the partnership. As one agency observed, one of the partnership's key achievements was having 'a dedicated professional coordinator that has held the partnership throughout the journey.' For those seeking to learn from the FVIP, ensuring that the partnership has a dedicated coordinator, with the personal and professional skills to support the partnership is one of the critical lessons.

(The coordinator's enthusiasm and commitment to the project has been the driving force...

Structures

Having a range of meeting structures with different but complementary aims has been important to the success of the FVIP. Matters of immediate concern on hearing days can be referred to the morning coordination meeting, the FVIP Steering Committee has been the forum for strategic

governance, and the FVIP working groups provide the platform for the court and agencies to work together more deeply on systemic and process issues. Meetings were consistently well-attended – a function of many factors including organisational commitment, effective coordination, a sensible and clear work agenda and sharing of the workload – therefore contributing to their effectiveness.

Safety

The FVIP partnership's work in relation to safety has been extensive, encompassing work in relation to systems, practices, and policies, and is well-documented throughout this and other FVIP reports. The key lesson to note however in relation to these achievements has been that the principle of 'ensuring the safety of women and children' has guided every step of the FVIP's agenda. This principle has been the touchstone for every decision and action, and has without doubt contributed to keeping the partnership focused and united in pursuit of that goal.

Timing and tenacity

The Protected Persons' Space is a unique resource in Victorian courts. While the FVIP partnership worked hard to ensure that this space was available for FVIO applicants, there were elements of luck and timing in securing the space. This space became available as one tenant left the court building. There were multiple parties interested in the space, however, because the FVIP partnership had developed strong relationships at court, because the FVIP message around safety had been extensively promoted, because there was a united partnership advocating for this space, and to some extent through timing and tenacity, the space became available for use as a Protected Persons' Space. In part, the lesson from this experience is to have an opportunistic mentality – ready to review and grasp opportunities as they arise, if they support the goals of the partnership.

Spreading the message

The IOSS Education Sessions were consistently well-attended over three years, indicating a clear demand for information and resources. These sessions not only enabled dissemination of information, they broadened the reach of the partnership and greatly increased the number of agencies with an understanding – if only superficial – of court processes and support services, who left the sessions knowing how to link someone in need to the right service.

5. The Future

The FVIP funding will cease in early 2015, and further funding has not been sourced, presenting an unclear future for the partnership. Partners have expressed their commitment to maintaining the partnership, and to expanding it to include the newly funded court Applicant Support Worker and Respondent Worker. However, without the funding, the resources of the Coordinator will no longer be available, and it is not clear how this workload would be managed.

Recent developments in Victoria introducing Family Violence Registrars into magistrates' courts offers the option of transferring responsibility for coordination of the FVIP into the responsibilities of this role. Other potential options include sharing responsibilities and workload across the member agencies, and/or the Eastern Region FVP taking on this role, given this partnership focus of this role.

Whichever option is taken up, it will be important that the new iteration of this partnership continues to build on and extend the achievements made to date, including the important role of the Information Sessions.