



Evaluation of the Family Violence  
Integration Project:  
Final Report

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## Summary of Key Findings

### Overarching project outcomes

1. The Family Violence Integration Project has clearly made steady progress towards achieving its three key goals of improving the coordinated legal response for victims/survivors of family violence; demonstrating a successful partnership model and sharing its work and achievements with the broader community.

### Clear evidence base

2. A clear evidence base has been developed to inform the Family Violence Integration Project's work in improving the response of legal and support services to victims/survivors of family violence.

3. From the evidence base and issues identified, a workplan has been developed with recommendations for actions to address each issue. The simple, but coherent and structured approach of the project work enables the evidence base and activities to be continually monitored and reviewed.

### Improve coordinated responses

4. The collaboration of agencies involved in the Intervention Order Support Service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court has improved significantly through the Family Violence Integration Project. Improvements are evident through tangible outcomes, such as policies and procedures that provide a more coordinated response for applicants; through feedback from participating agencies and through the structures established to support the on-going collaboration, in particular the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group, providing a governance and coordination focus to the work and the Morning Coordination Meetings, providing a coordinated service response for clients during their attendance at court.

5. The success of the collaborative effort of the agencies involved in the Family Violence Integration Project is evident in some of the project's key achievements, most notably the establishment of Victoria's first and only Protected Persons' Space of its type, in a magistrates' court. While the primary purpose of this area is to provide a safe and separate physical space for clients, it is also a de facto 'one stop shop' for clients where the Intervention Order Support Service members can:

- provide information to clients
- coordinate services for clients
- assess and monitor client safety, and
- refer clients to services.

From the client perspective, the Protected Persons' Space allows clients to:

- sit separately from the respondent in a safe, comfortable and supportive environment
- safely be accompanied by support people



- bring their children to court, if no other alternative is available, and
- consult with multiple service providers in one room.

It contributes significantly to clients' feelings of safety and anecdotally it appears, can be instrumental in supporting clients to attend court.

## Expand existing partnerships

6. The Intervention Order Support Service has been expanded to include EACH Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program and Anglicare, the agency funded to provide the Men's Respondent service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court. With these service providers joining the Intervention Order Support Service and attending court at least weekly, applicants have faster access to support for victim of crime applications and access to counselling and respondents have access to information, support and referrals.

7. The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group has expanded to include the Court Network. This ensures that the key services operating at court and key service providers working with Applicants and Respondents participate in the steering of the project's work.

## Education and case coordination

8. The Intervention Order Support Service has provided information sessions for agencies that work with people who may be victims or perpetrators of family violence. In 2012, around 200 representatives of a wide range of agencies attended three information forums.

## Access to information

9. Through the project, referral processes to Victims of Crime Assistance and Counselling have improved, in particular through the attendance at court of the Victims' Assistance and Counselling Program worker, and as a result more timely information is available to clients and service providers.



## Key Lessons

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The experience of the project generated a number of important lessons that continue to inform work in the second stage of the project. They are documented here not only as a record of the lessons learned through the project, but also for their potential to inform other work in the family violence setting.

### 1. Have the safety of women as the central objective of the work

In practical terms, having the safety of women as the central objective of the work means that:

- ♦ All actions are driven by the agenda of increasing the safety of women.
- ♦ There is an in-built test for all decisions '*Does this increase the safety of women (or not)?*'
- ♦ All project partners are unified around the common objective of increasing the safety of women, despite the different imperatives of their organisations.

The structure of the project is deliberate. Establishing partnerships, as an example, is often an objective of work in family violence. The rationale is that partnerships support integrated work. However, the work in establishing partnerships is difficult and susceptible to distraction, derailment or losing momentum. In contrast, with the FVIP's structure, the desired result of increasing the safety of women is at the centre of the work giving the project coherence, clarity, focus and momentum. With this approach, establishing a partnership can be seen as a means to an end, but not the end result.

### 2. Start working with a specific and narrow focus

The Family Violence Integration Project started with a narrow, localised focus: *increasing the safety of women attending Ringwood Magistrates' Court in relation to an intervention order matter*. This narrow and localised focus provided a place to start and prevented the task from appearing over-whelming.

### 3. Share the workload and increase the number of people involved

A Steering Group guides the work of the FVIP and all partnership agencies are represented on the committee. Using a working group approach to key tasks, work is progressed by smaller groups of people. This allows people to focus their energy on areas of particular interest. More importantly it provides more time and space for discussion of issues and brings in more perspectives, as agencies' operational staff can serve on working groups.

### 4. Driving the work from outside the Family Violence sector

With the work driven by a Community Legal Centre rather than a family-violence specific service, it sends a strong message that family violence is everyone's responsibility, not just that of the family violence sector.

### 5. All partners feel a sense of ownership of the work and achievements of the FVIP

While the ECLC is the lead agency for the project, there is a strong ethos that all partners share in the successes and the challenges of the work. This creates the strong sense of unity and also sets up a focus on



committing to the work for the longer-term when external funding has ceased and it will need to be self-funded and integrated into the work programs of all agencies.

## **6. Cultural change gains its own momentum**

The partnership has found that the project has started to influence the culture at Ringwood Magistrate's Court, with examples of staff groups not involved in the project taking initiatives of their own volition to increase the safety of women involved in family violence matters.

## **7. Continuous quality improvement is now a way of thinking amongst the group**

Partners are now initiating their own improvements to increase the safety of women involved in family violence matters, well outside the initial brief of the project.

At the outset of the second stage of the project, in keeping with the project's open approach, members visited other courts to learn about good practices that could be implemented at Ringwood Magistrates' Court. This initial investigation is now informing new case-management approaches currently being developed.

Inspired by practice elsewhere, when an Affected Family Member does not attend court, Victoria Police at Ringwood Magistrates' Court now adjourn the hearing for one week rather than have the order struck out. During that week, police check on the Affected Family Member's safety, conduct a risk assessment and check whether any assistance is required to return to court.

## **8. The two-way benefits of the partnership**

Pre-dating the Family Violence Integration Project, there was a long history of trying to establish morning coordination meetings between agencies and the court on Family Violence sitting days, with limited success. This effort was re-ignited with the Family Violence Integration Project. With stronger relationships created through the Steering Group, more open discussions were possible. Given the pressures on court time, there was some reluctance to attend the Morning Coordination meeting without clear evidence of how it would benefit court efficiency. However, other agencies found the meetings very beneficial, particularly through the participation of the court. Since learning the value of their attendance to other agencies, the court is regularly represented and the Morning Coordination meetings are a key element of the success of the project. There have been additional benefits, as external agencies have gained insight into the court's care and concern for Affected Family Members.

## **9. Sharing learnings and extending the influence of the work**

The Family Violence Integration Project provides information sessions for agencies with an interest in the work of the court in relation to family violence. These sessions have been very well attended and positively evaluated by participants. This has enabled the reach of the project to extend far beyond the formal partners.



## **10. Success unites members**

Key achievements help to galvanise a partnership. The Family Violence Integration Project successfully established the Protected Person's Space in the Ringwood Magistrates' Court one of the first of its kind in Victoria. The Protected Person's Space was launched by the Victorian Attorney-General in November 2012 and gained extensive positive media coverage. This key achievement has generated a palpable sense of pride in the group and provided continued motivation for the work.

## **11. With success comes higher expectations**

With the second stage of the project commencing, it is evident that partnership agencies now have a deeper knowledge of the work they are engaged in and higher expectations of what can be achieved. The 'bar has been raised'.



## Introduction

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The Family Violence Integration Project, based at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court, aims to improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence in a coordinated and integrated manner. The project was undertaken by a partnership of agencies, led by the Eastern Community Legal Centre. It was funded through a major grant of the Legal Services Board from February 2011 – January 2013. The Eastern Community Legal Centre has recently received funding from the Legal Services Board to continue the project for a further two years.

This report documents the evaluation of the first stage of the Family Violence Integration Project.

### Project Background

The process of considering and seeking an Intervention Order is a highly complex and challenging experience for victim/survivors. There is, however, scope to make systemic and strategic improvements to this process, especially through the partnership and collaboration of key agencies. Driven by local agencies, the Family Violence Integration Project has sought to affect systemic and strategic change.

### The Intervention Order Support Service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court

The Intervention Order Support Service has operated at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court since 2002. This service originated through a partnership between the Eastern Community Legal Centre, Victorian Legal Aid and EDVOS – the Eastern Domestic Violence Service, with the support and cooperation of the Ringwood Magistrate's Court.

The Intervention Order Support Service partnership identified a need for greater coordination and integration of support at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court.

### Project Partners

The Intervention Order Support Service partnership expanded for the Family Violence Integration Project to include the nine organisations listed below. It continues to grow and include new partner agencies.

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#### Members of the Intervention Order Support Service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court

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	Court Network
ECLC	Eastern Community Legal Centre
EDVOS	Eastern Domestic Violence Service
EMBCC	Eastern Men's Behaviour Change Consortium
EMRFVP	Eastern Metropolitan Regional Family Violence Partnership
EVACP	EACH Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program
RMC	Ringwood Magistrates' Court
VLA	Victoria Legal Aid
	Victoria Police

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## Project Aim

The overarching aim of the Family Violence Integration Project is to improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence in a coordinated and integrated manner, with a focus on the partners working at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court. The project's vision, aim and goals are:

- Vision** To instil 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.
- Aim** To improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence in a co-ordinated and integrated manner, through the partnership and collaboration of key agencies working at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court (RMC).
- Goals**
- ◆ Improve the co-ordinated and integrated response for victim/survivors of family violence accessing the legal system.
  - ◆ Demonstrate a successful partnership model and a range of strategies that could be utilised and adopted in other regions.
  - ◆ Present key learnings and recommendations to be distributed and considered for wider community engagement work.

## Project management and resourcing

The Family Violence Integration Project is led and managed by the Eastern Community Legal Centre. The ECLC engaged a Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator to lead the development of the project, coordinate its implementation, facilitate communication between partners and ensure that the project aims are achieved within timelines. The Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator is also responsible for resourcing the evaluation of the project.

## Structure of the report

The evaluation report is structured around achievements, in a broad sense, against the project's goals followed by greater detail against the project objectives. It concludes with suggestions around its future focus with the second stage of the project.

## Methodology

The evaluation has been undertaken primarily as a desk-based review of evaluation information due to limited resources, such as partnership analysis survey results and material developed by the Family Violence Integration Project. The evaluator has advised on evaluation methods and tools and met regularly with the Project Coordinator and the ECLC. The evaluator has also attended the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group and the launch of the Protected Persons' Space, and consulted with partners on these occasions.



## Project Overview

Driven by a clearly articulated and forward-focussed vision, aim and goals, the key elements of the Family Violence Integration Project include:

Project element	The Family Violence Integration Project Structure
Management	Eastern Community Legal Centre
Resourcing	Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator
Governance	The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group
Working groups	<p>Three working groups, reporting to the Project Steering Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited information and Support Working Group and Referral Pathways Working Group</li> <li>• Risks to Safety and Privacy Working Group</li> <li>• Systems Issues Working Group</li> </ul>
Key objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a clear evidence base regarding effective strategies for improved services.</li> <li>2. Establish improved coordinated responses for parties (especially victims/survivors) engaging with the legal responses of the family violence system.</li> <li>3. Utilise and expand the existing partnerships of agencies currently delivering an Intervention Order Support Service at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court.</li> <li>4. Develop and implement education and case coordination strategies to improve the pathway and experience of parties entering and exiting the court system.</li> <li>5. Ensure that victims/survivors are well informed and able to access all of their entitlements through victims of crime support and compensation and other relevant programs.</li> </ol>
Project workplan	<p>Project activities were articulated for each of the five objectives. Arising from the project's initial task of developing a clear evidence base, six priority action areas were determined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to information</li> <li>• Limited support</li> <li>• Risks to safety and privacy</li> <li>• Limited legal response</li> <li>• System issues</li> <li>• Agency issues</li> </ul> <p>Responsibility for investigating the priority areas was allocated to either a working group or to the Project Steering Group.</p>
Monitoring	<p>Indicators of success were articulated for each of the five objectives. The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group measured progress against:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work undertaken in the six priority areas</li> <li>• reflection on whether the project was reaching its own measures of success</li> </ul>
Reporting	<p>Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator provides regular progress reports to the Steering Group</p> <p>Annual reports provided to the funding body against achievement of objectives</p>



## Key Findings

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*I often feel overwhelmed. It is an uneasy journey through pain and shame to navigate unfamiliar systems, access assistance from places that you have never been before, deal with legal issues,, talk to police, find out how to now live and all the while reeling from the effects of violence and the breakdown of a relationship.*

Victim/survivor advocate speaking at the launch of the Protected Persons' Space, Nov 2012

The Family Violence Integration Project commenced with a reasonably modest aim that had three parts. Firstly, *to improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence*. In order to achieve this outcome for people affected by family violence, the aim included working *in a co-ordinated and integrated manner*. Evidence from academic research, the daily experience of services working in the family violence sector and the litany of client stories informed this part of the aim. When services are coordinated and integrated, victims/survivors of family violence are spared the trauma of endlessly repeating their story to each worker they encounter or the challenge, during a time of distress, of discovering and referring themselves to the full range of legal and community services that are available. The third part of the aim focussed this work on *the partnership and collaboration of key agencies working at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court (RMC)*.

While the project partners were clear about the project's aim and took on each of its parts in effect as guiding principles, at project commencement in 2011, none of the partners envisaged that just 21 months later in November 2012 the Attorney-General would be attending the Ringwood Magistrates' Court to launch one of Victoria's first Protected Persons' Spaces – a safe and separate space for intervention order applicants to wait whilst attending court. The Protected Persons' Space is a high point in the achievements of the project. However, this was achieved partly by serendipity – the space became available by chance when a tenant of the building vacated, and largely by effective advocacy and a strong partnership – space is at a premium at all courts and there is competition for any vacant space.

This success though should not obscure the hard work, the small but instrumental 'wins' that preceded it and the commitment of the partners to improving the court experience for victims/survivors.

### Overarching project outcomes

- ♦ Goal 1: Improve the co-ordinated and integrated response for victim/survivors of family violence accessing the legal system.

Achievements in this area include:

- The establishment of the Protected Persons' Space, which provides physical safety for applicants whilst at court, and through the co-location of applicants and service providers, clients can be seamlessly and conveniently referred across services.
- Improved procedures and protocols implemented by the registrar, such as an automatic risk screening for all intervention order applicants and referral to the Protected Persons' Space.
- Protocols governing the Protected Persons' Space.
- Morning Coordination Meetings on Family Violence sitting days, where risks to safety are examined.



- Greater focus of all services on following up clients.
- Recently instituted practice of adjourning cases for one week in the event of a 'no show' in order for police to undertake a safety check of the applicant, rather than striking the case out.
- ♦ Goal 2: Demonstrate a successful partnership model and a range of strategies that could be utilised and adopted in other regions.

Two key structures have been consolidated through the partnership. The first of these is the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group with management level representation from key services, as well as the Regional Family Violence Partnership. This group operates a flexible model, with smaller working groups created to address priority issues and engage operational staff in the work of the partnership. It is resourced by the Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator. The second key structure is the Intervention Order Support Service. This service, comprising the key agencies represented at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court on the Family Violence sitting days, predates the project. As a group, it did not have a strong history of working together on a regular and consistent basis. Through the project, Morning Coordination Meetings have been instituted between the key services attending court on the Family Violence list days. While initially attendance at each of these forums was patchy, there is now regular and full attendance. The groups have needed to work through issues and broaden their understanding about other services, and their imperatives to reach this point. However, with a clear focus on improving the legal responses for those affected by family violence whilst attending Ringwood Magistrates' Court on intervention order matters, and the impetus of external project funding, momentum and progress has been maintained.

Each of these structures could be replicated at other courts, and informed by the approaches that the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group has tried. The work of this group has been assisted through a dedicated coordinator role.

- ♦ Goal 3: Present key learnings and recommendations to be distributed and considered for widercommunity engagement work.

The Intervention Order Support Service and the Ringwood Magistrates' Court delivered three information sessions in 2012 to a broad audience of service providers who work with victims or perpetrators of family violence. Participants found these sessions to be extremely informative and useful. Information distributed at these sessions include the Intervention Order Support Service Guide, developed through the project and providing information about referral pathways and each of the organisations involved in the service.

The evaluation of the Family Violence Integration Project contributes to the project's knowledge base and provides information that can be disseminated by the project to wider community / legal sector to inform work in other locations.

#### **Key Finding:**

1. The Family Violence Integration Project has clearly made steady progress towards achieving its three key goals of improving the coordinated legal response for victims/survivors of family violence; demonstrating a successful partnership model and sharing its work and achievements with the broader community sector.



## Clear evidence base

Objective 1: Develop a clear evidence base regarding effective strategies for improved service

### Activities

In order to develop an evidence base about effective strategies for an improved service, the Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator facilitated consultations with key stakeholders at the beginning (September, 2011), middle (March, 2012) and end (January, 2013) of the project.

#### Consultations with agencies

The purpose of these consultations was to identify the services provided by each agency and areas where services intersected, and as the project progressed, to measure perceived changes over time about the effectiveness of the service system.

All agencies involved in the Intervention Order Support Service Partnership were consulted. Other agencies external to this partnership but based in the region and with a direct or indirect interest and need to know about the IOSS were also consulted. Consultations were conducted through surveys and focus groups.

#### Consultations with people who had experienced family violence

The purpose of consulting people who had experienced family violence was to collect data on the client experience and ensure that the project was grounded in consideration of the client experience.

Consultations were held with people who had experienced family violence and had accessed the Ringwood Magistrates' Court and applied for an Intervention Order.

Clients were provided with project information, ethical considerations in terms of participating in the research and a consent form and were invited to participate in a consultation. Consultation options included face-to-face interview, telephone interview, written survey or group discussion. All those participating opted for either face-to-face or telephone interviews.

### Reporting

The Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator has prepared consultation reports at the completion of each of the project's three consultation stages. The reports are provided to the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group for their endorsement for future action.

### Outcomes

As a result of the project's research and consultation activities with clients and agencies, six priority areas for action were identified in the Stage 1 Consultation Report:

1. Limited access to information
2. Limited support
3. Risks to safety and privacy
4. Limited legal response
5. System issues
6. Agency issues



The elements of an effective legal response were also identified from this research in terms of information, support, risks, legal response, systems and agencies. This has provided the Family Violence Integration Project with direction to guide their actions, aiming for achievable, good practice.

Informed by the elements of an effective legal response, and evidence-based areas for action, the Family Violence Integration Project identified recommendations to make improvements under each priority area and possible actions. The actions are delegated to the Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator, working in conjunction with either the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group or one of its working parties.

The Family Violence Integration Project has therefore created a simple and coherent workplan, based on key issues to be addressed. After each consultation phase, the Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator has prepared a Consultation Report documenting achievements, progress and opportunities for each priority and equally importantly, the future focus for action, which ensures that the project maintains momentum through its activities. The Family Violence Integration Project documents its work and structure in a simple, one page outcomes flowchart, which is updated at appropriate stages. The project has clearly met its indicator of success of having '*key recommendations for action for improving service*'. (See Attachment 1: Family Violence Integration Project Consultation Report and Attachment 2: Family Violence Integration Project – Stage 2 Consultation Report)

#### **Key Findings:**

2. A clear evidence base has been developed to inform the Family Violence Integration Project's work in improving the response of legal and support services to victims/survivors of family violence.
3. From the evidence base and issues identified, a workplan has been developed with recommendations for actions to address each issue. The simple, but coherent and structured approach of the project work enables the evidence base and activities to be continually monitored and reviewed.

## **Improve coordinated responses**

**Objective 2: Establish improved coordinated responses for parties (especially victims/survivors) engaging with the legal responses of the family violence system**

### **Activities**

#### **Development of the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group and Working Groups**

The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group was established in 2011 at the outset of the project. Chaired by the CEO, Eastern Community Legal Centre and resourced by the FVIP Coordinator, the Steering Group is actively involved in the oversight of the project. Membership of the group has expanded during the life of the project to its current membership of nine agencies.

The Steering Group established a Working Group model so that work on priority areas for action identified through the consultation phase could progress simultaneously and efficiently and operational staff could contribute to the discussions, in particular around day-to-day practice. The FVIP Coordinator is a member of each working group, records notes and undertakes the agreed tasks. The Steering Group establishes the



brief for each Working Group and the groups report back to the Steering Group. Three Working Groups have been created:

- ◆ Limited Information and Support and Referral Pathways Working Group,
- ◆ Risks to Safety and Privacy Working Group, and
- ◆ Systems Issues Working Group.

### Partnership survey

In order to reflect on the Steering Group's partnership and coordinated responses, a 'Partnership Analysis' was undertaken with the partner agencies, using a modified VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool. This was administered as an electronic survey at the beginning and end of the project. Additional questions sought partners' views on topics such as what 'success' in the project would look like and changes that would be evident in the way organisations work together at the beginning of the project. At the end of the project, partners were asked about what changes were evident through the project and what has been different for clients, as well as identifying future improvements for clients.

### Outcomes

There has been considerable activity in relation to this objective and achievement of outcomes.

The establishment of the FVIP Steering Group in itself is acknowledged by members as a significant outcome, providing the first forum for all these parties to meet around the common goal of better co-ordination and integration of family violence services and an improved response for victims/survivors of family violence. Evidence of improved and better-developed agency relationships includes:

- ◆ increased opportunities for interaction
- ◆ increased communication and secondary consultations occurring
- ◆ improved case-coordination
- ◆ increased confidence and trust in the roles and expertise of IOSS workers

The Steering Group has worked productively on a range of complex issues. The group has worked through the challenges that typically face a new partnership, but after two years of activity there is a real momentum to the activity of the group, meetings are well attended and the workload shared fairly across members. There is a genuine long-term commitment to change and continuous improvement evident in the group. The FVIP Coordinator is a trusted resource for the group, and her role in supporting the project and undertaking key tasks is valued.

The Steering Group's Partnership Analysis scores at the beginning and end of the project reflect the level of commitment and on both occasions resulted in scores equating to: '*A partnership based on genuine collaboration. The challenge is to maintain its impetus and build on the current success.*' The score at the end of the project dropped slightly from 140/175 to 133/175 potentially indicating a higher level of expectation from the group. The highest score achieved both times was in the area of '*determining the need for the partnership*', showing the level of clarity and agreement on the need for the partnership held by the partners. The lowest score recorded both times was for '*minimising the barriers to partnership*', showing that there are still challenges in this area, such as the need for 'formal structures for sharing information



and resolving demarcation disputes'. In addition to high levels of support on the need for the partnership, there was 100% agreement or strong agreement for the following statements, indicating the key elements of the partnership experience:

- *The partners see their core business as partially interdependent.*
- *The managers in each organisation support the partnership.*
- *Partners have the necessary skills for collaborative action.*
- *All partners are involved in planning and setting priorities for collaborative action.*
- *Partners have the task of communicating and promoting the coalition in their own organisation.*
- *There is a core group of skills and committed (in terms of the partnership) staff that has continued over the life of the partnership.*
- *There is a clear need and commitment to continuing the collaboration in the medium term.*

The work driven by the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group has resulted in not just a well-functioning partnership, but in a number of significant, tangible outcomes in the priority action areas, described below.

### **Information**

The *Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS) Guide* has been developed which documents the service, the Family Violence Integration Project, the roles of the partner agencies and information about court assistance and safety. Details on partner agencies includes their role, contact details, the organisation, the work they undertake in relation to family violence and the intervention order process and criteria for accessing their service. The Guide is for agencies involved in the IOSS and other agencies needing this information. The IOSS Guide also include client-focussed information, such as the 'Commonly Asked Questions' about the experience at court, the process involved in the intervention order process and commonly used legal terms. The guide is useful both for agencies within and outside the family violence sector and for individuals attending court for intervention order matters.

Other resources developed include an Application Stage Referral Sheet as well as *Steps 2 Safety* (funded by a grant from the Victoria Law Foundation) providing information for clients about the family violence intervention order process in DVD, pamphlet and poster formats. The Ringwood Magistrates' Court and partner agencies distribute this pamphlet widely. Information sessions for generalist and specific family violence service providers is a key element of the work in this area – see Objective 4 for further information.

### **Support**

The FVIP Steering Group has improved relationships and collaboration between services. The institution of **Morning Coordination Meetings**, held on the morning of the two Family Violence list sitting days at Ringwood Magistrates' Court, has been particularly significant in coordinating services and improving services for clients. The Morning Co-ordination Meetings involve all agencies in the Intervention Order Support Services. They provide the opportunity for court, legal and support services to review the list, identify any potential vulnerable cases or additional support needs and share required information between services. They improve the level of coordinated responses for clients and have resulted in increased communication and trust between services. Through the operation of the Morning Coordination Meetings and the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group, referral pathways between agencies



have improved, and therefore, clients' access to services has improved. The group has developed protocols for members to absent themselves from discussions if there is a perceived conflict of interest. This has been a useful learning for non-legal agencies, for example, in broadening their understanding of the responsibilities of legal officers to act in the interests of their client.

### **Safety of victims / survivors**

The '**Protected Person's 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 family violence applicants in Victoria. It was established in August 2011 and officially launched by the 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.

*'...when people do come to Court to seek protection, to seek to have their rights upheld they know that they can do so in an atmosphere of security and support.'*

*Attorney-General Robert Clark  
Launching the Protected Persons'  
Space, Ringwood Magistrates'  
Court,  
9 Nov 2012*

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.



## Legal responses

Court procedures have been tightened or improved, and the court has taken a much broader role in connecting with the community sector. The court has:

- ♦ developed a 'Commonly Asked Questions' sheet
- ♦ limited the number of people in the hearing room at any one time to improve the situation for the Applicant
- ♦ run information sessions for Family Violence services.

With the Protected Persons' Space comes the capacity for duty lawyers to consult their clients on the court premises, safely and with the opportunity to seamlessly refer clients on to domestic violence or victims' assistance services. Through the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group and the Morning Coordination Meetings, staff and agencies are able to provide a more coordinated service for clients.

*'...the Family Violence Act is all about protection – that's at its absolute heart, that is its legislative purpose and philosophy; that's what we are applying, that's what we are expressing as we run and operate our busy courts.'*

*Ian Gray,  
Chief Magistrate  
(upuntil Nov 2012)*

Partners recognise the work required to improve legal responses as an on-going activity. As a result of recent visits to other courts, Victoria Police at Ringwood Court have changed their procedures around Affected Family Members who do not attend court. Based on practices encountered at another court, Victoria Police now adjourn the hearing for one week, rather than have an order struck out, and during that time the police follow up with the Affected Family Member to conduct a risk assessment.

## System and agency issues

Partners recognise that improving legal responses for people affected by family violence is a continuous process. Current consultations, for example, have highlighted the need Applicants have for clear, concise and consistent information prior to attending court – during the application stage. While there has been a noticeable improvement in feedback from clients about the process, it remains a confronting experience during a time of high stress and hyper vigilance. A key theme in client feedback remains the request for clarity and consistency in the legal response - from lawyers, magistrates, police and the court.

Through the partnership, the group is involved in a dynamic process, examining how ad hoc problems can be solved, as well as continually focusing on addressing systemic issues. With the working group model, issues around the service system or the way the specific agencies work together can be referred to the appropriate group for consideration and suggestions for improvement. The group has reached a point in its maturity where differences between agencies do not create stumbling blocks. An example of this sort of distraction is the variation in terminology for people who have experienced family violence – lawyers and the courts use the terms of 'Affected Family Member'(from the Family Violence Act) 'applicant' and 'respondent'; the police can use the terms of 'victim' and 'perpetrator', domestic violence services use the term 'victim/survivor' and the Victims of Crime service uses the term 'client'. The importance of different terminology is respected, and while initially agencies preferred their own terms, they now recognise that no single term will serve all. Group members have developed their understanding of the imperatives of each service and the strengths and limitations of their roles in relation to victims/survivors of family violence.



### Key Findings:

4. The collaboration of agencies involved in the Intervention Order Support Service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court has improved significantly through the Family Violence Integration Project. Improvements are evident through tangible outcomes, such as policies and procedures that provide a more coordinated response for applicants; through feedback from participating agencies and through the structures established to support the on-going collaboration, in particular the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group, providing a governance and coordination focus to the work and the Morning Coordination Meetings, providing a coordinated service response for clients during their attendance at court.

5. The success of the collaborative effort of the agencies involved in the Family Violence Integration Project is evident in some of the project's key achievements, most notably the establishment of Victoria's first and only Protected Persons' Space of its type, in a magistrates' court. While the primary purpose of this area is to provide a safe and separate physical space for clients, it is also a de facto 'one stop shop' for clients where the Intervention Order Support Service members can:

- provide information to clients
- coordinate services for clients
- assess and monitor client safety, and
- refer clients to services.

From the client perspective, the Protected Persons' Space allows clients to:

- sit separately from the respondent in a safe, comfortable and supportive environment
- safely be accompanied by support people
- bring their children to court, if no other alternative is available, and
- consult with multiple service providers in one room.

It contributes significantly to clients' feelings of safety and anecdotally it appears, can be instrumental in supporting clients to attend court.



## Expand existing partnerships

**Objective 3: Utilise and expand the existing partnerships of agencies delivering an IOSS at the Ringwood Magistrate's Court**

The Intervention Order Support Service has expanded to include a representative of the EACH Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program and a representative of Anglicare.

The Anglicare Men's Respondent Worker attends the Ringwood Magistrates' Court on both family violence sitting days to provide information, support and referrals to men who are responding to an intervention order application. This is also an opportunity to discuss options that prioritise the safety and well being of children and women.

The EACH Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program Worker attends the Ringwood Magistrates' Court weekly, to coincide with one of the family violence sitting days. The result of this is that clients can be immediately referred to this service and if they meet eligibility requirements, they can commence steps to apply for a victim of crime application, including seeking access to counselling for adult applicants or for children affected by family violence, without being required to make contact with yet another service.

Whilst the Intervention Order Support Service predates the Family Violence Integration Project, this group did not meet on a regular basis and did not have a forum to consider or address systemic issues. The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group has provided that forum, and ensures that representation extends beyond core services, such as the Court, Victoria Police and legal services. The Court Network, the Eastern Region Men's Behaviour Change Consortium and the Regional Family Violence Partnership are all represented and able to contribute to the work of the Steering Group. Given the external and continuous improvement focus of the group, there is capacity to continue to expand the partnership in the future. The Family Violence Integration Project has identified the need to develop and extend their relationships and partnerships with Indigenous agencies in the region. This is commencing with relationships developing through training participation and visits to agencies by the Family Violence Integration Project Coordinator. During the next phase of the project it is hoped that stronger ties and protocols can be built in partnership with Indigenous agencies.

The Intervention Order Support Service Guide, an initiative of the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group, has been distributed widely through to the networks of group members.

The Ringwood Magistrates' Court and the Intervention Order Support Service delivered three Information Sessions (discussed further below) in 2012. The purpose of the session is:

- ♦ to build relationships and partnerships between the Intervention Order Support Services and service providers in the region
- ♦ to extend the reach of the work of the Intervention Order Support

What have been the main successes in terms of referral pathways?  
*Through the Family Violence Integration Project Information Sessions, there appears to have been an increase in referrals to organisations from court users and community/welfare agencies.*  
*Information session participant*



Service, by ensuring that the wide range of community agencies who may encounter people who are victims or perpetrators of family violence:

- are informed about available services
- know how to make appropriate referrals, including to the police and legal services
- have up to date information available for their agency and for distribution to their clients
- have an overview of the intervention order process.

#### Key Finding:

6. The Intervention Order Support Service has been expanded to include EACH Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program and Anglicare, the agency funded to provide the Men's Respondent service at Ringwood Magistrates' Court. With these service providers joining the Intervention Order Support Service and attending court at least weekly, applicants have faster access to support for victim of crime applications and access to counselling, and respondents have access to information, support and referrals.

7. The Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group has expanded to include the Court Network. This ensures that the key services operating at court and key service providers working with Applicants and Respondents participate in the steering of the project's work.

## Education and case coordination

**Objective 4: Develop and implement education and case co-ordination strategies to improve the pathway and experience of parties entering and exiting the court system**

The focus of education and case coordination focus of the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group is on:

- ♦ Improving knowledge **broadly** across the service system
- ♦ **Deepening** understanding and knowledge of the specific Intervention Order Support Services

To address the broad information needs, three *Information Sessions about the Intervention Order Process and the Support Services available at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court* were delivered in 2012 (March, July and October). These sessions were attended by approximately 200 participants, representing agencies and services ranging from maternal and child health services, community and Indigenous health services, schools, family relationship centres to migrant and multicultural services. Delivered through a panel style format in the Magistrates' Court, the half-day sessions included short presentations from each of the Intervention Order Support Services as well as presentations from other court services (the Dispute Settlement Centre and the Mental Health Court Liaison Service). People attending were invited to email questions with their registration details to enable panel members to cover these areas in their responses. Holding the sessions in the Magistrates' Court was also designed to provide participants with a sense of the experience on the day for people involved in an intervention order application.

What was information did you find most useful?  
*The security of seeing the Family Violence partnership in action.*  
Information session participant



Feedback was received from over 80 participants from the three sessions. Of this feedback, there was almost universal agreement that the format was appropriate and that the content of the session was useful and informative. Areas that participants found 'most useful' elicited comments such as:

- *Roles of various people at Court*
- *Understanding the language and the process.*
- *The DVD (Steps2Safety) was excellent – a good visual aid to the session.*
- *The application process for an Intervention Order – this will enable me to provide more appropriate support to my clients when needed.*
- *Just generally being able to hear from various bodies of the family violence system rather than through one focus.*
- *All of it as it highlighted the extent of the services wrapping around family violence.*
- *The legal mentions, directions, contest and the distinction between these.*
- *Diversity of speakers was excellent and the linkages between the services in supporting victims.*



Ringwood Magistrates' Court and IOSS Information Session, Ringwood Magistrates' Court, 2012

Feedback recorded about the session was consistently positive. It is acknowledged that the session provides a general overview, but participants were positive about hearing from the range of services and learning about the various roles and responsibilities. They received printed information, such as the Intervention Order Support Service Guide and Steps2Safety material. Participants appreciated receiving

the referral flowchart and other 'useful leaflets'. Many suggested that the session should be a regular feature of this and other Magistrates' Court. Suggestions to improve the session included:

- Involving a Magistrate in the panel discussion
- Involving service providers working with Indigenous communities and culturally diverse communities
- More information on working through the process with older people / young people / people with mental health or drug and alcohol issues

However, participants also valued that the sessions were focused and ran to time. Suggestions from participants such as opening with an Acknowledgement of Country, acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, have been taken up.

In terms of deepening project members' understanding of each other's services and roles, planning and presenting the Information Sessions as a panel greatly contributed to this.

#### **Key Finding:**

8. The Intervention Order Support Service has provided information sessions for agencies that work with people who may be victims or perpetrators of family violence. In 2012, around 200 representatives of a wide range of agencies attended three information forums.

## Access to VOCAT information

**Objective 5: Ensure that victim/survivors are well-informed and able to access all of their entitlements through victims of crime support and compensation and other relevant programs**

Initial consultations with agencies sought information about the extent of victims' accessing Victims of Crime (VOC) support and reasons for low uptake of this service.

The FVIP Coordinator consulted the Victims' Assistance Program representative. Consultations identified that there is often a lag of 3 – 4 months after a family violence matter and intervention order proceedings, before a client is ready to seek victim of crime assistance.

Changes and improvements that have been initiated through the Family Violence Integration Project project include:

- ♦ Victoria Policerefer victims to VOC assistance at the point of first contact with the police in relation to the family violence matter.
- ♦ Eastern Victims Assistance and Counselling Program worker is now based at Ringwood Magistrates' Court once a week, on a family violence list day, to provide information about victims of crime support services and application processes.
- ♦ The Intervention Order Support Services provide written information about victims' assistance options and the information is reinforced through discussions with clients.



- ◆ The Intervention Order Support Service Guide includes information about victims' assistance options and contact details. This information has been widely distributed across the region to service providers.
- ◆ A representative of the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal Registrar is one of the regular speakers at the Intervention Order Support Service Information Sessions and can answer questions from participants.

In combination, all of these strategies have increased the number of applications for VOC assistance and increased referral options for clients. Continuing to improve access to Victim of Crime information and assistance is the focus of the second stage of the project.

**Key Finding:**

9. Through the project, referral processes to Victims of Crime Assistance and Counselling have improved, in particular through the attendance at court of the Victims' Assistance and Counselling Program worker, and as a result more timely information is available to clients and service providers.



## Future Focus

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The Family Violence Integration Project at Ringwood Court has received further funding from the Legal Service Board. Through this second stage, the project will further develop the collaboration and expand the project focus to other areas of the justice system, in particular the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to consider broader systemic issues in the family violence response.

With the project collaboration's focus on continuous improvement, feedback is consistently sought about areas for future focus. Areas that have been raised through the first stage of the project for future work include:

- ◆ Providing information for clients at an earlier stage – i.e. during the application and pre-court stage
- ◆ Working more closely with Indigenous agencies, including Indigenous family violence agencies
- ◆ Working more closely with culturally linguistically diverse clients and specific support services
- ◆ Working more closely with magistrates, for example, a magistrate joining the Information Session panel or joining the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group
- ◆ Working to have the Applicant and Respondent Worker roles as funded positions and mandated referrals to Men's Behaviour Change programs

What can your agency do to create the best chance for further success?

*Continue to work together as a group who all have the same purpose rather than each agency with their own agenda.*

*Family Violence Integration  
Project partner agency*

These suggestions will be considered in shaping the next iteration of the project.

