

# Meeting the needs of children

FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE  
(CALD) BACKGROUNDS IN THE CONTEXT OF  
DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (DFV)

QLD ROUNDTABLE INSIGHTS SUMMARY



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

SSI and Myriad Kofkin Global (MKG) acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which we meet, live, work and learn. We pay respect to the Elders of each Nation – Past, Present and Future – and promote the continuation of the cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

## SETTLEMENT SERVICES

### INTERNATIONAL (SSI) BACKGROUND

SSI is a community organisation and social business that supports members of the community to achieve their full potential. We work across the Eastern Seaboard with people who have experienced vulnerability, including refugees, people seeking asylum, migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, children, families, people living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and LGBTQIA+ communities to build capacity and overcome inequality.

In the context of this work SSI is committed to amplifying the voices of children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds who are impacted by domestic and

family violence (DFV) so they are no longer invisible in the development of public policy and programs that affect their lives.

## MYRIAD KOFKIN GLOBAL (MKG) BACKGROUND

Myriad Kofkin Global is an impact advisory business partnering with purpose driven organisations to maximise their impact and future sustainability. MKG support organisations to build inclusion capabilities across culture, systems and structures using intersectional analysis, and work collaboratively with communities to co-design sustainable solutions that reflect community needs and expectations. MKG are passionate about driving bold and innovative impact with social conscience.

Our principal consultants have made a significant contribution in ensuring family and domestic violence responses at policy, systems and practice levels are inclusive of the voices and needs of multicultural women and their families. These efforts have included advisory roles to government, representation on peak bodies and working with organisations to embed intersectional approaches to programs and services.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SSI and MKG would like to thank the following people for their support and participation at the roundtable:

### Presentations:

1. Anne Hollonds, National Children's Commissioner – keynote address
2. Jatinder Kaur – presenter

### Panel:

1. Cecilia Barassi-Rubio – DFV Practitioner
2. Maree Foelz – Settlement DFV Project Officer, SSI
3. Racheal Kirabo – young leader, Multicultural Youth Queensland

4. Professor Silke Meyer – Chair Child and Family Research School, School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University

We acknowledge the importance of including children's voices in all discussions and decisions related to them. However, few children are sufficiently supported to participate in difficult and sensitive conversations of this nature at this time.

In lieu of children's voices, we are deeply thankful for the contributions from young adults with lived childhood experience and extend our sincere appreciation to all roundtable participants.

## THE NATIONAL PLAN TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN 2022-2032

The *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children* (the National Plan) released in October 2022, acknowledges that women and children from diverse cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds and migrant and refugee women and children, including those on temporary visas can face specific challenges. It specifically identifies migrant and refugee women and children as target communities across the four National Pillars (Prevention, Early Intervention, Response, and Recovery and Healing) and the need to co-design activities with, and tailor activities to, these communities.

The National Plan also acknowledges children, including LGBTQIA+ children and young people, as victims of gender-based violence in their own right and identifies actions to prevent and address violence against children in each of the four domains, from prevention through to recovery and healing. Making sure that all children in Australia can access age-appropriate consent and respectful relationships education and supporting recovery from childhood trauma are important strategies for ending gender-based violence.<sup>2</sup>

The National Plan commits to 10 years of sustained action, effort and partnership across sectors and levels of government towards our vision of ending violence against women in one generation. It outlines what needs to happen to achieve this vision, including building the workforce, growing the evidence base and strengthening data collection systems, while delivering holistic, coordinated and integrated person-centred responses. To achieve this, we must listen to and be guided by victim-survivors and people with lived experience.<sup>1</sup>

There is growing recognition that children from CALD backgrounds do not have an influential voice in government policy making in general, let alone in the complex area of domestic and family violence (DFV), and that this needs to change. As much of the public discussion about how this cohort is impacted by DFV is new, little formal research, data, and best practice information is available. The invisibility of these children in decision-making processes is a high-level policy issue that requires attention.

The release of the National Plan and the development of a five-year Action Plan present a timely opportunity to spotlight the DFV challenges children from CALD backgrounds face, and to commit to working collectively with them to build, implement and evaluate solutions.

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1. National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, p18  
2. IBID, p44

## ROUNDTABLE SCOPE AND APPROACH

To build on publicly available material and the current understanding of how DFV impacts children from CALD backgrounds, SSI developed and ran in partnership with Myriad Kofkin Global (MKG), a series of three roundtables (QLD, NSW, VIC) that focused on amplifying the voices of CALD children and young people (aged 0–under 19yrs) impacted by domestic and family violence.

The roundtables brought together victim/survivor advocates, academics, and experts from across government, DFV, community, legal, multicultural and children’s services to:

- ✓ focus on service delivery gaps, opportunities and solutions
- ✓ identify potential policy, planning and funding levers
- ✓ identify where collaboration might be possible.

Approximately 40 people attended the QLD Roundtable, including keynote speakers, panel members and participants.

## THIS INSIGHTS SUMMARY

This summary provides a high-level overview of what participants told us at the QLD roundtable.

The insights form an important anecdotal evidence base and part of the grassroots foundational work required to develop a strategic approach to influencing the national debate and State, Territory and Federal Governments’ frameworks, policy and funding decisions impacting children from CALD backgrounds, that derive from the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*. We recognise the variation in policy levers and service delivery systems across different states will require different responses tailored to each jurisdictional setting.

We also understand there are viewpoints that sit outside the roundtable process and do not suggest this content provides an exhaustive picture of QLD knowledge and experience. However, we are confident that the insights strongly reflect the challenges, gaps and opportunities identified in formal mainstream contemporary research and public policy debate as they relate to children from CALD backgrounds in the DFV domain in Australia.

A comprehensive Roundtables Report, which combines insights from QLD, NSW and VIC roundtables and contains recommendations for Australian, State and Territory governments has also been developed.

# KEY THEMES

The following eight key themes highlight **what we heard**; they integrate the perceptions, knowledge and experience of people who attended the event.

## 1 CHILDREN ARE INVISIBLE

In Australia we often still see children as appendages to their parents rather than individuals in their own right. They are largely invisible in policy, service delivery and structural considerations, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) are even more overlooked.

## 2 CENTERING CHILDREN'S VOICES

The UN Convention on Rights of Child - article 12 - is the right to be heard. This work is not about us doing things *for* children but *with* children.

We know that children don't disclose DFV for many reasons. Hearing from them on their own terms in safe spaces is critical to understanding what the barriers to disclosure are, e.g. corporal punishment is accepted in their families/communities; teachers are mandatory reporters so information can't be shared with them for fear of family breakdown and so on.

We need to create intentional, safe spaces and respectful conversations for children to share their experiences, along with the necessary professional, culturally appropriate support to the child. This requires collaboration between experts.

Government and services need to be asking children what works for them.

## 3 POSITION CHILDREN IN MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

It is an embedded belief in some cultures that children (particularly female children) should not speak out as it is disrespectful to adults. This belief takes away the child's agency and power. The pressure to stay silent can be compounded in families who are also experiencing other pressures from pre and post arrival trauma.

In some communities physical violence against children is seen as discipline and any discussion about it being unacceptable is minimized. Families may not know that what they are experiencing is considered domestic violence or that help is available. Adults may say that children are exaggerating and children may feel a sense of stigma and shame, or they may be worried that by disclosing the violence they risk family breakdown, so keep their experiences secret.

Women often don't know where to get help or raise issues, or they may fear that if they do disclose things will get worse or nothing will happen, so they too stay silent. This can also be the case with men who experience abuse.

We need to build trust in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, use their culture and faith as a source of strength and provide support to talk about what is happening.

## 4 DFV AND THE RISKS THIS PRESENTS FOR THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

A 2022 ANROWS report<sup>1</sup> is building the evidence base for connections between DFV and young people's problem behaviours, particularly mental health.

We know that problem behaviours are indicators of potential childhood trauma and this should ring alarm bells. It is a mistake to believe that once the immediate abuse is resolved, the impact of DFV ends; in fact, DFV can influence people's pathways throughout life.

Although there is little research in this area, some of the serious impacts are starting to emerge. They include:

- ✓ premature birth
- ✓ health complications
- ✓ delayed skill development
- ✓ mental health issues
- ✓ physical health issues
- ✓ crime
- ✓ use of violence later in life

## 5 INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Institutional racism was raised as cause for concern. The invisibility of children from CALD backgrounds in decision making is a high-level policy issue and there are currently no systems in place that could lead to sustainable change. Risk aversion and lack of decision makers' cultural responsiveness can be barriers to greater inclusion.

An example of this marginalisation can be seen in the lack of data capture across the majority of programs; where there is no data, there is no evidence of a problem and therefore no action. CALD and faith communities have historically been overlooked in Royal Commissions which demonstrates the lack of focus on non-mainstream communities in public inquiries, despite their public importance.

Data matters. If you don't know your cohorts you can't measure who is/not accessing the systems in place to prevent and respond to DFV. At present, for example, police are not compulsorily required to collect information about cultural background, hence there is no rigorous data on the prevalence of DFV in CALD communities, or its impact on children in these communities.

Some concerns related to evidence gathering include:

- ✓ clear agreement on the childhood age range (0 to 16 or 18yrs?)
- ✓ lack of child-focused interpreter services impeding communication
- ✓ lack of effective conversations with parents, especially where English-language proficiency is limited
- ✓ many barriers to DFV disclosure for women from CALD backgrounds, including community pressure and stigma
- ✓ services only working with children where the family has separated and not with those living with DFV in the home environment
- ✓ children from CALD backgrounds often live at home until they are married. The influence of parents and community can remain deeply embedded and unreported

We need to identify data parameters and collection points and gain the commitment of government to capture and share information. This information could help to inform the design and delivery of services.

## **6 LACK OF APPROPRIATE SERVICES AND RESOURCES**

The service system does not look like or reflect the community at large. Although child protection and DFV systems get lots of notifications, the screening rate for CALD is relatively low and is usually not mandatory.

The system isn't resourced to obtain, support and respond to CALD disclosures and children's voices are often lost in the chaos. Many children require support but not enough people with the skill sets required are available to work with them. Professionals such as teachers experience barriers to getting involved beyond reporting. We need to understand what educational and therapeutic community supports can be put in place so the child doesn't get lost.

Enormous investment in cultural responsiveness and domestic violence training that includes a focus on the needs of children in the service system is required, and collaboration with trauma informed professionals who understand cultural diversity nuances and work directly with children is needed.

Some programs, such as 'Safe and Together', which is not child-specific, but supports families that choose to stay together, appear to be working well but they are not widespread. The goal of this program is to create child-centered systems and practice change, keeping children safe and together with the protective parent. Other programs such as Women's Hubs provide safe spaces and help to build trust between services and the community.

Greater focus on perpetrator accountability is also required. There are currently insufficient services that focus on the source of the harm and that support men to address their needs and behaviour, and none are language specific in Queensland.

We need to improve the way we get feedback about services and programs from children in a child-appropriate way.

## **7 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS HAMPERING PROGRESS**

The fragmentation of the system creates many barriers and is an enormous challenge.

DFV funding arrangements tend to exclude work with children; they focus on child safety before child wellbeing. There is no consistent 'whole of family' approach or deep understanding of the 'child client journey'.

Policy and risk assessments are usually designed for adult needs and some progress has been made in assessing risk for women, but children should be assessed separately to consider the broader spectrum of harm. We know the threat/risk to children is high even when they are not directly targeted.

We re-traumatise people through system navigation because information is not easily shared, services are not joined up and wait lists are long. Privacy laws obstruct

the disclosure of critical information so key decisions are made without ‘the full picture’. This can result in the misidentification of the parent most able to parent, exposure to the justice system and adverse outcomes for children. The role of poverty cannot be ignored either. Single mothers are one of the poorest population groups in the country and their children are constantly affected by their lack of resources.

## **8 VISA RELATED IMPACTS**

Access to settlement support and DFV related services such as income support and housing is based on the visa pathway into the country. There are multiple visa-related issues which have resulted in many temporary visa holders and migrants receiving no state/commonwealth support. The impact on children in these circumstances can be dire; they may have nowhere to go, be forced to endure an unsafe home environment or live in ad-hoc short-term accommodation. In some situations women and children have no option but to leave the country.

Where children on insecure visas are eligible for permanent visas but residency has not been sought, there is a risk of visa cancellation if they come before the law. Some people have never been told about their rights and responsibilities in Australia so are unaware of services available to children, or the ‘notion’ of DFV, or the consequences of their actions.



## QLD INITIATIVES KNOWN TO PARTICIPANTS

PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE/ FOCUS AREA	COMMENT
<p><u>Community Hubs</u> (women's hubs)</p>	<p>Women feel safe in these environments so we need to continue supporting them through these programs.</p> <p>Programs can help women to learn how to look after themselves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ know contacts, who they can talk to</li> <li>✓ interrelated wellbeing of children, wellbeing with mother</li> <li>✓ building of trust between services and community</li> </ul>
<p><b>Health Impact Project</b></p>	<p>Specialist Occupational Therapist working with the parents and children in the community hubs.</p>
<p><u>Safe and Together</u></p>	<p>The goal of the Safe and Together model is to create systems and practice change that is child-centered, keeping children safe and together with the protective parent.</p>
<p><u>Caring Dads</u></p>	<p>Mission is to work with fathers to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and their mothers.</p>
<p><b>Family Peace Building Project</b></p>	<p>This project is run by RAILS (QLD refugee legal service) in collaboration with other services. It focuses particularly on men from CALD backgrounds.</p>



## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE/ FOCUS AREA	COMMENT
<b>Stopping violence in childhood</b>	Broad suggestion that our focus should be on stopping violence before it starts. No specific programs mentioned.
<b>Centre children</b>	Need to base approaches on key frameworks but be guided by children's needs in the design and delivery. Need to find a way to support children to influence government departments and policy.
<b>Raise children's visibility</b>	Need to speak with one voice to elevate children from CALD backgrounds in the DFV context. Need to create opportunities so children's voices can be heard intentionally, safely and respectfully, eg through Community Hubs. Need to bring child-focused experts into existing programs.
<b>Use of corporal punishment</b>	Physical violence against children is seen as discipline and can be minimised in CALD communities. Need to work with faith communities.
<b>Systems Reform</b>	Better partnerships, more resources and training. Integration of children's voice in programs and policy needed.
<b>Interpreter services</b>	No services for children. Opportunity to develop child-centred interpreter service?
<b>Therapeutic support for children in community programs</b>	Who can work with children? Lots of children around but no one with skills set to work with them. Everything goes to childminding/babysitting.
<b>Feedback from children</b>	How do we get feedback from children about service access?
<b>Challenges with service responses</b>	Need to build cultural responsiveness capability.
<b>Focus on perpetrators</b>	Not sufficient focus on perpetrator accountability. No CALD specific behaviour change programs. Need to work with faith communities and mainstream programs to build cultural responsiveness.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Risk assessment needs to consider broader spectrum of harm. Advocate for review of specific risk assessment for children.

PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE/ FOCUS AREA	COMMENT
<b>Long term impact</b>	<p>Problem behaviours are indicators of potential childhood trauma – this needs to be explored.</p> <p>We are missing links between DFV and the child and youth mental health space.</p>
<b>Training and collaboration</b>	<p>Need for cultural responsiveness understanding and training.</p> <p>Who are the professionals in the child space – what trauma informed training have they done?</p>
<b>Not speaking out</b>	<p>Victims don't know where to get help or raise issues. There are not enough safe spaces for disclosure.</p> <p>Need to build trust in communities and see culture and faith as source of strength.</p>
<b>Data</b>	<p>Need to get data on children from CALD backgrounds: Mental health presentations, inequalities re health needs, juvenile justice or OOHC, levels of homeless – intersectional data sets for comparison.</p> <p>No data on % of DFV incidents occurring in CALD, how police intervene, number of children in households, whether police connect to services, filicide, patterns of DFV prevalence in CALD communities.</p> <p>Data sharing is a big issue.</p>
<b>Visa issues</b>	<p>Many temporary visa holders don't have access to state/federal supports.</p> <p>There are no children advocates in immigration law so parents can be making status decisions without the child having a say.</p>
<b>Working with Health, Education and Justice</b>	<p>There are no substantive CALD intervention programs in Health and no substantive funding available.</p> <p>CALD inclusion team within Education but no focus on DFV?</p> <p>Justice system is not well equipped to deal with the needs of children from CALD backgrounds.</p> <p>How do we get better at working with government departments that interact with children as core business?</p>
<b>SETS DFV framework</b>	SSI – under development.
<b>National Policy on Children development</b>	Need to develop a national framework that responds to the needs of children from CALD backgrounds.
<b>Map existing research</b>	Document work already done to identify gaps and draw out innovation so we can share existing information on best practice.

