



2022 | DVConnect



Submission

Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce
Discussion Paper 3



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*DVConnect receives funding from
the Queensland Government*

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



DVConnect Submission to the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce

Discussion Paper 3: Women and girls' experiences across the criminal justice as victims-survivors of sexual violence and also as accused persons and offenders

About DVConnect

DVConnect is the state-wide domestic, family and sexual violence crisis service for all people in Queensland. Our services include:

- DVConnect Womensline 1800 811 811
- DVConnect Mensline 1800 600 636
- Queensland's Sexual Assault Helpline 1800 010 120
- Pets in Crisis Program with the RSPCA QLD
- Bella's Sanctuary; a safe place for women and their children to heal and rebuild after violence, providing independent, medium-term accommodation for up to five families at a time.
- As of July 1, 2022, DVConnect will provide specialist support to the National Sexual Assault, Domestic & Family Violence Counselling Service, 1800RESPECT
- As of July 1, 2022, DVConnect will deliver the state-wide helpline for victims of crime in Queensland, called VictimConnect

DVConnect was established in 1980 and is Queensland's state-wide crisis response service for domestic, family and sexual violence. DVConnect helps Queenslanders find pathways to safety 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. Annually, DVConnect takes in excess of 100,000 calls across all lines and provides crisis intervention across a number of key services. Womensline receives one call for help every five minutes (across a 24 hour period). Crisis support is provided in the form of emergency telephone support, emergency crisis accommodation placement and transport for families affected by abusive relationship, counselling for men, women and victims of sexual assault, education and support for men, community education, and care for pets of families experiencing domestic and family violence. DVConnect also operates Bella's Sanctuary a 5-unit medium-term accommodation residence that exists to provide women and children with a safe housing option after leaving a shelter/refuge. We are a not-for-profit organisation, predominantly funded by the Department of Justice and Attorney General, Office for Women and Violence Prevention.

DVConnect are a partner agency for Australia's national sexual assault, domestic and family violence support service, 1800RESPECT. This service provides information, referral and counselling 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. DVConnect's 1800RESPECT services are delivered in partnership with Medibank



Health Solutions on behalf of the Australian Government as part of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2010-2022. DVConnect have recently been successful in a tender to provide this service nationally from 1 July 2022 for the next 5 years, alongside Telstra Health.

Alongside this DVConnect has been successful in the tender to provide the state-wide response counselling and support service for victims of crime that fall under the Victim Of Crime Act 2019. While service provision does not commence until 1 July 2022, DVConnect has already been exploring and connecting with partner agencies and the community about the impact of violent and personal crime.

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

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

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



Opening Statement

DVConnect would like to acknowledge the comprehensive consultation and exploration of the Taskforce to date. The Taskforce's previous Discussion Papers and the Hear Her Voice Report demonstrate the due diligence of the Taskforce in addressing the matters before it. DVConnect appreciates the Taskforce's consideration of current matters and the comprehensive Discussion Paper (the Paper) prepared.

DVConnect identifies that our scope of expertise lies largely outside the scope of the Paper. However, we do work closely with Queenslanders impacted by sexual violence and assault through provision of telephone crisis counselling, information, referral and advice. We see how experiences of the criminal justice system for victims, accused and offenders intersects with all our of services; Sexual Assault Line, Womensline and Mensline, and 1800RESPECT. Therefore, our submission provides an overview of how the criminal justice experience impacts on women and girls who access our services and illustrates the compounding effects of trauma that can occur through this engagement. In saying this, DVConnect is expanding its understanding and relationship with the criminal justice system as we establish VictimConnect.

We are also cognisant of the impacts that reform such as legislating against coercive control will have on people impacted by DFSV, and the DFSV sector as a whole. DVConnect will monitor these developments closely to ensure we can prepare and advocate for what will be needed to support effective implementation of Taskforce recommendations relevant to the needs of people requiring crisis support.

Through reading the Taskforce's Discussion Papers and the Hear Her Voice report, we can see how thoroughly the Taskforce has researched and consulted on the matters before it. Therefore, this submission seeks to share the practice experience and wisdom we have from the provision of our services, only identifying evidence-based information or alternative papers if we feel they are pertinent or yet undiscovered/explored by the Taskforce.

Further to the above, we want to strongly note that we stand alongside many knowledgeable individuals and services, who have deep, and nuanced understanding of the criminal justice system as accused, offenders and victims of sexual violence. We defer to their knowledge, lived experience and practice wisdom. We hope to add our voice to the chorus asking for a more just and responsive system, expanding details in areas where we have expertise and experience.

Overall, DVConnect agrees that the matters chosen for exploration under the Paper are appropriate for the scope and intent of the Taskforce. We consider many of the matters explored in this final Paper to be considered in relevant and balanced ways with appropriate research, consultation and with consideration for the role gender, patriarchy, culture, structural discrimination, and diversity have.

DVConnect want to thank the Taskforce and the sector for the opportunity to participate in this discussion and hope for robust consideration and appropriate uptake Taskforces findings by the Government.



Part 1

1. Cross Cutting Issues

Overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Children

As the Discussion Paper details there are complex contributing factors to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls as victims of sexual violence as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women identified as the accused or the offender within the criminal justice system. The Paper appropriately outlines how those systems perpetuate these complexities as negative outcomes and experiences. As the Discussion Paper outlines, significant focus needs to be directed to improving these outcomes.

Beyond the historical and ongoing impacts of racism within the criminal justice system, which the Paper captures, DVConnect sees the larger service and support system failing to meet the help seeking behaviors and safety needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls. That is not to say, these services and resources are not always available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, but the way the system provides these supports does not match what evidence and lived experience tells us Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls need, nor the cultural, social or individual contexts of their life and previous experiences. This ill-fitting support and criminal justice service system fails to meet First Nations women's needs due to systemic racism, embedded patriarchal structures, and disregard for cultural knowledge creating ongoing institutional betrayal and mistrust.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have great capability to support their own women and girls, however, are limited by lack of resources and autonomy over service types and expectations. In some situations, where there has been provision of government resourcing, it has been allocated to specific programs and interventions without thorough community consultation and fundamentally does not meet the needs of those it intends to support, therefore, set up to fail. Lack of self-determination compound the failure of the larger service system to respond, thereby impeding the community's capacity. This in turn drives women and girls to find alternative help-seeking behaviours or alternative coping mechanisms, which can be associated with criminal activities. By identifying, acknowledging and resourcing these needs, capacity can be community led.

An example of this is a domestic and family violence shelter in remote Queensland managed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. The shelter is recognised by the community as being a safe, healing place. Like all shelters across the state, they are constantly responding to over-referral. However, unlike other shelters that are able to work with DVConnect to identify interim accommodations, this shelter cannot. This is because its primary referral pathway is women presenting in person, dropped off by family, friends, taxi or a government authority. At this point, the shelter must respond. This is an omnipresent obligation of this shelter that is not accommodated for in its funding nor appreciated by the systems that govern its service. This does disservice to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who manage the shelter and to the women and children it serves. This is one example of how our system increases stress and vulnerability to an entire community through its poor fit to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

Another DVConnect specific example of drivers of overrepresentation include the hidden experience and toll of DFSV on First Nations' women. In the last month alone, DVConnect has responded to a coronial inquest into an Aboriginal woman's death, one that was not captured in the public domain, including many of the attuned pathways that communicate when a woman is murdered. A review of her brief journey with DVConnect to safety showed significant violence, yet at her time of death, this was unseen. DVConnect know that many DFSV deaths are unseen, and when we do not see them, we fail to respond to them. This failure to respond again diverts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women away from the systems in place



to protect them. With limited options available to meet often competing needs, such as housing, DFSV support, or mental health services, pathways to safety are reduced or non-existent. This increased vulnerability heightens exposure to unsafe environments often associated to crime.

Our clients consistently report experiences that highlight the presence and impact of systemic racism and the perpetuation of historical oppressive practices including pervading bias. Bri Lee articulates this well in her book *Eggshell Skull*¹, about the Queensland Criminal Justice and our clients repeatedly identify that this continues to be their experience.

To address this, it first needs to be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services need governance and funding that meets the needs of their own community. Second, a culturally responsive practice needs to be embedded and resourced across the criminal justice system. Not only does trauma-aware, healing informed training need to be comprehensively rolled out, but a trauma informed approach needs to be championed in an ongoing manner in police, court and corrections. This training must be explicit about anti-oppressive ways of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and consider the historical and historical authority of these roles in enforcing brutal and discriminatory practices against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Intersecting Disadvantage

We know from our work that the intersectional experience of people exponentially compounds vulnerabilities adding layers to the harm caused, and altering people's help seeking behaviours. In turn, this diminishes the effectiveness of the systemic responses to safety needs. People with intersectional experience are unable to access many service and safety responses because their other needs are then not able to be met as the service or safety response dislocates them from those supports.

An example is a call to our Sexual Assault Line from a young woman with a disability. Due to ill-fitting system responses to her disability, she is dependent on a community member and the broader household to meet her daily physical health needs, her ability to connect and engage with the community, and to socialise. The recognition of her disability allows her to access financial resources that house her, on which the broader household are dependent on, but is unable to access NDIS for a range of reasons. After repeated sexual assault by this community member, she calls to seek support. As we explore options for safety and justice, she identifies how seeking support for her sexual assault will result in her personal care being negatively impacted. She is skeptical of being believed by police and is deeply concerned of being ostracized by the community on which she depends. While we are unable to know how this woman chose to progress, it was clear that any option we explored with her to uphold some of her human rights greatly compromised some of her other human rights. This struggle appears silent to the system and forces women to make unfair and unsafe choices.

Responding to women and girls who experience complex and intersecting needs as victim-survivors of sexual violence needs to be expansive and adaptive. We believe a foundational element to support women and girls within the criminal justice system is to provide a safety-focused and recovery-based response. The distress and trauma of this type of violence is immense. Women and girls need opportunity to recover for the emotional and psychological capacity needed to engage in the criminal justice system. This recovery needs to be tailored to her needs with funding for practical assistance, healing components, advocacy and other individual needs that impact her ability to participate in a safe and equitable way. With this resourcing, women and girls can then begin the involved and complex process of pursuing matters in a criminal context. This is the beginning of a trauma-informed criminal justice response. There is a collective obligation to ensure this journey does not revictimise the woman, and contribute to any further harm, either intentional or unintentional.

¹ Lee B, 2018, *Eggshell Skull* Allen & Unwin, Australia



Accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence also needs to be more than criminal justice. It needs to include space for perpetrators to do the work to change their thinking, attitudes and behaviours. To improve their ability to be safe and to stop using violence. It also needs the system, in its fullness to see its role in keeping him accountable as not just responding to the part that falls within that departments prevue but connecting with and supporting all parts to create a whole system of accountability. If the perpetrator is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, then accountability needs to recognise the impact of colonialism and intergenerational trauma and the ongoing disadvantage of First Nations people and respond to that as part of his accountability journey.

The criminal justice system also needs to acknowledge that the value it places on the history of law impedes its ability to respond to contemporary society needs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are more vulnerable now due to the history of the criminal justice system. The buildings, the statues, the uniforms and garb, symbolism of law are artefacts of oppression and abuse. This alone, fails to be addressed by the criminal justice system, let alone other trauma-informed culturally responsive criminal justice system changes.

Resources, investment and value for money

In a conversation with QCOSS, current Under Treasurer Leon Allen², identified that the Treasury sees value in approaching current investment differently, and the potential significant financial benefits of different investments. However, as he notes, there are statutory obligations that Treasury must ensure the state can meet, and how this limits its capacity to invest in alternative structures. DVConnect acknowledges this pressure. However, simple measures could have significant impact. For example, expanding the court's ability to be culturally responsive and safe would immediately reduce the statutory costs on the system, by reducing the overincarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls. This would see benefits for not only the presenting case, but also in reducing recidivism and intergenerational impacts of familial incarceration.

Governance and accountability

Due to DVConnect's typically short engagement with women and girls on their journey through the criminal justice system, we recognise the importance of listening to those who work more closely with the system and who have lived experience.

What we do know, is that the community, when seeking supports from our sexual assault line repeatedly express concern about the duration, commitment as well as the personal and reputational impact of pursuing matters through criminal justice. We know that this is both due to experience (i.ee attempting to report to police or seek a forensic medical examination) as well as community perception (where no contact has yet occurred with the criminal justice response). Both reasons are problematic and continue to negatively impact on the victim and allows the perpetrator to be silent.

While the Queensland Government does recognise that many sexual violence incidents are not reported and does allow women and girls to access Victim Assist Queensland services, including financial support, these are prone to further audit by a government body of their application's validity. For example, Special Primary Victims can apply for financial assistance without police intervention. However, without this police authority oversight, these applications can be denied by this government agency. This creates additional and unnecessary barriers that dissuade people from ongoing participation, as well as increasing risk of revictimisation.

² QCOSS 2022 'In Conversation with Under Treasurer Leon Allen' QCOSS QCOSS *In Conversation Series* Recorded Webinar accessed 17 March 2022 [In Conversation with Under Treasurer Leon Allen - YouTube](#)



2. Women and girls' experience as victim-survivors of sexual violence

Community understanding of consent and sexual assault

DVConnect provides training and education to the community about domestic, family and sexual violence. While this training is not targeted around consent, consent does form part of topics, particularly when unpacking experiences of attendees. While we see signs that the community at large has increasing awareness about consent and interest in improving the safety of women and girls, many long-standing myths and gendered assumptions continue. Many of these myths are perpetuated by patriarchal structure, entertainment and media and the community. As the Paper explores, challenging matters such as rape myths lay less in the overarching belief that everyone has a right to feel safe and women are to be believed, and more in each individual situation, where many social artefacts perpetuate the mythologies. Therefore, continued work is needed to deeply unpack consent, gender roles and community expectations, this includes that consent is not the absence of a no, but the need for a clear and uncoerced yes. This work needs to be targeted and tailored to men and boys.

Further, calls to our services highlight women understand consent but feel that their safety is jeopardised when they do not give consent. That is, it is safer to endure violence than to be persistent in their refusal to consent to an act. After the violence, women fear the impact on their ongoing reputation and safety when they are vocal about the sexual abuse that is experienced. In this case, women and girls need ongoing education and empowerment about their right to safety, liberty, and reputation. Consent is a key part of a person accessing their human rights.

Finally, consent education needs to include the experience of consent in diverse communities. While gender roles and stereotypes differ across groups of people, the Queensland context is still inherently mainstream patriarchal. Therefore, the binary nature of male and female expectations exists but consent needs to be explored in the experience of the LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse populations. Similarly, consent needs to be talked about in other contexts of sexual violence, such as for women and girls with disability, where the abuse may be overlaid by consent to personal care.

Reporting and the criminal justice response to sexual violence

DVConnect works alongside women and girls who are victims of sexual assault both our domestic and family violence crisis line and Sexual Assault Line. Both services provide information, advice and brief counselling over the phone to sexual assault victims/survivors. Due to the nature of our work, we are removed from a woman's or girl's journey with reporting through the criminal justice system. To this point we urge the Taskforce to reflect on submissions from our sister services, specifically sexual assault services and women's health services funded by the Queensland Government, as well as women's and community legal services, especially those that work with specific population groups such as First Nations women and girls.

In saying the above, DVConnect Sexual Assault Line did receive just under 1,500 calls in 2020-2021 from people seeking support. What we do know from these calls is that many barriers exist to reporting and perusing justice via our criminal justice system. These impediments are wide reaching, complex and intersecting. We know these barriers are both directly experienced by our callers as well as concerns expressed based on community perceptions. The Paper does capture many of these barriers.

Our calls range from women and girls with acute, recent and/or historical experiences of sexual violence. Across all experiences, women and girls describe significant trauma impacts, including physical, emotional and psychological impacts. It is in these acute states of trauma that women and girls are trying to make significant decisions regarding pursuing matters with police and courts. While there are many elements in the criminal justice system that do need due consideration, there must first be a trauma-aware, healing informed response that helps women and girls with the acute and enduring impacts of sexual violence. This



is essential for implementing the change needed to build confidence in the system and embed a DFSV appropriate lens to a predominantly punitive environment. This includes a range of counselling and other healing and advocacy resources that are diverse and meet the cross sectional needs of our community. With these supports, women and girls are then provided with more capacity to engage with the structures and demands of the criminal justice system.

We also know from our conversations that women and girls have strongly held beliefs about community perceptions of “perfect victims” and that use of drugs or alcohol, their location or dress, or any consent that they gave about any sexual engagement up until consent was not given (including stealthing), are significant barriers to reporting and being believed. We also know that women and girls can experience sexual violence more than once in their lives, an initial negative experience with criminal justice will impact on their future actions, propensity and capacity to seek support. This often results in increasing self-blame and rejection of the criminal justice as a suitable response. Again, effective mechanisms to support women and girls to move from trauma to healing supports women and girls to make informed decisions about utilising the criminal justice system.

While we advocate for a comprehensive suite of counselling and healing opportunities for women and girls who experience sexual violence, DVConnect would like to comment on recently introduced legislation and its impact on effective and safe sexual assault counselling. Failure to report sexual offences against children, as introduced in July 2021 under the Criminal Code (Child Sexual Offences Reform) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2020, has created a complex and challenging situation for women and girls when they reach out for counselling to support their recovery from sexual violence. Legislation, while making a strong statement that it is the community’s responsibility to report sexual offences against children, is a blunt instrument, trapping women and girls in situations where disclosure results in duty of care reporting by counsellors. This removes that woman’s or girl’s ability to have autonomy over her journey in the criminal justice system. It also jeopardises sexual assault counsellors’ safety, as they must report as individuals under the legislation, offering them no protection from their employer and compelling that individual to be party to the criminal justice process. This has disrupted the support that women and girls can have from currently funded services and their healing opportunities.

DVConnect do think that alternative models and adjustments to current processes are needed to empower victims/survivors, increase uptake of the criminal justice system as a mechanism for accountability, and to reduce the negative impact that the process has on victim/survivors.

Restorative justice, as the Paper outlines, does have some interest and positive uptake. DVConnect agrees there is merit for continued exploration of restorative justice, with significant and important considerations. Any restorative justice model must give substantial consideration for the subtle and varied forms of continued abuse, coercion, and control that can occur under the premise of restorative justice, particularly when there has been or is a relationship or connection between the perpetrator and victim/survivor, including broader social, cultural or kin relationships. The repercussions on abuse that is perpetrated through approaches like restorative justice are hard to identify and often are not evident for significant periods of time. Protection and autonomy of victim/survivors must remain central to any model, which has to include dedicated and realistic education and information about the process, timeframes and outcomes, dedicated advocacy and case management support through the entire process, and pre and post conferencing counselling and support to ensure victim/survivors are comprehensively supported and empowered throughout the process.



DVConnect does agree that a specialist court is worthy of a pilot. As the Paper raises, the reduced privacy and confidentiality of a matter being heard in a specific court is a significant worry, but with careful management, it does provide opportunity to create a trauma-informed process. DVConnect considers the following as essential inclusions for such a court:

- Entry and exit processes that are trauma informed, and focused on safety
- Improved waiting rooms and waiting times to reduce stress and re-traumatization of the victim/survivor. That is safe, secure, separate wait rooms and clearer, shorter timeframes for matters to reduce anxiety-inducing uncertainty and feeling of vulnerability being in a unfamiliar building in which the perpetrator, and his supporters, are also present.
- Removal of victim-blaming language from courts, including language used by Magistrates and Judges. While it is the duty of the Magistrate or Judge to oversee the justice of a matter, it is not the duty of this person to comment on anything but the proceedings, especially directing or educating victim/survivors on sexual violence and safety. This is not only inappropriate it is also often inaccurate and underpinned by structural bias.
- Video conferencing and alternative models of giving witness needs to be less onerous to access with more discretion provided to the victim/survivor
- The location and process of the court needs consideration. The entire process is foreign, intimidating and often filled with artefacts of patriarchal and racist oppression, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls. Consideration needs to be given to creating a calm and welcoming environment where security and process is present, but not in a manner that demonstrates that these matters are more important than justice to victims.



3. Women and girls' experience of the criminal justice system as accused people and offenders

DVConnect acknowledges its service scope is adjacent, but not central to the experience of the criminal justice system. Our recommendation is that the Taskforce consider submissions from our sister services and academics who have significantly more insight in this domain, especially those that can bring a gender, safety and trauma informed lens to this review. DVConnect also express confidence that the Taskforce is giving due consideration to critical factors that have already been captured in the Paper. In saying this, women and girls who have experience of being an accused person or offender access our service. Therefore, we would like to add some additional insights.

Women and girls who experience DFSV may have well developed help-seeking and safety-creating behaviours. However, many of these appear counter intuitive or present as “maladaptive” to practitioners and support systems. Offending is one of these help-seeking and safety making activities. Retaliatory violence and misidentification of the predominant aggressor being significant circumstances where women and girls enter the criminal justice system as accused persons and offenders. However, behaviours, which often result in being accused or becoming an offender is more pervasive and widespread.

Many women, particularly women of population groups with intersectional experiences, such as diverse culture, disability, LGBTIQ+ or socio-economic groups, are unable to use police to keep themselves safe. In fact, police involvement can increase their risk. This is a for a range of reasons, many identified across the Hear Her Voice report and this Paper. This results in these women and girls seeking retreat from police involvement. For example, slamming the door in a police officer's face, refusing to cooperate, or increasing aggression, resulting in criminal charges being placed against them. This misconception behind the real risk and reasons for these types of behaviours can lead to not only an escalation, but a punitive response.

Women and girls can participate in offending behaviour at the coercion of their abusive partners. Women and girls also actively partake in criminal acts to access resources, find wellbeing and safety, or keep their family safe, especially when other systems are unable to provide for, or address their unmet needs. Women and girls also engage in offending to find safety in imprisonment. One example of this was a woman who, when returning to an unsafe home after a trip interstate, pulled a knife at the airport as she disembarked, hoping to be detained as she feared the violence that she was going to experience if returned to her home. While addressing this does not sit solely at the feet of the criminal justice system, if these women and girls had positive experiences at their first engagement with criminal justice then their help-seeking and safety making behaviour may have been more receptive to the system and the ancillary service supports, thereby reducing their offending behaviour.

Another thing that we know from women and girls seeking crisis supports from our service is that if women experienced DFSV prior to imprisonment, she is highly vulnerable to significant violence upon release. But her immediate safety, while in prison, and absence of risk indicators often result in this risk being unseen by the system. If a woman does access DFV supports, her recent engagement with the criminal justice system may result in systemic bias in the under resourced DFV shelter network. Offending behaviours are part of the assessment process when managing shelter referrals and safety of other women in these accommodations.

Finally, we also anecdotally note, that many women who are imprisoned, who have experienced DFV, have experienced extreme levels of abuse, coercion and control. Whilst we are unable to statistically underpin this, we are confident that the experience of significant and high risk DFV is a driver of offending behaviours in women. The absence of accurate and transparent access to data about the DFSV history and offending behaviours of women who are in prison represents a systems issue in itself. This requires attention to help provide a more complete picture and evidence-base to drive policy, system and clinical reform.



DVConnect echo some of the suggestions in this Paper and other submissions, about reintegration being critical to safety and success. Stable housing being a foundational element of safety. Mental health support while incarcerated and upon release are critical, both in addressing acute or biological mental health needs, and to support complex trauma and to facilitate healing.

4. Closing Statement

As identified in the Opening Statement, DVConnect acknowledges the work and perspectives of those whose work aligns more closely with the specific focus of Discussion Paper 3. That being said, we have contributed valuable insights from the perspective of a statewide DFSV crisis response service that has interaction on a daily basis with women impacted by their experiences of sexual assault and the criminal justice system. We have confidence in the Taskforce for addressing the priority areas of this Paper and encourage reflection on any recommendation or statements of our sister services as we have articulated throughout.

We commend the Taskforce on being diligent in applying a gendered and trauma informed approach to this discussion and have confidence that this will underpin any recommendations.

We urge the Taskforce to consider how services and the community outside the criminal justice system are influential over the engagement and experience of women and girls within the criminal justice system and request consideration of these wider reaching elements in its recommendations. Specifically, the importance for diverse and broad opportunities for women and girls to heal.

DVConnect endorse the approach that improvements in criminal justice processes will improve safety and wellbeing for women and girls across Queensland. Both in increasing confidence and uptake in the system as victim/survivors of sexual violence, but also increasing positive outcomes for women and girls once engaged as accused or offender in the criminal justice system, including recidivism.

Kind regards,



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