



Jesuit Social Services

Victorian State Election Platform:
Gender and culture

November 2018



The Victorian State Election

Elections are times for asking what kind of a society we want. They invite us to name our own vision. At election times, too, politicians offer us their visions for a good society. We have a responsibility to assess what they offer, and have an opportunity to advocate for change.

Jesuit Social Services accompanies and works with people and communities who are excluded and isolated.

Our work with people on the margins draws our attention to the multiple and interrelated factors that cause disadvantage, push people to the margins, diminish communities' capacity to shape their future, and damage the natural environment we all depend on. This understanding challenges us to take account of these challenges in our accompaniment and our advocacy. We bring together 'doing' and 'influencing' to ensure our programs and advocacy are shaped by our practice wisdom, evidence and rich heritage.

We work with people with significant barriers to participation and social and economic inclusion.

We accompany them, address their needs and partner with community, business and government to support them onto a pathway to education, training and employment.

Our doing and influencing spans:

- Disadvantaged and marginalised communities
- People with complex and multiple needs
- People involved or at-risk of entering the youth and adult justice systems
- Boys and men who are in trouble or causing trouble
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- People and families seeking asylum
- Education, training and employment

The experiences of vulnerable people are diverse. So are their needs. Effective responses demand programs that can be tailored to individual needs, constant adaptation for successful delivery, and sustained commitment from governments. Above all, they must be founded on the recognition that every human being deserves a second chance.

Gender and Culture

Boys and men are in trouble – and they are causing trouble. We see it in high levels of substance abuse, mental health issues, radicalisation and violence. Around 95 per cent of victims of violence experience violence from a male perpetrator,¹ and 93 per cent of all prisoners in Victoria are male². The impact on women, children, families, communities and society as a whole is profound. As a society we have recently begun to acknowledge one significant aspect of the problem – violence against women.

The focus has been, as it should be, on supporting the victims of this violence. But we must also address the root causes of the problem by supporting boys and men to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives, where they are able to develop loving relationships free from violence and contribute to safe and equal communities. We need to promote positive change around gender norms and stereotypes and what it means to be a healthy and respectful man in the 21st century. We need to focus on the contributing factors to male violence like mental health problems, substance abuse and social isolation.

To this end, Jesuit Social Services recently established The Men's Project. The Men's Project is working with boys and men to understand their attitudes and behaviours, as well as to support them to establish meaningful relationships, to build hopes and aspirations, and to fully realise their potential.

We call on the elected government to invest in addressing the harmful norms that underpin violence by, and poor wellbeing among, boys and men. We also call on the elected Victorian government to invest in responses to adolescent family violence as part of the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Our asks

We call for the next state government to:

- Introduce policies in the areas of mental health and wellbeing, crime prevention, alcohol harm reduction and road safety which:
 - explicitly recognise the influence that men's attitudes and behaviour can have on poor outcomes
 - make addressing and changing these behaviours and attitudes a priority
 - include investments in preventative interventions to deliver on this priority.
- This focus and investment should be informed by, and complement, work already underway in the prevention of family violence field.
- Invest in responses to Adolescent Family Violence in order to fully implement recommendations from the Royal Commission and recent studies into this issue.

Introduce policies in the areas of mental health and wellbeing, crime prevention, alcohol harm reduction and road safety which:

- **explicitly recognise the influence that men's attitudes and behaviour can have on poor outcomes**
- **make addressing and changing these behaviours and attitudes a priority**
- **include investments in preventative interventions to deliver on this priority.**

This focus and investment should be informed by, and complement, work already underway in the prevention of family violence field.

Evidence from research into men's behaviours and attitudes conducted overseas has found that adherence to social pressures to behave like a 'real man' can result in perpetrating acts of violence, and in poorer outcomes for men in a range of areas including mental health and wellbeing, drinking, and risk-taking behaviours.

The Men's Project undertook a similar study, [The Man Box](#), released in October this year – the first comprehensive study that focuses on the attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of young Australian men aged 18 to 30. The 'Man Box' is a set of beliefs within and across society that place pressure on men to be a certain way – to be tough; not to show any emotions; to be the breadwinner, to always be in control, use violence to solve problems; and to have many sexual partners. Findings show that the Man Box is alive and well in Australia today. The majority of young men agree there are social pressures on them to behave or act a certain way because of their gender. Living up to the pressures of being a 'real man' causes harm to young men and those around them, particularly women.

Young men who most strongly agree with these rules report poorer levels of mental health, engage in risky drinking, are more likely to be in car accidents and to report committing acts of violence, online bullying and sexual harassment.

Given these findings, there should be a renewed focus on addressing these attitudes and behaviours in relevant policy areas including mental health and wellbeing, crime prevention, alcohol harm reduction and road safety. This should build on and complement the recent focus and investment in changing men's attitudes and behaviours as part of addressing the drivers of family violence in *Change the Story: the shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and children*, and *Free From Violence: Victoria's Prevention Strategy*.

Invest in responses to Adolescent Family Violence in order to fully implement recommendations from the Royal Commission and recent studies into this issue.

Despite around one in 10 family violence incidents involving violence from young people aged 10-17, there are very few interventions focusing on this younger cohort.

The Family Violence Royal Commission, Monash University's *Investigating Adolescent Family Violence in Victoria*, and the Centre for Innovative Justice's *Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent Violence in the Home (PIPA Project)* have all explored this issue. They have made recommendations on enhancing existing services, and developing new interventions focused on keeping families safe and breaking the cycle of adolescent family violence.

Some recommendations have been acted on, but a number of recommendations on respite options for young people who commit family violence, early intervention programs, and the utilisation of restorative justice remain to be implemented.

As part of The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services has partnered with The Children's Court of Victoria to deliver the Adolescent Family Violence Restorative Pilot (AFVRP) program.

This program was developed in response to an identified absence of interventions for adolescent perpetrators in the Family Division of The Children's Court. The AFVRP program aims to deliver an effective intervention which applies restorative practice principles and offers a Family Group Conference process for civil cases involving young people who are using family violence. It is assisting the family member victims and adolescent perpetrators to address the harm caused by family violence and prevent further harm being caused.

The second Rolling Action Plan of the 10 Year Plan to End Family Violence should include a focus on adolescent family violence and funding for interventions to respond to this issue.

Endnotes

1 Diemer, K. (2015). *ABS Personal Safety Survey: Additional analysis on relationship and sex of perpetrator*. University of Melbourne: Documents and working papers, Research on violence against women and children. Retrieved from <https://violenceagainstwomenandchildren.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/abs-personal-safety-survey-victim-perpetrator-sex-and-relationship6.pdf>

2 Corrections Victoria. (2018). Monthly prisoner and offender statistics – 2018-19 (to August 2018). Retrieved from <http://www.corrections.vic.gov.au/utility/publications+manuals+and+statistics/monthly+prisoner+and+offender+statistics>