



Submission to consultation on the

Northern Territory Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework

August 2019



Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society

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Jesuit Social Services

Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. For over 40 years we have been working at the hard end of social justice with some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of our community, who are often experiencing multiple and complex challenges.

As an organisation, we do and we influence. We accompany people and communities to foster and regenerate the web of relationships that sustain us all – across people, place and planet; and we work to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice and exclusion.

We work where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference. We have a presence in Victoria, New South Wales, the Northern Territory and internationally, through involvement in the Jesuit Prison Network.

Our practical support and advocacy covers five main areas:

- **Justice and crime prevention** for people involved with the criminal justice system.
- **Mental health and wellbeing** for people with multiple and complex needs and those affected by trauma, suicide, and complex bereavement.
- **Settlement and community building** for disadvantaged communities, and recently arrived migrants and refugees.
- **Education, training and employment** for people with barriers to sustainable employment.
- **Gender and culture** providing leadership on the reduction of violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, and building new approaches to improve their wellbeing and keep families and communities safe.

The pursuit of **ecological justice** underpins all that we do in our programs and advocacy. Recognising the inherent interrelationship between all things, as an organisation we have been on a journey to transform our programs and practices so that they are both environmentally and socially just.

The promotion of **education, lifelong learning and capacity building** is fundamental to all our activity. We believe this is the most effective means of helping people to reach their potential and exercise their full citizenship. This, in turn, strengthens the broader community.

Research, advocacy and policy are coordinated across all program and major interest areas of Jesuit Social Services. Our advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence participants' lives and improve approaches to address long term social challenges. We do this by working collaboratively with the community sector to build coalitions and alliances around key issues, and building strong relationships with key decision-makers and the community.

Our **Learning and Practice Development Unit** builds the capacity of our services through staff development, training and evaluation, as well as articulating and disseminating information on best practice approaches to working with participants and communities across our programs.

We acknowledge that we live and work on unceded Aboriginal lands. We value and respect the knowledge and living culture that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bring to our communities. We walk alongside them as we strive together for justice.

Our work in the Northern Territory

Jesuit Social Services' work in the Northern Territory commenced in 2008 with an invitation to work collaboratively with the Central and Eastern Arrernte people in Santa Teresa and Alice Springs.

Since then, at the invitation of a number of other communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, our work has grown to include the communities of Atitjere and Engawala on the Plenty Highway and Tennant Creek, as well as with the Thamarrurr Regional Aboriginal Authority Corporation (TRAAC) and Thamarrurr Development Corporation (TDC) in Wadeye. Our work in Central Australia and the Top End has focused on building the governance and service delivery capacity of the communities and organisations with whom we work.

To enable a more strategic response to the structural issues we see playing out in the lives of people on the ground, in 2015 we established an advocacy presence in Darwin. We have a strong network of relationships within government and community leaders and have been strong advocates, particularly on youth justice issues.

In 2017, with the support of a range of agencies including Aboriginal legal services, Jesuit Social Services initiated a pilot pre-sentence Youth Justice Group Conferencing program in the Top End (delivered in Darwin, Palmerston and Katherine). Jesuit Social Services continues to deliver this service and is working to promote and build capacity in restorative practice in the Territory.

Our work on gender justice

Jesuit Social Services has been working with boys and men for over 40 years. This work has included work with boys and men involved in the criminal justice system, including those leaving prison; establishing Victoria's first dedicated counselling service to working with young people struggling with concurrent mental health and substance abuse problems; and the Support After Suicide program which provides free individual and family counselling to people bereaved by suicide and runs a specialist men's group.

Many of the boys and men we work with use violence, and we see many of them hold harmful attitudes towards girls and women. Our work with men who have committed serious violent and sex offences seeks, upon release from prison, a successful transition back into the community to lower the risk of recidivism and improve community safety.

Drawing from this experience, The Men's Project has been established to provide leadership and to develop new approaches to reduce violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, to build new approaches to improve their wellbeing, and to keep families and communities safe.

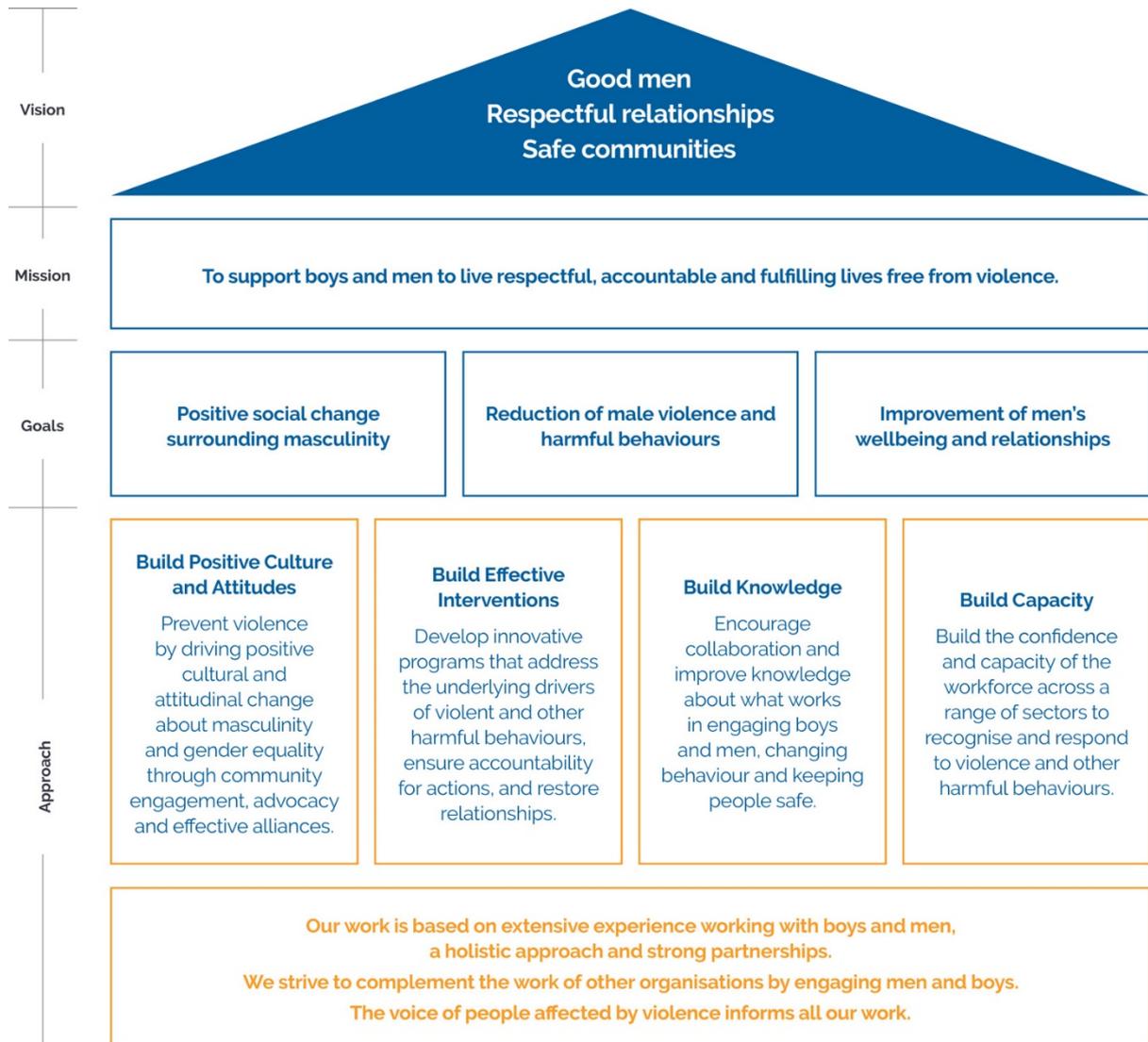
The Men's Project incorporates a range of initiatives across four key approaches, namely to:

- 1) Promote cultural and attitudinal change around issues of masculinity and gender to support primary prevention efforts
- 2) Develop, deliver and evaluate interventions that address violence and other harmful behaviour
- 3) Share knowledge across sectors about what works to engage boys and men and change their behaviour, and
- 4) Build capacity across services to recognise and respond to violence and other harmful behaviours in boys and men.

Collectively, these initiatives seek to promote positive social change surrounding masculinity, reduce male violence and harmful behaviours, and improve men's wellbeing and relationships.

An overview of our vision, goals and approach taken through The Men’s Project is provided overleaf.

Figure 1: The Men's Project



Recommendations

Jesuit Social Services recommends:

Recommendation 1

That the Northern Territory Government establish appropriate governance structures to facilitate coordinated whole-of-government implementation and monitoring of the complementary gender equality and violence reduction strategies, including the current Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction (DFSVR) Framework 2018-2028, and the new Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework and Gender Equality Framework.

Recommendation 2

That the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework clearly articulates its scope with respect to the DFSVR Framework and other related Northern Territory and Commonwealth Government strategies.

Recommendation 3

That the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework articulate a clear vision, outcomes, actions required to achieve those outcomes, timeframes and indicators of success, and that these be developed with reference to the outcomes of the DFSVR Framework and the Gender Equality Framework.

Recommendation 4

That the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework is adequately resourced, including resources for monitoring and evaluation of relevant initiatives and the framework as a whole.

Recommendation 5

That the Minister for Territory Families be required to table in Parliament an annual progress report towards the achievement of the outcomes in framework.

Recommendation 6

That the development, implementation and monitoring of the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework is informed by the expertise and experiences of women and men who have experienced sexual violence.

Recommendation 7

That Aboriginal people are engaged as lead partners in the development, monitoring and implementation of the Sexual Violence Prevention and Reduction Framework.

Recommendation 8

That the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework acknowledges the responsibility of men in preventing sexual violence.

Recommendation 9

That efforts to reduce sexual violence in the Northern Territory are built on a strong platform of primary prevention through the Gender Equality Framework and Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework, and that these efforts are adequately resourced.

Recommendation 10

That the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework include initiatives that educate young people about the attitudes and behaviours that can give rise to sexual violence, complementing actions through the Gender Equality Framework, including specific strategies to engage male and female role models in promoting healthy and positive expressions of masculinity.

Recommendation 11

That the Northern Territory Government resource the delivery of sexual violence education in communities.

Recommendation 12

That the Northern Territory Government resource the delivery of protective behaviours education in all Northern Territory schools. For remote communities, this should be delivered in conjunction with education for parents, carers, service providers and the broader community.

Recommendation 13

That the Northern Territory Government lead by example in challenging the attitudes, behaviours and workplace practices that facilitate sexual violence.

Recommendation 14

That the Northern Territory Government and Commonwealth Government increase investment in responses to children and adults who have experienced sexual violence, prioritising the availability of trauma-informed, culturally-safe services in remote communities. This includes:

- women's safe houses
- health and counselling services for adults who have experienced sexual abuse
- counselling and support services for children and families who have experienced child abuse-related trauma, including sexual assault.
- therapeutic programs for children exhibiting problem sexual behaviours and sexually abusive behaviours.

Recommendation 15

That the Northern Territory Government and Commonwealth Government increase investment in programs that work with men who use or are at-risk of using sexual violence, such as *Stop it Now!* and Circles of Support and Accountability. These programs should work with men so that they take responsibility for their violence, change their violent attitudes and behaviours and address any factors that may be amplifying their risk of violence. All programs for men must put women and children's safety at the centre. Programs for Aboriginal men should be developed within an Aboriginal cultural framework.

Recommendation 16

That the Northern Territory Government and Commonwealth Government invest in the development of tailored early intervention responses for children and young people displaying problematic sexual behaviours and thoughts, recognising that about half of all child sexual abuse is carried out by children and young people.

1. Introduction

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Northern Territory's first Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework.

As identified in the discussion paper, sexual violence refers to behaviours of a sexual nature and covers a spectrum of criminal and other behaviours committed against children and adults. This includes sexualised bullying, sexual harassment, problem sexual behaviours, unwanted kissing and sexual touching, sexual pressure and coercion, child sexual abuse, and sexual assault, including rape. Sexual violence can overlap and interact with domestic and family violence.

Sexual violence is a gendered crime. Women are overwhelmingly the victims of sexual violence, and sexual violence is almost exclusively (95 per cent) perpetrated by men.¹ It is estimated that approximately one in five women have experienced sexual violence at some stage in their lives since the age of 15.² The Northern Territory has the highest rate of reported sexual assault of any Australian jurisdiction.³ Data suggests that while non-Aboriginal women make up the majority of victims of sexual violence in the Territory, Aboriginal women are significantly overrepresented.⁴ All estimates of the incidence of sexual violence are likely to understate the true prevalence, given the multiple personal, social and institutional barriers to disclosure and reporting.⁵

The development of this framework, along with the Gender Equality Framework, is a commitment under the first Action Plan of the Northern Territory's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction (DFSVR) Framework 2018-2028, *Action Plan 1: Changing Attitudes, Intervening Earlier and Responding Better (2018-2021)*.

A range of actions within this first action plan will contribute to the reduction of sexual violence in the Northern Territory, including through community education, the implementation of policies and initiatives that challenge the underlying conditions for domestic, family and sexual violence, improved responses for women and children who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence and improved responses to men who commit acts of domestic, family and sexual violence.

¹ Stathopoulos, M. (2014) The exception that proves the rule Female sex offending and the gendered nature of sexual violence, Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) Research Summary ([online](#))

² Philips, J. and Park, M. (2006) Measuring domestic violence and sexual assault against women: a review of the literature and statistics, E-Brief issued 6 December 2004, updated 12 December 2006, Parliament of Australia ([online](#))

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2018) Recorded Crime – Victims, Australia, 2018. Cat no. 4510.0, Victims of Crime, Australia, Table 6.

⁴ Data from domestic violence services has indicated that approximately half (47 per cent) of victims of domestic violence identified as Caucasian (47 per cent); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women comprised the second largest group (37 per cent) and were over-represented in relation to the proportion of Indigenous peoples in the Northern Territory population (26 per cent) (Hunter 1996 cited in Leivore, D. (2003) Non-reporting and Hidden Recording of Sexual Assault: An International Literature Review, Australian Institute of Crime for the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet ([online](#))).

⁵ Leivore, D. (2003)

In addition, the concurrent development of the Gender Equality Framework provides a strong platform for primary prevention.

Combined with the Northern Territory Government's response to the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Assault* and the *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory*, Jesuit Social Services acknowledge the landmark focus that the current Northern Territory Government is placing on the eradication of gendered violence in all its forms, going hand-in-hand with the advancement of gender equality. We commend the government for this commitment.

The development of a discrete strategy focused on the prevention and response to sexual violence is important as it provides scope to address sexual violence as it occurs outside domestic and family violence, including sexual harassment in the workplace and sexualised bullying, and child sexual assault. The framework should include strategies to address all forms of sexual violence, including:

- sexual harassment
- sexual assault and rape
- technology-facilitated violence
- youth sexual violence, and
- child sexual abuse.

However, to be effective, the framework must be clear in its scope and its objectives aligned with other supporting strategies, in particular the DFSDV Framework and the Gender Equality Framework. This is required to ensure both accountability for the achievement of the outcomes for each framework, and the efforts taken under each framework are mutually reinforcing.

An effective framework will articulate a clear vision, desired outcomes, actions to achieve those outcomes and agency responsibilities. The implementation of the framework must be adequately resourced, including funding to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives within the framework.

Funding for monitoring and evaluation should be seen as an investment: ensuring that the resources dedicated to sexual violence prevention and response initiatives are having an impact. It also recognises the need to develop an evidence base for effective interventions in Aboriginal communities to inform ongoing policy and program responses; despite its prevalence and harm, there remains very limited literature on what works in responding to Indigenous sexual assault.⁶

⁶ A systematic review undertaken in 2014 identified “a complete lack of evidence from the published peer review or gray literatures on what works in responding to Indigenous sexual assault.” See McCalman, J., Bridge, F., Whiteside, M., Bainbridge, R., Tsey, K. and Jongen, C. (2014) ‘Responding to Indigenous Australian Sexual Assault: A Systematic Review of the Literature’ ([online](#))

Lastly, but critically, the voices of women and men who have experienced sexual violence must be at the centre of the Northern Territory Government's response to sexual violence. This should be reflected in the consultation process and the design of governance groups to oversee the framework's implementation and monitoring.

Recommendation 1

That the Northern Territory Government establish appropriate governance structures to facilitate coordinated whole-of-government implementation and monitoring of the complementary gender equality and violence reduction strategies, including the current Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction (DFSVR) Framework 2018-2028, and the new Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework and Gender Equality Framework.

Recommendation 2

That the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework clearly articulates its scope with respect to the DFSVR Framework and other related Northern Territory and Commonwealth Government strategies.

Recommendation 3

That the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework articulate a clear vision, outcomes, actions required to achieve those outcomes, timeframes and indicators of success, and that these be developed with reference to the outcomes of the DFSVR Framework and the Gender Equality Framework.

Recommendation 4

That the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework is adequately resourced, including resources for monitoring and evaluation of relevant initiatives and the framework as a whole.

Recommendation 5

That the Minister for Territory Families be required to table in Parliament an annual progress report towards the achievement of the outcomes in framework.

Recommendation 6

That the development, implementation and monitoring of the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework is informed by the expertise and experiences of women and men who have experienced sexual violence.

2. Tailored responses

Specific groups of the population are more vulnerable to sexual violence. As acknowledged in the consultation document, it is important that the framework takes an intersectional approach that is informed by the specific experiences of different groups in the community and includes tailored prevention and response strategies. This includes for:

- **Girls and young women.** Young women are the group most likely to experience sexual violence. In 2018, girls between the ages of 10-14 years had the highest rate of reported sexual assault of any age and sex group on the Northern Territory, followed by women aged 15-19 years.⁷ Overall, in 2017 and 2018, young women aged 15-34 accounted for more than half of all police-recorded female sexual assault victims in Australia.⁸
- **Aboriginal women.** Nationally, Aboriginal women are six times more likely to be sexually abused than a non-Aboriginal women.⁹ This abuse is perpetrated by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men. In 2018, Indigenous women accounted for more than 1 in 3 (35 per cent) of all hospitalisations for family violence.¹⁰ Between 2010 and 2017, the sexual assault victimisation rate increased for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.¹¹ Studies indicate that around 90 per cent of violence against Indigenous women is not disclosed, nor most cases of sexual abuse of Indigenous children.¹² The disproportion levels of violence against Aboriginal women, and the barriers to disclosure and support, must be understood in the context of historical and continued colonial and systemic violence.^{13,14}
- **People with a disability.** People with a disability are 1.7 times as likely to have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15, equivalent to one in four women (25 per cent) and one in 20 men (6.5 per cent) with a disability, compared to 15 per cent of women and 3.9 per cent of men without a disability.¹⁵ The current Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability is an opportunity for the Northern Territory Government to advocate for

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2018) Recorded Crime – Victims, Australia, 2018. Cat no. 4510.0, Victims of Crime, Australia, Table 2.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Korff, J. (2019) *Aboriginal sexual abuse*, Creative Spirits ([online](#))

¹⁰ AIHW analysis of National Hospital Morbidity Database, cited in AIHW (2019), p.10.

¹¹ ABS (2018)

¹² For full citations see Willis, M. (2011) Non-disclosure of violence in Australian Indigenous communities, Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice No. 405 (January 2011), p.1 ([online](#))

¹³ Healing Foundation with Adams, M., Bani, G., Blagg, H., Bullman, J., Higgins, D., Hodges, B., Hovane, V., Martin-Pederson, M., Porter, A., Sarra, G., Thorpe, A. and Wenitong, M. (2017) *Towards and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention framework for men and boys*, The Healing Foundation and White Ribbon Australia, p.3.

¹⁴ Willis, M. (2010) Non-disclosure of violence in Australian Indigenous communities, Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) ([online](#))

¹⁵ ABS (2018) Personal Safety Survey, 2016, TableBuilder. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Findings based on use of ABS TableBuilder data. Canberra: ABS, cited in AIHW (2019), p.8 ([online](#))

strong actions by government and in the community to reduce the rates at which people with a disability experience sexual violence and any form of abuse and exploitation.

- **LGBTQIA+ people.** Research suggests that LGBTQIA+ people experience sexual violence at similar or higher rates than heterosexual people.¹⁶ Within the LGBTQIA+ community, transgender people and bisexual women face the most alarming rates of sexual violence: US research has estimated that around half of transgender people and bisexual women will experience sexual violence at some point in their lifetimes.¹⁷ Australian research points to higher rates of physical intimate partner violence among women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, and mainly heterosexual, compared to women who identified as exclusively heterosexual (24 per cent, 29 per cent and 22 per cent, compared to 12 per cent).¹⁸ The *Sorting it Out* study of Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (GBTI) men's attitudes and experiences of intimate partner violence and sexual assault found that almost two thirds of men indicated that they had been in an unhealthy or abusive relationship in the past, with sexual victimisation being a key concern. However, of the men who reported personal experiences of abusive relationships, only 6 per cent disclosed to medical services and 5 per cent had reported to police.¹⁹
- **Women in rural and remote communities.** A report by the Women's Services Network (WESNET) found that, where comparable data exists, there is a higher reported incidence of domestic violence in rural and remote communities than in metropolitan settings.²⁰ The same study explored the specific factors that increase women's vulnerability to violence in rural and remote communities that should be considered in developing responses for women outside urban centres (noting responses need to consider the differences between the experiences of women in remote compared to rural settings, and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women). Further discussion of sexual assault in rural and remote areas, including regional variation in recorded assault for the Northern Territory is presented in Leivore, D. (2003).²¹
- **Women from non-English speaking backgrounds, including migrant and refugee women.** The Women's Safety Survey found that 96 per cent of women from non-English speaking background (NESB) who were sexually victimised did not report the most recent incident to police, compared to 83 per cent of women born in Australia. Research on the range of personal, cultural and religious, informational, language and institutional barriers to reporting by NESB women is

¹⁶ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2010) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSVS): An Overview of 2010 Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation ([online](#))

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ AIHW (2019) p.9

¹⁹ Ovenden, G., Salter, M., Ullman, J., Denson, N., Robinson, K., Noonan, K., Bansel, P., Huppatz, K. (2019) *Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer Men's Attitudes and Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault*, Sexualities and Genders Research, Western Sydney University and ACON ([online](#))

²⁰ The Women's Services Network (WESNET) (2000) *Domestic Violence in Regional Australia: A Literature Review, A report for the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services* ([online](#))

²¹ Leivore, D. (2003) Non-reporting and Hidden Recording of Sexual Assault: An International Literature Review, Australian Institute of Criminology, p.66-70 ([online](#))

discussed in Leivore, D. (2003) and the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) has produced research on intimate partner violence in Australian refugee communities.^{22,23}

- **Boys and men.** The prevalence of sexual assault against males can be under-recognised. Research suggests that one in between six to 10 males are sexual abused whilst under the age of 16 years²⁴ and over 30 per cent of confirmed reports of child sexual abuse involve male victims.²⁵ For males, sexual assault is most likely to occur at a very young age: in 2018, boys aged 0 to nine years had the highest rate of sexual assault victimisation of males in the Northern Territory.²⁶ Reflecting that fact that men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of sexual assault, 80 per cent of childhood sexual abuse of males is perpetrated by males. Boys are more likely than girls to be abused outside the home, subjected to extra-familial abuse, abused around witnesses and be abused by strangers.²⁷ Research on the prevalence of child sexual abuse is summarised in the *Stop it Now!* Scoping Study Report.²⁸ The Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) has conducted research into improved and practice responses for men sexually abused in childhood.²⁹
- **Older people.** While less common than emotional and financial abuse, elder abuse can include forms of sexual violence.³⁰ It considered the most hidden, as well as least acknowledged and reported, form of elder abuse.³¹ While the prevalence of elder abuse among Australians is unknown, worldwide, an estimated one in six adults (16 per cent) aged 60 and over have been the victim of elder abuse in the past year; females are disproportionately the victims.³² For some women, the experience in older age of family violence, including sexual assault, represents the continuation of a lifelong pattern of spousal abuse.³³ Nursing home residents are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault, as are women living in isolated communities; yet negative stereotypes such as that older people aren't sexual beings, their greater dependency on others, potential divided loyalty to staff members or residents are unique barriers to reporting, detecting, and preventing sexual assault for older people.³⁴ The current Royal Commission into Aged Care is

²² Ibid.

²³ El-Murr, A. (2018) Intimate partner violence in Australian refugee communities Scoping review of issues and service responses, CFCA Paper No. 50, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) ([online](#))

²⁴ Dube et al. (2005), Dunne, Purdie, Cook, Boyle and Najman (2003) cited in Foster, G., Boyd, C., and O'Leary, P. (2012) Improving policy and practice responses for men sexually abused in childhood, ACSSA Wrap. No. 12 ([online](#))

²⁵ Foster, G. et al (2012).

²⁶ ABS (2018)

²⁷ Ogloff, Cutajar, Mann and Mullen (2012), ABS (2006) and Crome (2006) cited in Foster, G. et al. (2012)

²⁸ See The Men's Project (2019) Stop it Now! A scoping study on implementation in Australia, pp.9-10 ([online](#))

²⁹ Foster, G. et al. (2012)

³⁰ Kaspiew, R., Carson, R., Rhoades, H. (2016) 'Elder Abuse: Understanding Issues, Frameworks and Responses' Research Report 35, Australian Institute of Family Studies ([online](#))

³¹ Ibrahim, J., Smith, D., and Bugeja, L. (2018) 'It's hard to think about, but frail older women in nursing homes get sexually abused too.' *The Conversation* (22 November 2018) ([online](#))

³² AIHW (2019), p.7.

³³ Kaspiew, R., Carson, R., Rhoades, H. (2016)

³⁴ Ibrahim, J., Smith, D., and Bugeja, L. (2018)

an opportunity for the Northern Territory Government to advocate on issues related to elder abuse, including sexual violence.

The need for tailored responses reflects the specific vulnerabilities of different groups in our community, variations in the nature of and contexts in which sexual violence might occur, the different ways in which the impacts of sexual violence are felt, and the specific barriers to disclosure, reporting and support. It is therefore important that governments continue to fund research that improves our understanding of the ways in which sexual violence is experienced across the community.

3. Aboriginal-led responses

Despite the prevalence of sexual violence against Aboriginal women and children, most current prevention efforts and service responses rely on the adaption of mainstream approaches. As noted by in work by The Healing Foundation and White Ribbon Australia, *Towards an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention framework for men and boys*, to date, strategies to reduce the disproportionate levels of violence, including sexual violence, in Aboriginal communities:

“have predominantly relied on the culturalisation of western violence prevention programs, where an Indigenous spin is put on a successful mainstream program or service.”³⁵

This approach assumes that the factors associated with gendered violence are fundamentally the same in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.³⁶

While many of the risk factors for the perpetration of violence, as well as the barriers to disclosure and accessing support for victims, are shared across Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, we know that there are unique factors contributing to the disproportionate levels of violence experienced by Aboriginal people.³⁷

Aboriginal women who experience sexual violence face particular challenges, over and above the personal and system-related barriers encountered by victims in the broader community.³⁸ This includes fear and distrust of justice system and other government agencies, discrimination within the service and justice systems, lack of awareness of and access to services (especially culturally safe services), the likelihood of negative repercussions in small, interconnected and isolated communities where anonymity cannot be maintained, as well as cultural considerations and obligations that may work against disclosure.³⁹

³⁵ Healing Foundation (2017) citing Weston, R. (2017) ‘We won’t close the gap if we put an Indigenous spin on western approaches,’ *The Guardian* 16 March 2017 ([online](#))

³⁶ Healing Foundation (2017), p.3.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Willis, M. (2011)

³⁹ Ibid. See also Thomas, C. Sexual Assault: Issues for Aboriginal Women ([online](#))

Accompanying this, the cumulative impacts of historical and continued colonial violence, dispossession, child removals and the ensuing cultural and family breakdown, combined with the impacts of alcohol and other drugs, mental health issues, poverty and overcrowding create the conditions for the high rates of violence within Aboriginal communities.⁴⁰

An effective strategy to prevent and reduce gendered violence in Aboriginal communities must recognise these unique barriers and foreground the impacts of ongoing structural violence and intergenerational trauma, and place collective healing as key objective of any response.⁴¹

Key elements of an effective violence reduction framework for Aboriginal men and boys

Work by the Healing Foundation and White Ribbon *Towards an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention framework for men and boys* was informed by a knowledge circle of nationally recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention experts.

It highlights the unique factors that contribute to the disproportionate levels of violence experienced by Aboriginal women, identifies the critical elements of an effective prevention and response framework, and includes case studies of effective responses.

We note that while this was developed to inform family violence responses, it has application as a foundation to inform culturally-specific responses to all forms of gendered violence in the Northern Territory. The report highlights the following critical elements of an effective framework:

- Violence should be understood within a historical context, recognising the effects of foundational and structural violence, and the wide ranging continued impacts on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys.
- The many strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men must be supported to lead work with men and boys, and reconnect men to their core cultural practices and protocols as a central factor to creating change.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women should be involved in the design and development, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the framework.
- Prevention strategies must be positioned within broader community strategies that address intergenerational trauma through individual, family and community healing approaches – drawing from both local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and western therapeutic practice.
- All work should be developed in partnership with communities through a genuine co-design process that respects and supports local cultural governance and self-determination, and empowers communities to drive change.

⁴⁰ Healing Foundation (2017), p.3.

⁴¹ See Healing Foundation (2017), p.36-39.

- A focus on collective wellbeing should be supported through referral pathways to trauma-informed holistic health and wellbeing services.

Crucially, any strategy must be adequately resourced, implemented in a safe, accessible place, prioritise safety for women, children and men, and be supported by trauma informed therapeutic services and programs. A priority is investment in Indigenous family violence prevention program evaluations, which are co-designed and implemented in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Source: Healing Foundation (2017)

For further discussion of innovative Indigenous-led models addressing violence against Aboriginal women, see Blagg, H. et al. (2018).⁴²

Recommendation 7

That Aboriginal people are engaged as lead partners in the development, monitoring and implementation of the Sexual Violence Prevention and Reduction Framework.

In the context of the commentary above, Jesuit Social Services notes that the programs suggested for consideration throughout this submission are not Aboriginal-specific. Any application of these programs in the Northern Territory requires a process of genuine co-design with Aboriginal communities in a way that respects and supports local cultural governance, drawing from both Indigenous culture and western practice, and capturing community objectives and indicators of success.

4. The importance of primary prevention

As articulated in the consultation document, the most effective way to prevent sexual violence is to stop it from happening in the first place. Strong primary prevention must be the foundation of a Northern Territory Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework.

While quantifying the economic benefits of prevention presents challenges, reflecting the significant direct and indirect social and economic costs of sexual violence, there is evidence to show that investment by government in prevention activities is a cost-effective way to reduce sexual violence – in the same way that investments in health promotion and a justice reinvestment approach make economic sense.⁴³

⁴² Blagg, H. et al. (2018) Innovative models in addressing violence against Indigenous women: Key findings and future directions, ANROWS ([online](#))

⁴³ Bowles, R. (2014) 'Economic analysis of the Stop it Now! UK and Stop it Now! Netherlands Helplines: Summary', Independent Consultant in Criminal Justice Economics For NatCen Social Research ([online](#))

Primary prevention demands more than increasing awareness and understanding of sexual violence; it must also change the norms, behaviours, underlying social conditions and risk factors that facilitate sexual violence at the individual, interpersonal, community and societal level – consistent with the ecological model presented in the consultation document.

Gender equality and sexual violence

Sexual violence exists at the intersection of gender, power and inequality. Attitudes, beliefs and social norms about sexuality and gender can facilitate and condone sexual violence.⁴⁴ Particular expressions of gender inequality consistently predict higher rates of sexual violence. These include:

- Condoning of violence against women.
- Men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence in public and private life.
- Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity.
- Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

Effective primary prevention must therefore address the fundamental links between gendered power relations and inequality, and challenge the culturally structured beliefs and norms about masculinity and femininity, and heterosexuality that permeate all levels of society.⁴⁵

A strong prevention framework will foreground the responsibility of men to prevent sexual violence – in terms of their own potential for violence and taking a stand against the violence of other men.

As noted above, Jesuit Social Services commends the Northern Territory Government for its landmark focus on reducing gender inequality and advancing women’s safety and equality through the development of the Northern Territory’s first Gender Equality Framework, which we hope will provide a strong platform for the primary prevention of sexual violence.

Recommendation 8

That the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework acknowledges the responsibility of men in preventing sexual violence.

Recommendation 9

That efforts to reduce sexual violence in the Northern Territory are built on a strong platform of primary prevention through the Gender Equality Framework and Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework, and that these efforts are adequately resourced.

⁴⁴ Our Watch, *What drives violence against women?* ([online](#))

⁴⁵ Quadara, A. and Wall, L. (2012) What is effective primary prevention in sexual assault? Translating the evidence for action, ACSSA Wrap No. 11 ([online](#))

Challenging harmful gender norms

Insights from The Man Box research

Understanding the prevalence of harmful beliefs about masculinity is necessary if we are to work as community to shift these beliefs. For this reason, in 2018, through The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services undertook an Australian-first research project to better understand the attitudes and behaviours of young men towards gender stereotypes, and the impact that this can have on their wellbeing, behaviours and the safety of our wider community.

The Man Box research project surveyed 1,000 young men aged 18 to 30 years to gauge their perception of social pressures to conform to particular ideas of what it means to be man, as well as young men's personal adherence to these beliefs. This included beliefs relating to self-sufficiency, acting tough, physical attractiveness, rigid gender roles, heterosexuality and homophobia, hypersexuality, and aggression and control.

We found that the Man Box is alive and well in Australia, with two thirds of young men saying that since they were a boy they had been told that a 'real man' behaves in a certain way. We found that young men feel these pressures everywhere in society and see them reinforced and influenced by their closest relationships – families, partners and friends. In the context of the perpetration of sexual violence, pressures that were particularly strong included acting strong and not saying no to sex.

Although there was not one Man Box rule that a majority of young men agreed with, the study showed that a substantial minority (averaging around 30 per cent) of young men endorse most of the Man Box rules. Of particular concern are high levels of personal endorsement of rules that indicate gender inequitable views and control of women.

The study also clearly showed that the 'rules' of the Man Box are causing harm to young men themselves and to those around them, particularly women. Of particular note, the top 20 per cent of young men 'inside the Man Box' (that is, subscribing to the rules of the Man Box) are *20 times* more likely to perpetrate sexual assault.

More detailed findings of the Man Box are summarised in our submission to the consultation on the Northern Territory Gender Equality Framework. The full report can be accessed [here](#) on the Jesuit Social Services website.

Findings from the Man Box reflect findings from the most recent National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey NCAS that found a disturbing number of young men still don't understand that controlling behaviours in relationships are a problem, and too many believe that having control is a normal part of a relationship.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Politoff, V., Crabbe, M., Honey, N., Mannix, S., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Powell, A., Stubbs, J., Ward, A., & Webster, K., (2019) *Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality: Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)* ANROWS ([online](#))

Strategies to educate young people and adults about the attitudes and behaviours that can give rise to sexual violence and role model positive alternatives must therefore be a key plank of an effective primary prevention strategy against sexual violence. This includes school-based initiatives such as Respectful Relationships education⁴⁷ that address gender norms and attitudes before they become deeply ingrained in children and young people, as well as community-based initiatives that engage men and women as role models to challenge harmful gender norms and violent behaviour in places where boys and men live, work and meet – including schools, university, workplaces, sports clubs and other community groups.

Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program

In our submission to the Gender Equality Framework we have highlighted the importance of engaging men and women to role model healthy and positive alternatives to the dominant gender norms.

In 2018, Jesuit Social Services commenced the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program that seeks to develop strong role models – both male and females – to lead change in the places where boys and men live, work and meet.

MoRE is a three month program supporting community members who work closely with boys and men to develop the knowledge and skills to create change in their communities around issues of respect and equality. This includes challenging harmful and limiting stereotypes about what it means to be a man today and supporting boys and men to be their best selves.

The program commences with a two day intensive workshop focused on personal reflection and growth, building awareness and understanding of the issues, developing skills to model and drive change within their own work, team and community. This is followed by ongoing, active support for participants to identify and action opportunities and activities in their own communities, supported through online and offline peer support. The program wraps up with a half-day follow-up workshop that celebrates achievements, aims to solve problems and consolidates learnings.

Since the program commenced in October 2018, there have been more than 75 participants from a wide range of backgrounds including schools, sporting clubs, community service organisations and faith-based community groups.

⁴⁷ Keddie, A. and Ollis, D. (28 May 2019) 'Let's make it mandatory to teach respectful relationships in every Australian school.' *The Conversation* ([online](#))

Recommendation 10

That the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework include initiatives that educate young people about the attitudes and behaviours that can give rise to sexual violence, complementing actions through the Gender Equality Framework, including specific strategies to engage male and female role models in promoting healthy and positive expressions of masculinity.

Building awareness and strengthening protective behaviours for children

The need for widespread sexual education and awareness in Aboriginal communities has been highlighted in a number of inquiries, and contributes to the high rates of non-disclosure of sexual abuse.⁴⁸

In relation to child sexual abuse, while it should ultimately be the responsibility of adults to keep children safe, providing children with information about how to recognise when they feel unsafe, and how to seek help in unsafe situations, is an invaluable strategy in preventing and responding to child abuse. Submissions to the recent Productivity Commission Inquiry into Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory have highlighted the lack of preventative and community education programs about child sexual abuse and inappropriate sexual behaviour.⁴⁹

The expansion of both community education about sexual violence for adults and protective behaviours education for children must therefore be a key component of sexual violence prevention in the Territory.

This should include education in schools around child-to-child sexual abuse, pornography and cyber safety, recognising the increasing vulnerability of children to bullying and predatory behaviours through the proliferation of online platforms such as Snapchat and TikTok. Schools are an ideal environment for this type of training, as they provide immediate access to adults in positions of trust such as teachers, counsellors and Aboriginal teaching assistants.⁵⁰

Programs need to be culturally informed and tailored to the unique context of the Northern Territory. For remote communities, it has been recognised that whole-of-community approaches to the promotion of protective behaviours are likely to be most effective, that is, working not only with children, but also engaging school staff, parents and carers, local police, health workers, child protection staff and early years childcare and education workers so that adults in the community are 'on the same page'.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See Willis, M. (2011), p.9.

⁴⁹ See for example AMSANT (2019) Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory ([online](#))

⁵⁰ NSW Ombudsman (2012) Responding to Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities: A report under Part 6A of the Community Services (Complaints, Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993 ([online](#))

⁵¹ Ibid, p.63.

An example of the impact a whole-of-community approach to protective behaviours education in Central Australia is provided below.

Case study: engaging the community to strengthen protective behaviours

For a number of years, Jesuit Social Services has been working in a community development role in Central Australia. In the course of this work, Jesuit Social Services was asked by communities to support them in implementing protective behaviours workshops. We funded a specialist educator to deliver intensive, week-long protective behaviours education in the communities. This included work through the school, alongside work with communities' men's and women's groups. As a result of the education sessions, some disclosures were made by children who had participated in the workshops.

Recommendation 11

That the Northern Territory Government resource the delivery of sexual violence education in communities.

Recommendation 12

That the Northern Territory Government resource the delivery of protective behaviours education in all Northern Territory schools. For remote communities, this should be delivered in conjunction with education for parents, carers, service providers and the broader community.

Government leadership

Public messages that implicitly or explicitly legitimise violence against women permeate society. Government has an important role to challenge these messages, including influence on media standards and avoiding gender stereotyping and sexualised images of women and children in its own publicity.

The Northern Territory Government can show a leadership role through its internal workplace policies, including ensuring all staff receiving training in training reducing sexual harassment in the workplace, and about appropriate workplace behaviours, and ensuring clear policies are in place to support staff who have experienced sexual violence. As suggested in our submission to consultations on the Gender Equality Framework, the inclusion of gender justice outcomes in the Northern Territory Government's procurement processes, as part of a broader Social Procurement Framework, is a lever for government to influence wider community change.

Recommendation 13

That the Northern Territory Government lead by example in challenging the attitudes, behaviours and workplace practices that facilitate sexual violence.

5. Improved services responses

Responding to children and adults who have experienced sexual violence

There remains a severe lack of frontline services across the Territory to respond to both children and adults who have experienced sexual violence.

Women's shelters continue to turn away high numbers of women⁵² and service estimates suggest that 40 per cent of calls to youth counselling helplines go unanswered.⁵³ A lack of housing, particularly in remote communities, gives women facing sexual violence very few options for escape.^{54,55} Reflecting the wider lack of therapeutic services for vulnerable children and young people in the Northern Territory, Aboriginal health services have identified a lack of counselling services for children who have experienced as direct victims or witnesses to sexual abuse and assault. Advice from other service providers indicates an absence of local capacity in the Northern Territory to recognise, prevent and appropriately respond to problem sexualised behaviours in children and young people.⁵⁶

Addressing sexual violence requires a whole-of-government response: one that engages health, housing, justice, education and child and family services. Jesuit Social Services acknowledges the significant investment by the Northern Territory Government in actions that will contribute to the reduction in sexual violence through the response to the *Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory* and, for example, significant recent investment in housing across the Territory.

Recommendation 14

That the Northern Territory Government and Commonwealth Government increase investment in responses to children and adults who have experienced sexual violence, prioritising the availability of trauma-informed, culturally-safe services in remote communities. This includes:

- women's safe houses
- health and counselling services for adults who have experienced sexual abuse
- counselling and support services for children and families who have experienced child abuse-related trauma, including sexual assault.

⁵² 'Territory organisations lacking resources to give refuge to domestic violence victims' *NT News*, 29 November 2017 ([online](#))

⁵³ 'Kids Helpline unable to answer 40 per cent of calls because of rising demand for counselling' *ABC News*, 25 March 2014 ([online](#))

⁵⁴ 'Why Indigenous women in remote Northern Territory have 'no realistic way' to escape violence', *ABC News*, 15 February 2016 ([online](#))

⁵⁵ Consultations in Alice Springs on the Fourth National Action Plan to Reduce violence against women and children highlighted the need for safe spaces are needed to support women, regardless of whether sober or intoxicated. See Alice Springs consultation summary on the Department of Social Services [website](#).

⁵⁶ Requires interstate specialists to be brought in to respond.

- therapeutic programs for children exhibiting problem sexual behaviours and sexually abusive behaviours.

As noted above, there is an identified lack of specialist services to respond to children and young people exhibiting problem sexual behaviours and sexually abusive behaviours. In the context of the Northern Territory Government's commitment to raising the age of criminal responsibility, it is important that appropriate responses are in place for this cohort of children both under and over the age of criminal responsibility. It is suggested that the Northern Territory response consider drawing on approaches in:

- Victoria, through the sexually abusive behaviours treatment services and the accompanying Aboriginal-specific service currently in development.⁵⁷
- Queensland, through the new Youth Strategy Action Plan that includes an action on youth sexual violence, including place-based early intervention trials, a focus on culturally specific trials and new sexual abuse and sexual assault counselling services and training to assist organisations work with young people who have harmful sexual behaviours.⁵⁸
- United Kingdom, through their Harmful Sexualised Behaviours Framework.⁵⁹

Mobile outreach services for remote communities

In its recent response to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into the Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory, AMSANT highlighted the significant lack of counselling services for children who have been victims of sexual abuse, particularly in remote communities.⁶⁰ It was noted that the lack of services in remote communities exists alongside already limited service provision in urban and regional centres.

AMSANT noted that although children who have experienced sexual assault can be evacuated from remote communities for initial medical treatment and assessment at the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek or Alice Springs, SARC is not funded to provide ongoing services to children who return to remote communities – meaning children are sent back to their communities without ongoing follow up.⁶¹

Mobile Outreach Service Plus (MOS Plus) is an example of an outreach service that previously existed to support children in remote communities and their families and communities experiencing trauma, child abuse and neglect. The model had flaws, reflecting its hasty design, implementation and expansion in the context of the Northern Territory Emergency Response⁶², and these lessons

⁵⁷ See information from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services on sexually abusive behaviours treatment services [here](#).

⁵⁸ See information from the Queensland Government on its response to youth sexual violence [here](#).

⁵⁹ See details of the framework [here](#).

⁶⁰ AMSANT (2019)

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

should inform any future service design. Nevertheless, the provision of both case-related services for children and family, alongside wider community education, professional development and secondary consultation services in remote communities remain a critical service gap that must be filled.

Improving criminal justice system responses

The criminal justice system remains the primary institution for responding to sexual violence offences. It should play a powerful role in upholding justice for and the safety of survivors of sexual violence and their families, yet we know that that for the majority of women (and men) who have experienced sexual violence, travelling through the justice system can be a painful, often re-traumatising and ultimately fruitless process.⁶³ Indeed, the discrimination, marginalisation and fear that many survivors experience in the community, often extends to the criminal justice process.

Criminal justice reform, including policing reforms, law reforms and judicial training must therefore be a priority in the Northern Territory Government's response to sexual violence. Jesuit Social Services has not made detailed comments in this submission on the criminal justice system reforms required, anticipating that these will articulated in responses from legal and women's services.

Responding to men who perpetrate sexual violence

The discussion paper highlighted a gap in relapse prevention programs and, more broadly, effective programs to help perpetrators change their behaviour and prevent future violence.

Women and children's safety must be at the centre of all responses to men who use sexual violence. As reflected in the National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions, this means women must have confidence that they will be supported and protected if they report violence, and the responses must minimise any trauma women and their children experience as a result of their involvement (for example during the court process and during the conduct of programmes and case management).⁶⁴

Interventions with men who use violence need to encourage men to take responsibility for their violence, change their violent attitudes and behaviours and address any factors that may be amplifying their risk of violence.

Consultations conducted in the Northern Territory to inform the Fourth Action Plan for the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children highlighted the need for safe spaces that enable men who use violence to unpack and reflect on their behaviour, find strategies to how they may deal with behaviour, and learn from other men about healthy relationships.⁶⁵

⁶³ Australian Woman Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) (2017) Sexual violence: Law reform and access to justice Issues paper ([online](#))

⁶⁴ See COAG (2015) National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions ([online](#))

⁶⁵ See Alice Springs consultation summary on the Department of Social Services [website](#).

The need for culturally informed responses

As identified in work by the Healing Foundation and White Ribbon, responses to Aboriginal men and boys who use violence must be informed by the foundational violence, structural violence, cultural breakdown, intergenerational trauma and disempowerment experienced by Aboriginal people. This requires responses that are underpinned by Aboriginal values and principles, based in local culture and which create safe spaces for trauma-informed healing.⁶⁶ As noted earlier, further detail on effective response to Aboriginal men and boys is discussed in the 2019 report, *Towards an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander violence prevention framework for men and boys*.

Innovations in responses to men who use sexual violence

Through the Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services is working to respond to identified gaps in programs that respond to men who use sexual violence, including work to intervene earlier to prevent violence. Examples of approaches could be considered for application in the Northern Territory are provided below.

Intervening earlier to prevent child sexual abuse

Stop It Now! Scoping Study on Implementation in Australia (a partnership with the University of Melbourne)

There are currently no preventative interventions in Australia for people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours in relation to children. This gap was identified by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and *Stop It Now!* was highlighted as a potential model to adopt in the recommended National Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Strategy.

Stop It Now! is secondary prevention program that operates in North America, the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the Netherlands, and has also previously operated on a small scale in Queensland, Australia. The program has been positively evaluated in both the UK and the Netherlands.^{67,68}

Stop It Now!'s key feature is a national confidential and anonymous phone helpline that provides information and support for people who are worried about their own sexual thoughts and behaviours, as well as parents, family-members, and professionals who are concerned about actual or potential child sexual abuse.

⁶⁶ Healing Foundation (2017), p.32.

⁶⁷ Brown, A., Jago, N., Kerr, J., McNaughton-Nicholls, C., Paskell, C., & Webster, S. (2014). Call to keep children safe from sexual abuse: A study of the use and effects of the Stop It Now! UK and Ireland Helpline. London: NatCen Social Research ([online](#))

⁶⁸ Van Horn, J., Eisenberg, M., McNaughton Nicholls, C., Mulder, J., Webster, S, Paskell, C., Brown, A., Stam, J, Kerr, J., and Jago, N. (2015). Stop It Now! A Pilot Study Into the Limits and Benefits of a Free Helpline Preventing Child Sexual Abuse, *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 24:8, pp853-872, DOI: 10.1080/10538712.2015.1088914

As part of The Men’s Project, Jesuit Social Services, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, has assessed the feasibility of a *Stop It Now!* phone helpline. Discussions with a wide range of stakeholders revealed strong support for a *Stop It Now!* program in Australia.

A copy of the full scoping study including the proposed preliminary models and recommendations for its operation in Australia is available [here](#).

Intervening earlier for children displaying harmful sexual thoughts and behaviours

Worried About Sex and Porn Project (WASAPP)

About half of all child sexual abuse is carried out by children and young people, yet currently there is a lack of early intervention responses for children and young people displaying problematic sexualised behaviours and thoughts. Recognising this gap, as part of the development of the *Stop it Now!* program, Jesuit Social Services is working with the University of Melbourne to explore the development of a tailored service response and practice framework for this cohort.

We know that young people who have sexually abused say that porn is a trigger as well as their own experiences of victimisation. They say they knew it was wrong but couldn’t stop and that there was nothing there to help them stop. Worried About Sex and Porn Project for young people (WASAPP) is exploring whether there is a window of opportunity to intervene early with children and young people in the same way that there is with adults.

Reducing recidivism among people who commit sex offences

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSAs)

Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAs) is a restorative justice program that has been shown to reduce the risk of sex offenders reoffending by helping them re-integrate into society after release from prison. It is a program that harnesses the assistance of volunteers and aims to create a safer community for all, at the same time holding offenders accountable for their actions and ensuring they recognise the need for behaviour change.

COSA Canada describes the aim of the program as: “To substantially reduce the risk of future sexual victimisation of community members by assisting and supporting released individuals in their task of integrating with the community and leading responsible, productive, and accountable lives.”⁶⁹

Rather than being “soft on offenders”, as the program is sometimes portrayed, the primary goals are to reduce reoffending and to protect communities. The program reflects the reality that most

⁶⁹ Correctional Service Canada (2003), “Circles of Support and Accountability: Guide to project development”, Ottawa: CSC, accessed <http://cosacanada.com/cosa-canada-mission-statement/>

sex offenders will be released back into society at some stage, and that effective reintegration is the best way of ensuring no future victims.

The aim of COSAs is to engage Core Members with community, providing a surrogate social network as well as providing additional monitoring. Social connection both sets boundaries and provides a sense of belonging that reduces the risk of offending.⁷⁰ COSA volunteers help with some of the practical aspects of settling back into the community, providing a sounding board on everything from housing possibilities and study or volunteering options to modifying risky behaviour, while always having professionals to oversee their management and be on call in situations of concern.

Understandably, many victims have little interest in seeing humanity in perpetrators of sex offences. Yet victims are among the supporters of COSAs, and children's charity Barnados is a backer and partner of COSAs in the United Kingdom. Explaining its involvement, Barnados states "there is significant evidence that highlights enhanced child and public protection in geographical areas where Circles operate."⁷¹ Acknowledging victims, and discussing with past offenders the devastating impact of sexual abuse, is a core part of the COSA approach, while the focus is on building a positive future notwithstanding that past behaviour.

Jesuit Social Services is happy to provide further information regarding the COSAs model and its possible application in the Northern Territory with Territory Families and the Department of Attorney-General and Justice.

Recommendation 15

That the Northern Territory Government and Commonwealth Government increase investment in programs that work with men who use or are at-risk of using sexual violence such as *Stop it Now!* and Circles of Support and Accountability. These programs should work with men so that they take responsibility for their violence, change their violent attitudes and behaviours and address any factors that may be amplifying their risk of violence. All programs for men must put women and children's safety at the centre. Programs for Aboriginal men should be developed within an Aboriginal cultural framework.

⁷⁰ Höing M, Duke L & Völlm B (2015), "Circles4EU European Handbook – COSA Circles of Support and Accountability", 2nd ed, Circles4EU, Breda, the Netherlands

⁷¹ Barnados website (2017), http://www.barnados.org.uk/orchard_mosaic/mosaic_how_we_can_help.htm, accessed 4 August 2017

Recommendation 16

That the Northern Territory Government and Commonwealth Government invest in the development of tailored early intervention responses for children and young people displaying problematic sexual behaviours and thoughts, recognising that about half of all child sexual abuse is carried out by children and young people.

6. Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the development of this landmark framework.

If you have any questions or require any further information regarding our submission, please contact:

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