

Creating Safe Places for Women.

Preliminary findings and recommendations.

August 2018

"We, in the early days, idolised and protected our women. Through the changing time domestic violence has just become outrageous. Just being Aboriginal these days is hard enough."

Prepared by:

Dr. Brian Gordon & Luke van der Beeke

Marketing for Change

We would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of Australia, and Aboriginal leaders past, present and emerging. We would like to thank the Aboriginal elders, workers and community members involved in this project to date for sharing their stories and experiences.

Contents

1.0	Summary of key findings.....	4
1.1	Swan Aboriginal Community	4
1.2	Family.....	4
1.3	Kinship	4
1.4	Normalisation.....	4
1.5	Lateral violence	4
1.6	Environmental toxicity	4
1.7	Racism	4
1.8	Fear	4
1.9	Employment.....	5
1.10	Shortage of services	5
1.11	Shame.....	5
1.12	Lack of transport and child care.....	5
1.13	Lack of basics.....	5
2.0	Recommendation summary	6
	Recommendation 1: Yarning circles.....	6
	Recommendation 2: Increase education and early intervention	6
	Recommendation 3: Expansion of breakfast programs	6
	Recommendation 4: Greater integration of and collaboration between service providers.....	6
	Recommendation 5: More Aboriginal staff	6
	Recommendation 6: Development of a positive employment strategy by the City of Swan.....	6
	Recommendation 7: Establish an Aboriginal Reference Group	7
	Recommendation 8: Establish a short-stay safe house for Aboriginal women	7
	Recommendation 9: More prevention and engagement strategies for men	7
	Recommendation 10: Co-production of services	7
	Recommendation 11: Develop and maintain a directory of Aboriginal services	7
	Recommendation 12: Fund family violence prevention programs for a minimum of two years	8
	Recommendation 13: Establish and fund an Aboriginal owned and operated community centre	8
	Source a suitable building and find funding for an Aboriginal owned and operated community centre within the City of Swan.....	8
	Recommendation 14: Examine the feasibility of person-centred approaches	8
	Recommendation 15: Increased access to safe and affordable housing	8
	Recommendation 16: Regular meetings between service providers and community reps.....	8
	Recommendation 17: Community education to address gendered drivers	8
3.0	Background	9
3.1	Project overview	9
3.2	The prevalence of domestic and family violence	10
3.3	Family violence and the Aboriginal community.....	11
3.4	A brief background history of events leading to the breakdown of a society	13
3.4.1	Breakdown of the Spirit.....	13

3.4.2	The Stolen Generation	14
4.0	Findings.....	16
4.1	Swan Aboriginal community	16
4.2	Family.....	17
4.3	Nature and breadth of violence.....	19
4.4	Contributing Factors to Violence.....	20
4.4.1	The normalisation of violence	21
4.4.2	Violence is role modelled	23
4.4.3	Poverty, alcohol, drugs, homelessness and displacement	23
4.4.4	Racism	26
4.5	Barriers to self-referral and successful intervention.....	28
4.5.1	Colonisation and the breakdown of community	28
4.5.2	Threat of removal	28
4.5.3	Lack of Aboriginal staff	29
4.5.4	Lack of services	31
4.5.5	Shame and the threat of continuing violence from family members	33
4.5.6	Lack of transport and childcare	34
4.5.7	A lack of the basics	35
4.5.8	Phone and contact details	36
4.5.9	Lack of cultural competency and awareness	36
4.5.10	Help only available during business hours	38
4.5.11	Language.....	39
4.5.12	Opposition to self-improvement	39
5.0	Recommendations.....	41
5.1	Yarning circles	41
5.2	Increase education and early intervention.....	42
5.3	Expansion of breakfast programs.....	44
5.4	Greater integration of and collaboration between service providers	45
5.5	More Aboriginal staff in frontline agencies.....	47
5.5.1	Frontline staff	47
5.5.2	Cultural awareness	49
5.6	Development of a positive employment strategy	50
5.7	Establish an Aboriginal reference group.....	51
5.8	Short-stay safe house for Aboriginal women.....	52
5.9	More engagement and prevention programs for men	53
5.10	Ensure co-production of services with Aboriginal people	55
5.11	Develop and maintain a directory of Aboriginal services	56

5.12	Fund programs and initiatives for a minimum of two years	56
5.13	Establish and fund an Aboriginal owned and operated community centre Source a suitable building and find funding for an Aboriginal owned and operated community centre within the City of Swan.....	57
5.14	Examine the feasibility of person-centred approaches	57
5.15	Increased access to safe and affordable housing.....	58
5.16	Regular meetings between service providers and community reps	59
5.17	Community education to address gendered drivers	59
6.0	Closing remarks	61
7.0	Acknowledgements	62

1.0 Summary of key findings

During the project (to date) a large amount of insight has been gathered from members of the Aboriginal community and those that provide family and domestic violence related services to members of the Swan Aboriginal community.

1.1 Swan Aboriginal Community

The Swan Aboriginal community is not a unified whole, but a blending of family, tribal and community groups with cultural differences.

1.2 Family

The Aboriginal family system is an extended family structure, as opposed to the nuclear or immediate family structure which is common in Western society. This extended family concept is rarely endorsed or understood by government authorities with adverse consequences for affected families.

1.3 Kinship

Kinship is at the heart of Aboriginal society. A person's position in the kinship system establishes their relationship to others¹

1.4 Normalisation

There is a "normalisation" of sexual and family violence that is now becoming intergenerational.

1.5 Lateral violence

Lateral violence, which makes victims subject to intimidation and community denunciation for reporting offenders, further inhibits self-referral.

1.6 Environmental toxicity

A 'toxicity' of environment which includes poverty, unemployment, poor housing, drug and alcohol abuse and an under-resourced education system, leads to an increased potential for abusive or neglectful relationships.

1.7 Racism

Racism and the perception of racism are broadly prevalent in the Swan region and negatively impacts the physical and mental health of those affected.

1.8 Fear

Victims are afraid of their children being taken away and are reluctant to self-refer. The legacy and impact of Australia's colonial history, compounded by the current history of the removal of children, has resulted in profound levels of mistrust of government, the legal system and government service systems by Aboriginal communities.

¹ <https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/indigenous-culture/kinship>

1.9 Employment

The employment of Aboriginal staff in service areas is critical to their success – *‘there’s [sic] still a lot of organisations around that don’t employ Aboriginal staff, and then wonder why they can’t access Aboriginal families.’*

1.10 Shortage of services

There is shortage of services that can respond to Aboriginal family violence in the Swan region. There needs to be a focus on and investment in culturally appropriate early intervention, prevention, family preservation and restoration activities.

1.11 Shame

Aboriginal women would rather not talk about family or domestic violence because *‘it’s the big shame factor.’*

1.12 Lack of transport and child care

The lack of transport and childcare are significant barriers to young Aboriginal mothers keeping appointments.

1.13 Lack of basics

The lack of the basics in life, such as food and housing mean that securing them is a higher priority than safety.

2.0 Recommendation summary

Our recommendations stem from the many community conversations, yarning circles and stakeholder interviews we conducted as part of our project scoping phase. Recommendations are discussed in more detail in Section 5 of this report.

Recommendation 1: Yarning circles

Funding be sought and provided in whatever format is deemed appropriate to facilitate gender specific yarning circles on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 2: Increase education and early intervention

Community education strategies targeting girls and boys be expanded to raise awareness as to what is unacceptable and to provide tools to promote individual and community safety.

Recommendation 3: Expansion of breakfast programs

Schools within the City of Swan be supported in the provision and extension of breakfast programs.

Recommendation 4: Greater integration of and collaboration between service providers

Reforms to existing accountability arrangements and incentive structures be identified which will encourage better cross-departmental policymaking and inter agency implementation, without weakening financial discipline or formal accountability.

Recommendation 5: More Aboriginal staff

A strategy of positive discrimination favouring the employment of Aboriginal workers be adopted for all front-line agencies handling family violence.

Recommendation 6: Development of a positive employment strategy by the City of Swan

There is a need to develop a positive employment strategy in the City of Swan to increase the proportion of Aboriginals in the workforce.

Furthermore, to maintain their employment the following supports are needed:

- Ongoing mentoring and support
- Flexible work arrangements to allow Indigenous employees to meet their work, family and/or community obligations
- Support for the families of Indigenous employees
- Dealing with racism in the workplace through initiatives that address the broader workplaces' culture.

Recommendation 7: Establish an Aboriginal Reference Group

The City of Swan establish an Aboriginal Reference Group whose terms of reference are to:

- Provide a point of contact and liaison between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- Encourage communication, participation and sharing of information and knowledge.
- Provide a leadership, advocacy and advisory role.
- Strengthen understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and achievements

Recommendation 8: Establish a short-stay safe house for Aboriginal women

Establish a safe house run by Aboriginal people to provide short stay accommodation for at-risk women and children.

Recommendation 9: More prevention and engagement strategies for men

Any strategy for the prevention of family violence includes a collateral strategy for the positive engagement of men to increase their cultural pride and promote healing.

Recommendation 10: Co-production of services

Any service that seeks to prevent family and domestic violence against Aboriginal women in the Swan region should be designed in equal partnership with members of the Aboriginal community.

Recommendation 11: Develop and maintain a directory of Aboriginal services

An accessible directory of services for Aboriginal people in the Swan region be produced and maintained annually.

Recommendation 12: Fund family violence prevention programs for a minimum of two years

Any pilot programs designed to address family and domestic violence in the Swan region be funded for a minimum of two years, and ideally a minimum of five years.

Recommendation 13: Establish and fund an Aboriginal owned and operated community centre

Source a suitable building and find funding for an Aboriginal owned and operated community centre within the City of Swan.

Recommendation 14: Examine the feasibility of person-centred approaches

Consideration be given to the merits of funding the person seeking support rather than the service alone in a similar manner to the disability sector.

Recommendation 15: Increased access to safe and affordable housing

Develop a strategy to deliver additional safe and affordable housing to members of Aboriginal community and increase the level of priority housing assistance for those experiencing family violence.

Recommendation 16: Regular meetings between service providers and community reps

There needs to be more efficient and open sharing of information between service providers, initially via regular interagency meetings.

Recommendation 17: Community education to address gendered drivers

Develop and implement an appropriately targeted community education program to address gendered drivers of violence against Aboriginal women.

3.0 Background

“Each culture has its sayings and songs about the importance of home, and the comfort and security to be found there. Yet for many women, home is a place of pain and humiliation”²

3.1 Project overview

This report is one of several outputs stemming from the first stage of a Department of Social Services (DSS) funded behaviour change project titled: “Creating Safe Places for Women.” The project is being facilitated by non-profit service provider Koolkuna and Marketing for Change, a social enterprise.

The project is one of several pilots funded under *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children—2010–2022*.

The National Plan provides focuses on six national outcomes:

1. communities are safe and free from violence
2. relationships are respectful
3. Indigenous communities are strengthened
4. services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence
5. justice responses are effective
6. perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.

The initial project aim was to work in partnership with the Aboriginal community and key stakeholders in the City of Swan to increase help seeking behaviours amongst Aboriginal women experiencing domestic violence.

However, in response to early feedback from community representatives the primary aim of the project was changed. The overarching goal became the prevention of violence against Aboriginal women and their children. Encouraging help-seeking behaviours was seen to be important, but the overwhelming desire of community representatives and stakeholders was that the violence had to stop, and that achieving this should be our key objective.

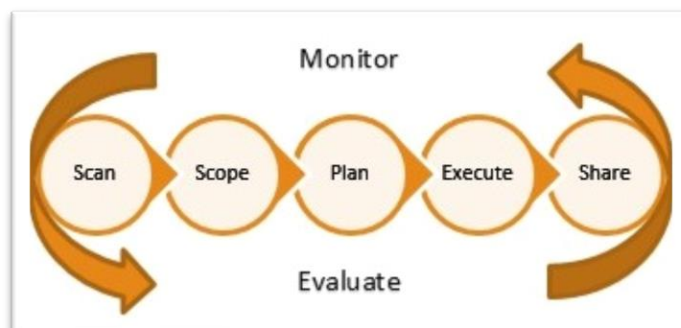
In keeping with the social marketing approach that underpins the project, a great deal of emphasis was placed on engaging non-government organisations and the wider community to co-create sustainable practices to: (a) reduce violence against Aboriginal women and to (b) effectively respond to and support women and their children experiencing violence. This remains a work in progress.

All players involved in this project recognise that reducing domestic violence is a complex undertaking. This report reflects insights gained from community conversations and stakeholder

² C García-Moreno, H Jansen, M Ellsberg, L Heise and C Watts, WHO multi-country study on women’s health and domestic violence against women: initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses, World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva, 2005, p. vi.

research undertaken over the past two years as part of the project's scoping phase (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Marketing for Change's Social Marketing Planning Process



It should be noted that our work builds on many valuable contributions made by individuals and community organisations living and/or providing services in the Swan region. It includes those already made to the understanding of family violence and abuse in Aboriginal communities over the years; especially in terms of mapping the complex web of factors that create and sustain this critical issue, at the level of individuals, extended families, community systems and the socio-environmental context within which they exist.

Our hope is that the findings and recommendations contained in this report can be used by service providers and local community members to source further funding for the planning and execution of domestic violence prevention strategies within the City of Swan.

3.2 The prevalence of domestic and family violence

Family and domestic violence is a major problem in Australia, causing serious effects on the physical and mental health of victims, as well as significant economic harm to individuals, families and society.

Australian police deal with 5,000 domestic violence matters, both indigenous and non-indigenous, on average every week. That's one every two minutes.³ Nationally, this amounts to 264,028 cases per annum, of which 16,461 occur in Western Australia.⁴



While family and domestic violence is a universal issue, some groups are at a greater risk, including Aboriginal women.⁵

³ Clare Blumer, 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-21/domestic-violence/7341716> Accessed 7 December 2017

⁴ Clare Blumer, 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-21/domestic-violence/7341716> Accessed 7 December 2017

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence in Australia*, 2018

Family and domestic violence is behaviour which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation, economic deprivation, or behaviour which causes the victim(s) to live in fear.

While men are victims of family and domestic violence, most victims are women.

Examples of criminal offences that occur in family and domestic violence situations include assault, sexual assault, making threats about a person's physical safety, stalking, damage or stealing.

In a refinement of definition, some researchers would differentiate between family and domestic violence as follows:

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence (physical, sexual, emotional and psychological) that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. It tends to involve an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear.

Family violence refers to violence between family members as well as between current or former intimate partners. For example, it can include acts of violence between a parent and a child or between siblings. Family violence is the preferred term for violence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as it covers the extended family and kinship relationships in which violence may occur.⁶

Family violence is the most widely-used term to identify the experiences of Aboriginal people because it includes the broad range of marital and kinship relationships in which violence may occur, rather than just intimate relationships. In order to cover both definitions, commentators often use the expression “domestic and family violence” in Australia.⁷

3.3 Family violence and the Aboriginal community

While the overall figures for domestic violence are terrible, those for the Aboriginal population are truly shocking.

The Aboriginal female population is said to be 34 times⁸ as likely to be hospitalised due to family violence, and the male is 21.4 times as likely compared to their non-indigenous counterparts.⁹

The disproportionately high number of Aboriginal people experiencing family violence can be attributed to a range of factors linked to colonisation including:¹⁰

- Intergenerational trauma
- Forced removal of children
- Dispossession of land
- Interrupted cultural practices

⁶ COAG (Council of Australian Governments), *National plan to reduce violence against women and their children*, Canberra, 2011.

⁷ Fact Check Q&A <http://theconversation.com/factcheck-ganda-are-indigenous-women-34-80-times-more-likely-than-average-to-experience-violence-61809>

⁸ Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council. (2012). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health performance framework 2012 report*. Canberra: AHMAC.

⁹ ANROWS, *Fast Facts – Indigenous Family Violence*, [online: www.anrows.org.au].

¹⁰ ANROWS, *Fast Facts – Indigenous Family Violence*, [online: www.anrows.org.au].

- Economic exclusion

Notably, each of these factors came through very strongly during our own conversations with community members and service providers. Racism was also cited on many occasions as a key driver of the structural disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people which in turn increased the likelihood of family violence occurring.

The broader term 'family violence' is used in relation to Aboriginal people, as it is the preferred term in many, although not all, Aboriginal communities.¹¹

The 2002 Gordon Inquiry into Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities noted that:

*"Within the Aboriginal community there is no agreement on approaches or whether Aboriginal family violence is the same 'phenomenon' as domestic violence in the wider community. As with child abuse, there has been increasing emphasis on the broader context of family violence and a range of theoretical approaches. In particular, family violence within the Aboriginal community increasingly includes child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse."*¹²

Interventions that view family violence in Aboriginal communities as a singular and isolated problem, without considering the multiple, interrelated contextual factors that contribute to it and flow from it do not work.¹³

Therefore, family violence needs to be understood within broader contexts as both a cause and effect of:

- social disadvantage
- intergenerational trauma
- poor parenting
- substance misuse

Family violence remains a critical social policy issue, placing a huge burden on communities, and especially women and children.¹⁴

The cultural context is widely seen as important. Few published sources exist that document Aboriginal women's use of violence except in passing (see, for example, Atkinson, 1990; Bolger, 1991), Yeo (1996) has suggested that, due to Aboriginal women's reluctance to report the violence they experience to police, they may be more inclined to retaliate with physical force when victimized.

In a fresh study, Dr Jones and Dr Wilson¹⁵ covering women from Bandyup Women's Prison, Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women and three regional jails, were told stories of families and community members sometimes watching on and doing nothing as the women were beaten by their partners.

¹¹ Parliament of Australia, *Domestic violence in Australia—an overview of the issues, November 2011*

¹² Gordon, S Hallahan, K, Henry, D (2002) Putting the picture together, Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia.

¹³ Parliament of Australia, *Domestic violence in Australia—an overview of the issues, November 2011*

¹⁴ AIHW December 2016 Family violence prevention programs in Indigenous communities, Resource sheet no. 37 produced by the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse

¹⁵ Drs Jocelyn Jones and Mandy Wilson 2017 *Violence in the lives of incarcerated Aboriginal mothers in Western Australia* Sage Open

Researchers heard of a hesitance by the women to disclose the violence they experienced, because in some instances there 'was a reluctance and/or failure by service providers, police and community and family members to appropriately assist'.

The study found many women believed violence in relationships was 'normal', and they would not report attacks because of a fear of paybacks.

They also report on the women's use of violence in their relationships with others. Results reinforce that Aboriginal women are overwhelmingly victims of violence; however, many women report also using violence, primarily as a strategy to deal with their own high levels of victimization.

This report considers both the barriers to reporting and strategies to encourage help seeking behaviours amongst Aboriginal women experiencing family and domestic violence, recognising:

- Concern the Department of Child Protection (DCP) would become involved.¹⁶
- Perceived failure by service providers, police and community and family members to appropriately assist'
- Fear of paybacks
- Normalisation of violence in some communities

3.4 A brief background history of events leading to the breakdown of a society

3.4.1 Breakdown of the Spirit

What past studies have shown, and our community conversations have confirmed, is that there appears to be an association between a failure to uphold traditional law, and the growth in family violence in Aboriginal communities.

*"It's actually trying to empower the spirit of the men... I believe, actually, it has been lost years and years ago, not only through the removal of children, where a big part of that actual extends, but also the settlement days, when they came up the river and things happened there."*¹⁷

"I know that people these days are there to help our people, but when it actually started, it was a different type of men. They were pretty hard back then. Quite brutal towards our people.

I believe that when they came into Noongar country, they first started to break the spirit. By doing that, they actually attacked the men and the structure of the tribes, and their kinship with the kinship within the family system. It's a very close structure.

*By taking the language away, traditional lifestyle, that's when they started to break down the Noongar nation, really. The respect went out the window, in came the alcohol. That had a very, very big impact on our people."*¹⁸

*"The idea of severing was to divide and conquer. That was the way that they were going to get land for nothing."*¹⁹

¹⁶ Drs Jocelyn Jones and Mandy Wilson 2017 *Violence in the lives of incarcerated Aboriginal mothers in Western Australia* Sage Open

¹⁷ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

¹⁸ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

¹⁹ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

*"If I can put it as divide and conquer, they separated the families. They also brought other tribes in to live in one region. They had their boundaries. They had their law structure there, their kinship. The only time they really did associate with other groups was through different ceremonies: training, and giveaways, and things like that. They'd come through, and the process was when, say, the Balardung people would come into Noongar or Whadjuk country. There was always smoking, and welcome, and welcome to the country ceremonies that actually happened. They were the oldest form of communication between the tribes and the groups within the areas."*²⁰

*"What they do, affects the generations further downstream. A lot of the young men these days, drugs are becoming a lot harder, alcohol use and stuff, and the lack of knowledge and traditional structure of Noongar people, young men don't really understand it much. I've got cousins out there that are the same as me, younger, and uncles and so forth that are older, but they don't have that traditional knowledge of what had actually happened."*²¹

3.4.2 The Stolen Generation

Between 1910 and 1970 many Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families as a result of various government policies. By some estimates, following more than 150 years of violence and dispossession as many as 1 in 3 Aboriginal children were removed from their families and communities. They were placed in missions, institutions or with non-indigenous families. These children became known as the 'Stolen Generation'. The aim was assimilation.

While for some in the non-indigenous population this may seem to be 'ancient history', the reality is that the trauma remains very real for the Aboriginal community today, evidenced by the stories we heard and pain we witnessed from several community members we spoke to.

*"So, when they were actually put into an institution, that's when they started to break their strength and the spiritual strength of Aboriginal people, whether they be women or males."*²²

"Yeah. Knowing what my mum went through, and her brother and sister, it affects me too. As I said, it didn't happen to me personally, but the actual pain that mum and them had, and I guess what my grandparents put [up] with, seeing their children dragged away from their very arms. Then my grandfather turned to alcohol. He was a very, very strong old gentleman, and loved his family and his wife and that.

*The story with pop and nan is that Harold dad, he walked from Northam to New Norcia just to see his wife. They kept arresting him three times, four times, basically locking him up because they didn't have the permission from the government to get married. Pop kept going and kept going, and they'd lock him up. He was in Fremantle gaol just for being in love with a lady.*²³

The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families estimated that between 1910 and 1970 not one Indigenous family has escaped the effects of forcible removal'.

"Then, there's that whole thing of the transgenerational trauma and stuff that has happened and the church organisations that are spooky. It's not that long ago that people took children from

²⁰ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

²¹ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

²² Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

²³ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

*Aboriginal families and missions. It's still alive and the wound is very raw, so the elders may say 'That St John of God mob, they used to run the mission up in Beagle Bay' or something, so 'I wouldn't be going there if I were you.' They pass on that kind of alertness to the next generation. I think there are loads of things that are getting in people's way."*²⁴

*"I also think that this is a long-term challenge. I think that historical impact has created feelings of inferiority, uselessness, powerlessness and I think if we can strengthen our Aboriginal women and strengthen our Aboriginal men and strengthen culture and strengthen Elders that would be amazing."*²⁵

Any effort to address family and domestic violence against Aboriginal women in the Swan region must acknowledge and account for the spiritual and lived experiences of the Aboriginal people.

²⁴ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

²⁵ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

4.0 Findings

“OUR INNER SPIRIT IS THE CENTRE OF OUR BEING AND EMOTIONS. WHEN OUR SPIRIT FEELS STRONG OUR MIND FEELS STRONG. WHEN OUR SPIRIT FEELS TANGLED OUR MINDS FEEL TANGLED. STRONG INNER SPIRIT IS WHAT KEEPS PEOPLE HEALTHY AND KEEPS THEM CONNECTED TOGETHER. STRONG INNER SPIRIT KEEPS OUR FAMILY STRONG, OUR COMMUNITY STRONG AND OUR COUNTRY ALIVE.”²⁶

4.1 Swan Aboriginal community

As previously stated, the Aboriginal female population is said to be 34 times as likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults and the male is 21.4 times as likely compared to their non-indigenous counterparts.

Indigenous Australians are not a homogeneous people (Australian Law Reform Commission 1987). It is estimated that there were about 600 Aboriginal languages when white colonists arrived in Australia (Blainey 1980). Unsurprisingly then, the Aboriginal population of the Swan region is a composition of peoples from around the State.

There are the Noongar who include the Whadjuk, Binjareb, Wardandi, Ganeang and Wilmen. These are peoples of the Perth region.²⁷

Then there are Yamatji (or Yamaji) people who came down from the Murchison area and the Wangai. The latter’s origins are to be found in a territory that extended from the coastal area of the Southern Ocean, at Esperance north as far as the Warburton Ranges, and thus is inclusive of biogeographic areas of Coolgardie, South-East Wiluna and the Western half of the Great Victoria Desert.²⁸

“We’re in Noongar country and then we’ve got the Yamatji’s, we’ve got the Wangai’s, so with each Aboriginal community, it’s different. We had so much diversity as Aboriginal people within our communities.”²⁹

These different communities with their tribal group sub-sets all have differences of culture and custom from each other.

“So, if we’re getting people from down north and we’re getting people from Geraldton, so we’re dealing with different diversities of Aboriginal people.”³⁰

“We’re all quite diverse in our own ways. So, up north where I come from, we don’t play didgeridoo, but in my husband’s country, they play didgeridoo. So, that’s what creates us being so different is that we had so much diversity as Aboriginal people within our communities. So, if we’re getting

²⁶ Joseph ‘Nipper’ Roe

²⁷ Aboriginal groupings of Western Australia, Wikipedia, available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aboriginal_groupings_of_Western_Australia

²⁸ Bedells 2010, p. 1.

²⁹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

³⁰ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

people from down north and we're getting people from Geraldton, so we're dealing with different diversities of Aboriginal people."³¹

The intertribal differences are further compounded by "mixed blood" Aborigines who sometimes see themselves as different as well.

*"Different shades too, because I recognise as Aboriginal and some of the conversation can be quite racist as well."*³²

These differences matter given their differing cultural undertones and the constant referencing of the need to pay attention to culture that permeated all the conversations and yarning sessions we held. Throughout the conversations cultural understanding was seen to be key if reconciliation is to be affected.

*You're saying you're from Queensland, I'm from up north and I've got family down here, but every community is different. Even Albany to Brookton, and stuff like that, they're totally different communities. And, we're so diverse in our world..... and, only an Aboriginal worker can understand that when we're engaging with families.*³³

And

*Another thing I find is big in our Aboriginal communities is everybody assumes everybody is Noongar, you know, because we live in Perth. That's not so. So, gently, gently. "Who is your mob? Where are you from? Make that connection."*³⁴

Finding

The Swan Aboriginal community is not a unified whole but a blending of family, tribal and community groups with cultural differences.

4.2 Family

A sound understanding of the structures and concepts that exist in Aboriginal communities is necessary to formulate effective responses to the issues they face in the 21st century.

Indiscriminate violence towards family members within Aboriginal societies and culture was not present in pre-settlement times. While some forms of violence were used, it was practiced within Aboriginal law, largely as a punishment for breaking laws.³⁵

*We, in the early days, idolised and protected our women. Through the changing time domestic violence has just become outrageous. It's just – it's just too much. Just being Aboriginal these days is hard enough.*³⁶

³¹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

³² KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

³³ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

³⁴ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

³⁵ Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2002, Child abuse and family violence in Aboriginal communities

³⁶ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

The Aboriginal family system is an extended family structure, as opposed to the nuclear or immediate family structure which is common in Western society. This extended family concept is rarely endorsed or understood by authorities and service providers, with adverse consequences for affected families.³⁷

Two of several similar stories told us are recounted here to demonstrate how this lack of understanding had real, adverse, family outcomes:

“Just an example we came across in Rockingham, one of the schools said the family had to wait for a position to become available, even though the grandparent lived in the area. And, she was in grade 4, yet she’s missed a month or two of schooling.

And,

“Same with women, because there’s a little loophole now where they’re calling mum and dad the grandparents taking care and there’s no money involved or anything, because they don’t want to tell anyone, because the department will get involved. So, there’s a lot of issues.”³⁸

Finding

The Aboriginal family system is an extended family structure, as opposed to the nuclear or immediate family structure which is common in Western society. This extended family concept is rarely endorsed or understood by government and service providers which has adverse consequences for affected families.

The concepts of extended family and ‘community as family’ in Aboriginal communities encompass the idea that children are not just the concern of the biological parents, but of the entire community – whether blood related, by marriage or even the broader community such as Elders, friends, or community members.³⁹ However, it has been said that family and friends are often interchangeable concepts.

Most indigenous families their friends are their family. They don’t really have a lot of friends out of family.⁴⁰

And,

“Kinship is at the heart of Indigenous society. A person’s position in the kinship system establishes their relationship to others.”⁴¹

And,

“I think Aboriginal people are very social people and very community focused.”⁴²

³⁷ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

³⁸ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

³⁹ NSW Department of Community Services – Working with Aboriginal people and communities; available from: <http://www.carersaustralia.com.au/storage/>

⁴⁰ Stakeholder V KOO-004

⁴¹ <https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/indigenous-culture/kinship>

⁴² Stakeholder VII KOO-004

Because of the complexity and importance of kinship in the Aboriginal community an understanding of it is essential in responding to their needs. A lack of understanding sharply reduces the efficacy of intervention strategies.

Kinship systems define where a person fits into the community. Kinship systems may vary across communities and nations, but the principle is the same across Australia. Kinship defines the roles and responsibilities for raising and educating children and structures systems of moral and financial support within the community.”⁴³

“Having that knowledge of Noongar culture and language - Because if you don't have that structure where language and kinship comes from in your skin groups, then you're only doing thing half-heartedly.”⁴⁴

Finding

Kinship is at the heart of Indigenous society. A person's position in the kinship system establishes their relationship to others.⁴⁵

4.3 Nature and breadth of violence

The extent of family violence in Aboriginal communities and the cost to affected individuals, communities and the nation is extremely high.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are between two and five times more likely than other Australians to experience violence as victims or offenders.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are five times as likely to experience physical violence, and three times as likely to experience sexual violence, than other Australian women in the previous year.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults than other Australian women.
- According to the Australian Productivity Commission, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are twice as likely to die as an outcome of family violence compared to other Australian women.
- Family violence is a major contributor to children being removed from their families. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over nine times as likely to be on care and protection orders and ten times more likely to be in out of home care than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Without intervention, the cost of violence perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, is estimated to be \$2.2 billion in 2021-22, including costs associated with pain, suffering, premature death and health costs.
- Family violence is a greatly underreported crime.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have lower reporting rates than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and are known to face specific and additional barriers to reporting.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are five times more likely to be victims of homicide than other Australian women. More than half (55%) of these homicides are related to family violence.

⁴³ NSW Department of Community Services – Working with Aboriginal people and communities; available from: <http://www.carersaustralia.com.au/storage/>

⁴⁴ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

⁴⁵ <https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/indigenous-culture/kinship>

Addressing the issue of family violence is not possible without understanding the main drivers of that violence. Underlying drivers of violence in the Aboriginal community in the Swan region are not dissimilar to those found across the country. In this section we explore those drivers through the eyes of the local community within the context of the national experience.

The broad nature of family violence in Aboriginal communities is well summarised by the New South Wales government in their ABORIGINAL FAMILY HEALTH STRATEGY 2011–2016. It captures the networked nature of Aboriginal families which demands a holistic, not piecemeal response.

The term “family violence” takes place within the extended nature of Aboriginal families. Responses need to take account of the diversity and complexity of kinship ties in Aboriginal communities, and this holistic definition recognise that family violence in Aboriginal communities impacts on a wide range of kin and community members.

The causes of family violence in Aboriginal communities are commonly viewed in terms of a response to past traumas, including the impact of the large-scale removal of Aboriginal children from their families, the long history of oppression and dispossession, and current day disadvantage.

The present problems relate to economic, social and health disadvantage, complicated for some by the experience of racism, substance abuse and behavioural problems. Repeated layers of pain have contributed to manifestations of despair and self-destruction, behaviour that did not appear to be present prior to the disintegration of many traditional cultural laws.⁴⁶

4.4 Contributing Factors to Violence

There are many historic and prevailing factors, starting with colonisation and, in this present day, systemic discrimination against Aboriginal peoples, which contribute to the high incidence and severity of family violence among Aboriginal people.

This report is not breaking new ground in identifying the causes, but it does find that the causes underpinning family violence are notably the same in the Swan region as in the broader Australian indigenous community.

These underlying causes (drivers) include:

- Inter-generational trauma
- Dispossession of land
- Forced removal of children
- Interrupted cultural practices that mitigate against interpersonal violence
- Disproportionate rates of criminalisation and incarceration
- Economic exclusion and poverty
- Systemic and indirect racism and marginalisation and⁴⁷
- Racism

All these factors emerged or were alluded to during our conversations and yarning circles with service providers and community members in the Swan region.

⁴⁶ Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2002, Child abuse and family violence in Aboriginal communities

⁴⁷ Antoinette Braybrook, Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (FVPLS Victoria)

The following factors were repeatedly, if not universally, highlighted:

- The normalisation of violence
- The role modelling of violence
- Poverty, homelessness, alcohol and drugs as drivers of violence
- Racism
- A lack of awareness of abuse

4.4.1 The normalisation of violence

The accounts we heard highlighted (1) a degree of normalisation of violence in some families and, (2) a degree of fatalism about change.

People we spoke to also drew attention to the impact of lateral violence, which makes victims subject to intimidation and community denunciation for reporting offenders in Aboriginal communities.

“One of the things that we’ve been talking a lot about in the area of family domestic violence is that a lot of Aboriginal women are normalising the violence. They don’t know that, in fact, the experience they’re having is one that is abusive, and it is violent.”⁴⁸

And

“Somehow that behaviour is okay in that family or that group because they’ve perhaps seen it generationally. That’s what they’ve grown up with, that’s just what they believe is normal. It’s normalising, kind of.”⁴⁹

“A lot of the girls in the intergenerational trauma, and the way that we’ve lived, is that, ‘Well, Nan and Pop used to do that,’ or ‘My mum and dad used to do that, and my nan and pop used to do that.’ And so, it’s never ending, and so they normalise it. They think it’s a normal way of living.”⁵⁰

And

“We have great grandkids that are coming in because their nan and pop or nan or pop were housed through Swan. It’s lack of change.”⁵¹

And

“[There is] possessive type behaviour from men from not having good role models in previous life. It could be because of stolen generation. It could be because of their own parenting, single parents. They might have been taken and placed in care. But, it’s that not seeing a good family life of their own as they were growing up. They saw their dad treat their mum wrong and, so they think that’s the norm.”⁵²

⁴⁸ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

⁴⁹ Stakeholder X KOO-004

⁵⁰ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

⁵¹ Stakeholder V KOO-004

⁵² Stakeholder IV KOO-004

Finding

There is a "normalisation" of sexual and family violence that is becoming inter-generational.

And in an example of lateral violence:

*"Quite often if you report it or call the police, then that will have a knock-on effect to the extended family; that could be quite frightening, because the police aren't coming quick enough when you need to call them, or you're afraid to walk down the shops because you might get assaulted by someone that's related to the perpetrator."*⁵³

And

*"Yes. That's right. And, how dare you? Then she has to face the females of his family and that might be confrontational in some situations, not all. How do I deal with that? I would rather just shut up and put up, rather than go out and put it out there."*⁵⁴

And

*"I think women won't seek help unless they're going to feel safe if they do; so many of them won't disclose because they know that when they get home, if they've told anybody, life is going to be even worse for them."*⁵⁵

And

*"One of our clients who's an elder in Midland, I entirely respect her, and she was leaning on a ute at the tattoo shop and she was chased with a weapon. The police were called, because she called the police, and they arrested her and took her away."*⁵⁶

Finding

Lateral violence further inhibits self-referral.

Violence that is seen as inevitable or unavoidable is unlikely to be disclosed to police. Violence may be seen this way in some Indigenous communities, with people expecting to be victimised and see their children grow up to be violent—an expectation both realised and perpetuated by the intergenerational nature of the violence (Atkinson cited in Memmott 2001; Taylor & Putt 2007).

*"I think the belief that it's okay. I think that it's normalised through family interactions, and there's not enough Elders in the community, strong Elders that are able to speak up and say 'No. No. That's not okay'. Because it's just intergenerational and it spans across the entire family, so it's almost become acceptable or okay that violence is used by women and by men. I think it can go both ways."*⁵⁷

⁵³ Stakeholder VII KOO-004

⁵⁴ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

⁵⁵ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

⁵⁶ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

⁵⁷ Stakeholder VII KOO-004

4.4.2 Violence is role modelled

The normalisation of violence is supported by extensive role modelling of abusive behaviour within familial contexts.

*"I have the right to do this, by a male, you know? I've seen my dad do it, and my pop do it, and Dick do it, and that."*⁵⁸

And

*"[It] comes back to the people who are perpetrating it. So, what are they learning in their family and what are they watching that their father and all of their uncles do?"*⁵⁹

And

*"People learn from their parents and children see bad behaviour and think that it's okay. Maybe boys grow up seeing their mother getting smacked and think it's okay to smack people. It's learned. Yes. I feel it is. I think it's hard to break the mould and if you come from a family that is like that, to get above it and be non-violent yourself."*⁶⁰

And

*"The attitude is one of the biggest problems within men. It's just the belief of an Aboriginal man now is you're not a man unless you go to jail. That's a very big problem. I've actually drunken with a lot of cousins, my uncles and that, and their attitude is, "You boys sit over there. You haven't been to jail. You can't talk to us men."*⁶¹

4.4.3 Poverty, alcohol, drugs, homelessness and displacement

Researchers have referred to a 'toxicity of environment' which includes violence in all its forms - poverty, unemployment, lack of good housing and an under resourced education system. This 'toxicity' leads to an increased potential for abusive or neglectful behaviour in families, or higher incidences of other social ills.⁶²

These factors are present in the Swan region and acknowledged by many we spoke to as contributors to the relatively high incidence of violence in the community.

*"We're working with families who are experiencing homelessness, so family violence regularly presents."*⁶³

And

⁵⁸ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

⁵⁹ Stakeholder X KOO-004

⁶⁰ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

⁶¹ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

⁶² Garbarino 1995 Parton 1985, Seagull 1987, Limber & Hashima 1992, Harrington & Dubowitz 1993, Rayner 1994, Thompson 1995, Cox 1997

⁶³ Stakeholder VII KOO-004

"Clearly, when you come from disadvantage you don't have high self-esteem. You don't, perhaps, make the right choices, your environment doesn't contribute to you to grow change. [sic]"⁶⁴

And

"The reasons are poverty, absolutely. - generational poverty."⁶⁵

And

"In poverty you get something, and it's gone that day and that's a problem and that can cause domestic violence clearly because we have nothing."⁶⁶

And

"Kids come to school and they haven't had any breakfast. We know that kids perform really, really poorly when they haven't had breakfast."⁶⁷

And

"I think over-crowding in the household. I think unemployment which is really sad. I guess with unemployment comes idleness and then there's just a lot of people in one house and they're just there all the time. There's no space. They're on a pension. It's just a cycle, it just keeps going around and around. One family will have to come and live with that family because they've been exited from their house so that's another family in that house with kids."⁶⁸

And

"Because I think the poorer you are, [you have] overcrowding. You get lots of family in the one house and regardless of whether you're Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal you put a lot of people together in a house and it's going to cause problems.

If we could have housing first as a priority for all our families, employment second well probably education and employment, I think that would go a long way and safe, secure support networks around them. It would go a long way to reducing DV."⁶⁹

And poverty, unemployment and mental health create a stressed environment.

"I think Aboriginal families are stressed and you can't think straight when you're stressed. There's all this going on, poverty, unemployment, you can't get a job. All those things, health, mental health, all the stats that we know, that's how they affect our mob. They need that sort of support and people who care about them and know all the issues that they're faced with."⁷⁰

And

⁶⁴ Stakeholder XI KOO-004

⁶⁵ Stakeholder V KOO-004

⁶⁶ Stakeholder V KOO-004

⁶⁷ Stakeholder XI KOO-004

⁶⁸ Stakeholder VIII KOO-004

⁶⁹ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

⁷⁰ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

[In terms of prevention] *"I think housings got to be number one. The single most important has got to be safe, creation of housing, and safe space, and safe housing. And safe housing does not mean 17 people in one house."*⁷¹

In a 2011 Parliamentary Inquiry, researchers fitted a logistic regression model to the International Violence against Women Survey data. They found that the strongest risk factors for current intimate partner physical violence were associated with the partners' behaviour—drinking habits, levels of aggression and controlling behaviours.⁷²

The 2011 Inquiry also noted that alcohol is a significant risk factor for domestic violence, particularly in Aboriginal communities. A longitudinal analysis of alcohol outlet density found a relationship between alcohol availability and domestic violence. Packaged liquor outlets that sell alcohol for off-premise consumption were particularly implicated.⁷³

However, drug and alcohol consumption in the metropolitan area is harder to manage than in regional or remote communities. The pervasive extent of alcohol fuelled violence in the Swan region was frequently commented on by participants without their being able to identify a solution.

*"As much as I don't like to say, it's about alcohol and drugs."*⁷⁴

*"Obviously, drug and alcohol is a huge issue in Midland."*⁷⁵

*"Then you've got your alcohol and your drug which influences your mind. A lot of them don't have control because they drink themselves until they can't remember and stuff like that. A lot of people drink themselves till they can't even walk, and then they wake up the next morning, and they've either stabbed her to death, or they've done a lot of things that they regret. Alcohol is one of the main problems, and now becoming very fast is ice and drugs."*⁷⁶

Many of the community members we spoke to felt alcohol brought to the fore other issues.

*"I think drugs and alcohol. I think displacement, identity issues as well, especially with the men."*⁷⁷

*"They're on alcohol. They're doing nothing. They're sitting around."*⁷⁸

*"I think people feel very displaced in this society and then compound that with racism, it's really tough."*⁷⁹

*"Alcohol, drugs, and jealousy. - Husband and wife jealousy, you know."*⁸⁰

⁷¹ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

⁷² Mouzos and Makkai, *Women's Experiences of Male Violence*, op. cit., pp. 59–62

⁷³ M Livingston, 'A longitudinal analysis of alcohol outlet density and domestic violence', *Addiction*, no. 106, 2011, pp. 919–925.

⁷⁴ Stakeholder X KOO-004

⁷⁵ Stakeholder V KOO-004

⁷⁶ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

⁷⁷ Stakeholder VII KOO-004

⁷⁸ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

⁷⁹ Stakeholder VII KOO-004

⁸⁰ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

Finding

A 'toxicity' of environment which includes poverty, unemployment, poor housing, drug and alcohol abuse and an under resourced education system leads to an increased potential for abusive or neglectful relationships.

4.4.4 Racism

Racism is based in the belief that one's own culture is superior to that of another. It may manifest in offensive or aggressive behaviour toward members of another race stemming from this belief, or as a policy or system of government and society based on it.

Most of the Aboriginal people we spoke to said they experienced racism daily. They felt racism was entrenched and underpinned structural and social disadvantage which in turn increased the likelihood of family violence.

"I think there is huge discrimination. There is huge discrimination between white Australians and Indigenous Australians and I think that often white people will look down on Aboriginal people. You'd have to be blind Freddy not to see it".⁸¹

Racism is seen to be present in government, and in non-government agencies providing services to people experiencing domestic violence.

"Racism at a personal level but also hugely at a structural level. We don't employ enough Aboriginal people within our services. We don't work alongside."⁸²

Racist attitudes are perceived in the everyday events of life.

"Will my handbag be checked, or do I make sure I don't take anything in, in case it hasn't got a receipt or something. Things that are in your mind that a lot of people wouldn't think if they're going to the shops which causes trauma for our families even before they go out there in the community."⁸³

Racism may lie in a semi-conscious attitude.

"The condescending attitudes that as white people we don't even realise that we have this sense of superiority and this sense of place. Aboriginal people have it in the negative, this sense of inferiority and regardless of how strong they are. That strength sometimes comes out as an anger because they're the ones fighting and then we go, "Typical, they're getting angry."⁸⁴

And

"Whether we like it or not, people judge us by what they see visually. If they see a scabby little kid walking down the street, trouble. I hate the way the police say that they can look at a little Aboriginal kid and they'll tell you that kid's going to go be a little criminal in ten years' time.

⁸¹ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

⁸² Stakeholder IX KOO-004

⁸³ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

⁸⁴ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

Because, all those factors are in play and they may need to change their way of looking at black kids as well.”⁸⁵

While there can be no justification for racism, it was acknowledged by some that anti-social behaviour can contribute to racism in the community.

“I think when you mix drug and alcohol or mental health on top of that, behaviours can become anti-social, and that’s so present out in the streets or in the park or what not. So, I think it can manifest from that.

I think also behaviours in the homes, so this expectation of community letting people in, that kinship. It does lead to overcrowding which then can lead to neighbour issues and social issues, and society doesn’t like that.”⁸⁶

Racism in the workplace was also cited as a contributor to violence in the home.

“Men get employed and they’re happy and content and then there could be some workplace bullying or just they’re demonised every day at work, go home with family, quit.”⁸⁷

And

“So, a lot of men are told “get a job” and then there’s racism in the workplace that no one else is going to see. Then they go home and take it out on their family and eventually quit.”⁸⁸

Racism is corrosive. The link between self-reported perceptions or experiences of racism and poorer physical and mental health is well established (Kelaher et al. 2014; Ferdinand et al. 2013). Anyone who is exposed to continuous racism suffers, no matter if this racism occurs at a young age at school or later in adult life.

A three-year study by the Flinders University’s Southgate Institute in South Australia found that when experienced regularly, racism leads to poor health. It causes stress and negative emotional and cognitive reactions which have negative impacts on mental health. It also adversely affects the immune, endocrine, cardiovascular and other physiological systems.⁸⁹

The study also found that racism negatively impacted coping mechanisms—especially for young adolescents— which tended to include unhealthy activities such as smoking, alcohol and drug use.

Finding

Racism and the perception of racism are broadly prevalent in the Swan region and negatively impacts the physical and mental health of those affected.

⁸⁵ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

⁸⁶ Stakeholder V KOO-004

⁸⁷ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

⁸⁸ Stakeholder V KOO-004

⁸⁹ Source: <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/racism-in-aboriginal-australia#ixzz52pJkUDYY>

4.5 Barriers to self-referral and successful intervention

Several barriers to reducing the level of violence in Swan Aboriginal communities were identified during our community conversations and stakeholder interviews. Most of these barriers are particular to Aboriginal communities, often arising from, and entwined with, the causal drivers of family violence.

4.5.1 Colonisation and the breakdown of community

“Our history, that’s a barrier in itself.”⁹⁰

In many kinship groups the role of males in Aboriginal society has been significantly diminished because of colonisation. Since the colonial ‘takeover’, the role of men as providers and protectors has been diminished.

The taking away of men’s roles in the social structure has also contributed in a significant way to the breakdown and collapse of community life. This redundancy of Aboriginal male role and status is often compensated by an aggressive assertion of male rights over women and children (Bragg 2000).

Breakdown of community leads to breakdown of support between Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal women, it is the intersection of racial and gender inequity that create and condone high rates of violence against them and their children. Aboriginal women’s experiences are “bound up in the colour of her skin as well as their gender” (AHRC 2006).

4.5.2 Threat of removal

As mentioned previously, the trauma of the Stolen Generation pervades the consciousness of the Swan Aboriginal Community.

While the threat of removal is rooted in history, the anxiety it causes is well-founded today.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population projection data which indicated that – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children only comprise 5.5% of all children aged 0-17 years, yet in 2015-16 they constituted 36.2% of all children placed in out-of-home care.⁹¹

Some 35% of those taken out of home were placed in non-indigenous care of one sort or another.⁹²

The trauma of the Stolen Generation is being relived in some community member’s minds. The consequent anxiety the threat of removal creates is a major barrier to self-referral and reporting.

The difficulties associated with removal are best evidenced by those we spoke to:

“And, even today went to a meeting in Rockingham, and one of the guys said, “Oh, you’re still taking children away?” And, he’s the same age as me.”⁹³

⁹⁰ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

⁹¹ Australian Institute of Family Studies Available at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-protection-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children> accessed 31 December 2017

⁹² Australian Institute of Family Studies Available at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-protection-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children> accessed 31 December 2017

⁹³ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

And

"Sometimes when those cases are open so long with DCP, something will happen at this time, and something might happen another time, and they will go 'cross, cross, cross, cross, cross, all right, let's remove,' that kind of thing.

So, it's stolen generation all over again. It's re-traumatising Aboriginal families, and it's that intergenerational trauma business again.⁹⁴

And

"Really, that's probably the biggest barrier in connecting with services ... in this day and age, they still fear that their child will be taken away. It happens. I hear it all the time. Each one of our complex care clients face that scenario. That causes anxiety for the whole family."⁹⁵

And

"Taking that child is just recreating history of a stolen generation in a modern way. I don't know. Something like that. The police and DCP and everyone getting involved like that, leave your partner or we take your child."⁹⁶

And

"Also, because when there's a report made and police attend, they report straight to DCP. So, they're fearful of that as well."⁹⁷

Finding

Women experiencing violence are afraid of their children being taken away and are reluctant to self-refer. The legacy and impact of Australia's colonial history, compounded by the current history of the removal of children, has resulted in profound levels of mistrust of government, the legal system and service systems.

4.5.3 Lack of Aboriginal staff

In dealing in government or non-government agencies and organisations, Aboriginal people can find it difficult to build open and trusting relationships with staff. This can often be attributed to a lack of cultural understanding, a lack of awareness of effective practice techniques, or perceived racism. Many of the community members we spoke to question the appropriateness of non-Aboriginal staff dealing with them given their cultural ignorance.

⁹⁴ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

⁹⁵ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

⁹⁶ - Stakeholder V KOO-004

⁹⁷ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

*"At the refuge, at that frontline you're going to need that connection or you're going to have barriers... It's just their textbook methods are not working practically in the community."*⁹⁸

And

*"I don't know if the white person should be telling the Aboriginal person how to do something. That's a really soft spot. You have to really tread carefully."*⁹⁹

The answer in the minds of both service staff and community members in the Swan region was universally acknowledged as lying in the recruitment and training of Aboriginal front line staff. Without any such recruitment, the agency response will be far less effective.

*"I don't think Koolkuna's ever hired an indigenous worker - That's huge. At the refuge, at that frontline, you're going to need that connection or you're going to have barriers."*¹⁰⁰

And

*You have to have Aboriginal staff within each organisation or you've got no hope. And, I think there's [sic] still a lot of organisations around that don't employ Aboriginal staff, and then wonder why they can't access Aboriginal families."*¹⁰¹

And

*"I think it needs to be Aboriginal workers that support people that they can go to. It's so often about the connection and that trust, and once you have the trust of that family or that individual, you've got the whole family. It's amazing."*¹⁰²

And

"To be able to address that with an Aboriginal woman is you need an Aboriginal worker. Because, we've got our set of skills of communicating and educating them, and delivering that health promotion knowledge to her and putting it in our language and the language that we engage in.

*Aboriginal women, we only think that it's physical. Our girls aren't knowing that it's sexual, it's financial, it's emotional, spiritual, that sort of thing. It's about having these Aboriginal workers, having a really good set of health promotion resources available to be able to educate them within the community."*¹⁰³

And

*"Even if the Aboriginal person doesn't want to speak to an Aboriginal person, it's about seeing the Aboriginal face and walking side by side with the non-Aboriginal worker and then the Aboriginal person, just to do that initial introduction and then the victim can choose who she wants to work with, who she feels comfortable with."*¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ - Stakeholder V KOO-004

⁹⁹ Stakeholder VIII KOO-004

¹⁰⁰ Stakeholder V KOO-004

¹⁰¹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁰² Stakeholder VII KOO-004

¹⁰³ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁰⁴ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

As one Aboriginal Liaison Officer put it:

*"In getting connected with them, explaining what my role is, also, having extended knowledge of the families who I'm related to, has given us an overall advantage to engage with them within the community and within CAMHS structure"*¹⁰⁵

Finding

The employment of Aboriginal staff is critical to reaching and helping members of the Aboriginal community.

A further complication is that potential trainees and service providers can find the prospect of training and/or arranging an apprenticeship daunting and overly complex.

"A real barrier is very much the whole training system. To get a traineeship, from a management point of view, is just a nightmare. Our trainee is just yesterday finished his last unit for a Certificate III in Community Services. And, so, he's been with us now for a year. But, had I not known him personally I would have given up ages ago because of the rigmarole.

*You have to have an RTO involved, you have to have traineeship involved, you have to have the job provider involved. And, for those of us that don't work in that sector, oh my goodness, and everyone gets their dollar. I'm thinking, "What actual support are you giving this man?"*¹⁰⁶

And

*"The hoops you've got to jump through just to get that traineeship. And, then, "I've got a job for 12 months. What happens after that?" Or, even, your contract's up. I'm back at square one."*¹⁰⁷

And

"When you've got family issues and family things going on, it can be quite hard to see that course through.

*That's where employers need to say, if you going to do it by block, we'll give you the block periods off, and be prepared to make that commitment and pay that person to go and do their studies at block. If you want really good qualified workers, you pay for them."*¹⁰⁸

4.5.4 Lack of services

During our community engagement process, we heard concerns about the lack of services, both general domestic violence support services, and Aboriginal specific services. It is clear from the many interviews that there is a need to improve access by Aboriginal people to relevant services.

¹⁰⁵ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

¹⁰⁶ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁰⁷ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁰⁸ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

As outlined in the previous section, such services need to employ more Aboriginal local support coordinators to link people to the services. In addition, there is a need to embed flexibility in service delivery to enhance outcomes for Aboriginal people.

"I don't think that there's enough services for prevention of family violence."¹⁰⁹

And

"I don't think that there's enough services for prevention of family violence for any woman."¹¹⁰

And

"The single biggest barrier is probably lack of immediate support or emergency support."¹¹¹

In addition to a lack of general and culturally appropriate services, we also heard from several people we spoke to that there is a lack of knowledge about where women can go to find support.

"I think that people just don't know where to go."¹¹²

Wait times are excessive given the immediacy of demand:

"Wait times can be an issue as well for someone that's in that crisis moment, wants to get the support. It's not necessarily going to be that quick. It might be a couple of weeks, and then by then they might have reunified or worked out what was happening and then they return to the family."¹¹³

Many respondents also spoke of the need for support services that target women and the men. There is a lack of holistically based services, and services that see men and women working together to address family violence together.

"There's not a lot of services that will work with whole family. They only work once the mother's left and the children have left and the perpetrator's no longer in the home."¹¹⁴

And

"We've often talked about when there's an incident in the home usually the perpetrator is asked to leave for 24 hours, where do they go. They get pretty pissed off when they're told to leave their own house. We need a house that they can go to for that 24 hours."¹¹⁵

And

"I think it's hard for them [men] to find their place. Women are quite often supported with services and the men not so much. I think they're very family focused, and that goes around the women, but the men tend to be left on the side."¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Stakeholder X KOO-004

¹¹⁰ Stakeholder X KOO-004

¹¹¹ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

¹¹² Stakeholder XII KOO-004

¹¹³ Stakeholder VII KOO-004

¹¹⁴ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹¹⁵ Stakeholder VIII KOO-004

¹¹⁶ Stakeholder VII KOO-004

And

“There’s not enough support services for the men to support them to be in the home”¹¹⁷

As the Australian Institute of Family Studies pointed out in its 2015 report,¹¹⁸ crisis-based approaches are proving to be ineffective in preventing harm to children and young people. There needs to be a focus on and investment in culturally appropriate early intervention, prevention, family preservation and restoration activities, rather than simply a focus on the placement hierarchy.

Finding

There is shortage of services that can respond to Aboriginal family violence in the Swan region. There needs to be a focus on and investment in culturally appropriate early intervention, prevention, family preservation and restoration activities.

4.5.5 Shame and the threat of continuing violence from family members

Shame is a powerful emotion. Aboriginal people have experienced racism, mistreatment and subjugation for generations. The repercussions of the past have had a ripple effect on Aboriginal society at large, resulting in a disconnect to people, land, language and culture and creating doubt about one’s Indigenous heritage.¹¹⁹

A desire to avoid shame and embarrassment can also prevent Aboriginal children and families from seeking and receiving support when they need it.

“We also talked about that shame factor, that’s why Aboriginal women don’t want to access our services. That shame factor and, you know, being disowned from the community, feeling shame, feeling that you’re going to get payback from your in-laws.”¹²⁰

And

“Aboriginal women they would rather not talk about it because it’s the big shame factor. Also, having to face the relatives of their partner, thinking, you know, the blame game and all of that. It’s a big thing”.¹²¹

And

“Even though we’re talking about domestic violence in the community and the media and that stuff, it’s still very hard for a person who is a victim of domestic violence to seek out help, to openly talk to somebody about it.

It’s hard enough for a white Australian woman to do that. We’re talking about a culture that don’t share and definitely don’t share with white people. It’s a shame. We need to find a way of

¹¹⁷ Stakeholder VII KOO-004

¹¹⁸ Enhancing the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

¹¹⁹ Spargo, *Me and Mine*, Available at <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/63280>

¹²⁰ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹²¹ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

getting into the Aboriginal communities and actually getting in there and just starting those conversations."¹²²

While our work is firmly focused on the prevention of violence against women, it should be noted that many of the community members we spoke to raised concern for the many male victims of domestic violence, citing shame as a key barrier for them seeking help.

*"Well, that's a shame factor thing, isn't it? What bloke's going to say, 'Hey, my missus has been beating me up'? That's the biggest thing is that shame thing."*¹²³

The concept of shame is very important and can be a barrier to 'help seeking' by Aboriginal families and individuals.

Finding

Aboriginal women would rather not talk about family or domestic violence because 'it's the big shame factor.'

4.5.6 Lack of transport and childcare

The lack of available and suitable transport (public and private) is seen to be a major barrier to service access.

"Getting there. Getting to appointments. When you've got three kids, one's sick, one's got schooling, your priority is to have food on the table. Attending a domestic violence program that DCP told them they've got to, on the list of things that they have to do for the day, is really not up there.

And, someone says, "Catch a cab." Well, if you've got a newborn it needs to be in a car seat.

Difficulties with accessing transport are compounded by a lack of childcare facilities where services are available.

"The barriers that are facing a lot of the women that come to the group is simple things like childcare. Obviously, in a group, you know, if they're babies and stuff I have no problem with them bringing babies, but when there's two and three-year old's there's conversations going on that we don't want the kids to be party to, obviously.

*But, yeah, just with practical things, transport and child care, quite simple barriers, but we can't do anything more to engage if we can't have the simple, basic things covered."*¹²⁴

Finding

The lack of transport and childcare are significant barriers to young Aboriginal mothers accessing support services.

¹²² Stakeholder VIII KOO-004

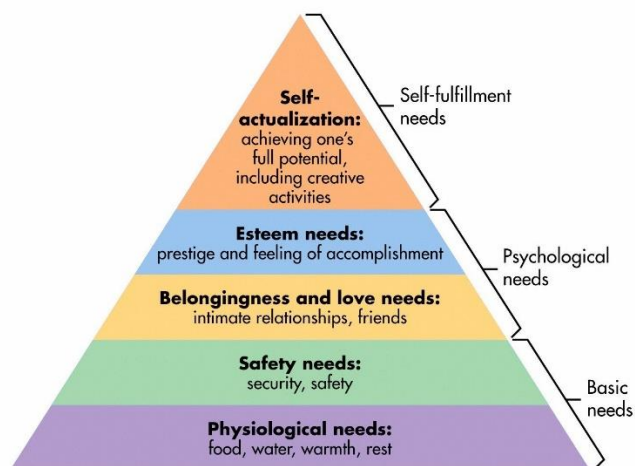
¹²³ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹²⁴ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

4.5.7 A lack of the basics

In 1943 Abraham Maslow developed his theory on our hierarchy of needs.

Figure 2: Maslow's Hierocracy of Needs



What is clear from the interviews undertaken with the Aboriginal community in the Swan Region is that the lack of fulfilment of the most basic needs are a significant barrier to help seeking behaviour. Priority is given to physiological needs such as feeding of their family.

"Because, if someone can meet that need of, 'All I need is food for the kids,' ... So, I think that barrier is maybe staff not being aware of what's important to them, and meeting really basic needs to start with, and then you'll dig down to other stuff"¹²⁵.

And

"Our priority would be parenting but... if you don't know where you're staying, what you're going to feed the kids, how you're going to keep them safe. You know they've got to go to school, but there's nothing to feed them at school and stuff."¹²⁶

And

"I've heard of Aboriginal families where they all rush to get that food, so they can have enough in their bellies."¹²⁷

Finding

The lack of the basics in life means that for many women securing things like food and shelter is a higher priority than personal safety.

¹²⁵ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹²⁶ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹²⁷ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

4.5.8 Phone and contact details

Domestic violence incident reports that are provided to service providers often don't have adequate or correct contact information. This in turn means that services do not reach many women who need them.

"And, what happens is that domestic violence incident reports comes with a phone number for the woman, and so that's the phone number that we try and ring her on. But, it's either incorrect, it's disconnected, she's run out of credit, we don't know what it is, but we can't even make contact with her.

And, as XXX says, we're not allowed to do home visits because we don't know where the perpetrator might be, so we won't take that risk. How we try and overcome it is difficult. It's almost something that is hard to overcome...

It's a real barrier for us, in fact, trying to even get in contact with the woman."¹²⁸

Finding

An over-reliance on phone numbers as the primary means of contact leads to many women not receiving the services they need.

4.5.9 Lack of cultural competency and awareness

A lack of cultural competency persists across government agencies that provide a range of services to Aboriginal people despite numerous recommendations highlighting its importance.¹²⁹ In part as a result of this, Aboriginal women in need of support face multiple and varied structural barriers to accessing services.

"We live in a white society with white rules, and they're expected to live by these rules. I have a client at the moment who can't read and write, yet she's expected to go and job search.

She didn't do the job searching because she couldn't read and write, so then she had to go do work for the dole. It's just knock-on, and then she gets cut off for six to eight weeks because of her not being able to read and write."¹³⁰

And

"You can call DCP as supporting a client and they talk to you like you're an idiot and this person may be 25-years-old. It's just their textbook methods are not working practically in the community."¹³¹

And

¹²⁸ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹²⁹ www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/.../161114+Aboriginal+Youth+Suicide+Draft

¹³⁰ Stakeholder VII KOO-004

¹³¹ Stakeholder V KOO-004

“Government departments, they have that attitude, that stigma against Aboriginal people. When they see you walking in the door, ‘What the bloody hell do they want?’ Stuff to that. There’s a lack of respect from a lot of them.”¹³²

And

“We need to engage in a way that is, culturally, relevant. I change my language, I make you more welcoming, I don’t make it a massive book of things that you have to read, because, if my literacy is poor, that’s a barrier.”¹³³

And

“Not accessible because they’re not culturally appropriate Because they’re not culturally appropriate and they’re not safe and they’re not community. We’ve got to go to the people, we can’t be behind closed doors and have the people coming in to us, because it will never happen.”¹³⁴

The importance of “place” – the space within which connections are built and relationships nurtured, cannot be overstated. The physical appearance and layout of buildings where services are delivered, and the culturally insensitive way in which Aboriginal people are ‘welcomed’ upon arrival can be significant barriers to help seeking behaviour.

“Government buildings are not very welcoming looking to start with and people are a bit overwhelmed by them and don’t know how to navigate them. That’s not just Aboriginal people. It can be as simple as some receptionist or somebody answering the phone and being rude to you, that can put you right off and think I’m not going back there again.”¹³⁵

And

“So, I think it’s all about your building and the way you are. I go with clients to some, not mentioning them, and I just sit there and think you’re feeling like crap before you’ve even seen anyone. No eye contact, little things like that.

That poor person’s been standing there waiting and, the receptionist, there’s no eye contact, there’s no nothing, they walk out. There, you’ve lost someone who’s actually, for the first time in a couple of weeks maybe, asked for help.”¹³⁶

And

“We have no awareness of the impact of structural disadvantage and what it actually looks like. Organisations just don’t know. That first yarning circle remember the lady, she went straight in on me, “What does the office look like?” That was her first thing.”¹³⁷

And

¹³² Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

¹³³ Stakeholder XI KOO-004

¹³⁴ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

¹³⁵ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

¹³⁶ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹³⁷ Stakeholder X KOO-004

“So if a family has identified that they want services that we can't provide, significant violence counselling or anything like that, asking them to come to another agency, another service, making that referral, saying, 'Come to our big, beautiful, white building. Walk your family in here with us,' it's immediately like why would you want to? It's not homey, it's not accepting, it's not anything like that. So, I think for some of my families at least that's something that we've come across.”¹³⁸

“When you walk into a building, so Department of Housing and these other government organisations are totally different to if you walk into say our organisation. It's very humble, it's very connected with people.”¹³⁹

Finding

A lack of cultural competency and awareness continues to be a major barrier to help seeking behaviour for members of the Aboriginal community.

One of the service providers we spoke to was St John of God Hospital in Midland, specifically Moort Boodjari Mia who deliver services on an outreach basis, rather than solely in one physical location.

“The other thing about us is we do antenatal care, but we don't do it just in the hospital. We go to people's homes and we do their antenatal care. I've done antenatal care in the park. I've done antenatal care in McDonalds and I've done antenatal care for people who are homeless.

There's none of this waiting for medical appointments, because Aboriginal people don't like to wait sometimes for appointments. It's great, they get in and see us really quickly, they get out, they're happy. They ring us all the time with questions, so it's great.”

Finding

The 'place' in which domestic violence related services are offered need to account for the cultural beliefs and sensitivities of the Aboriginal people.

4.5.10 Help only available during business hours

Acts of family and domestic violence are committed at all hours of the day. Furthermore, much of the anecdotal evidence we captured suggests that more often than not, women need help outside of business hours. However, many support services are only available during business hours.

The fact support is often only available for such a short period of time during the day is a source of frustration for providers:

“We only work 8:30 to 4:30. Everybody says, 'We wish we could phone you day or night, that you were 24/7.' Of course, then we wouldn't have a life either. Really, there needs to be a 24-hour hotline or things like that, that people can ring.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹³⁹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹⁴⁰ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

The Aboriginal support workers we spoke to said that when the work day ends they return home to a community that still needs their help.

"We can't walk away. That's the thing is that you can go home and yet we are facing this on a daily basis and I think that that understanding is that we don't leave that community and just go into our little home or something. We are living this on a daily basis and this is what we need to understand is our people are doing the same thing."¹⁴¹

Finding

To meet community, need and help protect women experiencing family violence, support services need to be available 24/7, not just during business hours.

4.5.11 Language

For many Aboriginal people, English is a second or third language. This can be a barrier to service access:

"The other thing is that with Aboriginal people, sometimes English is a second or third language, so if you're coming from up north and you're living in the city and you need to access a service, there needs to be an advocator and they need to be comfortable with that advocator. That's quite important I think when Aboriginal people are accessing services."¹⁴²

Finding

English is a second or third language for many Aboriginal people and providers need to account for this when developing educational materials, and at the point of service.

4.5.12 Opposition to self-improvement

During our conversations with women in the community it became apparent that several felt there were culturally based barriers to their own self-improvement. It was reported that family members could be unsupportive at best, and violent at worst, when women sought to improve themselves.

"I got an education and I got a job and that was a huge barrier for me to do that, so it caused domestic violence and a family break-up because I too wanted to go to work."

And

"So being successful and making it better for yourself can be a barrier too because you're this, you're that so it's easier to stay there than to try and work your way up."¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹⁴² KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹⁴³ Stakeholder V KOO-004

And

I think one of the areas, education is not highly valued. Women who aren't educated aren't empowered, so their place is very limited. They're not encouraged to be educated, to reach out into the world. They're very based in their community, in their family. ¹⁴⁴

And

I don't know. It's hard to say. There's an old saying "black fellas can't be happy for another black fella."¹⁴⁵

Finding

Attempts by Aboriginal women to obtain an education and employment may be hindered by family members. Women who do so may be subject to discrimination and/or abuse.

¹⁴⁴ Stakeholder XI KOO-004

¹⁴⁵ Stakeholder V KOO-004

5.0 Recommendations

In this section we provide overarching recommendations for consideration by the local Aboriginal community, service providers and key stakeholders.

All recommendations stem from our listening to the those living and working in the City of Swan. Many of the individuals we spoke to have lived experience of domestic violence.

We believe these recommendations reflect the highest priorities of those we spoke to and we have included quotes from community members and service providers to reinforce this point.

There are a number of additional ideas we will discuss with stakeholders and members of the community, but the purpose of this report is to convey, without embellishment, the recommendations we've heard from the community itself.

5.1 Yarning circles

Funding is sought and provided in whatever format is deemed appropriate to facilitate gender specific yarning circles on an ongoing basis.

There is a thread of conversation that runs through Aboriginal issues in the Swan region' as elsewhere that is twofold – the need for healing and the spiritual base for that healing. The need for healing is seen as arising from historical trauma and present-day challenges. Many Aboriginal men and women exist in an environment defined by poverty and violence blanketed by an overlay of covert racism and denial of culture.

It is clearly impossible to turn back the clock and some have suggested that rather than a blanket return to traditional ways, there is a need for spiritual healing and an opportunity to redefine cultural identity for example, that there should be a development of 'special places', including women's and men's centres (Robertson 2001: 277).¹⁴⁶

One of the ways healing and spiritual wholeness can be recovered is through 'yarning'. Indeed, as part of our scoping work, two yarning circles were organised and facilitated by local Aboriginal women.

Yarning in this context, is an informal conversation that is culturally friendly and recognised by Aboriginal people as meaning to talk about something, someone or exchange information.¹⁴⁷

Many of those we spoke to felt that these sorts of platforms for relationship and dialogue could play an important role in the restoration of the individual, and the fractured community.

"Having the people all talking to each other and connecting together, I think there's a lot of opportunity for whole family healing individually as well as together."¹⁴⁸

And

It's them all getting together and talking about what's going on in their lives and that's where the healing starts, isn't it?¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2002, Child abuse and family violence in Aboriginal communities

¹⁴⁷ <http://8ways.wikispaces.com/2012+Teaching+through+culture>

¹⁴⁸ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹⁴⁹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

And

*They sit they talk. Not only them, sporting heroes and stuff like that. Just to encourage the men to basically take another look at their life and what they're doing towards their families and their wives and stuff. So, it's actually trying to empower the spirit of the men.*¹⁵⁰

And

*So, there were women that would not usually speak with each other that were so sometimes it's women talking to each other and without traumatising each other they can sit and yarn and build a positive relationship in a safe environment.*¹⁵¹

Generally, these yarnning circles were seen as gender specific with 'men's business and 'women's business' enjoying separation.

Many participants suggested that the yarnning circles could also form around an activity. Examples given to us included, hiking, fishing or golf for men and art and design for women

*"It's about, okay. This is a get together. This is a women's gathering, let's go and have them doing something. Let's do some art. Let's do some weaving. Let's make some dolls. You know? There's yarnning dolls that you can make. And, when people are doing things like that, it's the people that can facilitate that, "How are you going? What's happening?"*¹⁵²

There is a scarcity of programs tailored specifically for the Aboriginal community, and where there are programs, they tend to be short-term and uncoordinated. There are some initiatives that seek to develop 'special places' for yarnning but there is no coherent approach.

Finding

The use of yarnning and yarnning circles is an important process within Aboriginal culture and enables the sharing of knowledge and learning while building relationships, promoting healing even as cultural knowledge is preserved and promoted. Its use is strongly supported.

5.2 Increase education and early intervention

Community education strategies targeting girls and boys be expanded to raise awareness as to what is unacceptable and to provide tools to promote individual and community safety.

Most if not everyone we spoke to agreed that there was a clear need to increase awareness amongst the young that abuse is not acceptable.

Primarily working through schools, it was proposed that educative sessions be held to teach children what is unacceptable, and to provide tools to promote individual and community safety.

Many also felt that there is a need to educate students and adults as to what abuse looks like given the normalisation of much abusive behaviour throughout the community.

¹⁵⁰ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

¹⁵¹ Stakeholder V KOO-004

¹⁵² Stakeholder IV KOO-004

*"There are all sorts of different control mechanisms that are actually abuse that people just don't even recognise. I think a lot of people are uninformed or ill-informed about that."*¹⁵³

And

"We need to be teaching girls in schools as well then that it's not okay and these are the steps that you can and should take.

*A lot of the girls in the intergenerational trauma, and the way that we've lived, is that, 'Well, Nan and Pop used to do that,' or 'My mum and dad used to do that, and my nan and pop used to do that.' And, so, it's never ending, and so they normalise it. They think it's a normal way of living."*¹⁵⁴

And

*"It's a cycle. And, the only way to break a cycle is through knowledge."*¹⁵⁵

Education is seen as a cheaper form of effective prevention:

*"The never-ending pot of money that doesn't exist. I mean what we're doing isn't working, so we need to be looking at it from a different perspective and perhaps that is by educating men, boys in schools."*¹⁵⁶

And

The need is now!

*It's also about getting into the schools where there are girls programs and getting early intervention so that it's not too late when they're married with three, four children, so that they know that this is totally unacceptable. We know that there are girls' programs happening around in this area in a couple of secondary schools. That's where we need someone to be tapping in and having those conversations with our secondary girls now.*¹⁵⁷

And

*Respectful relationship - a program to be developed around there that we could roll out in schools*¹⁵⁸

And

*"We need to be teaching girls in schools as well then that it's not okay and these are the steps that you can and should take."*¹⁵⁹

And

¹⁵³ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

¹⁵⁴ Stakeholder X KOO-004

¹⁵⁵ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁵⁶ Stakeholder X KOO-004

¹⁵⁷ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁵⁸ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁵⁹ Stakeholder X KOO-004

"I think it needs to start in schools. I think it needs to start young. I think you need to start teaching everybody that they have to respect each other."¹⁶⁰

Education helps to break the silence around violence:

"I would like to see a whole program developed around domestic violence that could be rolled out in schools. In some of these schools that do have girl's programs, like Swan View Senior High School ... It's about raising the self-esteem of young female women in society and making them realise that no, it's not something that you shouldn't talk about. Because, a lot of parents I feel, and I know, train their children not to say anything, especially Aboriginal families."¹⁶¹

While programs could be gender specific, they don't have to be:

"You know, like I say, having the conversations, having a program, even if it's a four or six-week program where you can talk to the young females, even the males. Young men need to know it's not acceptable. Just a program in school.

Role modelling, mentoring, having Aboriginal people come in, having Aboriginal come in who are willing to share their experience, to talk to the young people. This is real, this did happen to me. Let them know that you don't need to be treated like that. A program that could be rolled out in secondary schools, raising awareness like that."¹⁶²

There is an opportunity to build on existing community education efforts – to learn what's already working and build on it:

"Just in say the last five years it (community education) has kind of ramped up now to make people aware that it's not normal behaviour for men to be bashing women or vice versa, women to be bashing men. It is not the way it should be. It's not cultural, and it's just starting to develop an awareness that it is unacceptable in society these days.

Before, it was all a taboo and wasn't spoken about. It was hidden. It was seen that was happening in the home and shouldn't be talked about. Shame factor. All those things previously kept it hidden and suppressed."¹⁶³

Finding

Education in schools and other forums to raise awareness and to provide tools to promote individual and community safety, is a low cost and effective strategy that helps prevent the cycle of family violence.

5.3 Expansion of breakfast programs

Schools within the City of Swan be supported in the provision and extension of breakfast programs.

¹⁶⁰ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

¹⁶¹ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

¹⁶² Stakeholder IV KOO-004

¹⁶³ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

It is a sad reality that many children, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, go to school hungry. Two thirds of Australian teachers (67%) report that children are coming to school hungry, and that the problem is worsening.¹⁶⁴

The consequences are many. Hunger is known to affect student achievement and behaviour, leading to tardiness, acting out and lack of attention in class. It not only disrupts the class at the point but affects the child's future performance. When this is compounded by family violence the result is dysfunction in the school setting. It is also widely acknowledged that a lack of breakfast negatively affects cognitive function.¹⁶⁵

"Getting the kids to school is half the battle. When kids come to school, they've got a backpack full of issues already. Come to school, no lunch, not in uniform, didn't get much sleep. Teacher's like, 'Where's your homework? Where's this?' How do they react? They start acting up, so they get suspended.

I always brought food in, fruit, and sometimes you'd get to the classroom and the kids would be climbing walls. And, it's like, "Hang on. Just set the lesson plan outside. Give them the fruit, lunch first, or the sandwiches, and they settle down." Because, that's probably the only thing they haven't had. Because, they're hungry. I've heard of Aboriginal families where they all rush to get that food, so they can have enough in their bellies."¹⁶⁶

And

"When we're talking about children within the school, and attending school, is that they've come from this domestic violence home, from a big argument the night before that didn't finish until five o'clock and they got two hours sleep and then they had to go off to school. The thing is what is their learning like? They're so traumatised in their minds. So, by the time they sit down and pick up that pencil, they can't learn because they're still traumatised about the night before. And, within the schools, how can we help non-Aboriginal teachers address that?"¹⁶⁷

Finding

A significant number of children are going to school without breakfast and this situation may be compounded by family violence the night before. The result is poor learning outcomes and acting out, reduced cognitive function and impaired memory.

5.4 Greater integration of and collaboration between service providers

Reforms to existing accountability arrangements and incentive structures be identified which will encourage better cross-departmental policymaking and interagency implementation, without weakening financial discipline or formal accountability.

As noted in the introduction, programs that view family violence in Aboriginal communities as a singular and isolated problem, without considering the multiple, inter-related contextual factors that contribute to and flow from it do not work.

¹⁶⁴ Foodbank Available at: <http://www.healthyfoodforall.com.au/school-breakfast-program/>

¹⁶⁵ Wesnes KA, Pincock C, Scholey A Appetite. 2012 Dec; 59(3):646-9.

¹⁶⁶ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁶⁷ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

"Some people come and see you with one thing, but then it takes you three hours to sort out all of their other problems for them."¹⁶⁸

Therefore, family violence needs to be understood and responded to within broader contexts as both a cause and an effect.

To achieve this to best advantage, both in terms of efficacy and cost, greater collaboration between service providers is needed. There are currently gaps in some areas, and considerable duplication and overlap of services in others. This leads to cost inefficiencies and less than optimal outcomes for Aboriginal women (and others) experiencing family violence in the City of Swan.

"I was just thinking about your comment about integrated services, and your comment about the woman who's got so many issues that she's managing. It's not just violence, there's a whole bunch of stuff that's happening for her, and sometimes I wonder whether the way that we've just got a health service, or we've got a DV service, and we've got a legal service.

But, for a woman, she doesn't separate all those things in her life. For her, it's her whole life. So, sometimes I wonder whether one of the mistakes we make is that we just provide separate services, but not the whole integrated. That's all. I just think she doesn't separate those things."¹⁶⁹

Collaboration requires a change of perspective - it's a relational strategy that benefits all concerned. Most importantly, improved collaboration between providers will lead to better outcomes for community members.

"I think that changes about what we were discussing before, being more integrated. These fellows here might be working in the dark trying to find someone, whereas you might be there already visiting the family and you're actually not aware of that information, that gap. One thing about Aboriginal people, we hate telling our story over and over and over to different people. That's right. Especially domestic violence, because, it's re-traumatising each time we tell our story."¹⁷⁰

A number of those we spoke to acknowledge the need for greater cooperation even as they acknowledged the failure of agencies to collaborate.

"I think the National framework has got good intentions, but I think there's a gap between what happens with those agreements and those COAG agreements and what happens on the ground. There's a gap there. I think you cannot look at domestic violence in isolation, you cannot look at Aboriginal in isolation, you cannot look at women in isolation."¹⁷¹

One of the reasons given for the problem of realising successful collaboration is entrenched thinking:

"Collaborating as a community and networking together to problem solve is something that I've personally experienced as an indigenous worker. An example most of the women here at xxx have been here forever. They don't like anyone new coming in with new ideas and that's just an opinion."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

¹⁶⁹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁷⁰ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁷¹ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

¹⁷² Stakeholder V KOO-004

Collaboration is more than just interagency initiatives. It's about 'meaningful engagement' with the Aboriginal community and letting them lead.

"When we're dealing with Aboriginal issues, we've had elders and we've been signing the same song for many years, dealing with Aboriginal issues it needs to be Aboriginal led. That needs to be led by community as well. But, to be recognised by the organisations with structural power."¹⁷³

Effective collaboration would simplify pathways of access and response:

"It's a matter of knowing where to go and I think people fall down in that area, knowing where to go; even health professionals, just to know where to go or where to send people."¹⁷⁴

Finding

There is a siloed approach to many service agencies operations. Yet, the benefits of effective collaboration in this arena are clear to all, whether agency or client. The creation of a collaborative culture is generally acknowledged as a key to success.

A number of potential barriers to meaningful collaboration exist and several were touched on during our scoping work. The most off-cited issues that will need to be addressed were:

(a) The issue of client confidentiality:

"I guess, how to overcome that system's issue with confidentiality, and not breaching information sharing and stuff."

(b) The issue of rivalry and jealousies between family groups

"The hardest thing with Noongar people too is they don't see eye-to-eye. There's a lot of jealousy within the community."¹⁷⁵

(c) The issue of 'turf' and agency objectives

"There's always an inherent siloing between any organisation. So, with the best networking in the world, you can obviously mitigate or reduce that risk, but, inherently, we are all coming from slightly different organisations and there's always going to be a little bit of a silo."¹⁷⁶

5.5 More Aboriginal staff in frontline agencies

A strategy of positive discrimination favouring the employment of Aboriginal workers be adopted for all front-line agencies handling family and domestic violence.

5.5.1 Frontline staff

The need for Aboriginal staff on the front line is needed to help reduce family and domestic violence within Aboriginal communities.

¹⁷³ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁷⁴ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

¹⁷⁵ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

¹⁷⁶ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

*"We need Aboriginal people. Qualified Aboriginal people."*¹⁷⁷

And

*"Even as Aboriginal employers working for a white organisation they themselves do struggle to engage with families and as white fellers we've got no hope."*¹⁷⁸

For reasons already outlined, the majority of Aboriginal people will not willingly engage with providers that are run and/or delivered by white people.

*"I work with a city doctor and whenever I sit outside the van, I've probably got 99 percent Aboriginal people coming in. As soon as I sat inside the van, no, straight past. Didn't want anything to do with the white folk that's sitting out the front. That's the difference."*¹⁷⁹

Significantly, in addition to employing and training more Aboriginal workers, organisations much pay the same amount of money to Aboriginal staff as they do non-Aboriginal employees. There is a perception that this is not always the case:

*"We always say I support Aboriginal people, but what talks is money. They need to be supported financially as well as all these other things. That means that the job is secured by the right kind of funding, that they're given equal pay to somebody else who's sitting there who's non-Aboriginal and they're getting the same recognition, because they do it double time. If you've got an Aboriginal worker, they are the gatekeepers. If you want a gatekeeper, get Aboriginal people working for you."*¹⁸⁰

The need for Aboriginal workers is linked to the fact that at the core of Aboriginal being, their very identity, is their spirituality. It gives meaning to all aspects of life including relationships with one another and the environment within which we live. All objects are living and share the same soul and spirit as Aboriginals. There is a kinship with the environment.¹⁸¹

Having shared values and understandings supports successful interventions.

*"So, when we're talking about Aboriginal employees, and I will add onto what you said as well, was that we have a spirituality, and, with Aboriginal people, that will make us a stronger worker or Aboriginal employees a stronger worker when your organisation really, really understands you as an Aboriginal worker and that's where you've got to make the best work happen."*¹⁸²

Given their understanding of Aboriginal culture and their lived experience within the local community some suggested that Aboriginal staff need not be formally qualified to gain employment. Training and formal qualifications could be earned once on the job, ideally with the support of the employing agency.

"Definitely employment of Aboriginal staff and not needing qualifications to come into it in a big way but the qualifications that Aboriginal people bring are life experience, knowledge about culture. I'm not saying that we shouldn't expect people to be qualified we should. We should be

¹⁷⁷ - Stakeholder V KOO-004

¹⁷⁸ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

¹⁷⁹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹⁸⁰ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹⁸¹ <https://www.lowitja.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/DP9-Aboriginal-Spirituality.pdf>

¹⁸² KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

supporting them to work towards that qualification. There are a huge amount of jobs within our sector that could and should be done by Aboriginal people."¹⁸³

Without Aboriginal staff who can give voice to the Aboriginal people?

"We need Aboriginal workers within these organisations. There was an Aboriginal engagement officer, whatever the title was, about five years ago. Restructuring took that position away. [Now] who's there to speak for Aboriginal people."¹⁸⁴

Finding

The need for Aboriginal staff on the front line is seen as a paramount requirement to the implementation of successful prevention and intervention strategies.

5.5.2 Cultural awareness

Aboriginal culture is the oldest extant culture in the world. It is highly unrealistic to expect anyone to develop an understanding or even a meaningful awareness of it in just one day. Gaining cultural awareness requires an ongoing commitment from the individual and/or organisation concerned. "I had someone say to me the other day who was actually coming into a position of supervising Aboriginal staff and I started talking about some of the issues that I saw and that she would have to deal with. Her fist response was, 'Well, I've the day's cultural awareness training. '

"It's years and years and years of working alongside to realise as non-Aboriginal people to even begin to understand some of the issues that these people face on a daily basis."¹⁸⁵

For service providers, it's really about providing understanding of the culture and the history behind Indigenous Australians. Then there is a need to respect that and find ways to work with them in a way that is valuable for both parties; overcoming preconceptions formed through the popular media and history.

"That's where they need to have that cultural competence. And, that is educating them in their mind, because we're dealing with two centuries of media that have downed Aboriginal people."¹⁸⁶

Doing so provides an environment of cultural safety that:

- Is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people,
- Enhances personal empowerment of Indigenous client and staff
- Ensures there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are, and what they need.

It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

¹⁸⁴ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹⁸⁵ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

¹⁸⁶ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁸⁷ http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/801771/Cultural-Awareness-Training-TaTE-V1.pdf

The importance of cultural training and sensitivity cannot be overstated. An understanding of culture is seen as underpinning relationship.

In response to the question: *'What's the single most significant change that the State government could make?'* One response given was:

*"Being aligned with reconciliation; respecting the cultural differences, less talk and really following with action, because it is an action plan isn't it? It has to be actioned."*¹⁸⁸

Cultural sensitivity also means looking beyond the immediate environment:

"It's about having cultural awareness training. It's about when you go into this house, you're looking at the person in the face, in the eyes. You're not looking around the room and seeing the ripped curtains or the broken chair or the whatever. You are totally focussed on what your job is there for, from the time you get out of the car and walk up. It's a way you approach ... It's like, 'Hi. How are you going? I'm xxx and I'm here to listen to your story.'" ¹⁸⁹

And

*"[Staff need an] Understanding our Aboriginal ways, and thoughts, and lifestyle, and stuff like that. Far more cultural awareness is needed, Done by the right people too. Done by people who know what they're talking about, who've actually lived that culture, or their parents have, and they've been brought up in that language and knowledge."*¹⁹⁰

And

"I think it comes down to training of staff, understanding how to work with someone that may be disclosing that or that you may have witnessed.

*I think it's rapport building, having that relationship with individuals so they can disclose these things, because they might disclose it and not want to be removed from the house. They might want to work through it, and that's okay. It's trying to remove that stigma and not being judgmental."*¹⁹¹

5.6 Development of a positive employment strategy

Development of a positive employment strategy by the City of Swan to increase the proportion of Aboriginals in the workforce. Furthermore, to maintain their employment the following supports are needed:

- **Ongoing mentoring and support**
- **Flexible work arrangements to allow Indigenous employees to meet their work, family and/or community obligations**
- **Support for the families of Indigenous employees**
- **Dealing with racism in the workplace through initiatives that address the broader workplaces' culture.**

Economic disadvantage is an underlying structural driver of family and domestic violence, but Aboriginal people have much lower employment rates than other Australians due to factors

¹⁸⁸ Stakeholder XI KOO-004

¹⁸⁹ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

¹⁹⁰ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

¹⁹¹ Stakeholder VII KOO-004

including education, training and skill levels, poorer health, limited market opportunities, discrimination, and lower levels of job retention.¹⁹² Steps to improve general employment rates amongst Aboriginal people living in the Swan region are recommended. Notably, many of those we spoke to and interviewed expressed serious concern about the perceived low levels of Aboriginal employment in the area.

The City of Swan came in for particular criticism in this respect:

“As the largest population of Aboriginal people in the metropolitan area their whole workforce should reflect that this is the largest Aboriginal population in the area and they need to give traineeships and opportunities for our local people.”¹⁹³

And

“There’s only a couple of Aboriginal people employed with the City of Swan and that’s another thing that needs to be challenged.”¹⁹⁴

The benefits of employment were clear:

“Employment for Aboriginal blokes - I think if they’re sitting around not doing a lot, they need to feel that they have a purpose other than making babies. I think it’s empowering to have a job and to provide for your family and to make your children feel proud. The ones who do that, definitely are great role models.”¹⁹⁵

But they need support:

“More opportunities for employment because we see a lot of people, they just don’t know where to go, what course should they do, where could they start a course. There needs to be more information out there and more opportunities.”¹⁹⁶

There is a clear opportunity for the City of Swan to adopt a leadership role fostering and supporting employment for Aboriginal people within its own organisation and the wider community.

5.7 Establish an Aboriginal reference group

The City of Swan establish an Aboriginal Reference Group whose terms of reference include:

- **Provide a point of contact and liaison between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community**
- **Encourage communication, participation and sharing of information and knowledge**
- **Provide a leadership, advocacy and advisory role**
- **Strengthen understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and achievements**

The establishment of a reference group similar to that in the City of Cockburn we seen as a useful model for the City of Swan. The concept has the support of some agencies in the area as well as members of the Aboriginal community.

¹⁹² <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/economy/aboriginal-employment-jobs-careers>

¹⁹³ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

¹⁹⁴ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

¹⁹⁵ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

¹⁹⁶ Stakeholder XII KOO-004

"The City of Cockburn's got Aboriginal reference group. I'm not saying base it on that, but a similar thing would be great.

I think it needs to be broader than a group focus on family violence. We know that child protection wants a reference group, we know that St John of God wants a reference group, and we have a group that helps get made."¹⁹⁷

A reference group provides a safe platform for addressing a broad range of Aboriginal issues:

"They mentioned the same thing yesterday was that meeting together and addressing Aboriginal issues within a safe environment."¹⁹⁸

The Reference Group needs to be formally recognised and have some level of genuine authority:

"I think that there needs to be an awareness of all of the different groups that are happening in the area. And, I think the Midland District Leadership Committee, has the potential to facilitate that. Or, this one has the potential to facilitate that.

But, I think it has to be recognised as a group with great power and great wisdom. When we're dealing with Aboriginal issues, we've had elders and we've been signing the same song for many years, dealing with Aboriginal issues it needs to be Aboriginal led. That needs to be led by community as well."

And

"But, to be recognised by the organisations with structural power.

The Reference Group needs to engage with the community as well as the elders and heads of agencies if it is to be effective.

So, you can have your reference group with whoever you want on it, but I also think it's important then to have the meetings where it's an open forum to invite community along and to inform them what we've been doing, or what you've been doing, and this is where we're at, so you get that high-level decision making, and then you're still feeding back to community.

And, at that high-level decision making you still have your elders on that reference group so it's not all weighted as all making decisions. You still need to have an opportunity to put it out there, "This is a community forum."¹⁹⁹

Significantly, our suggestion that the City of Swan take a leading role is based on feedback collected during community conversations and stakeholder interviews. Further exploration with the community and its elders may lead to alternative hosting and structural arrangements.

5.8 Short-stay safe house for Aboriginal women

Establish a safe house run by Aboriginal people to provide short stay accommodation for at-risk women and children.

¹⁹⁷ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁹⁸ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

¹⁹⁹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

There is need for a circuit breaker early in the cycle of violence; somewhere where the women and their children can go away from their partners. A short-stay safe house for Aboriginal women and their children is a well-supported concept which should be progressed within the City of Swan.

*"It would be nice for somewhere for the women to go to cool off and potentially most of the time they will go home and go back to their partner."*²⁰⁰

And this from one of the yarning circles:

"Jenna Woods who's doing her thesis on domestic violence and child protection. And, one of things that was recommended there, and I mentioned it yesterday, was that the community are asking for a safe house.

Both the communities, because I went to both of the research workshops, both said, and they were different people at the workshop, that they wanted a safe house and that it was to be run by Aboriginal people. It was to address domestic violence and it will look like a three day stay where the woman will come in, someone will be there to support them for three nights.

That fear of their children being taken away won't be so strong, and you will be able to so safety plans with her, and it'll be done culturally as well. It was funny that they mentioned that, because when we started this research one of the documents that I read was after the intervention they implemented safe houses within the community.

*So, one of the things was that before he went to go get drunk the lady would go stay the night, to take her and her children to the safe house, and that's been working awesome."*²⁰¹

It could take the form of a group facility:

*"It could be a refuge, or it could be a safe house. It doesn't have to be a refuge that's a designated building. Could it be safe houses that women can go to in groups, even like if there's a six, seven-bedroom house or a four, five-bedroom house. Something like that, where it's small, they can talk. They can have social workers come in and services come in, talk about finances, talk about transport."*²⁰²

The service should be co-designed with members of the Aboriginal community and then operated by Aboriginal people.

Finding

If a safe house was available that women and children could go to in the very early stages of conflict, it would provide a circuit breaker in the downward spiral of violence.

5.9 More engagement and prevention programs for men

Any strategy for the prevention of family violence includes a collateral strategy for the positive engagement of men to increase their cultural pride and promote healing.

²⁰⁰ Stakeholder V KOO-004

²⁰¹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

²⁰² Stakeholder IV KOO-004

The increasing focus on men as targets of prevention efforts represents a significant shift. While men have long been seen as perpetrators they are now also being seen as 'partners' in prevention. The White Ribbon Foundation asserts: *"It is a men's issue because a minority of men treat women and girls with contempt and violence, and it is up to the majority of men to create a culture in which this is unacceptable."*²⁰³

Family violence by its definition requires a broader response than simply responding to the victim; it also involves engaging the perpetrators for effective prevention.

*"Because I think they're family issues. They're not just about women and children. They're about the dads as well."*²⁰⁴

One approach is to provide a platform for men to come together and talk.

*"Sometimes men need to have someone to talk to. If they have a men's program they can go to, you know, the Men's Shed and things like that, well they can talk about that. They can share that problem and, okay, so we don't need to be living a life like this."*²⁰⁵

Effective prevention is secured through building strong men - effectively healing them.

*"Dr Cheryl Kickett-Tucker, she's done some amazing research in partnership with Beyond Blue. Her research needs to be supported to actually implement her projects. Building strong Aboriginal men and strong Aboriginal fathers, I think was more the intent, but the underlying was to reduce DV and to increase that cultural pride and building of men."*²⁰⁶

And

*"Men's business is so important. Whether it's a fire and they're doing nothing, it doesn't matter. That's something that they enjoy. They're not doing nothing. There's something special with fire. It's healing. It's them all getting together and talking about what's going on in their lives and that's where the healing starts, isn't it?"*²⁰⁷

According to many of those we spoke to, many Aboriginal men have lost their way. They're disconnected from their culture, and in many respects have lost their way. The Aboriginal-led design and roll-out of initiatives that seek to build self-esteem and reconnect men with their culture is recommended.

*"That's one thing that I really, really do believe in, is taking men back to what we're doing and getting them to be proud of their culture, their language, their family structure."*²⁰⁸

Sourcing funding for programs like those of Dr Kickett-Tucker and the highly thought-of Strong Fathers Program through Indigo Junction should be a prioritised.

²⁰³ https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/gentleman/2014/violence-against-women-it-as-a-menas-issue

²⁰⁴ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

²⁰⁵ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

²⁰⁶ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

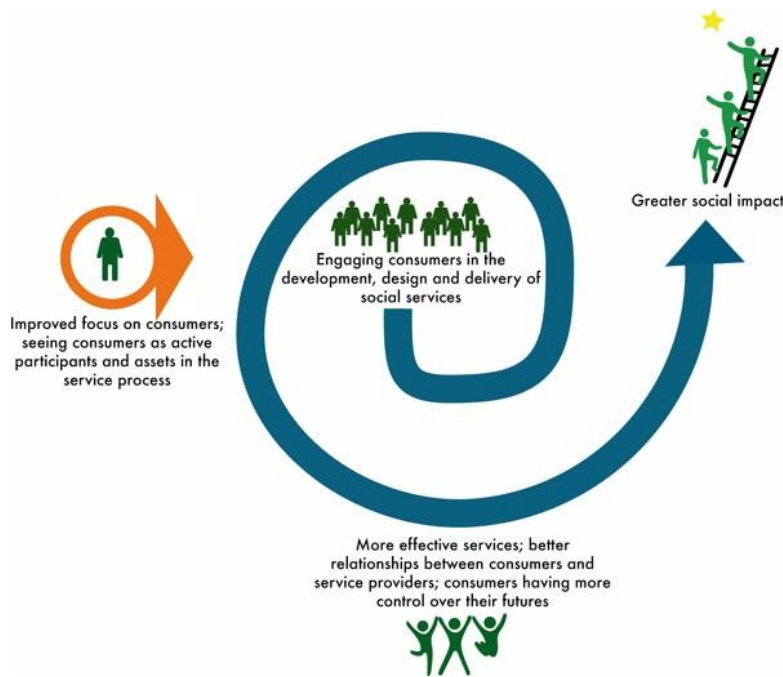
²⁰⁷ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

²⁰⁸ Stakeholder XIII KOO-004

5.10 Ensure co-production of services with Aboriginal people

Any service that seeks to prevent family and domestic violence against Aboriginal women region should be designed and operated in partnership with the Aboriginal community.

Figure 3: Co-designing for social good²⁰⁹



The need for Aboriginal input into the design of services supporting Aboriginal families has long been acknowledged and was a recurring theme throughout our research.

To engage the community in such a partnership is not only beneficial for the service outcomes but it is empowering for the community as a whole.

“We need to have co-design with Aboriginal women driving this and being supported by people with the experience within the sector, so it’s a partnership.”²¹⁰

“When we’re dealing with Aboriginal issues, we’ve had elders and we’ve been signing the same song for many years, dealing with Aboriginal issues it needs to be Aboriginal led. That needs to be led by community as well.”²¹¹

One of the suggestions made to support a unified response to domestic violence was to hold a community forum. This report provides recommendations and findings that suggest potential ways forward. A community plan of action needs to be developed by the community itself and our hope is the findings and recommendations contained in this report will provide some ideas for discussion at such a forum.

²⁰⁹ <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2012/07/co-designing-for-social-good-part-i-the-role-of-citizens-in-designing-and-delivering-social-service>

²¹⁰ Stakeholder IX KOO-004

²¹¹ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 080917

In terms of co-production, ways in which Aboriginal community members can be better supported to run their own organisations should also be considered. The provision of governance and management workshops to Aboriginal run community organisation that feel they would benefit is one such example.

5.11 Develop and maintain a directory of Aboriginal services

An accessible directory of services for Aboriginal people in the Swan region be produced and maintained annually.

A directory listing all services that specifically support Aboriginal people would be a useful resource for community members and service providers.

"I think we actually need a directory just for Aboriginal services. We have a directory for all services and every now and again you will see a directory come out through a workshop or something. I went to a men's workshop and it was great because it was focused on all the services around that conversation. I think we need to have a directory for all Aboriginal services."²¹²

The directory could be produced and updated on an annual basis.

Further conversations with community representatives are recommended to establish an appropriate format for the directory and how it should be disseminated and/or accessed.

5.12 Fund programs and initiatives for a minimum of two years

Any pilot programs designed to address family and domestic violence in the Swan region be funded for a minimum of two years, and ideally a minimum of five years.

While we recognise two-year programs are insufficient to achieve lasting impact, we operate in a funding environment where some projects are funded for just six or twelve months. One of the key barriers we encountered when initially starting this project was a lack of trust. Many community members and service providers didn't believe we were committed to a long-term project – particularly given the relatively short period of funding we were operating with at the time.

These were justifiable concerns and largely based on past experiences of government agencies and community service providers "coming in for a short while, then leaving when the money ran out".

The duration over which funding is allocated is a clear signal of intent to the community. A project that is funded for five years is likely to garner considerably more community support than a project funded for 12 months because it signals a longer-term, more genuine commitment. This is important for a myriad of reasons, not least of which being that when dealing with complex, multi-factorial issues like family violence a long-term perspective is required.

"Don't just go, 'we'll fund this for six months and 12 months and we'll see how it goes', because it's going to take longer than six months or 12 months to gain these people's trust and working it out."²¹³

Ideally, programs that seek to address family and domestic violence in the Swan region would be funded for a minimum of five years.

²¹² Stakeholder VIII KOO-004

²¹³ Stakeholder VIII KOO-004

A comprehensive review of procurement and funding practices would be highly beneficial. Longer term funding provides the Aboriginal community with greater confidence and helps to build trust. It also increases the likelihood of implementing initiatives that affect meaningful change.

5.13 Establish and fund an Aboriginal owned and operated community centre **Source a suitable building and find funding for an Aboriginal owned and operated community centre within the City of Swan.**

One of the key issues raised by several service providers and community members we spoke to is the lack of an Aboriginal owned and operated building for Aboriginal people to visit and connect with others.

"Every service that I know of says, 'Let's go sit in the park and have a yarn.' It's freezing cold. Who wants to sit in the park? It's just ridiculous. It's a really ridiculous pattern of thinking when you've got people who are in crisis to say, 'Do you want to go and have a coffee down here?' They've got a little trail of kids coming along and you go in the coffee shop and everybody's staring at that little family. They're being already judged when they're sitting in there, because the kid's not going to sit quiet."²¹⁴

There are a range of buildings within the City of Swan that, according to some, would make ideal locations for an Aboriginal community centre.

"The places exist. It only needs funding for the delivery... it's about the funding for the people, it's not about a physical location, because there are places in this geographical area that could be used, with a bit of renovation."²¹⁵

In addition to the provision of informal activities and community resources, consideration could be given to this 'safe place' providing services for men and women under the one roof.

"I think it's about whether there's more services needed where they do work with everyone, and there are services for men and there are services for women, but there's not a lot bringing that together."²¹⁶

5.14 Examine the feasibility of person-centred approaches **Consideration be given to the merits of funding the person seeking support rather than the service alone in a similar manner to the disability sector.**

Several community members and service providers suggested that a more holistic, flexible and person-centred approach to delivering services should be considered.

Person-centred approaches are concerned with ensuring that the individual is at the centre of any decision-making that impacts their health and wellbeing. Person-centred practice also recognises that other people have a strong impact on a person's life, and so family, friends and the wider community are also involved in developing service plans when appropriate.

²¹⁴ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

²¹⁵ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

²¹⁶ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

"It does strike me that there's a potential opportunity there, a bit like what we've done in the disability sector, which is to move away from funding programs, but to put the funding to the family who can then have the wraparound services.

*That's quite a big challenge and a big step to make, but there does seem to be a move across the world to explore more a client-centred, family-centred approach and have the funding go to the client and then the wraparound sort of come into play a bit.*²¹⁷

Person-centred approaches acknowledge that all parts of the service system need to be involved in changes to practice and that there is a need to transform block funding for services into flexible, individualised funding.²¹⁸

Such an approach may help to alleviate the considerable challenges Aboriginal women face trying to navigate the complex web of services providers and offerings available to them.

5.15 Increased access to safe and affordable housing

Develop a strategy to deliver additional safe and affordable housing to members of Aboriginal community and increase the level of priority housing assistance for those experiencing family violence.

A lack of access to safe and affordable housing linked to socio-economic disadvantage within Aboriginal communities is a reinforcing factor that may increase the frequency or severity of violence against women.

Furthermore, domestic and family violence is a leading cause of homelessness amongst women and children, so priority housing assistance should be provided where appropriate.

A strategy to deliver additional safe and affordable housing to members of Aboriginal community should be developed. This might begin with a dialogue between the City of Swan, Department of Communities (housing), service providers, key stakeholders and community representatives.

"The single most important has got to be safe, creation of housing, and safe space, and safe housing. And safe housing does not mean 17 people in one house."

*If we could have housing first as a priority for all our families, employment second well probably education and employment, I think that would go a long way and safe, secure support networks around them. It would go a long way to reducing DV.*²¹⁹

Another point raised on several occasions was the challenges many Aboriginal people had understanding the tenancy agreements. Notwithstanding the public perception that many families are removed from public housing due to anti-social behaviour, the reality is that most evictions occur due to tenants defaulting on their rent.

For many Aboriginal people English is a second or third language. Simplifying tenancy agreements and providing support where necessary may lead to fewer evictions due to defaults on contracts that tenants didn't understand up-front.

²¹⁷ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

²¹⁸ Working in Person Centred Ways: A Resource Book for NSW Advocacy and Information Services, Family and Community Services NSW, 2011.

²¹⁹ Stakeholder IV KOO-004

"The tenancy agreement is a 27-page document of legal jargon. People are desperate for housing, what do they want? They want keys. They'll sign anything."

5.16 Regular meetings between service providers and community reps

There needs to be more efficient and open sharing of information between service providers, initially via regular interagency meetings.

While nobody we spoke to knew how many DV-related service providers operate in the Swan Region, there was general consensus that there are well over 100, most of which would offer several programs and/or services.

While an integrated response requires agencies to work together, many agencies have little understanding of what other services are available.

This was immediately recognised by attendees at our yarning circles who valued the opportunity to connect and speak with other providers and representatives of the local community.

"We should meet. This should not just be a one-off. It should be a meeting that is ongoing to discuss things as they come up and keep this updated."²²⁰

We recommend the establishment of regular interagency meetings between operational staff where information can be shared as appropriate. These meetings should also include Aboriginal community representatives.

In time, consideration might be given to establishing a formal Memorandum of Understanding between signatory agencies operating DV-related service within the City of Swan. Amongst other things, this would allow for the establishment and formalising of arrangements for the sharing of information on matters of mutual interest and/or responsibility.

5.17 Community education to address gendered drivers

Develop and implement an appropriately targeted community education program to address gendered drivers of violence against Aboriginal women.

Funding for community education programs that seeks to address community attitudes and gendered drivers of violence against Aboriginal women should be actioned as a priority. These gendered drivers are as follows:

1. Condoning of violence against women
2. Men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence in public and private life
3. Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
4. Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.²²¹

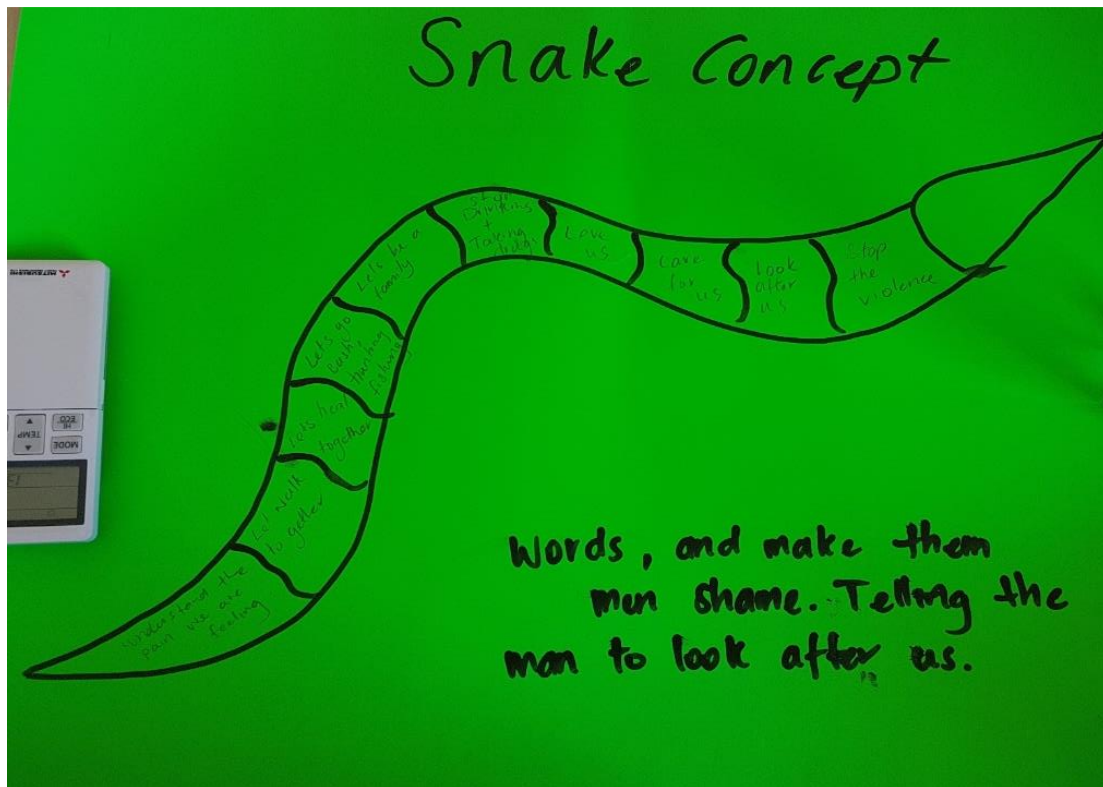
While these gendered drivers exist throughout society, some are particularly prevalent within Aboriginal communities where cultural beliefs around gender roles can be quite fixed.

A specific suggestion made at one of the yarning circles was a women's march through the streets of Midland. The march (or indeed the strategy as a whole) could build on the 'snake concept' developed at the same session (see figure 3 next page).

Figure 3: Snake Concept

²²⁰ KOO-004 Yarning Circle 070917

²²¹ Change the Story – Our Watch, 2015.



- Understand the pain we are feeling
- Let's walk together
- Let's heal together
- Let's be a family
- Stop drinking and taking drugs
- Love us
- Care for us
- Look after us
- Stop the violence

The community education program should include a pre and post evaluation plan that clearly links back to overarching 'Creating Safe Places' project goals.

6.0 Closing remarks

This report does not pretend to be more than a snapshot of the situation faced by the Aboriginal community in the Swan region in the context of family violence.

We acknowledge that our engagement to date has been limited, and that there are a large number of community members, service providers and stakeholders with whom we still need to meet.

Our intent remains to facilitate and support efforts by the Aboriginal community and existing providers to reduce family violence, most of whom are already delivering excellent programs under very challenging circumstances.

We would also like to reiterate our acknowledgement that any program of work developed to address domestic and family violence within the Swan Aboriginal community must be led by the Swan Aboriginal community.

Our engagement and findings to date confirm that national issues faced by the broader Aboriginal community are the common experience of those living in this region. It seeks to draw attention to what can be done better, where some of the gaps are, and how an improvement in prevention could be achieved.

The lack of funding for Aboriginal workers is a constant theme; whether it is funding for premises, or funding for equal benefits as non-Aboriginal workers

"Funding. Nobody's got any money to do anything. It's like getting cut back on this and getting cut back on that. Education is getting cut back. I just think funding is just; there needs to be more money put into this. You need the workers. Have the people on the ground that can go out." ²²²

Notably the cultural issues were another constant theme and the real reluctance by most of the non-Aboriginal agencies to properly address this rather than making a token effort.

Yet in truth, this is not a funding issue. Much of the violence stems from a lack of real recognition of the true place of Aboriginal culture in the lives of the Aboriginal community.

²²² Stakeholder IV KOO-004

7.0 Acknowledgements

We want to acknowledge the many participants in this short inquiry, particularly the scores of community members, frontline workers and service providers who attended yarning circles, community gatherings and stakeholder interviews.

Project Steering Group

Dy Ryder

Hon Ken Wyatt AM

Robyn Fitall, Koolkuna

Luke van der Beeke, Marketing for Change

Mark Bishop, City of Swan

Kim Massam, WA Police.

Staffing

Community Liaison Officer – Lydia Hayden

Funding

Department of Social Services

Organisations

ANROWS

CACH Health Promotion

Centrecare Djooraminda

City of Swan

Community Newspapers

Curtin University (CERIPH)

Department of Social Services

Koolkuna

Indigo Junction

Marketing for Change

MIDLAS

Moort Boodjari Mia

NGALA

North Metro Aboriginal Education

Relationships Australia

Starick

Swan Alliance

WA Police



L-R - Kim Massam, Robyn Fitall, Luke van der Beeke, Dy Ryder and Mark Bishop at White Ribbon March in Midland 2016