



February 2016

Submission

Blueprint for the domestic and family violence response in NSW





Prepared by Jacqui McKenzie

Contact person:

Katie Acheson

Chief Executive Officer

Suite 403, 64-76 Kippax St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010

Phone: (02) 8218 9815, Fax: (02) 9281 5588, Email: katie@youthaction.org.au

Website: youthaction.org.au

About Youth Action

Youth Action is the peak body for young people and youth services in NSW. We represent 1.25 million young people and the services that support them. Our work helps build the capacity of young people, youth workers and youth services, and we advocate for positive change on issues affecting these groups.

To achieve these objectives, it is the role of Youth Action to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth service sector
2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy to shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services
3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers
4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services
5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them
6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services
7. Ensure Youth Action's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.

Submission: Blueprint for the domestic and family violence response in NSW

Youth Action & Policy Association (NSW)



Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Violence is present the lives of young people	8
Drivers for violence against young people	11
Young people: an opportunity for generational change.....	13
Next Steps	20



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: the NSW government appropriately and proportionately respond to the specific needs of young people impacted by domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 2: the NSW government invest an initial \$600,000 to trial preventing domestic and family violence through a whole school approach across 30 school sites.



Introduction

Domestic and family violence (DFV) has considerable impact on young people¹ across NSW. Young people experience domestic and family violence in their own intimate and domestic relationships, as well as through 'witnessing' or exposure to situations of domestic and family violence.

For the purpose of the submission, Youth Action defines domestic and family violence as outlined in *It Stops Here: Standing together to end domestic and family violence in NSW*.² Youth Action adds emphasis to the relationships in a young persons life, including teen dating (intimate partner) relationships.

As such, Youth Action welcomes the opportunity to submit to the *Blueprint for the domestic and family violence response in Australia*.

We also take this opportunity to congratulate the NSW Government on its commitment to reducing and responding to domestic violence in NSW. In particular, we commend the recognition of the important role of young people and the corresponding changes to the NSW syllabus.

Youth Action asserts that addressing attitudes and gender stereotypes in schools has the potential to create lasting generational change, and is an important step in preventing domestic violence. Strategies to prevent domestic violence must be informed by the experience of young people including the particular attitudes

¹ Defined as aged 12-25

² Women NSW, 'It Stops Here: Standing together to end domestic and family violence in NSW: The NSW Government's Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform', February 2014, accessed via https://www.women.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/file/0003/289461/It_stops_Here_final_Feb2014.pdf

young people hold, and an understanding of the formation of those attitudes, in order to be successful.

While the inclusion of domestic and family violence in the NSW syllabus is important, as is the development of a 'toolkit' to support teacher delivery, Youth Action believes that the policy can be strengthened, and associated risks mitigated, through consideration and application of the evidence-base for population preventative measures. Youth Action's contribution to the discussion paper canvasses prevention measures for young people in a school environment to support current policy direction.

It is critical to address underlying causes in prevention approaches. Youth Action submits that young peoples experiences of domestic violence are different to adult experiences. Therefore understanding the issues specific to young people, as well as identifying the causes and contributing factors is fundamental to understand 'what kinds of messages and/or communication channels will be most effective in encouraging positive attitudes and behaviours in relation to DFV?'³

In the context of the consultation paper, Youth Action submits the following information under Part 1, Question 1, of the consultation paper:

- the prevalence of violence for young people;
- the key drivers and causes of domestic violence for young people; and
- the effectiveness of, and evidence-base for a prevention approach in schools in NSW.

³ Women NSW, 'It Stops Here: the Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform, Public Discussion Paper', p.7



Youth Action recognises that primary prevention efforts are most effective when there is a coordinated range of mutually reinforcing strategies.



Violence is present in the lives of young people

Many young people are living in situations of domestic and family violence, or are victim to domestic and family violence. Research shows that the prevalence of violence against women is highest for young women.⁴ Young women are at a higher risk of intimate partner violence than older women, with those aged 18 to 24 twice as likely to experience sexual assault, with some estimates that those aged 15 to 19 are four times as likely.⁵ The 2012 Personal Safety Survey identified that 13% of young women (aged 18 to 24) experienced at least one incidence of violence in the 12 months prior, a rate higher than for any other age group surveyed.

Moreover, young people are frequently exposed to, witness, or are 'pulled in' to domestic and family violence.⁶ Again, the 2012 Personal Safety Survey showed that 31% of women who experienced violence by current partner (128,500 women) had children who saw or heard, as had 48% of women who experienced violence while they were living with their most recently violent previous partner (733,900 women).⁷

⁴ A Harris, N Honey, K Webster, K Diemer & V Politoff, 'Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women: Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey for respondents 16–24 years, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation', Melbourne, 2015, p. 11

⁵ Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies 'Violence against young women in Australia: Contexts beyond the family home', *Face the Facts Briefing*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 2015.

⁶ K Richards, 'Children's exposure to domestic violence in Australia', *Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice*, No. 419, June 2011, Australian Institute of Criminology; UNICEF, 'Behind closed doors: The impact of domestic violence on children' United Nations Children's Fund, Geneva, 2006; L Laing, 'Children, Young People and Domestic Violence', *Issues Paper No. 2*, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 2000

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 'Personal Safety Survey 2012', cat. no. 4906.0, 2013, accessed via <www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0>



Earlier studies indicated that children and young people were present in 85-90% of domestic violence incidents.⁸

Just as research indicates that factors driving domestic and family violence for young people is unique and different to the experience of adults (see below), it also indicates that the negative impacts of domestic violence on young people is distinct, due to age and developmental factors.⁹ This has implications for the service response to girls and young women, such as the need for a youth-specific response, and distinct skills and expertise to what may be required for responses to older women.

The risk of domestic violence to young people in NSW is not well reflected in the NSW Government's Domestic and Family Violence Framework for Reform (herein the Framework). The Framework notes that 'younger women may be less likely to identify an abusive relationship, report it to the police or approach a domestic and family violence service for support' and that it 'will seek to ensure better integration between new domestic and family violence referral pathways and those in the child protection system, including any referral underway to address child wellbeing concerns'. However the extent and specificity of young people's experience of domestic violence, and the need for a proportionate and relevant response to young people that falls outside of the child protection system is not included.

⁸ 'Domestic Violence and Its Impact on Children's Development', Presentation delivered at Department of Community Services' Fourth Domestic Violence Forum, 24 September 2002 accessed via <http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/319754/dv_paper.pdf>

⁹ M Flood & L Fergus, 'An Assault on Our Future: The impact of violence on young people and their relationships', Sydney, White Ribbon Foundation, 2008, p. 21
<<http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/uploads/media/23546WhiteRibbonYouthSummary.pdf>>

Violence against young women is complex and while Youth Action supports an integrated response with child protection and NSW Family and Community Services (FaCs), as indicated in the Framework, but it cannot be the only response to the high prevalence of young people experiencing violence in their own intimate (teen dating) relationships.¹⁰

Recommendation 1:

Youth Action recommends the NSW government appropriately and proportionately respond to the specific needs of young people impacted by domestic and family violence. This includes:

- Identifying and acknowledging the heightened risk for young people in NSW.
- Embedding understandings of youth specific dimensions of DFV in, for example, advisory groups via the inclusion of young people, youth services, youth provides or youth peak representation.
- Ensuring any expansion of funding for accessible, specialist, targeted, culturally safe, client-centred services that meet the health, housing, justice and legal needs of women impacted by violence recognise and include the need to provide youth specific support.
- Ensuring the timely access and availability of youth specific support in response to domestic and family violence, or at the very least, requiring domestic violence services to provide or have formal partnerships and referral pathways with youth services.

¹⁰ M Sety, 'What Do We Know about Dating Violence among Australian Adolescents?', Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, Sydney, 2012; M Flood & L Fergus, op.cit.

Drivers for violence against young people

The link between domestic and family violence, and the prevalence of gender inequality is well established.¹¹ As Our Watch summarises, there are four interrelated dimensions of gender inequality that are mutually reinforcing and found to be particularly significant:

- Stereotyped roles of men and women
- Rigid gender identities (masculinity/femininity)
- An unequal distribution of power, and unequal relationships, between men and women
- Negative peer relationships and associations between men¹²

While this is also the case for young people, there are some particular factors associated with age and development. Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey show that age is one of the most influential demographic factors in understanding and attitudes towards gendered violence. Harris et al report 'Respondents in the two youngest groups (16–17 years and 18–24 years) were less likely than the sample as a whole to be classified as

¹¹ See, for example, European Commission (2010) Factors at play in the perpetration of violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence: A multi-level interactive model; World Health Organisation (2010) Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: Taking action and generating evidence; UN Partners for Prevention (2013) Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific; VicHealth (2007) Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria;

¹² OurWatch (2015), 'Submission to the Social Development Committee of the South Australian Parliament: Inquiry into Domestic and Family Violence', 6 March 2015, p. 6



having a high level of understanding of violence against women and as less likely to have a low level of attitudinal support.¹³

Harris et al also elaborate that while factors driving DFV for young people are the same as adults, these factors are particularly influential at this formational point in time as young people explore values and identity, and because by virtue of being young with limited personal experience of intimate relationships, 'contemporary context is the only world known to young people,¹⁴ and that context tends to be much more heavily gendered and limited to strict roles.

Young people are, overall, more vulnerable to domestic and family violence, of which some factors are very different than for adults. Factors such as stronger peer group norms, inexperience and misinterpretation of jealousy, for example, as a sign of love, patterns of age differences in relationships, lack of access to services, and a tendency towards passivity in help seeking for self or peers, all contribute to greater vulnerability.¹⁵

¹³ A Harris, N Honey, K Webster, K Diemer & V Politoff, 'Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women: Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey for respondents 16–24 years', Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, 2015, p. 24

¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 25

¹⁵ M Flood & L Fergus, 'An Assault on Our Future: The impact of violence on young people and their relationships', Sydney, White Ribbon Foundation, p. 26



Young people are an opportunity for generational change

Young people provide NSW with an unprecedented opportunity to effect large-scale generational change, where school-based approaches provide some of the best evidence bases for prevention initiatives.¹⁶

Young people provide significant opportunity to prevent and break cycles of DFV, due to qualities relating to their stage of life. Throughout adolescence and early adulthood young people are beginning to form ideas, beliefs, and an understanding of relationships, and therefore behaviours in intimate relationships.¹⁷ For this reason, this stage in the life cycle provides one of the strongest prospects to counter the 'factors' that lead to DFV. This is a finding that is supported over three decades of youth specific violence prevention research and programs: violence prevention education for young people works.¹⁸

Attitudes matter and there is much room for improvement, particularly amongst young men. Violence in domestic settings is most common in communities where violence-supportive attitudes are prevalent, and there is research across Australia that has canvassed young peoples attitudes.¹⁹ In 2015 Youth Action, in partnership with White Ribbon Australia, conducted research across Australia with over 3000

¹⁶ Our Watch, 'Submission to Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence: Part One', 5 June 2015, p. 15.

¹⁷ M Sety, op.cit., p. 4

¹⁸ M Flood, L Fergus, & M Heenan, 'Respectful Relationships Education: Violence prevention and Respectful Relationships Education in Victorian secondary schools', Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Melbourne, 2009, accessed via <http://www.xyonline.net/sites/default/files/Flood,%20Respectful%20relationships%20education%2009.pdf>

¹⁹ M Flood & B Pease, 'Factors influencing attitudes to violence against women', *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, vol. 10, no.2, 2009, p. 125.

young people on their attitudes to domestic, family and teen dating violence. Our research found that while young people understood that domestic violence was an important issue, they have some difficulty in understanding what behaviours are normal and what is domestic violence. Young people also had difficulty recognising domestic violence in their own dating relationships, primarily recognising it as an 'adult' issue. Young men were also more likely than young women to agree with statements supporting gender stereotypes and attitudes supporting violence, such as:

- 1 in 4 young men agreed with the statement 'Girls like guys who are in charge of the relationship'
- 1 in 6 young men thought 'Men are usually better at more things than women'
- 1 in 7 young men agreed that 'Men are supposed to be the head of the household and take control of the relationship'

This research corroborates similar findings across the field that indicate young men are more likely to hold attitudes that support violence.²⁰

What our research also found was that there is an opportunity to reach people at school, as only 39.7% indicated they had received information about DFV at school. When factoring in age, findings showed that for high-school students the number was again quite low, with only just over half (54%) of respondents indicated they had received information at school. School as a framework and environment has the potential to reach a large portion of the youth population in a non-stigmatising

²⁰ See VicHealth 'Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria', 2007, accessed via <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au>, p. 17; A Harris, N Honey, K Webster, K Diemer & V Politoff, op.cit.

way. A review of interventions found that school-based programs have the strongest evidence of effectiveness, a finding that has more recently been found in a recent systematic review of approaches to prevent violence against women in girls.²¹ Moreover prevention approaches in schools can reach the intended recipients relatively efficiently and cost-effectively.²²

Internationally, there are evaluated programs that have shown the potential for prevention in schools, as outlined by the following two case studies, sourced directly from Our Watch:²³

Example A – Safe Dates

Safe Dates is a US school-based program involving a 10-session curriculum for years 8 and 9. It aims to increase students' knowledge about what constitutes a healthy or violent dating relationship, the causes and consequences of violence; to equip them with effective communication and conflict resolution skills; and to provide them with the tools they need to help a friend who may be experiencing violence in a relationship. It also involves parents and carers by providing resources about the topics covered in Safe Dates to encourage discussion at home.

It is one of the longest running initiatives whose effectiveness is being tested through a randomized controlled longitudinal evaluation. Four years after implementation, those students who had participated in Safe Dates reported 56 to 92 percent less physical,

²¹ VicHealth, op.cit., p. 18; M Ellsberg, D.J Arango, M Morton, F Gennari, S Kiplesund, M Contreras, & C Watts, 'Prevention of violence against women and girls: What does the evidence say?', *The Lancet*, 385(9977), 2015, pp. 1555– 1566, accessed via [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)61703-7/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)61703-7/fulltext)

²² M Flood, L Fergus, & M Heenan, op.cit.

²³ Our Watch, 'Submission to Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence: Part One', op.cit.

serious physical, and sexual dating violence victimisation and perpetration than students who did not.²⁴ That is, the program has proven highly effective – on the most rigorous evaluation techniques available – in the primary prevention of violence against women.

Example B – The Fourth R

The Fourth R is a Grade 9 Physical and Health Education program in Canada, including a 21-lesson curriculum delivered over 28 hours by teachers with additional training in the dynamics of dating violence and healthy relationships. It was evaluated with a cluster randomised controlled trial design with a 2.5 year follow up with 1,722 students aged 14 to 15 years. Control schools targeted similar objectives without the training or materials.

Results indicated that physical dating violence was about 2.5 times greater among control versus intervention students. That is, teaching young people about healthy relationships skills as part of their required health curriculum reduced their future perpetration or victimisation of physical dating violence when measured against a group that didn't participate in the program, two and half years later.

Many schools across Australia have introduced respectful relationships programs to educate young people about violence including domestic and dating violence as well as sexual abuse and harassment. However, there is research to suggest that one-off programs of this nature are insufficient and ineffective, and in some cases,

²⁴ VA Foshee et al. 'The Safe Dates Project: theoretical basis, evaluation design, and selected baseline findings', *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, vol.12, no.5, 1996, pp. 39 – 47; VA Foshee et al., 'An evaluation of Safe Dates, an adolescent dating violence prevention program,' *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 88, no.1, 1998, pp. :45–50; VA Foshee et al., 'The Safe Dates program: 1-year follow-up results,' *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 90, no. 10, 2000, pp. 1619 –1622; VA Foshee et al., 'Assessing the long-term effects of the Safe Dates program and a booster in preventing and reducing adolescent dating violence victimization and perpetration,' *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 94, no. 4, 2004, pp. 619–624; and VA Foshee et al., 'Assessing the effects of the dating violence prevention program "Safe Dates" using random coefficient regression modelling,' *Prevention Science*, vol.6, 2005, pp. 245–258.

especially when done so through personal-development subjects.²⁵ So while we have aspects of healthy and/or respectful relationships in place, there are likely missing aspects that could make such interventions effective.

What has emerged in response to an international evidence base is the 'whole of school' approach to implementing Respectful Relationships Education. Respectful Relationships Education is defined as:

The holistic approach to school-based, primary prevention of gender-based violence [Respectful Relationships Education] uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as both education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence.

While there is some confusion between existing initiatives, such as NSW inclusion of DFV into the PDHPE syllabus, Our Watch reaffirms the difference:²⁶

Respectful Relationships Education is broader than the delivery of classroom-based learning in these areas. What sets Respectful Relationships Education apart is that it explicitly centres on addressing the drivers of gender-based violence.

As such, Respectful Relationships Education goes further than raising awareness of violence and promoting protective behaviours and is characterised by a critical analysis of gender and power. While alignments with other areas of work (such as sexuality education) are desirable, Respectful Relationships Education requires a stand-alone focus and investment, with attention to (and monitoring of) the creation of more gender

²⁵ M Mills, 'Issues in implementing boys' programme in schools: Male teachers and empowerment', *Gender and Education*, vol.12, no.2, 2000, pp. 221-238

²⁶ Our Watch, 'Respectful Relations: Education in Schools', *Evidence Paper*, December 2015, accessed via <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/4a61e08b-c958-40bc-8e02-30fde5f66a25/Evidence-paper-respectful-relationships-education-AA-updated.pdf.aspx>

equal and respectful attitudes, behaviours, structures and practices across the school culture.

Importantly, 'the single most important criterion for best practice in Respectful Relationships Education is the adoption of a whole school approach'.²⁷

Crucial to the 'whole of school' approach is addressing the overlapping domains that are formative to young people in a school setting and that go beyond a single lesson classroom setting, but tackles shifts at a 'policy, structural, process, system and institutional level,' to produce extensive exposure to messages and producing sustained change. These include:

- Curriculum across all subjects or learning areas;
- School policy and practices;
- School culture and ethos;
- The working conditions and culture experienced by staff; and
- The relationships modelled to students by their school community including staff, parents and community groups.

²⁷ Our Watch, 'Respectful Relations: Education in Schools', op.cit.



Figure 1: Whole School Approach, as implemented in Victoria²⁸

A final and important note in the evidence base for prevention programs is that prevention strategies need to come from evidence, but also generate evidence. Research and evidence (including learning from practice) should inform the

²⁸ Our Watch, 'Respectful Relations: Education in Schools', op.cit.



development and implementing of programmes, strategies and policies. While we have enough international evidence and an approach that can be transferred to the Australian context, without starting a prevention initiative in a NSW specific context, NSW will not generate evidence around what works.

Next Steps

In the NSW context, with some momentum under recent changes to the syllabus, implementing a whole school approach would be cost effective, and a trial could be put into place relatively quickly. NSW has significant infrastructure within the state already to aid development of a whole school approach. The knowledge and practice resources required for delivery are well developed, but need to be adapted to NSW setting; there is existing expertise in the community from youth and domestic violence organisations to support students and teachers; school settings enabling delivery of programs; and the approach would be complimented by a strong syllabus.

Given the diversity of the school sectors in NSW, an 'opt-in' approach for schools would align with government policy regarding localised decision-making structures, but allows for flexibility within other sectors. Schools and communities who identify a need to enhance their approach to DFV could participate in the trial, as supporting by a central program organisation.

Importantly, this approach embeds gender and violence experts within education infrastructure to support delivery of a revised curriculum, to support teacher



training and school policy reviews, as well as supporting the connection between schools, youth services and domestic violence services for disclosures from students and staff, for example. In the NSW context we recommend that this could be altered to sit within the structure of the three sectors, as opposed to geographical coverage given the rural nature of NSW.

We recommend a NSW specific advisory panel to inform the development of a model for NSW to trial, composing of, at the least, a youth service provider, domestic violence service provider, OurWatch, NAPCAN, as well as representatives from the 3 sectors, and a university partner to assist in ensuring proper evaluation from the beginning.

Some additional investment is required to embed and support a sustained program.

Recommendation 2:

Youth Action therefore recommends that the NSW government invest an initial \$600,000 to trial preventing DFV through a whole school approach across 30 school sites. This dollar amount would cover:

- Project coordination and management
- Development of further NSW specific project outline, tools, resources and professional learning package
- Project implementation staff
- Support for women and youth organisations to partner with specific schools
- Professional development for teachers and school staff
- Comprehensive evaluation