



## **Trends in Interagency Work <sup>\*</sup>**

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### **Background**

Programmes and services in the human services sector often developed in “ad hoc” ways to presenting problems, and largely functioned in isolation from each other. In more recent times, there has been an emphasis on the coordination and integration of responses, especially by the police, courts, child protection and health systems.

When considering efforts to end men’s violence towards women, Dobash et al. (2000) stress the need for interventions to incorporate responses at three levels:

1. Individual – work that responds to the needs of individual women and works towards safety and well-being.
2. Institutional – Improves the service delivery response to victims of domestic violence and perpetrators.
3. Social – work towards changing the beliefs and attitudes that underpin violence and allow it to continue.

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The difficulties of ensuring the safety and well-being of women, children and young people whilst demanding the accountability of partners who are violent and abusive, has led to the domestic violence field reflecting on the important question of “how to stop the cycle of violence?”. There has been a progression from purely delivering support and crisis services to women and children to questioning how to challenge the root cause of the problem, namely the violent offender. Furthermore, advocates are calling for an improvement in service delivery responses across the sector to ensure that inadequate responses are not reasons for women to remain or return to abusive relationships. Accordingly, Australia has drawn on models initiated in other countries such as the USA, Canada, UK and New Zealand to improve effective responses here. In Australia, there is a growing number of programmes fashioned on the notion of “integrated responses”.

## **Why integrated services?**

Integrated service provision means: coordinated, appropriate, consistent responses aimed at enhancing victim safety, reducing secondary victimisation<sup>1</sup> and holding abusers accountable for their violence.

Effective coordination is based on a multi-disciplinary approach that engages the range of professionals involved in domestic violence. Research shows that service coordination works best at a local level, and existing models are generally locality based. This offers opportunities to develop a consistent approach within a specific community, taking into account factors such as local needs, services available, and legislation.

Effectiveness depends on the ongoing commitment of agencies involved, adequate resourcing, and development of a sustainable structure that is not dependant on specific individuals. Senior personnel within agencies must have

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<sup>1</sup> Secondary victimisation refers to experiences that service users experience as a consequence of inadequate or discriminatory service delivery practices.

the authority to make responsive changes to domestic violence policy and practice (Queensland Government 2002)

## **Best practice models (overseas)**

### ***Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP), Duluth, USA***

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, known commonly as the Duluth Model, derives from the women's movement and has developed a powerful ethos based on a feminist understanding of control and power in relationships between men and women, which informs all of its work. It coordinates male abusers' programmes and women's projects in the community and has also developed awareness-raising, training and community development initiatives, all of which are supported by, and work in tandem with, the criminal justice services (Hague 1998, p. 441). There is a strong approach to case management and the actions of those within the criminal justice system are monitored on a daily basis to ensure they remain accountable to women experiencing domestic violence. Many programmes have subsequently modelled themselves on the Duluth model.

### ***Hamilton Abuse Project, New Zealand 1991***

The Hamilton project began as a pilot in 1991 and was derived from the principles of the Duluth model. In 1996, after extensive evaluation, the project dropped its pilot status and now continues to provide advocacy for battered women, education programmes for batterers, and monitoring of government agencies (Balzer 1999, p. 239). An attempt has been made to apply the Duluth model to suit local circumstances through mechanisms such as specific protocols for existing agencies (Robertson 1999, p. 76). Within Hamilton, treatment programmes exist but only within an integrated framework incorporating women's refuges and criminal justice agencies. For example, such 'protocols provide a standard set of procedures for each agency, which together, form a co-ordinated and consistent response to battering' (Robertson 1999, p. 76). Balzer (1999) and

others have noted the need to consider mechanisms within Maori communities that ensure the accountability of violent men. Robertson asserts that the sanctions handed down to batterers must be “meaningful” and that mechanisms may need to vary from community to community as long as batterer accountability and women’s safety are not compromised.

### ***Domestic Violence and Repeat Victimisation Project, UK Home Office***

One of the most important components in responding to domestic violence is the police response. There have been many criticisms from the community about the inadequacy and difficulties of police intervention (e.g. Katzen 2000). In particular, perceptions have included the “decriminalisation” (Douglas & Godden 2002) of domestic violence and negative attitudes to women who remain with a violent partner.

A project carried out in the Killingbeck Division of West Yorkshire Police in Leeds, aimed to reduce repeat victimisation. Using an interactive crime prevention approach, it focussed equally on the victimised woman and the offending man in order to protect the victim and demotivate the offender (Hanmer et al. 1999, p. v). It involved a three-tiered programme of operational interventions which increase in intensity according to the perpetrator’s history of contact with police. For example:

- Level 1*      First contact with police
  - Gather information, reiterate police force policy
  - Provide information via letter to woman and offender
  - Establish police patrols following incident
  
- Level 2*      Police attendance at more than one incident
  - Beat police constable visits the woman

“Coocoon watch” operationalised with neighbours, family and relevant agencies

*Level 3* Multiple attendances by police

Domestic Violence Officer visits the woman

Coordinated involvement of other agencies through agency meeting

Offer of duress alarm in certain circumstances

At each stage, if offences have occurred, the necessary legal response is undertaken with increasing liaison and information provided to the Crown Prosecution Service. The police response also relied on closer interagency involvement with services supporting women and children as well as those intervening with the offender.

### ***Quincy District Court Model***

The Quincy District Court model was introduced in 1986 in Norfolk County, Massachusetts, in the United States. This model revolves around the integration of services within the court setting. The success of Quincy’s coordinated approach is based on cooperation among the various parties involved in a domestic violence case. Judges, clerks, district attorneys, police and probation officers, social service providers and community agencies work together to provide an effective, comprehensive response to cases of domestic abuse (Tsai 2000, p. 1298). The Quincy programme also strives to make domestic violence cases a top priority by using an approach that accomplishes the goals of controlling the abuser and empowering the victim. The court process aims to provide enhanced sanctions for the abuser while at the same time making the court process as least intimidating as possible by providing support to women through advocates and services. Importantly, matters are “fast tracked” to ensure expedited hearings for women to obtain restraining orders as soon as

possible. Throughout the process the offender's behaviour is monitored and sanctions enforced (e.g. ensuring attendance at mandated batterer programmes or adherence to conditions of restraining order).

## **Australian models**

Community based services have led the way in developing coordinated responses to domestic violence at a local level, encouraging partnership between government and community based services (Queensland Government 2002, p.7). The following are examples of programmes initiated in Australia.

### ***ACT***

#### **ACT Family Violence Intervention Program**

The FVIP is a co-ordinated criminal justice approach which '...emphasises improved investigative practice imbedded within a project comprising detailed training, close management and monitoring, new technology, and closer working relationships between the Office of the DPP and the non-government Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS)' (Holder 2001, p.14).

#### **Key features:**

- Regular interagency meetings of key workers resulting in strong, positive and respectful relationships.
- Facilitation by the coordinator of the steering committee encouraged the group to work collaboratively, by regular injection of research evidence to discussions and by encouraging a joint problem solving approach between organisations.
- An ongoing process of experiment and evaluation regarding improvements to agency and systemic responses. The programme as a whole has been staged so that evaluation of previous stages occurs alongside planning and development of the next.

- Independent evaluation of changes occurring and what further steps need to be taken.
- Data collection provides the basis for further funding and resourcing.
- Improvement of investigative police practices which has resulted in a 152 per cent increase in family violence matters handled by the DPP, 61 per cent of which result in guilty pleas.
- Development of training programmes delivered jointly by police and prosecutors. This has been a crucial step towards better evidence gathering work.
- Proactive support provided to women to inform them about the legal process and issues relating to leaving a violent relationship.
- Appointment of a specialist family violence prosecutor and magistrate. This ensures that matters are dealt by those with particular expertise and knowledge (e.g. evidentiary issues, the complex processes involved in family violence, the resources available).
- Availability of a 26-week perpetrator programme to which offenders can be court ordered.
- Streamlining of court processes, which has reduced the number of adjournments.

(urbis keys young 2001a; Humphreys & Holder 2002).

## **Queensland**

Gold Coast Integrated Response, established 1998

The Dovetail Coordinated Approach, Townsville

Logan River Valley Integrated Community Response to Domestic Violence

Key features:

- Coordinated responses within a manageable geographic region.
- Lead agency to coordinate and monitor.
- Strategies including 'fax back' projects to encourage effective referrals from Police to support services for women and children and enhanced communication and collaboration between agencies.
- Services including group work with each client group: women, children and young people, and the abusive partner.

**South Australia**

Central Violence Intervention Program (CVIP)

Northern Violence Intervention Program (NVIP)

Key features:

- Incorporation of a criminal justice approach (e.g. effective prosecution of men who are abusive).
- Interagency collaborations (e.g. ensure coordinated, ongoing and consistent interventions, including follow-up).
- Specialist domestic violence interventions, e.g. ensure timely specialist intervention for women and children and for men who are abusive (Central Violence Intervention Program 2002).

**NT, SA & WA**

Cross Borders Domestic Violence Service: Good Protection for All Women (Indigenous focus), Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council and Women's Legal Service (S.A.) Inc.

Key features:

- Working closely with Aboriginal women, following through with their matter to its conclusion.
- Effective advocacy in relation to responses from other services.
- Establishment of good working relationships between the service and others in the justice system (e.g. protocols with police have been developed in three states).
- Gaining the confidence of, and credibility with, women and the community by building on successful outcomes for individual women.
- Incorporation of mechanisms to ensure the active participation of women from the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Council and the community, in the decision making process.
- Currently being evaluated by independent agency (urbis keys young 2001b).

***Integrated approaches to Family Law and child protection***

Recent research (e.g. Rendell, Rathus & Lynch 2000) has highlighted concerns about the safety of children on contact visits with the parent who has been abusive. The Columbus Project (WA) and the Magellan Project (Victoria) are specialist case management programmes which have been developed in response to recognition of the need to improve collaboration between the Family Court and state-based statutory child protection organisations where matters before the Family Court involve risk to the safety and welfare of children because of serious child abuse and/or domestic violence (Brown et al. 2001; Monaghan 2000).

Key features:

- Early identification and fast tracking cases where child abuse and/or family violence has been alleged and/or identified by Officers of the Court.
- A multidisciplinary team approach to case management.
- Sharing of information and case management collaboration between the Family Court, Legal Aid, Family and Children's Service and other relevant stakeholders.

## **Mechanisms**

Projects such as those described above rely on a range of mechanisms to support the collaborative approach. These include:

- Protocols.
- Cross agency agreements, memoranda of understanding.
- Clear policies articulating principles, aims and objectives.
- Practice Standards.
- Competency Standards.
- Best Practice Models.
- Strategic plans.
- Steering committees, monitoring the implementation of the protocol and adequacy of service delivery responses.
- Policy frameworks and action plans.
- Cross agency training initiatives.
- Identification of a lead agency.

Some specialist programmes which have been developed within a context of coordinated approaches include, for example:

- Court Assistance Schemes.
- Fax back projects (e.g. Gold Coast and Logan River Valley Integrated Response Projects. These are a mechanism to provide responses to women and children in tandem with police call-outs).
- Mandated men's programmes.
- Development of specialist positions.

## **What has led to effective coordination/collaboration?**

### ***Lessons from Duluth***

The elements identified by the Duluth Model highlight the importance of discussing the underpinning principles guiding each agency's intervention concerning domestic violence. Since their inception they have tackled many issues that at times thwarted the notion of collaboration. They suggest that the following key activities are central to an effective co-ordinated response:

1. Develop a common philosophical framework which guides the intervention process.
2. Create consistent policies and procedures which coordinate and standardise the intervention actions of practitioners involved in a coordinated community response.
3. Monitor/track cases from initial contact through case disposition to ensure practitioner and offender accountability.
4. Coordinate the exchange of information, interagency communication on a need-to-know basis, and interagency decisions on individual cases.
5. Provide resources and services to victims and at risk family members to protect them from further abuse.
6. Utilise a combination of sanctions, restrictions and rehabilitation services to hold the offender accountable and to protect victims from further abuse.

7. Work to undo harm to children.
8. Evaluate the coordinated community response from the standpoint of victim safety and the goals of the intervening agencies (Pence and Shepard 1999, p. 16).

## **Words of wisdom**

Betty Taylor (2001) from the Gold Coast Integrated Response Project has produced these words of wisdom about implementing an integrated approach:

- No quick fix.
- Takes time.
- Individual professional relationships are as important as organisational relationships.
- Each community has to find its own way.
- What might be a problem for one community may be easy to solve for others.
- Find what fits your community.
- Need individuals with vision and ongoing commitment, foster shared vision.

## **Perpetrator programmes and integrated approaches**

Considerable debate has occurred over the last decade about the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes, with many questions still unanswered. It is argued strongly in the literature that:

- Such programmes are not a panacea for the issue of domestic violence.
- It is dangerous to consider the development of perpetrator programmes in isolation from integrated approaches.

- They need to be located within a criminal justice context.

Gondolf (2002) summarises the key finding of his recent, longitudinal evaluation of perpetrator programmes in the United States, with the statement: ‘The system matters’: He concludes:

*The main challenge appears to be in making the existing components of intervention work together more decisively and consistently. They need to hold men accountable for their behaviour... the notion of “accountability” so frequently urged in batterer counselling, warrants some reinforcement.*  
(Gondolf 2002, p. 218)

## **Why Integrated Responses may stall**

The following summarises insights from coordinated services (Taylor 2001; Woodbridge 2001; Larkins 2001). Integrated responses are compromised when there is:

- Lack of understanding of the frustrations, barriers and strengths of other services.
- Lack of true communication between agencies and individuals.
- Lack of appropriate judicial responses.
- Lack of consistent lethality reviews and coordination between agencies for high risk cases.
- Lack of case management across agencies.
- Lack of access to data or records of other agencies.
- Lack of commitment to the project and uneven distribution of tasks and responsibilities.
- Lack of informed personnel within key agencies who maintain involvement with the project.

- Lack of support from higher levels of management within key agencies.

## **Strategies to address stalled integrated responses**

- Responses to a diverse cultural community should be community driven.
- Effective integrated programmes require shared understanding of domestic violence, and attitudinal, behavioural and organisational change.
- Needs to include autonomy, power sharing, openness to critical evaluation.
- Building and maintaining trust are central to ongoing collaborative efforts.
- Interaction between government and non-government services must acknowledge power differences.
- Cross government approach relies on government departments working together.
- Provision of adequate funding, especially if lead agency is a small community based service.
- Area based responses should not create artificial boundaries, should operate with flexibility across areas. They must incorporate the cultural diversity of the area.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst we may refer to practice standards and guidelines or to the words of wisdom from successful interagency projects, it is more important to consider what works for this community and under what conditions. Approaches to interagency work need to be innovative and flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of needs occurring within a particular geographical area or community. As Ellen Pence (DAIP, Duluth) points out, elements of any integrated approach need to be filtered through the political, social, and cultural realities of each community (cited in Woodbridge 2001, p. 60).

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