



Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence

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For more information, please contact:

Major Paul Hateley
Head of Government Relations
The Salvation Army Australia

Address: 2-4 Brisbane Avenue, Barton ACT 2600

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

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Statement of Recognition

The Salvation Army acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters throughout Australia. We pay our respect to Elders, past, present and emerging, acknowledging their continuing relationship to this land and the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

Executive Summary

The Salvation Army is located and embedded in many communities, providing significant emergency relief, homelessness and family violence services and community support through Salvos Stores and community-based activities. By virtue of what we do, we experience first-hand the widespread detrimental health and wellbeing effects of family, domestic and sexual violence across all demographics, ages, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic backgrounds within Australia.

Continued investment and prioritisation of prevention, early intervention and advocacy campaigns is critical to change community attitudes and underlying societal drivers of family violence. Governments must also consider education campaigns in relation to active bystander interventions as additional community preventative measures.

The Salvation Army is particularly concerned about those experiencing violence or for whom home is not a safe place, and those who have no place to call home. We urgently call on governments to provide increased and ongoing funding support for family violence services, perpetrator intervention programs and research, and to ensure adequate social and affordable housing for people leaving violence or experiencing homelessness due to family violence.

The Salvation Army has recommended a review of social security, migration and family law (including shared parenting arrangements) to avoid trapping victim-survivors and their children in a cycle of poverty, to provide adequate access to protections, services and justice, and remove opportunities for a perpetrator to further abuse and control the victim-survivor.

In the longer term, establishment of sector service standards that integrate family violence services with other key sectors is necessary and long overdue. A safety model must be holistic in its approach and conducive to information sharing across police, child protection, family violence and cross sector services, including the health sector. As identified from the audit of the Victoria Safety Hub model, careful consideration must be given to implementation to ensure funding and resources match demand and a collective understanding across all services.

Our experience has been that special consideration must be given to children and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and those on temporary visas or impacted by forced marriage. Additional support is also required for the committed service delivery workforce who are managing increased demand and complexity of cases. Technological barriers, the difficulty of managing vicarious trauma when a worker is working from home, and issues around supply of appropriate housing to ensure timely throughput are additional stressors to the personal impact of the pandemic on the workforce.

Introduction

The Salvation Army thanks the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs for the opportunity to provide a submission on family, domestic and sexual violence and inform the development of the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (the Plan). This submission addresses all terms of reference.

Family violence remains the primary presenting problem amongst women and their children seeking The Salvation Army homelessness services. During 2018-19 more than 150 Salvation Army staff assisted some 9,204 women including 3,739 children experiencing family violence across Australia. From 2 December 2019 to 10 January 2020, a Salvation Army homelessness research project surveyed 292 respondents and identified 49 per cent of single parent respondents were homeless due to family and/or domestic violence; and 23 per cent of all respondents identified family and/or domestic violence as a contributing reason.¹

The Salvation Army offers a range of specialist family violence services including outreach, crisis interventions, brokerage and emergency accommodation, transitional housing, and housing support and provides family violence prevention and intervention programs to over 1,000 men nationally. Our specialist family violence services also partner with services such as the police, financial counsellors and courts to offer individualised support to women and their children, addressing risk and safety while planning for recovery.

This inquiry represents an opportunity to examine and evaluate how governments are responding to family violence across Australia. It is important to acknowledge the gendered nature of family violence and foster a service system that ensures perpetrators accountable for their actions, everyone is safe and free from harm, and victim-survivors of family violence are supported to recover.

Impact from natural disasters and COVID-19

The Salvation Army family violence services experienced significant disruptions from the recent natural disasters and COVID-19. A substantial increase in demand is expected as restrictions ease and COVID-19 supports are wound back. Between March and April 2020, demand for supports offered by us through family and domestic violence flexible support packages grew by almost 60 per cent. In the same period, demand for safe accommodation and trauma-informed case management grew by 7 per cent.² The Salvation Army's experience identified a high proportion of women entering services on insecure or unstable temporary visas as they had no access to income and no other support. The pandemic also served to highlight the urgent need for more affordable housing and for additional support for victim-survivors, their children and perpetrators to enter into the private rental market.

¹ Lensun, L., & Russell, C. (2020). *Homelessness Project 2020: Summary of Findings* (Internal report for The Salvation Army Australia). Unpublished

² The Salvation Army Australia. (2020). *TSA Client Profiles Report (March 2020)*. Unpublished.

The Salvation Army Australia. (2020). *TSA SHS Extracts Statistical Client Profiles Report (February to April 2020)*. Unpublished.

As discussed in our submission to the Senate inquiry into lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20³, these increases have followed high demand as a result of the recent bushfires and the subsequent prevalence of violence experienced after every disaster. The short-term boost in COVID-19 assistance and services under the existing Plan will not be enough to keep people, especially women and children, safe following the pandemic. The human cost to women and young people during the pandemic has been significant. Family violence has been exacerbated by job losses, financial insecurity and increased trauma particularly within vulnerable populations. Without viable alternatives, many women have no option but to remain in dangerous and potentially life-threatening situations.

We expect that this will only increase with the easing of restrictions, leading to further increases in demand for family violence services and specific trauma-informed support for children staying in temporary accommodation with their parent. Key domestic violence experts have warned that the impacts of COVID-19 on women's safety are only just beginning to be felt and will compound the risks women face from abusive partners or family members for months and potentially years after isolation measures are lifted.⁴

The Salvation Army welcomed the additional Commonwealth funding of \$320,000 for the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes program but more will be needed to help women and children feel safe in their homes. It should remain a national priority to continue expanding investment in women and children's safety through risk and safety assessments, security upgrades, education and support regarding the use of technology through programs like Keeping Women Safe in their Homes; to prevent homelessness for women and their children experiencing family violence.

3 The Salvation Army. (2020, June 19). *Senate Finance and Government Public Administration Committee Inquiry into lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20*. <https://www.apf.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=9d3d7d57-3ed4-4516-aae2-e37db7fe098f&subId=681702>

4 Australian Women Against Violence Alliance. (2020, June 19). Experts warn COVID-19 impacts on women's safety just beginning. <https://awava.org.au/2020/05/08/media-release/2020-media-release/experts-warn-covid-19-impacts-on-womens-safety-just-beginning>

Safer in the Home – Living free from violence is everyone’s right

What is the Safer in the Home program

The Salvation Army’s Safer in the Home (**SITH**) program is designed to help women and children experiencing family violence to stay safely in their family homes or a home of their choice. The program recognises that it should always be the woman’s right to remain at home and connected to their support systems, and the importance for children to remain at their school, with their friends and in their neighbourhood. The program aims to minimise the social and economic consequences of escaping family violence, such as homelessness, disconnection from community, unemployment and disruption to children’s schooling that may be caused by being forced to leave the family home.

Who can use Safer in the Home program

SITH is available to any woman living in Australia who is experiencing low risk family violence and wants to remain in their homes after separation from their abuser. This includes women with or without children.

The service is confidential, free and sensitive to the needs of women from all cultural backgrounds and communities. The program may also be a more appropriate choice for Aboriginal women who want to stay connected to their family and land, women with disabilities who have previously had their houses upgraded to meet their needs, and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds wishing to stay in their communities.

What can Safer in the Home provide

Safer in the Home is designed to provide specialist support as well as basic security upgrades to homes. This could be as simple as changing locks, installing security or sensor lights or improving external visibility through trimming trees, bushes and scanning mobile phones for potential security breaches. A comprehensive property assessment can also be provided for all cases.

In addition, the pandemic served to highlight the urgent need for more affordable housing and for pathways into private rentals for victim-survivors. The Salvation Army is concerned about the potential risk to women and children where they are placed in accommodation that may be being used for crisis accommodation for exiting prisoners, homelessness services and other key providers. The issue is compounded by the chronic lack of specialised housing first and emergency housing responses for each cohort specifically.

Even before COVID-19, domestic and family violence was a leading cause of homelessness for women and children; now with job losses, the risks of victim-survivors facing financial insecurity and homelessness are even greater. The consequences of this are that women with no real choice lose agency and may be forced to remain in dangerous situations where they would otherwise leave if there was a viable alternative.

To meet immediate needs, increased funding, access to brokerage funds and adequate income support rates (including family support benefits) and crisis payments will avoid trapping women and children escaping family violence in a cycle of poverty and homelessness.⁵ Whilst the additional brokerage funding provided by some states due to the COVID-19 pandemic was welcomed and needed, The Salvation Army's experience before COVID-19 was that in many cases brokerage funding was exhausted within nine months of receipt. Private rental assistance was also depleted within six months of receipt.

COVID-19 has elevated existing issues and complexities for the family violence workforce working in remote regions, particularly delivering outreach case management services where unreliable internet connections inhibited the safety of remote workers. The pandemic identified the urgent need for additional remote frontline workforce staff, business continuity plans to manage unexpected events, improved governance to share knowledge and resources across services, and immediate access to reliable internet connections and computers, laptops and phones to facilitate working from home. COVID-19 also highlighted the need for continued investment in vicarious trauma support for the family violence workforce, particularly those with high caseloads. Some practitioners have identified that working from home 'wreaked havoc' on their boundaries and mental health due to the absence of psychological support from the broader workforce and work colleagues. These practitioners feared that this lack of boundaries would negatively affect not only themselves but the people they live with.

Recommendations – Overarching

- All Australian governments work to increase funding to frontline family violence services and flexibility in the use of those funds (especially in relation to brokerage funds) to allow for services to tailor supports to meet the specific needs of victim-survivors and their children.
- All Australian governments work to increase accessibility to exit housing, affordable housing and pathways into private rentals for victim-survivors who have left their homes due to family violence.
- The Commonwealth Government increase income support rates (including JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and family support benefits) and crisis payments to avoid victim-survivors being trapped in cycles of poverty and homelessness.
- The Commonwealth Government increase funding available under the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes program to allow women experiencing a medium risk of family violence to have access to the program and provision of case management.
- All Australian governments immediately increase funding to provide additional vicarious trauma support to a family violence workforce working from home.

⁵ Note, although the Coronavirus Supplement substantially increases income support in the short term, uncertainty around access to adequate income markedly increases the vulnerability of women and children to poverty and homelessness.

Service system reform

Social housing and brokerage funds

Sufficient social housing is a critical part of a comprehensive plan to enable victim-survivors' transition to safe accommodation. As the demand for long-term affordable housing is not being met nationally, there is inadequate stock of exit housing, whether through social housing or increased access to private rental assistance initiatives, for families who have left their homes due to violence. The Salvation Army recommends consideration of an increased stock of long-term self-contained apartments for single women and women over the age of 55 escaping violence. Current market prices mean private rentals are inaccessible for these groups of women.

A limited stock of social housing also compounds the already high costs associated with leaving the family home. Additional investment in the provision and access to brokerage funding will assist many victim-survivors meet the initial costs associated with entering a new lease, including bond, rent in advance and utility connection costs. There is also a large gap in funding for transitional accommodation (not emergency) from a hotel to a home. Transitional arrangements provide an opportunity for women and their children to settle and make decisions about their life going forward and are less likely to cycle through the process of returning to the abuser due to poverty and housing shortages. Rapid response systems in Tasmania provide emergency housing options that have the potential to roll into longer term rental agreements for those escaping violence.

Recommendation – Social housing and brokerage funds

- The Commonwealth Government work with state and territory governments, business and the not-for-profit sector to provide the environment, for shared funding, co-investment and incentives, required to grow social housing stock for both victim-survivors and perpetrators.
- The Commonwealth Government work with state and territory governments to invest in increased stock of long-term self-contained apartments for single women and women over the age of 55 escaping violence. Current market prices mean private rentals are inaccessible for these groups of women.
- All Australian governments invest in the renewal, refurbishment and significant upgrades of existing public and social housing stock to extend the useful life of the housing assets.

Access to services

Women on temporary visas or in forced marriages

The Salvation Army supports many women who have no access to income. With limited and inconsistent access to income support many women on temporary visas are turned away from accommodation services and are forced to remain in violent relationships. Others rely solely on support from The Salvation Army for ongoing living costs including food, bills, and legal and interpreting services. In some cases, we have supported women living in these circumstances for many years.

A targeted evidence-based service response is also critical for those at risk of or facing forced marriage, who face high risks of ostracism, violent retaliation, and even death if they refuse to go through with a marriage.⁶ Australia's current response to forced marriage is embedded within the trafficking and slavery framework, which requires cooperation with the Australian Federal Police to access long-term support and protection. Evidence from the Commonwealth Government's Support for Trafficked People Program indicates that many young women exit the program prematurely because they see forced marriage as preferable to prosecuting their parents. Additionally, progress has stalled on the government's commitment to introduce forced marriage protection orders, which would shift the focus away from prosecution to prevention and education, which is supported by the international evidence.⁷

Children and adolescents

The high number of single parents with children requiring Salvation Army assistance is of ongoing concern as it is widely accepted that exposure to family violence increases children's long-term risk of mental health issues, behavioural and learning difficulties, and placements into out-of-home care.⁸ Highlighting the need for children and adolescent specialists in national partnership agreements between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments would allow for them to be embedded in family violence services.

The Salvation Army's experience is that current access to case management for children and young people is either not available or, due to a lack of trauma-informed specialists, long wait lists exist (sometimes up to a year in advance). The Salvation Army supports expansion of adolescent violence services that respond to violence both as a victim-survivor of family violence or as perpetrators of violence either within the home or in intimate relationships. Case management should also be expanded to address age-informed attitudes towards gender and violence.

6 Richards, K. & Lyneham, S. (2014). Help-seeking strategies of victim/survivors of human trafficking involving partner migration. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, 468. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi468>

7 Vidal, L. (2017). Developing Innovative, Best Practice Solutions to Address Forced Marriage in Australia. *Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia*. <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellows/detail/4179/Laura+Vidal>

8 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2019). Specialist homelessness services annual report 2017–18. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2017-18/contents/client-groups-of-interest/clients-who-have-experienced-domestic-and-family-violence>

Families at high risk

There is currently a small government investment for families at high risk of violence to address family functioning, family dynamics and the role of all family members, including those with a disability. The Salvation Army would welcome opportunities for Functional Family Therapy (FFT) programs to be included within a therapeutic model of care as preventative measures to address conflict resolution and improve communication that engages and builds resilience within the family unit, not just with the individual.

Frontline staff not working in specialist family violence services.

The Salvation Army's Doorway hubs, which are located across the country, provide emergency relief with wraparound support and a 'one-stop shop' for people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. Given the strong and emerging link between family violence and homelessness, all staff working in emergency relief services would benefit from the specialist family violence training that is currently only available to family violence support staff. This training would help them identify signs of family violence and understand how best to respond to victim-survivors, navigate the current support systems, and advocate for clients. In some cases, Doorways staff continue to provide families with intensive family violence support for extended periods of time.

Recommendation – Access to services

- The Commonwealth Government consider amending the *Migration Act (1958)* and the *Migration Regulations (1994)* to ensure that women on temporary visas and their dependents, who experience domestic, family and sexual violence, do not face visa cancellation and can access protections, services and justice.
- All Australian governments recognise forced marriage within family violence and child protection frameworks to facilitate the provision of adequate protection orders and investment in specialised service responses within existing family violence services.
- All Australian governments increase funding for adolescent family violence services and family violence funding agreements, to support child and adolescents either exposed to family violence or who have perpetrated violence.
- All Australian governments increase funding for prevention measures that focus on families at high risk of family violence.
- All Australian governments provide for specialist family violence training to be undertaken by staff working in emergency relief, financial counselling and other frontline services.

Coordinated approaches

Service sector standards and minimum qualifications

Establishing national standards for the family violence service sector and a governance structure to support its implementation will help facilitate coordinated service delivery approaches. This includes family violence services working with child and mental health specialists, the police, general practitioners, hospitals, maternity care, the education sector, legal aid, the courts, disability support services and perpetrators. Integrated service delivery allows for a holistic approach to case management and ensures communication and information sharing is open between all agencies and services. Integration streamlines and speeds up processes and referrals for caseworkers on behalf of victim-survivors and their children.

Establishment of service standards such as the code of practice developed by Domestic Violence Victoria⁹, business continuity plans linked with funding needs, evidence-based responses, outcome measurement frameworks, referral pathways and coordinated responses will go a long way to strengthening integrity in the sector. Accreditation of family violence services against a code of practice will also improve accountability to victim-survivors.

The Salvation Army strongly recommends a national family violence workforce development strategy that introduces minimum qualification and service standards. Any standards should articulate the capabilities and responsibilities required to ensure effective responses to those subject to, or perpetrating, violence and should apply to all those employed in the broad range of family violence roles and positions. Knowledge of legislative, policy and practice frameworks are paramount. The Australian Association of Social Workers' family violence capability framework recognises the need for effective culturally appropriate engagement, assessment and management of risk, including perpetrator accountability, and prioritising safety through effective multidisciplinary case management plans.¹⁰

Establishing qualification standards for the family violence workforce will enable services to implement a uniform approach to staff recruitment and retention, including remuneration. It will also facilitate capability benchmarking for those currently working within services or those interested in entering the family violence workforce.

9 Domestic Violence Victoria. (2020). *Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services for Victim-Survivors*. http://dvvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/INTERIM-FINAL_2020_-Code-of-Practice_DVvic.pdf

10 Australian Association of Social Workers. (2018). *AASW Family Violence Capability Framework*. <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/10951>.

Parenting support

The Salvation Army recommends future investment and research into integrated family violence, child and family and perpetrator services that improve support for parent-child relationships and children exposed to family violence.¹¹ Knowledgeable and resourced case workers can provide effective parenting support post family violence, noting that at times proactive follow up with clients is needed to facilitate family support.

The Salvation Army strongly advocates for continuation and expansion of the Commonwealth Government's Children and Parenting Support services (**CaPSS**). The Salvation Army's Men as Fathers program is one example of how CaPSS can offer best practice by addressing the specific needs of men in relation to their parenting relationships with their children.¹² In the program we deliver in Melton and Wyndham in Victoria, a parenting practitioner establishes a range of strategic partnerships within and across the two communities. These partnerships have seen an outstanding increase in participation from 51 men in 2016 to 236 in 2018-19. We have also seen a 120 per cent increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers across all our CaPSS programs. Fathers have participated in dad's playgroups, an online father support network, evidence-based parenting education sessions aimed at fathers, school holiday programs, and activities which connect them and their children to their community.

Jim* and Melanie's* Story

Melanie and Jim have two young children. They first started going to The Salvation Army CaPSS wanting to make some changes, learn more about child development, and add to the parenting strategies they were already using. A parenting support practitioner worked with both parents to identify the struggles that they were having, and with Jim to help him manage and communicate his emotions in a way that provided a positive role model for his children.

To support Jim build confidence in his own parenting, the parenting support practitioner referred him to our Men as Fathers program. Working individually with Jim allowed him to share information about his situation and for the practitioner to highlight his existing strengths.

After several Men as Fathers sessions Jim was communicating with Melanie more freely and was using stress-reducing techniques recommended by the program, as well as some he had found himself. Both Jim and Melanie reported that Jim was managing his anger better, having learnt how to communicate 'low level' emotions, and talking about rather than reacting to situations. Jim was a lot happier to spend time alone with his children, which he had not previously been comfortable doing, allowing him to be a more 'hands on' father.

**All names changed*

11 Victorian Auditor General's Office. (2020) *Managing Support and Safety Hubs* (Independent assurances report to Parliament 2019-2020). https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/20200527-Support-Safety-Hubs-report_0.pdf

12 The Salvation Army. (2020). Children and Parenting Support Service (CaPSS). <https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/sashes/programs/children-and-parenting-support-service-capss/>

Multi-agency responses

Further investment in integrated responses will need to address the lessons learnt from the Victorian Support and Safety Hub (Orange Door) approach that creates a multi-agency partnership for intake and referrals. A recent audit report of the Victorian model demonstrates the importance of coordinated access to services and case management to ensure direct funding and resources match demand and a collective understanding of the model across all services.¹³ Integrated models of care must also adopt a holistic approach to the management and treatment of issues relating to comorbid mental health and alcohol and other drugs for both victim-survivors and perpetrators.

The Salvation Army's experience with Orange Door is that the level of collaboration in addressing perpetrators behaviour and with parenting and children's programs varies across sites. Resources are also not sufficient to meet increasing demands and there are delays in accessing parent-child relationship support and perpetrator interventions. Our staff have identified that electronic access to Orange Door and increased resourcing to train and attract a workforce with multilingual skills and cultural ability is yet to be implemented.

A highly skilled workforce is needed to manage coordinated responses particularly for high risk cases. The Salvation Army acknowledges the development of the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (**FVISS**) and the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (**MARAM**) in Victoria, which importantly is supported by a suite of policy, practice tools, training, legislation, and formal reviews that aims to change both the practice and culture around how professionals and organisations respond to family violence.

An important feature of MARAM is that it applies an intersectional lens to support diversity and inclusion in family violence practice.¹⁴ We draw this example to the Committee's attention as an example of current best practice.

Working with police

Coordinated responses also benefit from investing in early intervention approaches that work with police and vulnerable families. Some victim-survivors do not feel safe about reporting to police but embedding family violence specialists within police units assists with recognition of gender-driven domestic and family violence. Specialists empower, advocate for and refer victim-survivors to services.

13 Victorian Auditor General's Office. (2020) Managing Support and Safety Hubs (Independent assurances report to Parliament 2019-2020). https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/20200527-Support-Safety-Hubs-report_0.pdf

14 Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor. (2019). *Report of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor - As at 1 November 2019*. <https://www.fvrim.vic.gov.au/report-family-violence-reform-implementation-monitor-1-november-2019/>

Resources should be made available for a national roll out of the Alexis Program, a family violence response model in Victoria that embeds family violence specialists within the police force and has been shown to reduce recidivism by up to 85 per cent.¹⁵ It should be noted that whilst the Alexis Program is achieving good outcomes, the program would further benefit from additional investment in case management for the perpetrator as well as the victim-survivor and their children.

The Alexis Program – a family violence response model

The Alexis family violence response model is a targeted approach to violence in ‘recidivist households’, that is, families that have had three or more police attendances for family violence in the preceding 12 months or where police assessed a possible likelihood of further violence. It seeks to create a multi-disciplinary integrated response team by embedding a specialist key worker with family violence expert knowledge within a targeted police family violence unit.

Through the Alexis Program, the specialist key worker aims to:

- Strengthen integration between police and services
- Reduce the incidences of police attendance where there is a history of recidivism
- Prevent escalation of risk to women and children by intervening early
- Promote successful and ongoing engagement in mainstream services.

An evaluation of the Alexis model by RMIT University in 2017 found that it resulted in an 85 per cent reduction in police callouts in the 12 months following exit from the program. The success of the Alexis Program can be attributed in part to the program’s role in providing case coordination support and service integration for families.

¹⁵ Harris, L., Powell, A. & Hamilton, G. (2017) *Alexis – Family Violence Response Model*.
https://www.sarmy.org.au/Global/SArmY/Social/vsppu/Resources/SALV0006_Alexis%20Report_Online.pdf

Financial counselling and empowerment

The Salvation Army's Moneycare program provides free access to qualified financial counsellors who can help with crisis intervention and financial resilience services. Moneycare frontline staff have identified that they are struggling with demand, and in some cases are 'first responders' to victim-survivors experiencing financial abuse. For this reason, it is critical that financial counsellors are also included in coordinated family violence responses.

The Salvation Army advocates strongly for improved education around financial literacy and financial abuse. In many cases, victims-survivors are running households with minimal funds as perpetrators direct all income for personal use, attach all bills, purchases and rental contracts to the victim-survivor's name and acquire significant debt, making it more difficult for the victim-survivor and her children to escape violence. We have also assisted clients who have incurred Centrelink debt through incorrect reporting of income or coercive action by their ex-partner.

Lucy's* Story

In September 2017, Lucy* lodged a request for a review of a Centrelink decision while working with a financial counsellor from the Salvation Army's Moneycare program. Centrelink had advised that she owed \$19,035.84 due to incorrect reporting of her ex-partner's income. Lucy told us that her ex-partner had rarely contributed to household expenses and would tell her how much income to report to Centrelink, refused to let her see any payslips, and became abusive when challenged.

Lucy did not dispute the debt but requested a waiver under special circumstances on the grounds of domestic violence. Centrelink refused this request, stating that:

- Lucy remained responsible for the debt, as the debt was not caused solely by the department's error and therefore cannot be considered special circumstances.
- Centrelink's records did not indicate that she had raised the issue of domestic violence with the department or had spoken with the department social worker.
- No evidence was provided to suggest she raised this concern elsewhere, for example, with the police, or her general practitioner, within the debt period.
- Advice also stated a debt may only be waived if there are special circumstances, and the circumstances need to be sufficiently unusual or uncommon as to be termed special.

Lucy sought a review from the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (**AAT**) who directed Centrelink to temporarily defer the debt for six months but did not reverse the decision not to waive the debt. The AAT found they could not reach a conclusion that she did not knowingly misrepresent her combined financial circumstance to Centrelink.

Despite the evidence around the barriers to disclosing family violence, Lucy was refused relief because she did not disclose her experience in the way the system expected her to.

**Name changed*

Women and girls facing forced marriage

Australia's response to forced marriage is embedded within the Commonwealth Government's criminal justice response to human trafficking and modern slavery. The Australian Federal Police is responsible for handling referrals, investigating complaints and admitting victims-survivors onto the government's support program. Despite a pilot project extending the amount of time a person can remain on this program without making a formal statement to police, the outcome remains the same: women and girls must cooperate in the potential prosecution of their families in order to receive long-term support. As stated above, our experience is that many are choosing to exit the program, which means that government policy may be leading young women into forced marriages.

Whilst forced marriage is a serious crime, it is something that happens in the home and community and is often first reported to a school counsellor, health professional or family violence service provider rather than the police. One of the key problems with the federalised response to this problem is that the people most likely to encounter a potential or realised forced marriage, are the least trained and prepared to deal with it. With some emerging exceptions like Victoria, which has already recognised forced marriage as a form of family violence, few states are prepared to respond. There is no nationally consistent, state-based framework to bring local actors together to coordinate and streamline the response.

The result is that many forced marriages that could be prevented are proceeding, which has significant impacts on girls' education, health and livelihoods. The Salvation Army has long recommended that Australia take a different, more evidence-based approach, and centralise the response to forced marriage under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. Doing so would harness the knowledge and networks of local actors to respond to young women in danger. It would prioritise protection over prosecution, which remains extremely low and lacks evidence, and, where possible, promotes family preservation, which is what our clients tell us they want most.

The Salvation Army recommends the government develop a central point of coordination for government and the community sector in the form of a forced marriage unit, such as the one operated in the United Kingdom. There is substantial evidence that such a model has been quite successful in both preventing and redressing forced marriage.¹⁶ This unit should perform the key functions of a one-stop shop to connect victim-survivors to support services and government agencies, provide assistance for Australians who have been taken overseas to be married against their will, and undertake national data collection, evaluation and reporting.

16 Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (2018). *Issues Paper: Forced Marriage and Family Violence*. <https://www.goodshp.org.au/media/2151/issues-paper-forced-marriage-final-20180911.pdf>

Legal support for victim-survivors

The recent review by the Australian Law Reform Commission identified that family violence and abuse is a sustained and growing issue for the family courts.¹⁷ Whilst The Salvation Army does not provide specialised services within the court system, we often come alongside victim-survivors as they interact with the system. We commend this report to the Committee.

Our experience is that flexible brokerage packages are often used to cover legal costs, displacing funds needed to help women transition into safe accommodation. During the 2019-20 financial year, 18 clients from Bayside Peninsula in Victoria accessed flexible support packages to a value of nearly \$62,000 to pay for legal fees relating to family violence.

Often the power imbalance within a relationship where family violence is present means that perpetrators control the finances of the victim-survivor. Consequently, when a victim-survivor interacts with the family law system there is significant financial disparity. In some cases, victim-survivors may not be eligible for Legal Aid, be 'conflicted out' by the other party accessing Legal Aid first or find the eligibility for Legal Aid too complex or difficult. In other instances, Legal Aid lawyers do not have sufficient resources to present the evidence in a way that could withstand privately funded lawyers casting aspersions on the truth of claims of family violence. We have also experienced instances of perpetrators locking the victim-survivor out of accessing community-based legal centres by booking more than one service at a time. Due to demand, many community legal centres only have capacity to provide advice rather than represent victim-survivors, forcing them to go into significant debt by accessing private lawyers.

Delays impact all participants in the family law system but for victim-survivors delays can mean that they settle for outcomes that are not safe or satisfactory. Some of the people we support have expressed that they feel they cannot move away or start the healing process because they are in 'limbo' and required to stay in their current location. There have been instances where our clients have cancelled the process of obtaining a restraining order because of the exhaustion and stress of waiting and so that they can move on with their lives.

The establishment of the National COVID List, including the introduction of risk screening and triage, provides valuable lessons for the legal system in how to streamline and prioritise family violence cases. The Salvation Army acknowledges that legislative reform to remove the presumption of shared parenting responsibilities where family violence is evident, will help remove opportunities for a perpetrator to further abuse and control the victim-survivor. Recent research by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (**ANROWS**) also identified a need to improve judicial officers' knowledge and understanding of perpetrator interventions as part of the judicial decision-making process.¹⁸

¹⁷ Australian Law Reform Commission. (2020). *Review of the family law system*. <https://www.alrc.gov.au/inquiry/review-of-the-family-law-system/>

¹⁸ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). *The views of Australian judicial officers on domestic and family violence perpetrator interventions* (Research to policy and practice, 13/2020). https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/08081802/ANROWS-Fitz-Gibbon_RtPP.pdf

Recommendations – Coordinated approaches

- All Australian governments establish national family violence sector service standards and governance arrangements that integrate family violence services with other key sectors and services, to inform continual improvement, systemic reform and social change.
- All Australian governments establish a national family violence workforce development strategy that includes a minimum qualification standard and legislative, policy and practice frameworks.
- All Australian governments provide adequate funding and resources for integrated service delivery approaches to match demand and develop a collective understanding and consistent implementation across all services, as evidenced in the audit of the Victorian Support and Safety Hub approach.
- All Australian governments work toward a national rollout of the Alexis Program.
- All Australian governments work with state and territory governments to establish integrated responses that reflect the Victorian Risk Assessment and Management Panel Program and information sharing across the police, child protection, family violence services and cross sector services including the health sector to monitor, manage and implement perpetrator accountability.
- The Commonwealth Government invest in a national rollout of The Salvation Army's Men as Fathers program to support Children and Parenting Support Services that focus on effective parenting support post family violence.
- The Commonwealth Government work with state and territory governments to improve education around financial literacy and financial abuse for women.
- The Commonwealth Government review social security law and the special circumstances provisions in section 1237AAD of the *Social Security Act 1991* (Cth) to allow for an evidence-informed response to debt accumulated due to family violence.
- The Commonwealth Government work with state and territory governments to create a forced marriage unit to connect victim-survivors to services and improve prevalence data to establish evidence-informed responses for those experiencing or escaping forced marriages.
- The Commonwealth Government work with state and territory governments to support ongoing access to formal family violence assistance for the victim-survivor once engagement with the family law system has ceased to facilitate safer parenting orders, financial equity and keeping perpetrators accountable.
- The Commonwealth Government work with state and territory governments to address the presumption of shared parenting responsibilities where family violence is evident, to remove opportunities for a perpetrator to further abuse and control the victim-survivor.

Societal drivers of family and domestic violence against women

There are many factors that contribute to violence against women, but a chief factor is attitudes towards women and family, domestic and sexual violence more generally. Importantly, the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (**NCAS**) highlights that 'violence supportive attitudes' such as excusing perpetrators, minimising violence against women and mistrusting women's reports of violence can influence social norms and expectations.¹⁹

The Salvation Army's experience is that there is still confusion and uncertainty amongst the general community on how best to respond to family violence when they observe it, in particular when there is non-physical violence, of how police will respond to suspected family violence and the safety of children and adolescents in these cases. Some of our clients have identified that whilst nationwide advertisement on family violence is present, many victim-survivors do not know what services were available to them; how to access them and breaches of intervention orders appear to be treated with a lesser penalty.

Given how very influential community leaders and public reporting of gendered family violence can be, we ask that the impact on victim-survivors and perpetrator accountability be front of mind in all communications. We also advocate that every individual in the Australian community consider ourselves as active bystanders and support community-based violence prevention.

Recommendations – Community-based violence prevention

- That all Australian governments continue to invest in and prioritise prevention, early intervention and advocacy campaigns to change community attitudes and underlying societal drivers of family violence.
- That all Australian governments develop education campaigns in relation to active bystander interventions as a community preventative measure.

¹⁹ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2018). *Are We There Yet? Australians' attitudes towards violence against women & gender equity* (Summary findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey). https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/05051806/300419_NCAS_Summary_Report.pdf

Experiences of women and their children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may not seek help or report violence because they fear isolation from community and family connections, racism and lack of understanding from support services in their region.

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women often live in tight knit communities, the whole community can be affected by family violence and a shared sense of shame can reinforce the unspoken rule to keep silent, especially within the historical context of white settlement and colonisation and the continuing impacts of loss of traditional roles and status within communities.²⁰ Others may have to leave the community and their spiritual connections to the land, creating trauma for both women and their children. Due to this sense of loss from community, land and family, many women leave family violence services and return to unsafe and violent relationships.²¹

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have also mentioned to our staff that there is a lack of culturally appropriate family violence services that enable victim-survivors to safely disclose and build trust.

Women living in rural and regional areas

Smaller towns and less populated communities make disclosure more difficult and unsafe for women and children. A lack of support and services also elevates the risk for women and children. For those who escape violence, many must travel greater distances away from their social supports, including friends, other family members, jobs, children's schools, sporting activities and pets. Our experience is also that safe accommodation and family violence services in rural and regional towns often do not have confidential addresses, thus increasing safety risks to victim-survivors and their children.

Another issue that impacts women living in rural and regional areas particularly, although it can impact on all women irrespective of location, is that women are allocated to refuge accommodation on the basis of vacancies. Sometimes this means that women and children can be relocated far from their place of work and schooling. This can, in turn, constrain exit pathways for women who cannot return to their preferred location, whether due to the expense of relocation or the absence of suitable accommodation. This speaks to the need for accommodation options to be flexible to the needs of victim-survivors.

20 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service. (2017). *Strong Families, Safe Kids: Family violence response and prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families* (Policy paper).

http://www.natsils.org.au/portals/natsils/Strong_Families_Safe_Kids-Sep_2017.pdf?ver=2017-10-18-111427-643

21 Ibid.

Culturally and linguistically diverse women

Many culturally and linguistically diverse (**CALD**) women and children remain isolated within Australian communities due to a lack of community connection outside of their culture and language barriers. CALD victim-survivors are sometimes not aware of the fact that they are in abusive relationships and those that do may be threatened daily with deportation by the perpetrator. The situation becomes more difficult for CALD women as many are told they will also not be able to take their children with them.

The Salvation Army has worked intensively with CALD women to facilitate access to services and support. Many do not know their legal rights in Australia and face significant barriers in engaging with support services, especially if they are not provided access to interpreting services. Our experience has identified that in some cases children are asked to translate advice to their mothers, increasing trauma for both the child and the parent-child relationship. This issue is elevated in regional areas with less services.

LGBTQI women

The Salvation Army has significantly invested in providing specialist training and embedding inclusive practice to ensure equity of access, service and experience for women who identify as LGBTQI. For our services in Victoria, this includes working to achieve Rainbow Tick accreditation via Rainbow Health Victoria. The experience of ensuring an inclusive practice has reinforced that deliberate and sensitive effort is needed to ensure that services are welcoming and accessible for women who identify as LGBTQI.

Our experience also identifies a need to increase support services for LGBTQI women experiencing family violence, including housing options and improved access to frontline specialist knowledge and understanding of the unique challenges faced by this group of women.

Women on temporary visas

There is a large cohort of women on temporary visas accessing our services. No access to government support and ineligibility to other support services means that many women with no income turn to our services to access food, advice and accommodation. The Salvation Army's Safe House is one of the few services that enables access to those on temporary visas.

Women and girls facing forced marriage

From our experience, a significant majority of women in forced marriages are unaware of the existence of family violence services. In addition there are many barriers to reporting violence including lack of family ties in Australia, social isolation, a sense of obligation to stay in an abusive relationship, cultural shame and stigmatisation, and pressure to conform to cultural traditions of male dominance. Victim-survivors are fearful of the retribution they could face from their husbands if they contact police and many are threatened with deportation and separation from their children. It is also important that the broader service system, including police and first responders are equipped to identify indicators of forced marriage and respond appropriately.²²

Forced marriage

Police in Sydney contacted The Salvation Army after a 19-year-old woman reported to them that she could not return home as she was being forced to be married. The police were unaware of the federal framework and had limited knowledge of how to respond to the young woman's unique circumstances. Officers contacted a chaplain of The Salvation Army with whom they had a relationship, who informed them of The Salvation Army's anti-slavery programs and assisted to make a referral to the Freedom Partnership. Had the officers not had the relationship with that chaplain, the victim may not have been linked with appropriate care.

In another case, child protection authorities became involved with a family where the mother was arranging the forced marriage of her two daughters overseas. Having received no information or training on forced marriage, the primary worker was unsure of what to do, how to respond and what other agencies were appropriate to include in the case response.

Fortunately, the worker's colleague had just attended a community presentation on forced marriage given by The Salvation Army and provided him with relevant contact information. Subsequently, authorities intervened to safeguard the girls from being taken overseas for marriage, however, as they were unwilling to cooperate with federal police, the girls were unable to access the Support Program and were referred to an alternative service provider. Had the worker's colleague not attended the presentation on forced marriage, this case could have taken a very different direction.

22 Vidal, L. (2019). Opportunities to respond to forced marriage within Australia's domestic and family violence framework. Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand. https://goodshep.org.au/media/2423/gsanx-issues-paper_opportunities-to-respond-to-forced-marriage-within-australias-domestic-and-family-violence-framework.pdf

Women with disability

Our experience has shown that women with disability face specific challenges that are not always addressed in mainstream services. There is extensive evidence that women with disability are more vulnerable to family violence and face greater barriers to accessing justice.²³ From a service perspective, there are additional needs that need to be factored in to the physical environment, community aspects and support offering to properly accommodate physical, sensory, psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. It is also critical to note that 'women with disabilities' is a broad group of women who must be afforded the dignity of appropriate individualised support. Additional tailored accommodation options are required to meet the immediate needs and the broad issues around availability of accessible housing stock need to be addressed to create exit pathways for women with disability.

Women with pets

It is important that the Committee understands the experiences of women escaping violence with pets. In many cases, pets may be a woman's only or closest friend and companion. Additionally, the threat of violence against a pet if a woman seeks help is very real. Accommodation options with support services available that also allow pets are few and the broader issue of a shortage of appropriate housing options further limits the few available exit pathways. Our service delivery experience has emphasised the importance of pets in providing ongoing comfort and security. There is also anecdotal evidence of the positive impact of pets on mental health. We work with other providers to find solutions for women who present with pets, but the lack of appropriate options is an issue that the sector faces.

Emma's Story*

Emma entered a Salvation Army service after spending several months living rough. She was a victim-survivor of domestic violence who ran from her home with her only friend, her dog Tasha*. During the time Emma was living rough Tasha continued by her side day and night. Tasha not only acted in the capacity of friend and confidant but as protector and guard at night.

When Emma first entered the service, we were not able to immediately find appropriate accommodation, so we established a temporary arrangement whereby Tasha stayed with the RSPCA's boarding program while Emma stayed with our service. This created a huge amount of stress and anxiety for Emma. So much so that she chose to leave the service in the middle of the night to sleep outside of the RSPCA and then return in the morning. As soon as possible we were able to negotiate with a community housing provider to provide accommodation for both Emma and Tasha, but the stress and anxiety of the separation would not have been necessary if there were sufficient appropriate housing options.

23 Maher, J. et al. (2018). *Women, disability and violence: Barriers to accessing justice: Final report* (Research report). <https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/19024604/Maher-et-al-Horizons-Research-Report-1.pdf>

See also extensive work done by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

**all names changed*

Perpetrator accountability

Perpetrator intervention programs

Efficacy

The Salvation Army experience identifies that there are not many intervention options for perpetrators. The Salvation Army strongly advocates for increased government investment in a range of new men's perpetrator programs and trials to address prevention, early intervention and post-violence interventions. A continuum of perpetrator intervention options must also include outreach programs, including support and case management, for perpetrators and therapeutic counselling of perpetrators whilst in prison and when exiting prison. The Salvation Army is currently working with No to Violence to deliver by December 2020 a model of care that includes perpetrator programs.

Additional funding and resourcing are also needed to diversify and expand other options. Funding agreements currently do not provide adequate funding for the case management of perpetrators, or in some cases, do not fund it at all, which often results in recidivism. We strongly recommend that case management of perpetrators be coupled with access to emergency accommodation, so victims-survivors have the option to safely remain in the home.

Specialist resources are needed to facilitate group theory and practice sessions with the perpetrator and acknowledge the differences in men's behavioural needs between preventative and post-violence programs, as well as learned behaviour in cases where perpetrators have been child victims of family violence themselves.

Our experience is that there is a need for individual pre-group case management to mitigate the risk of perpetrators using group sessions to further abuse their ex-partner. In these cases, individuation programs that focus on understanding and healing attachment issues with their partner and children can help them to a point of being group ready. The Salvation Army Doorway services also help men access free counselling services in areas where there is a lack of access to family violence men's services or in cases where men have experienced further harm and trauma from other men in group behavioural sessions.

The Salvation Army's Start Today Again program²⁴ is a research-based practitioner training course aimed at helping men better understand the effects of their behaviour on their child's development and suggesting ways in which changes in parenting relationships can be made. The research revealed that there are mixed views on the effectiveness of perpetrator interventions in family violence matters, with case workers reporting having little access to

24 The Salvation Army Australia. (2020). Start Today Again. <http://salvationarmy.org.au/starttodayagain>

information about perpetrator interventions and a lack of knowledge about the availability and nature of perpetrator program referral options.

Further, while the effects of COVID-19 are still being realised, we anticipate that there will be significant need for voluntary programs for men who either have used violence for the first time or have identified that they are at risk of using violence.

Opportunities for perpetrator accountability

There remains limited research into perpetrators of family violence in Australia. Studies require larger populations, pilots of the programs highlighted in this submission and program comparisons over time, to better understand how best to develop sound intervention programs.

The Salvation Army strongly recommends a significant increase in government investment into perpetrator intervention and research, including in responses that remove the perpetrator rather than the victim-survivor from the home, noting that additional financial support is required for the victim-survivor and the children due to loss of income to meet rent or mortgage repayments.

Lessons can be learnt from a recent evaluation of 864 men in New Zealand's Gandhi Nivas program that offers emergency accommodation and free counselling to men, with almost 60 per cent of perpetrators who accessed the service not reoffending.²⁵

More perpetrator parenting programs are also needed that focus on, and use the dialogue of, children rather than the adult within family violence, and highlight the developmental damage to the child from violence. The Salvation Army's Men as Fathers Program as described on page 11 acts as a powerful way to engage, and change the behaviours of, perpetrators and develop skills on how to become good fathers.

Coercive control

Following the tragic murder of Hannah Clarke and her children in February 2020, there has been a growing push to criminalise 'coercive control' as a form of family violence. We note that the evidence is mixed on this²⁶ and that further research is required to inform whether this would yield the anticipated outcome of reducing violence and increasing perpetrator accountability.

25 Morgan, M., Jennens, E., Coombes, L., Connor, G. & Denne, S. (2020). Gandhi Nivas 2014-2019: A statistical description of client demographics and involvement in Police recorded Family Violence occurrences. Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand, Massey University.

26 Walklate, S. & Fitz-Gibbon, K. (2019). The Criminalisation of Coercive Control: The Power of Law? *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 8(4), 94-108, <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcsd.v8i4.1205>

'Coercion' is already captured under the definition of family violence under Queensland law.²⁷ It is therefore worth considering why this was not sufficient to protect Hannah and her children, the potential value of criminalising 'coercive control', where it is not yet included in family law and what would be needed to support this measure so that it better protects women. Research from the Australian Institute of Criminology has shown that many women simply do not seek help from police because of mistrust or an ineffective response when they initially sought help.²⁸ Of utmost importance, is the need to ask women themselves what they need to be safe. We reiterate the importance of hearing directly from victim-survivors and the need for additional direct research with women and victims-survivors of family violence.

Recommendation – Perpetrator accountability

- The Commonwealth Government significantly increase funding for perpetrator intervention and research.
- The Commonwealth Government invest in a range of new perpetrator intervention programs, including prevention, early intervention, parenting and outreach programs and programs for perpetrators whilst in prison and when exiting prison.
- The Commonwealth Government work with state and territory governments, and those with lived experience, to review existing challenges and the impact of criminalising coercive and controlling behaviour by a perpetrator.

Conclusion

The Salvation Army again thanks the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs for the opportunity to provide evidence to this important Inquiry. The eradication of family, domestic and sexual violence is critically important to The Salvation Army in Australia and across the world. We believe it can be achieved through complementary efforts to address the societal drivers of violence, provide appropriate housing solutions and coordinate approaches to family violence so they are tailored to the individual needs of victim-survivors.

We are grateful for the efforts of the Committee in examining and drawing attention to this critical issue. If there is any way, we can be of help to the Committee The Salvation Army would be very happy to assist.

²⁷ *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012* (Qld) Div 2 8(1)(e). <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/2017-05-30/act-2012-005>

²⁸ Richards, K. and Lyneham, S. (2014). Help-seeking strategies of victim/survivors of human trafficking involving partner migration. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, 468, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi468>

About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in 128 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia has a national operating budget of over \$700 million and provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country. Programs include:

- Financial inclusion, including emergency relief
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services
- Modern slavery

As a mission driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further Information

The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance.

Further information can be sought from Major Paul Hateley, National Head of Government Relations, at [REDACTED].