

SAFER LIVES
SAFER COMMUNITIES

Brisbane Domestic Violence Service

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Safer Lives Mobile Service
24 hours | 7 days

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To Whom It May Concern

1. Explanation of involvement in Vulnerable Person's Units (VPU) and the benefits of such a model for how police can effectively respond to domestic and family violence;

Micah Projects' Brisbane Domestic Violence Service (BDVS) has an embedded specialist domestic violence advocate within each of the Vulnerable Persons Units (VPU) located in the North and South of Brisbane. Their role is to assist VPU with linking aggrieveds in domestic violence situations into service that can support them with their ongoing risk and safety needs. This may also include responding to a crisis and ensuring that the aggrieved and children are in a place that is safe. A part of the embedded DFV advocate role is to co-respond with Queensland Police Service (QPS) officers to the homes or safe places of the aggrieved's after an incident. This ensures that the aggrieved has time and space to speak with QPS about any additional concerns they may have, as well as providing an opportunity to provide more information about domestic violence and available supports. This allows a face-to-face interaction for aggrieveds to see the QPS and support workers attempting to engage them with safety information and support. It allows the embedded worker to interact with aggrieveds at a critical opportunity to share information, safety plan and receive practical needs like a safe phone. This assists in building rapport with the embedded worker and with QPS, supporting future responses.

Another key aspect of the embedded worker's role is advocacy with QPS about the risk to the aggrieved and their children that may not have been identified. This is through case consultations and information sharing under the legislation from both the QPS and BDVS. This advocacy can also shed light on decisions that QPS has made that may have been misinformed or inappropriate responses to domestic violence, providing opportunities for learning and change. This advocacy may be as a part of a systems response to an aggrieved and their children but also from other teams within BDVS.

The benefit to this model is that it allows a wrap around service to aggrieved women and their children to gain access to services while still

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engaging with QPS. This model allows open conversations with QPS about their response to domestic violence and the follow up that may need to occur. This model ensures that where cases are considered high risk, the risk to an aggrieved has been assessed by a specialist domestic violence support worker as well as QPS. This can prevent misidentifications for aggrieved women as respondents and also allow QPS to have additional information about how a specialist would be interpreting what is occurring. The information sharing, when done under the legislation for safety and risk, does improve the approach of all services when attempting to assess the current risk to the aggrieved and their children. This can also be helpful when attempting to hold respondents accountable for criminal matters that may have occurred. The relationship between VPU and BDVS works together to ensure best practice for an aggrieved coming into contact with QPS. A benefit to QPS is that they do not need to take on a role that is outside their scope as well as allowing the support services to perform their role with the best information and access to informed QPS officers.

2. Observations about what police do well in responding to domestic and family violence, and what they don't do well, and what can be improved;

The VPUs generally have a vested interest in wanting to assist the aggrieved women as best they can within their role. This results in a better response and rapport with aggrieved women that have experienced or are experiencing ongoing domestic violence. The VPUs respect and work as a team to ensure the relationship with the embedded worker at BDVS is valued. The model of VPU to check each domestic violence occurrence, that QPS has attended or reported on, in the last 24 hours ensures that there is a second pair of eyes on QPS involvement with aggrieved women. This allows for missed information about risk and safety to be identified. It also allows QPS to pick up on patterns of behaviour and multiple calls for service. VPUs usually have a greater understanding of domestic violence and information sharing under the legislation.

QPS responses to domestic violence are inconsistent and lacking basic understanding of the complexities of this crime. QPS generally fail to see the risk to the aggrieved and the children on a regular basis. QPS responses are usually reactions to a 'one off' incident of domestic violence. This system usually fails to recognise a pattern of behaviour by a respondent. QPS lacks insight into how their system can assist aggrieved women and

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what their role in the situation can be. QPS will regularly give inconsistent or wrong information and advice to aggrieveds that are at risk. QPS will regularly misidentify the main aggressor in an incident and who is the person most in need of protection which leads to the misidentification of who is the aggrieved and who is the respondent. This demonstrates the lack of understanding of domestic violence and the cultural attitudes towards women within QPS. QPS will rarely ever admit if they have made a mistake or attempt to rectify this. QPS officers have a limited understanding of the process in place if they do make a mistake in order to rectify this. When QPS apply for a Domestic Violence Order (DVO) the officer needs to recognise and use the conditions of the order appropriately to mitigate risk. QPS rely on Magistrates to make a judgement call or for the aggrieved to go back to court and vary the order to get an appropriate order in place.

QPS have a limited knowledge of how to appropriately engage with aggrieveds that are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities. QPS relies heavily on external services to provide support for CALD and ATSI women and to advocate on their behalf. This leaves the response to the incident as incomplete and leaves these aggrieveds at risk. QPS have limited knowledge of how to identify and engage with aggrieveds that are highly traumatised. A significant amount of information is lost through poor communication styles and a failure to recognise signs of trauma.

Improvements need to be made in general understanding and knowledge of domestic violence. This would also include the QPS role when responding to the calls for service. This would lead to having consistent responses to aggrieveds, lessen the chance of misidentification, create more effective DVOs and lessen ongoing risk to aggrieved women. A culture of values within the QPS that aligns with best practice principals from domestic violence services would greatly improve the response from QPS to aggrieved women. Specifically, within the VPU an adequately staffed station with people who have a vested interest in domestic violence on an ongoing basis. This would support the greater QPS in working with complexities and picking up on missed risk. There needs to be more training in how QPS engage with CALD people through interpreters and Police Liaison Officers. This would benefit these communities and in turn, improve the QPS response to domestic violence. In addition to this, more training in how to identify and communicate effectively with people who have experienced trauma. QPS

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Brisbane
Domestic
Violence
Service

responses when the aggrieved has disclosed criminal offences, such as strangulation or sexual assault, to be followed up and the respondents charged with those offences rather than just a DVO being taken out. QPS recognising domestic violence as more of a criminal offence and seeking to charge respondents with more than just domestic violence offences, such as attempted murder. This will lead to respondent being held accountable for their actions rather than face civil court.

Yours sincerely,

Emma Wilson

