

Family Violence Integration Project

Eastern Community Legal Centre

Mid Term Report

February 2012

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Introduction

Commencing in February 2011, the Family Violence Integration Project is a partnership project led by Eastern Community Legal Centre, funded by the Legal Services Board. The Project is supported by a range of agencies involved in the Intervention Order Support Service at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court (RMC).

This is a mid-term report to the Legal Services Board on the project and its progress to date. Final reporting will take place on project completion in December 2012. The project is being independently evaluated. This report has been prepared by the evaluators.

Project Partners

The Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS) at Ringwood Magistrates' Court is provided by a partnership which includes the EACH Eastern Victims Assistance Program (EVAP), Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC), the Eastern Domestic Violence Service (EDVOS), Eastern Men's Behaviour Change Consortium (EMBCC), the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Family Violence Partnership (EMRFVP), the Ringwood Magistrates' Court, Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) and Victoria Police.

Project Background

The Intervention Order Support Service (IOSS) has been operating at the RMC since 2002, beginning with a partnership including the ECLC, VLA and EDVOS, and the support and cooperation of the Ringwood Magistrate's Court. This partnership has evolved since that time to include its eight current partner organisations / partnerships.

The Family Violence Integration Project was identified and developed by the IOSS Partnership and the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Family Violence Partnership. The process of considering and seeking an Intervention Order is a highly complex and challenging experience for victim/survivors (especially victims of family violence). There is, however, scope to make systemic and strategic improvements to this process through the partnership and collaboration of key agencies. The Family Violence Integration Project seeks to affect this change.

The IOSS partnership has worked together on other related projects, such as the production of *Steps 2 Safety*, a video explaining the Family Violence Intervention Order process.

Project Aim

The overarching aim of the Family Violence Integration Project is to improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence in a co-ordinated and integrated manner, with a focus on the partners working at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court. The project's vision, aim and goals are:

- Vision** To instil trust and confidence in the most vulnerable of victim/survivors that their safety and support needs will be upheld through their interaction with the legal components of the family violence system.
- Aim** To improve the response of legal and support services to victim/survivors of family violence in a co-ordinated and integrated manner, through the partnership and collaboration of key agencies working at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court (RMC).
- Goals**
- ◆ Improve the co-ordinated and integrated response for victim/survivors of family violence accessing the legal system.
 - ◆ Demonstrate a successful partnership model and a range of strategies that could be utilised and adopted in other regions.
 - ◆ Present key learnings and recommendations to be distributed and considered for wider community engagement work.

Activities

The activities planned for the project include:

- ◆ Consultation with agencies and past clients at the commencement and at key stages of the project, to inform project development and to develop a clear evidence base regarding effective strategies.
- ◆ Establishing improved co-ordinated responses for parties engaging with the legal components of the family violence systems, with an emphasis on victim/survivors of family violence.
- ◆ Utilising and expanding the existing partnerships of agencies currently delivering an Intervention Order Support Service at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court.
- ◆ Developing and implementing education and case co-ordination strategies to improve the pathway and experience of parties entering and exiting the court process.
- ◆ Ensuring that victim/survivors are well informed and able to access all of their entitlements through victims of crime support and compensation and other relevant programs.

Project management and resourcing

The Family Violence Integration Project is led and managed by the Eastern Community Legal Centre. The ECLC has engaged a FVIP Co-ordinator, whose role is to lead the development of the project, coordinate its implementation, facilitate communication between partners and ensure that the project aims are achieved within timelines. The FVIP Co-ordinator is also responsible for resourcing the evaluation of the project.

The FVIP Steering Group, with representation from the key agencies involved in the Intervention Order Support Service at the Ringwood Magistrate's Court, oversees and informs the progress of the project. Steering Group representatives ensure the support of their agencies for the project and work together to resolve systemic issues, identified through the project.

What has been done to date?

Project activity is reported against the project's objectives and planned activities.

Objective 1: Develop a clear evidence base regarding effective strategies for improved service

Activities	Progress
Collect data (initial, ongoing) that identifies the extent of service provision and the level of intersection.	At the commencement of the project, all direct and related agencies were consulted by the Project Co-ordinator to identify services provided and service intersections.
Conduct client and agency focus groups at the initial stage of the project and throughout to further understand the key issues and barriers for victims when engaged with legal and family violence interface.	<p>During the consultation phase of the project, people who had experienced family violence who had accessed the Ringwood Magistrates' Court and applied for an Intervention Order, or who had experienced family violence but had chosen not to apply for an Intervention Order were invited to participate in a consultation. Clients were provided with project information, ethical considerations in terms of participating in the research and a consent form. Consultation options included face-to-face interview, telephone interview, written survey or group discussion.</p> <p>Agencies were consulted through surveys and focus groups. All agencies involved in the Intervention Order Support Service Partnership were consulted. Other agencies external to this partnership but based in the region and with a direct or indirect interest and need to know about the IOSS were also consulted.</p>
Outcomes to date	<p>The <i>FVIP Consultation Report</i> (September, 2011) Based on an analysis of the feedback from victims/survivors and agencies, the report identified six key issues which limit the integration and effectiveness of the Intervention Order Support Services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to information • Limited support • Risks to safety and privacy • Limited legal response • System issues • Agency issues <p>The elements of an effective legal response were also identified from this research in terms of information, support, risks, legal response, systems and agencies.</p> <p>The report developed recommendations to address each issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the provision and accessibility of information about the IOSS at the RMC to services in the Eastern Region • Provide information in an accessible manner • Develop education/ information packages for workers/victims • Improve the relationships and collaboration between the IOSS agencies to increase the co-ordination of support at the RMC • Explore/implement risk assessment policies for services involved in

Objective 1: Develop a clear evidence base regarding effective strategies for improved service

Activities	Progress
	<p>the IOSS at RMC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the systems at the RMC for supporting victims of family violence who are feeling vulnerable • Explore and improve the access and provision of suitable legal information and advice • Explore opportunities and methods for advocating for an improved system for victims of family violence • Create regular opportunities for agencies involved in the IOSS to share information and knowledge <p>The FVIP Steering Group finalised and endorsed the recommendations and proposed actions of the FVIP Consultation Report for public distribution at its meeting in September, 2011. New actions have been integrated into the existing FVIP project plan.</p> <p><i>Indicator of success -> Key recommendations for action for improving service. This objective is on track and being met.</i></p>

Objective 2: Establish improved co-ordinated responses for parties (especially victim/survivors) engaging with the legal responses of the family violence system.

Activities	Progress
<p>Develop the Family Violence Integration Project Steering Group to oversee the development and implementation of the project.</p>	<p>The FVIP Steering Group was established at the outset of the project. This Steering Group is chaired by the CEO, ECLC. The FVIP Co-ordinator provides regular progress reports to the Steering Group. The Steering Group is actively involved in the oversight of the project. Membership of the group has expanded during the life of the project, as other agencies have identified the mutual benefit of their participation.</p> <p>In July the Steering Group established a Working Group model so that work on issues identified through the consultation phase could progress simultaneously and efficiently. The FVIP Co-ordinator is a member of each working group, records notes and undertakes the agreed tasks. The Steering Group establishes the brief for each Working Group and the groups report back to the Steering Group. Three Working Groups have been created: Limited Information and Support, Risks to Safety and Privacy and Systems Issues.</p> <p>A 'Partnership Analysis' was undertaken with the partner agencies, using a modified VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool. This was administered as an electronic survey, with additional questions included seeking partners' views on: What 'success' in this project would look like; changes that would be evident in the way organisations work together, what would be different for clients and what each agency could do to create the best chance of success.</p>

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Activities	Progress
<p>Develop and document clear understandings of the roles and responsibilities of all agencies involved in the Intervention Order Support Service at the Ringwood Magistrate's Court.</p>	<p>The <i>Intervention Order Support Service Guide</i> has been developed which documents the IOSS service, the FVIP, the roles of the partner agencies and information about court assistance and safety. Details on partner agencies includes their role, contact details, the organisation, the work they undertake in relation to family violence and the intervention order process and criteria for accessing their service. The IOSS Guide also includes copies of information available for clients, such as the 'Commonly Asked Questions.' The Guide is for agencies involved in the IOSS and other agencies needing this information.</p>
<p>Develop and implement combined training for relevant legal, agency and court staff.</p>	<p>Combined training for legal, agency and court staff is scheduled for March, 2012.</p>
<p>Outcomes to date</p>	<p>There has been considerable activity in relation to this objective and achievement of outcomes.</p> <p>The Partnership Analysis resulted in an overall score of 103.14/140 – 'A partnership based on genuine collaboration. The challenge is to maintain its impetus and build on the current success.' The highest score (17/20) was achieved in 'determining the need for the partnership', showing the level of clarity and agreement on the need for the partnership held by the partners. The lowest score (13.2/20) was for 'minimising the barriers to partnership', showing that there are still challenges in this area.</p> <p>The establishment of the FVIP Steering Group in itself is acknowledged by members as a significant outcome, providing the first forum for all these parties to meet around the common goal of better co-ordination and integration of family violence services and an improved response for victims/survivors of family violence.</p> <p>The Steering Group is working productively through a range of complex issues. The group has worked through the challenges typically facing a new partnership and is focused on planning and implementing collaborative action. There is a real momentum to the activity of the group, meetings are well-attended and the workload shared fairly across members. The FVIP Co-ordinator is a trusted resource for the group, and her role in supporting the project and undertaking key tasks is appreciated.</p> <p>Resource material and information produced through the working groups, under the auspice of the Steering Group include:</p>

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Activities	Progress
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IOSS Guide • Commonly Asked Questions for clients, distributed at the RMC • Results Letter, provided by the legal services at Court. <p>The issue of safety of victims / survivors whilst waiting at court is a key priority for the FVIP. The FVIP has achieved a number of significant outcomes in this area, through the Steering Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The establishment of the 'Protected Person's Space' at the Ringwood Magistrates' Court. This is a separate waiting area for applicants of Intervention Orders on Intervention Order Sitting days (Tuesdays and Fridays). Protocols have been developed for use of this space and are included in the IOSS Guide. Intervention order applicants are asked if they wish to use this space. Clients who choose to wait in the Protected Persons Space are registered and monitored to enhance their safety. On non-sitting days, this space can be used by vulnerable court users. The Protected Persons Space at the Ringwood Magistrate's Court is thought to be one of the first designated waiting areas for family violence applicants. The Magistrates' Court has committed to funding the improvement of this space in order to make it more serviceable for applicants. There are toys available for children, information about services, monitoring by staff of those using the area. • Morning Co-ordination Meetings involving all agencies in the Intervention Order Support Services. These meetings take place on the morning of the two sitting days. This is an opportunity for court, legal and support services to review the list, identify any potential vulnerable cases or additional support needs and share required information between services. • Risk assessment / screening of all applicants. The registrar asks all Intervention Order applicants three key questions to identify immediate or on-going risks to their safety. Clients who report risks to their safety are referred to the appropriate services for a comprehensive risk assessment if required. • The court has run information sessions for Family Violence services. • The court has refined record keeping procedures to ensure that risk and safety information is maintained on client files. • An application stage information sheet has been developed. In general, processes that prioritise victim/survivor safety and

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Activities	Progress
	<p>provide a respectful environment have improved through the collaboration of FVIP members.</p> <p><i>Indicator of success -> Meaningful collaboration between agencies involved in the IOSS at the Ringwood Court. Collaboration between agencies and co-ordination of services for clients has improved significantly through the FVIP.</i></p>

Objective 3: Utilise and expand the existing partnerships of agencies currently delivering an IOSS at the Ringwood Magistrate's Court

Activities	Progress
<p>Invite additional key agencies to partner with the project.</p>	<p>The FVIP Steering Group has been expanded to include the following agencies / representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victoria Police Family Violence Community Liaison Officer • EACH Eastern Victims Assistance Program (EVAP) • Court Network • Eastern Men's Behaviour Change Consortium
<p>Establish and maintain communication with indirect stakeholders from across the legal and family violence sectors.</p>	<p>Communication with indirect stakeholders has occurred through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with services through the Eastern Region, including through the Eastern Metropolitan Region - Regional Family Violence Partnership • Information presented through the ECLC website and newsletter • Opportunity for continued consultation with stakeholders • Distribution of the IOSS Guide to stakeholders • FVIP Steering Group members informing other organisations and networks about the work of the FVIP project • Workshop presentation to the National Association of Community Legal Centres Conference, 2011 made by the FVIP Co-ordinator <p>In 2012, IOSS information sessions will be conducted for service providers from the legal and family violence sectors, as well as the broader community sector. The first of these is scheduled for March.</p>
<p>Outcomes to date</p>	<p>Key outcomes for this objective include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The expansion of the FVIP Steering Group to include additional members and • Distribution of the Intervention Order Support Service Guide to agencies across the region. <p><i>Indicator of success -> Increased interaction with additional/indirect stakeholders of the IOSS at Ringwood Court. The FVIP Steering Group has increased to include additional stakeholders. Information sessions to be conducted at the RMC will enhance links with additional and indirect stakeholders of the IOSS. This is in keeping with the project timelines.</i></p>

Objective 4 - Develop and implement education and case co-ordination strategies to improve the pathway and experience of parties entering and exiting the court system.

Activities	Progress
Undertake key education activities in the form of regular education sessions and developing more effective printed information.	Education sessions are planned for 2012, with the first scheduled in March. The IOSS Guide is an example of effective printed information.
Based on the recommendations established through Objective 1, implement improved case co-ordination strategies.	Activities to improve case co-ordination include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementation of the Morning Co-ordination Meeting between the IOSS members (the court, police, legal and family violence services) held on Intervention Order Sitting Days. • Development of a Referral List • The production of the IOSS Guide • An information sheet for applicants
Outcomes to date	<i>Indicator of success -> Outcomes of education and case co-ordination strategies. Case co-ordination strategies have improved through the FVIP. Work on case co-ordination is on-going. Broader education strategies are yet to be implemented.</i>

Objective 5: Ensure that victim/survivors are well informed and able to access all of their entitlements through victims of crime support and compensation and other relevant programs

Activities	Progress
Consider the extent of victims accessing VOC services and the possible explanations behind this.	Initial consultations with agencies sought information about the extent of victims' accessing Victims of Crime (VOC) support and reasons for low uptake of this service. The FVIP Co-ordinator has consulted the EACH Eastern Victims Assistance Program and the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program, Central Office. Victoria Police (participating in the project) now refer victims to VOC assistance when they are first in contact with the police in relation to the family violence matter. This has increased the number of applications for VOC assistance. Consultations identified that there is often a lag of 3 – 4 months after a family violence matter and intervention order proceedings, before a client is ready to seek victim of crime assistance. The FVIP is considering other / additional referral options which may better suit the needs of clients.
Identify and implement potential improvements to service response and opportunities for increased collaboration.	Information about victims' assistance options is provided to victims / survivors through written material distributed by the IOSS and/or by other agencies and reinforced through discussions with clients.

Objective 5: Ensure that victim/survivors are well informed and able to access all of their entitlements through victims of crime support and compensation and other relevant programs

Activities	Progress
	<p>The coordinated approach of the FVIP ensures that member agencies' knowledge of cases / services is current.</p> <p>Information to agencies / organisations about victims' assistance options has been provided through the IOSS Guide which outlines available support options and contact details. This information has been widely distributed across the region.</p> <p>The Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal Registrar is one of the speakers at the forthcoming IOSS information session and will be available to answer questions from participants.</p>
Outcomes to date	<p><i>Indicator of success -> Improved access to information for VOC entitlements. There is increased information available on victim of crime assistance options. There has been increased collaboration between the IOSS and the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program. This area will continue to be monitored and reviewed throughout 2012.</i></p>

Impact

At this mid-point in the Family Violence Integration Project, it is evident that a strong and well-functioning partnership has been formed. While the core group of these services has been working together since 2002, the FVIP has provided the platform for this group to work towards achieving its shared vision to 'instil trust and confidence in the most vulnerable of victim/survivors that their safety and support needs will be upheld through their interaction with the legal components of the family violence system.' The initial consultations found that both victims of family violence and family violence organisations did not trust or have confidence in the system. The partnership analysis, undertaken subsequently, showed that agencies' sense of trust in each other was improving. When asked 'What can your agency do to create the best chance of success for the FVIP?' survey respondents emphasised 'keeping networking high on the agenda', 'involvement', 'contribution', 'working in partnership' and 'supporting the FVIP'. The strong commitment of members to the FVIP Steering Group and the steady progress being made by this group is further evidence of enhanced trust and collaboration. The FVIP Co-ordinator has observed that the project's future-focussed vision has been important in establishing this common commitment. Over the next twelve months, there may be some challenges maintaining the level of commitment and performance, as some staff turnover of original participants can be anticipated.

Through the work of the FVIP Steering Group, with the support of the FVIP Coordinator, the project has achieved a number of significant improvements. The experience for clients of the court now includes routinely-provided information about the intervention application process and the court hearing. Most significantly, there is a separate and discreet waiting area for victims of family violence, which now means that applicants and respondents do not share the same waiting area. Feedback from victims indicated that sitting in a shared waiting area significantly increased the stressful nature of their experience in court: 'He sat himself in a seat where he had a direct view of me walking into the Court, the whole time I was at the counter I could feel him staring at me.' 'It's like putting a match to petrol, having

everybody sitting so close to each other.’¹ The establishment of the Protected Persons Space, one of the first of its kind in a Victorian magistrates’ court, makes a significant contribution to reducing the victims’ stress and enhancing the safety of victims’, children and support people (family, friends and professionals).

Court procedures are more pro-active and there is now a greater emphasis on client safety. Rather than waiting for clients to ask questions, information is provided to all and a short, succinct risk assessment or screening is undertaken with all clients. Services – EDVOS, legal services, the police and other agencies work together to address client issues and streamline the process. The Morning Co-ordination Meeting is an efficient process that allows all relevant agencies to case-conference, and more importantly, to provide a more responsive service for their client, particularly on their day in court when stress levels can be extreme. As one FVIP member observed in the Partnership Analysis survey: ‘None of this existed prior to the FVIP.’

Information sessions will be held at the Ringwood Magistrates’ Court for interested agencies in 2012. The purpose of these sessions is to inform staff working in relevant sectors about the intervention order process, the courts, the family violence and legal sectors and ways to achieve a responsive service system. This will enhance the work undertaken to date and broaden the system focus of the project activities. Feedback will be collected from participants to identify whether their knowledge and understanding improves as a result.

FVIP participants have observed that, at a procedural level, the project is essentially about adopting a continuous quality improvement focus. Improvements have been identified through the FVIP Steering Group, various sub-groups investigate each issue further, processes are trialled, refined and implemented. The FVIP has provided the motivation for this partnership to work collectively on their processes. Through doing so, the group has now ‘formed’ and is undertaking work which significantly improves the experience of court for victims/survivors of family violence and the responsiveness of legal and support services to their needs.

The project is well-on track to meeting each project objective and is keeping to its timelines. Work on system improvements, such as referral pathways, education, training and case co-ordination is planned for 2012. In parallel, continuous improvements will be identified on an on-going basis. The evaluation of the project will continue, with final reporting in 2012.

It is anticipated that the project will achieve its goals of improving the co-ordination and integrated response for victims/survivors of family violence accessing the legal system and demonstrate a successful partnership model and strategies that could be adopted in other regions. Learnings from the project will be identified through project monitoring and evaluation processes. They will be shared with the broader family violence / legal / community / health service sectors.

¹ FVIP Consultation Report, p. 6