

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria

Melbourne—Tuesday 6 August 2024

MEMBERS

Ella George – Chair

Annabelle Cleeland – Deputy Chair

Chris Couzens

Chris Crewther

Cindy McLeish

Meng Heang Tak

Jackson Taylor

WITNESSES *(via videoconference)*

Fiona Bilucaglia, Principal Practitioner, Family Violence, Mallee Sexual Assault Unit and Mallee Domestic Violence Service;

Cindy Cavanagh-Knez, Team Leader, Zoe Support Australia; and

Amy Cupper, Manager, Family Safety, Mallee Accommodation and Support Program.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. My name is Ella George, and I am the Chair of the Legislative Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee. We will now resume the public hearing of the Committee's Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria.

I begin this afternoon by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to their elders past, present and future.

I am joined today by my colleagues the Member for Bayswater Jackson Taylor, the Member for Clarinda Meng Heang Tak, the Member for Geelong Christine Couzens, the Member for Euroa and Deputy Chair Annabelle Cleeland, the Member for Mornington Chris Crewther and the Member for Eildon Cindy McLeish.

Thank you to the witnesses who have already appeared before the Committee this morning. We recognise that the evidence given to this inquiry may be distressing, and we urge people to reach out for support. You can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, 1800RESPECT or the Blue Knot helpline on 1300 657 380.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live. While all evidence taken by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege. Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of today's transcript to check, together with any questions taken on notice. Verified transcripts, responses to questions taken on notice and other documents provided during the hearing will be published on the Committee's website.

I am now pleased to welcome Amy Cupper, Manager of Family Safety, from the Mallee Accommodation and Support Program; Cindy Cavanagh-Knez, Team Leader, from Zoe Support Australia; and Fiona Bilucaglia, Principal Practitioner for Family Violence, Mallee Sexual Assault Unit and Mallee Domestic Violence Service. They are appearing via Zoom today. Thank you very much to these witnesses from the Mallee region for appearing and for making the time to be part of this inquiry. I now invite you to make an opening statement of around 5 to 10 minutes, and this will be followed by questions from members. Thank you.

Amy CUPPER: Does it matter which one of us goes first? We have not actually settled on that at all.

The CHAIR: That is fine, Amy. Take it away.

Amy CUPPER: I unmuted first so I will go first if that is all right with the other ladies. As I said before, my name is Amy Cupper. I am the Manager of Family Safety and Director of Practice for the Mallee Accommodation and Support Program, which we usually refer to as MASP. I would like to quickly take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land from which I am coming to you today. Up here it is the Latje Latje and Ngintait. I would also like to do a quick shout-out to their very near neighbours, the Barkindji, over the river.

For the past 30 years MASP has operated in the Mallee region of north-west Victoria and far-west New South Wales. Our overarching purpose is to empower our community to be free from homelessness, abuse, poverty and disadvantage. Today MASP is a diverse community services organisation employing more than 160 staff across a range of services, including homelessness support; children, youth and families; family safety; residential services; and social housing.

As the Manager of Family Safety I have a unique perspective of the issues posed by family violence across the Mallee catchment. I oversee MASP's operation within the Mallee Orange Door, where we are the largest partner agency and provide the Child First response. I also manage the Restoring Relationships program in partnership with Berry Street, which works with adolescents using violence in the family home. Finally, I am also responsible for the family safety housing support team, which is a family violence case management and housing response service covering the Wentworth and Balranald local government areas of New South Wales.

As I am sure members of this panel are aware, in 2023 the Mildura LGA had the second highest rate of reported family violence in the state. The Swan Hill LGA was ranked eighth, the Gannawarra LGA was ranked 29th and Buloke came in at 63rd. These numbers are all the more disturbing when you consider that the Mallee makes up just over 1% of the state's population in Victoria.

Acknowledging the topic of this inquiry, I will make comment on what I feel Victoria is doing well as a state and highlight barriers that prevent the effective collection of perpetrator data. Over the course of my career I have been privileged to have responded to family violence in the context of child safety and wellbeing both before and after the reforms driven by the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The MARAM framework and the legislation that underpins it have radically improved the way that the family violence and child welfare sectors are able to work together to increase safety for women and children but, more importantly, keep perpetrators visible and wherever possible hold them accountable for their behaviour.

In our work at the Orange Door we are now able to effectively identify perpetrators with a history of violence regardless of whether they have had contact with police. Similarly, the statewide Orange Door network now allows us to track perpetrators across catchments which, with a population that is quite transient, has been a game changer. More importantly, we are able to gather perpetrator information, including patterns of behaviour, quickly and easily from prescribed services to effectively increase safety for victims of violence.

MASP would like to highlight that in our region one of our greatest challenges we face in terms of gathering perpetrator data is the Murray River. When a perpetrator crosses the George Chaffey Bridge, our services have a limited ability to gather risk relevant information from our New South Wales colleagues. New South Wales police and family violence services are governed by the *Crime (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007*. While part 13A allows for perpetrator information to be shared across state borders in certain situations, frequently service providers are either unaware of these provisions or do not feel comfortable to share the same levels of detail that we enjoy in Victoria. This has had, and will likely continue to have, a negative impact on client outcomes. MASP as well as the other agencies representing the Mallee here today would welcome any additional measures our government could introduce to facilitate a more consistent and meaningful flow of information across state borders at a national cabinet level at the next opportunity. Sorry, I thought we only had five minutes, so I kept it very brief. That is MASP.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Amy, that was fantastic. Would Cindy or Fiona like to make an opening statement now?

Cindy CAVANAGH-KNEZ: Yes, I am happy to go ahead and do one.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Cindy.

Cindy CAVANAGH-KNEZ: Hi, my name is Cindy Cavanagh-Knez, and I am the Team Leader at Zoe Support Australia. Zoe Support Australia provides a service and supportive community for young mothers aged up to 25 years in Mildura, regional Victoria. We provide assistance and support on the parenting and education journey with the aim of seeing mothers and young children thriving in safe and healthy families. Our primary objectives are for the mothers to break the cycle of welfare dependence, increase family stability, improve mental health and physical wellbeing, engage in education and find employment. This is achieved through a place-based wraparound service. We provide integrated and intensive family services for high-risk clients, focusing on building strong, healthy families. Within the service we also provide family day care, transport, skills-based programs, practical support, social programs, playgroup and study hubs. We currently support 75 young mothers with 99 children within the service, and during the 2023–24 financial year we supported 113 young mothers and 157 children. Forty-one of these mothers and their families were supported through the Zoe Support integrated and intensive family services program.

Family violence is an underlying part of why these young mothers seek support, with 59% of clients disclosing having experienced family violence directly from a current partner or family member; past history from a parent, partner or family member; or exposure to family violence as a child. The information sharing for family violence in Victoria has improved over the years. This has enabled a timely response for direct client support and assistance as needed. It is a vital part of case management to have correct and up-to-date information to achieve the safe and supportive environments for the families that we work with and for the staff that work within the family homes.

As you are aware, Mildura is a cross-border community. This introduces further barriers for families and frontline workers being able to obtain relevant information on perpetrators of family violence. Obtaining this vital information from New South Wales is often challenging due to services being unwilling to release the information or resulting in the delay of sharing information. If this issue remains, clients and workers will

continue to be at a disadvantage, potentially resulting in ongoing safety concerns for family and our staff. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Cindy. Fiona, thank you.

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: Good afternoon. I am Fiona Bilucaglia, as we said earlier. I am currently working also in the role of RAMP coordinator—if people are not aware, it is for the highest risk family violence situations in our state—and as the Mallee Principal Practitioner for Family Violence at Mallee Sexual Assault Unit and Mallee Domestic Violence Service. Prior to these roles, I worked in the family violence investigation unit at the Mildura police station, and I have worked in specialist family violence roles in a victim-survivor specific capacity for five years. My previous roles pre MARAM involved primarily out-of-home care and family support, so also on the periphery of working with people who are victims of family violence.

Mallee Sexual Assault Unit and Mallee Domestic Violence Service are an MDC, so a multidisciplinary centre, in Mildura, and have a core and cluster model refuge as well. This was another post royal commission advent. We have an office in Swan Hill providing outreach to southern Mallee. We have also been providing a service in this area for around 30 years. We provide service to victim-survivors in New South Wales regularly and to a lesser degree South Australia—more commonly referrals in or out to provide upgraded safety for people if we cannot within our own community.

In the time since the royal commission the information-sharing parameters have improved; however, they seem to have tightened more recently. As a risk assessment entity we receive referrals from numerous sources—the Orange Door, police, Safe Steps being among them, and child protection. At the most basic level a family violence intervention order is where protection for a victim and her children lies, and the information sharing has also reduced in this area. The Magistrates' Court do not provide specialist family violence services with a list of intervention orders being heard, so we could take a person off the floor for an entire day just to hear an outcome for one of their clients. Otherwise you wait for the info share; you could send an email seeking the info share as an urgent matter and it might take two or three days. So you might then be accommodating somebody because you do not know where the risk lies or you do not know if the order has gone through or people just are unsafe. If there is not a representative from the organisation at the court or interview or the video link, like I said, it could take days.

Information sharing between Victoria and New South Wales tends to operate in a smoother fashion when it comes to the higher risk cases, so at that pointy end we have much more ability to share information via high-risk panels. The concern with this is that we aim to provide a service before someone is at the highest risk end of the risk spectrum, so if we could avoid the escalation of risk by knowing where a respondent is or a person using violence is, then we could potentially mitigate risk far sooner and prevent some of that extreme violence that we see.

There is no legislation or operational requirement that mandates a collaborative response in border towns, so these relationships tend to rely on individuals seeking each other out and having a shared understanding. Our high-risk panels can collaborate, but it is only based on the decisions that we make or when people change jobs, seeking that information or those people out. And the high-risk panel members from New South Wales are in Broken Hill, so they are three hours away, and come to the border towns—come to Dareton or Wentworth—on a fortnightly basis.

Because we are being employed and funded by discrete states and services, there is nothing that really matches up. The current data collection for specialist family violence organisations does not facilitate the collection of details of persons using violence. This is something to be thought about mindfully rather than just I guess something suggesting that you need to do that before you move to the next part of data collection or data entry.

My final point would be that our databases do not speak to each other. Databases even collectively around Victoria do not speak to each other, so there is no real auto share, I guess, of some of that information that could be integral to mitigating risk. That would be me. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Great. Well, thank you, Amy, Cindy and Fiona, for your opening statements. Just from that alone you have certainly given us a lot to think about. I will start off with a question and then I will hand over to my colleagues to ask some questions. I would really like to know about some of those barriers to collecting, sharing and using data when it comes to people who are using family violence in the Mallee region, with a

particular focus, I suppose, on what you see as some of those unique barriers that you face in your region in the Mallee.

Amy CUPPER: It is probably worth clarifying—I said it works really well and Fiona has said that it does not so much—obviously my information is very much coming from the context of the Orange Door, which is a statewide network. As I mentioned in my statement, pre the reforms if someone moved to Mildura from Geelong we knew absolutely nothing about them as an intake and assessment service because all of the information was held catchment by catchment. You had to know who to reach out to and had to hope the person on the other end of the phone would be happy to have a chat. So from an Orange Door perspective that information flow is infinitely easier. Once you step out into case management as a risk assessment entity—so, for me, my case management components are for Restoring Relationships and then my stuff on the other side of the river—you have to then lean into the family violence information-sharing scheme and the MARAM requirements around information gathering and sharing from the Orange Door or other services, as Fiona highlighted. That can become problematic in terms of turnaround. Fiona is probably better placed to explain some of that side of things. From an adolescent perspective there is still often time pressure that we need to work under, so we need really quick gathering and sharing of information, but it is probably better to hear from Fiona around the adult victim-survivors and the barriers that poses.

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: I agree with Amy in that it is infinitely better; the info share has increased. There were a couple of moments in time where we were, particularly for court outcomes, able to receive the list to see who was having their IVOs heard on any particular date, so you could then check that, but that has decreased. Probably exclusive to Mildura is that proximity to both New South Wales and South Australia. We would struggle, more so with South Australia—what are we, maybe an hour away—and because we deal with South Australia less often, we have to then really work hard to find out what the legislation is from their part, because we do not work with it every day. The work that you do not do every day becomes quite difficult—even to an extent New South Wales, that info share and knowing who you can go to.

Mildura is remote in a lot of ways, but we are a city. When you just, as Amy said, cross the George Chaffey Bridge, they are rural and vastly remote because they are in such a remote part of New South Wales. They are so far away from their capital city. They are so close to us, and yet their funding models and how they access different funds and how they operate are vastly different in a lot of ways to how Mildura and Victoria operate.

Amy CUPPER: If I could jump in—I am in sort of a unique position, because I am managing family violence services on both sides of the river, which in some ways makes things really easy. I think Fiona highlighted in her statement that quite often we get a good flow of information around perpetrators across the border wherever we have got longstanding relationships with individuals on the ground, which is all well and good until someone changes jobs or a funding model in New South Wales ceases and a new one steps in. It would be amazing to see a more consistent and better understood set of guidelines and frameworks around sharing perpetrator information in particular, because the New South Wales legislation is not completely different to ours but just different enough that people feel genuinely uneasy about sharing the information, even just in terms of how we complete risk assessments. In Victoria obviously we are under the MARAM. We have got the four risk ratings of family violence: serious risk, elevated risk, at risk and no risk. In New South Wales there are two: you are either at threat, which is at a very low level of risk of serious injury or death, or it is serious threat. There is no room in between, and a lot of the time information sharing and whether you need client consent is contingent on what that risk rating is. So even the fact that our systems do not match up neatly can sometimes pose problems. So yes, the state border is a huge barrier.

The CHAIR: Amy, you just said that there is a reluctance to share information, because there are legislative differences between Victoria and New South Wales. Could you expand on that in some more detail, please?

Amy CUPPER: Sure. Like Fiona said, it is not my bread and butter, but I have a little bit to do with it. In Victoria obviously everyone understands MARAM framework. We are seeing an increasing understanding and a nuanced understanding of how people are obligated to share. In New South Wales there are less organisations that you can freely share with in terms of sharing victim-survivor information—Fiona, feel free to jump in if you think I have got this jumbled up—and New South Wales is far more reliant on victim-survivor consent to share their information, which is not a bad thing. Best practice is that you always gather a person's consent or, at the very best, their views about how you handle their information. Perpetrators—it is a little more murky, or murkier again. So in Victoria, as soon as you form the belief that someone may be a perpetrator, you are fairly

covered to share risk-relevant information with other entities. In New South Wales it seems to be a lot more contingent, to the point where I do this stuff every day and I still find it confusing when I dip into the *Crimes Act* over there about how and when you can share, with or without consent, even around perpetrators. There is just that added level of complexity when you ring a New South Wales policeman to say, 'Hey, I've got this lady. She's rocked up here at the Mildura Orange Door'—which is a whopping, what, five kilometres away—'She's saying that the police have rolled around there last night. She's got bruising. We're really concerned for her safety. Can you tell us a little bit about what happened?' 'Ah, no. No, I'm not sure. I might have to go and have a conversation with someone before I can let you know that.' Or 'I can let you know a little bit but not very much.' It is just not consistent at all. By comparison, when we ring Mildura Police Station with the same information, within minutes we have got the whole narrative of what has gone on and what the police's intentions are in terms of increasing safety. It is chalk and cheese some days.

The legislation in the way that we interpret it—and Fiona and I have a fairly similar understanding of how that information gathering and sharing can and should work—is there is enough flexibility there to be able to get done what we need to get done, but it is never quick and easy nor is it consistent. It is really dependent on who potentially picks up their phone on the other end. I am not sure if that is helpful at all.

The CHAIR: That is really helpful, Amy. Am I correctly interpreting that it can be challenging for services on the Victorian side of the border to get information from New South Wales based services?

Amy CUPPER: Yes.

The CHAIR: Okay. And what about the other way round: is it challenging for New South Wales based services to get information from Victorian-based services as well? Are they encountering the same difficulties?

Amy CUPPER: I would say for my service, which is sitting on the other side of the river, it can be. So if the practitioner working in New South Wales is able to frame the question properly within the MARAM, then yes, they are usually pretty right to get appropriate information fairly quickly from the Orange Door. I am not quite sure how that looks. We have never had much contact with other services like Mallee Domestic Violence or the local Aboriginal family violence service here. With police it can be quite hit and miss. I know we have had quite a few women and their perpetrators chopping and changing between police stations depending on where they are. It can be really challenging. Again, it really relies on goodwill and relationships more than legislation, unfortunately.

The CHAIR: And your comment about the MARAM framework, does that mean someone in New South Wales would have to have a good understanding of the MARAM framework to ask an appropriate question as well?

Amy CUPPER: Yes, I would say so—wouldn't you, Fiona?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: Yes, I would agree. And you know, for people working for MASP who work in New South Wales or for any of our organisations, we work in both states at different times. So for most people that work in either of our organisations, MARAM would be the primary knowledge base. Certainly we do not operate in New South Wales ordinarily. We work with clients from New South Wales, but we do not necessarily work with them ordinarily. We support clients at court in New South Wales, again, but it is far less often and less common. So our staff, no matter where they work, will have a really good understanding of MARAM—New South Wales legislation and models less so.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Amy CUPPER: And look, we very much operate under the understanding that client consent trumps everything. The minute you have got a victim-survivor's consent to go and share their information, all the other legislation slips by the wayside, because that fits. It is not very often that we actually have the perpetrator's consent to gather and share his information to support his partner's belief. It does not happen very much.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Annabelle.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you. I am just conscious of time and everyone wants to ask lots of questions, so can I ask a couple of questions on notice? You have not been able to make a submission, and

really what you are aware of is like gold for our inquiry and guides some of our recommendations. Amy, you were talking about the cross-border data-sharing barriers: would you mind sending us maybe what the legislative change recommendations would be to address that? It is a loaded question, sorry. But if you are saying it is only a tweak, could you just let us know exactly, to lead us there—and likewise in Victoria if there is any guidance on the wording of legislative changes that need to be made to make sure that that is acceptable, even if that means about the geographic area that is covered, for instance. And I want to ask, Amy, just for clarity, how are you funded, then? You have a cross-border remit, so how are you funded?

Amy CUPPER: Orange Door and Restoring Relationships, FFH and FSV. And then our funding for New South Wales: Family Safety housing reports to the Department of Communities and Justice. So MASP is a bit special. We have got both state governments giving us a bit of money to do what we do, with all the complexities that throws in the mix.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Feel free to send us through some of those complexities as well.

Amy CUPPER: For sure.

Annabelle CLEELAND: And Fiona, you mentioned our databases do not speak to each other. What databases are you using, and what ones do you need to speak to one another? I am stealing all of Cindy's questions; I am sorry.

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: So we currently use SHIP and IRIS. I think there is a lot of information in the CRM, which is the Orange Door model, and as a RAMP coordinator I have access to that, but I have to be very mindful of how I utilise that. RAMP coordinators have this absolute freedom of access to information, but they need to be incredibly mindful of how they utilise that. But, you know, when I consider the amount of information that that model holds, in terms of that pointy-end, specialist family violence case management, even a contracted version of that would be incredibly helpful. I think something that all workers who do family violence work have access to—I probably do not have any real understanding of where the issues would lie with that. However, having access to it and not being able to utilise it to its full potential because of the conditions around my use of it—I see it as incredibly useful.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Just so we can get a picture of the cross-border logistic challenges, are there safe accommodation houses or shelters in the Mallee?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: That is us—well, primarily us, I think, in terms of family violence. We have the core and cluster refuge. That was a royal commission recommendation. We used to just have houses. We had three houses where it was largely shared accommodation, but the recommendation in the royal commission was that shared accommodation was no longer suitable or conducive to people healing, so we now have the core and cluster. The core and cluster has an office, an admin building, and in that admin building there is a common room, so we are able to do programs in there. There are units that have kitchen facilities and bathrooms and several bedrooms. There is one that can be joined for larger families to move into. There is a fabulous playground in the centre. It has got cameras everywhere, and there is parking that is fenced—so no access.

Annabelle CLEELAND: I imagine the capacity on that is quite full-on. Is there a waitlist? How do you manage people to be able to use it?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: The goal is to have people in and on to their next stop as soon as we possibly can. The housing crisis obviously makes that incredibly difficult, but we still have some good outcomes. We have got staff, and that staffed model of refuge has probably improved outcomes for people. With that staffed model people are supported to apply for housing, to get their office of housing priority housing happening in a timely manner—and also private rental, supporting people into private rental using the personal safety initiative to make sure if we are able to get someone back into their own home, then we support them by upgrading the security on their property. That might mean that we provide cameras. It might mean that we just put in sensor lights and change the locks and that sort of thing.

Amy CUPPER: Fiona makes this sound really easy, because there is the MDVS refuge and there is Meminar—so there is an Indigenous-specific refuge here in Mildura as well. They are the only refuges for about 300 kilometres, so if you get into trouble in Dareton or Balranald, which are the big centres—well, 'big

centres'; the towns over the river—the nearest New South Wales refuge is Broken Hill or Griffith. The next stop would be Bendigo from here, Fiona?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: Yes. Swan Hill has access to a transitional property, so if someone goes into that, that is three months, and the expectation is that they are moving into their next accommodation. Probably something unique about Swan Hill is that they have no refuge but they actually have a train that goes to Swan Hill. So they can jump on a train from Melbourne or Bendigo and get to Swan Hill, and then there is no accommodation. We had someone seeking accommodation and they ended up moving back. She escaped, fled where she lived due to the family violence, and needed to go back closer that way because she spent six months. She was working and she had no—sorry?

Annabelle CLEELAND: I just wanted to ask about—my question is also about people from interstate. If people from New South Wales require a refuge that does not exist, do you decline them from your emergency housing, or are they able to be there?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: Yes, they are.

Annabelle CLEELAND: But the challenge is the housing crisis means that they cannot move on easily into priority housing?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: Yes. They can relocate to Victoria, but that would require relocating to Victoria. But we can accommodate.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Okay.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Christine.

Chris COUZENS: Thank you for your time today. We really appreciate it. I know you are all very busy. My question is: how can the Victorian Government support training and capacity-building initiatives for service providers in the Mallee region to promote the collection of data on people using family violence?

Amy CUPPER: The invention of Teams and Zoom has been a game changer. We do not have to have people out for days at a time to do training in Melbourne. I think the training available around, particularly in the Orange Door context, is pretty good. In terms of the importance of why you need to gather information for a system that is very admin-laden and with a high level of detail in it, there is a fairly high level of staff buy-in around filling in those fields, because they understand it is another way of holding perpetrators visible within the system. That is my experience, anyway.

Chris COUZENS: So do you think there is an opportunity for data collection or analysis to be part of professional development opportunities for the region?

Amy CUPPER: I think so. What do you think, Fi?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: Yes. I would agree. I feel like bringing the states together in some capacity would be a benefit in terms of some sort of training where there is a shared understanding.

Chris COUZENS: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Christine.

Chris CREWETHER: Thank you, Chair. Firstly, thank you very much for giving evidence today and all the work that you do across your organisations up in Mildura, Mallee and surrounds. I was actually up in Mildura on Friday. Some of you may know I used to be on the board of Zoe Support Australia, and I know you do a terrific job with Zoe in terms of helping pregnant and parenting young mothers get back into education, in parenting and more to break intergenerational disadvantage. With some of these young mothers, of course some have experienced family violence or are going through family violence. What are you seeing in terms of the specific needs of these young mothers, and what are the barriers you are seeing, particularly in data and data sharing, in your area as against more inner regional areas like Bendigo or Ballarat or Geelong, or indeed city areas? What are the barriers specifically facing such young mothers and young women, in particular with family violence in that area? That is probably for you, Cindy.

Cindy CAVANAGH-KNEZ: I suppose having the support to find where they need to get the support that they require. Usually the information is not easily shared. They find it quite challenging to ask for assistance, and people do not usually give them the time of the day because they are so young. That is probably our biggest area that makes a big impact on them. Housing obviously is a bigger issue as well. If they are underage and if they have been in a relationship and flee a perpetrator of family violence, because they are not old enough to apply for private rentals, then finding somewhere to live as well is challenging.

Chris CREWITHER: Do you find that you have less access to some data as compared with some of the more inner regional areas like Bendigo or Ballarat or Geelong?

Cindy CAVANAGH-KNEZ: I cannot really answer that, because obviously I do not know what Bendigo and Ballarat and Geelong have.

Chris CREWITHER: Adding to what was said earlier about cross-border services: do you find you have got sufficient flexibility to deliver the services that you provide? I think last time you may have had three homes you are providing to young mothers, and maybe more now? Perhaps you can elaborate on that. Are there any barriers in terms of data sharing that are hindering the provision of such services?

Cindy CAVANAGH-KNEZ: Are you talking specifically about Zoe Support?

Chris CREWITHER: Yes, with Zoe Support and I guess more generally also with accommodation, houses and shelters.

Cindy CAVANAGH-KNEZ: We do not provide accommodation. The three houses that we have hold our family day care childcare service that we deliver, plus our offices for our staff. So there are no clients that live in these homes—we run our programs from the homes as well. They are rental properties. It is like, I suppose, a business building, so we do not have any properties for clients at all. We do not work across New South Wales, but we do have clients that obviously will live in Victoria and the perpetrator will live in New South Wales, and then that becomes challenging to get the information required to keep the young mums safe.

Chris CREWITHER: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Chris. Heang?

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your presentation today. Can you tell the Committee: in the Mallee region are there challenges about collecting, sharing and using data on young people's use of violence, and the intersectional factors like gambling, drugs and other substance use?

Amy CUPPER: In the context of young people in particular—so under 18?

Meng Heang TAK: Yes, that is right. Or young people in general.

Amy CUPPER: Young people in general, yes. Again, there are two contexts that I can speak to. Within the Orange Door identifying young people using violence can be a bit fraught. It depends on how that young person comes to the notice of our system. If parents call police—when the police roll out to an incident they have to list somebody as a perpetrator or a respondent and they have to list somebody as an aggrieved family member. So young people, if they come to the notice of police in the context of a family violence incident, are more likely to be identified as perpetrators, and that label is likely to then follow them through the rest of the system, which then makes it a bit easier for us in terms of—

It is not something that I feel incredibly comfortable about, because we know that data tells us that overwhelmingly these young people are victim-survivors in their own right and are quite often still experiencing family violence when they themselves are using unsafe behaviour. They are labelled as perpetrators, and that then enables us to use not only the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, but they are also children, so we can use the Child Information Sharing Scheme as well to gather and share their information to increase safety for the people who are the victims of their behaviour, but also develop good plans and responses to try and intervene and change their trajectory. Like I said before, I wear a few different hats for MASP, but the Restoring Relationships program is one that I am incredibly passionate about because it is one of the few opportunities we have got to really act early and change the trajectory of these young people.

It becomes more problematic within an Orange Door setting when we have places like schools or families themselves calling in for support around young people using unsafe behaviours, because they are not often labelled as such and so a higher level of assessment is required to unpack what is going on there. Likewise, we also know that families are unlikely to reach out for support because of the level of shame and stigma around being victims to your child. So it is likely to be one of those areas that is incredibly under-reported, and as such the data around that is probably not going to be super representative of what the true story is in that area.

Sorry—I have waffled on and forgotten what the second part to your question was.

Meng Heang TAK: The challenges—and if there are, what has been done to address them?

Amy CUPPER: Up here we work very closely with Berry Street to try and deliver good information and training to the Orange Door and to the schools and mental health support services in particular around what our program is and how we can help. We have already seen a big jump in the amount of young people that are being referred to our service and being identified. I think we are funded to work with 18 people a year and last year we worked with 27 or something like that, Mallee wide. So these kids are out there and they are really keen for support, which is incredible, really.

There are probably similar barriers to what Fiona mentioned before. Within the Orange Door system it is fairly easy to find and track these kids once they do pop up. It becomes more challenging in what we could term the back end, because then we are more reliant on the information-sharing laws and we have to—as we should—make formal requests, and then we are in the hands of the person we are requesting to get that information back to us in a timely manner, which when there is not much going on is okay, but in higher risk situations it can be more problematic. Does that help?

Meng Heang TAK: Yes, that helps. Thank you, Chair. That is all from me. Thank you so much.

The CHAIR: Cindy.

Cindy McLEISH: Thank you. My questions are around the information that you do gather about the perpetrators, whether or not you record that officially or just write it down on a piece of paper because there is nowhere to capture it on the system. First of all, Cindy, with the young people you mentioned that it was a very large percentage—was it 59%?—of those that come to you have experienced family violence through a parent or a partner? Do you have breakdowns of those sorts of statistics?

Cindy CAVANAGH-KNEZ: I believe we are gathering stuff on that. Unfortunately, Merinda, who is our CEO—she was organising this information and has had to go away, so I do not have that on me.

Cindy McLEISH: I am just quite interested to see what sorts of percentages are maybe sibling on sibling, parent on the young woman or the partner or former partner, to get a bit of a feel. I guess for any of you: what is that information that you do collect on perpetrators and do you notice any patterns?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: We do collect the information. There is space in our databases to collect that information. We can also request things like predominant aggressor tools, which are done by the Orange Door, so we can collect information that is logged on our databases in terms of the documents and the information. There is space to put the information, but there are no prompts for you to actually collect that information. It is collected; we do collect it. I certainly know that we more recently have done a bit of a data drop, because we are doing our strategic planning, so I do not have that at hand. But certainly we do collect it.

Cindy McLEISH: What about anecdotally? Do you have a feeling of whether or not there are particular characteristics of those who use family violence?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: Look, working where I have worked—I spent three years prior to January this year in a police station—it is everybody. It really is absolutely every demographic. Someone from every demographic is a user of family violence.

Cindy McLEISH: But that is probably not the question that I am asking. It is more about any particular personality traits or characteristics or background information that they may have regardless of demographic. Are they people that are drug users primarily, are they single-parent families, are they people that are new to the country or are they people who have got mental health issues, who dropped out of school at year 8?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: All of those. Go, Amy.

Amy CUPPER: I was going to say I would probably reinforce what Fiona said. It is sometimes nice to be able to say that it is only certain people from certain walks of life that can engage in this behaviour, but probably one of the more concerning things about this work is that we literally see people from all walks of life, from 86-year-old men through to—as I am working with at the moment—10- and 11-year-olds who engage in behaviour that could be seen as family violence.

Cindy McLEISH: I guess that is not my question. It is not about the age.

Amy CUPPER: Could you rephrase it, because you have stumped us all a bit?

Cindy McLEISH: Yes. It is not about the age of people; it is about personality characteristics or traits, regardless of whether they are 10 or 80, because we are trying to look at capturing data on the profile –

Amy CUPPER: No. There is no consistency of traits or personality; it is anybody.

Cindy McLEISH: If we are trying to capture data on the profile of perpetrators of family violence, you are telling us we are wasting our time?

Amy CUPPER: Not on profiling, no, but I would say that it is really hard to pin it down.

Cindy McLEISH: Well, that is what I am after. My questions are about what makes up the profile.

Amy CUPPER: By and large, Fiona, what do you think? There will certainly be some with mental health traits, but not all. There will be some that use drugs and alcohol, but not all. There will be some that are ATSI, but not all.

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: There will be some that were victims of family violence as children themselves. Not all but almost every victim of family violence will potentially be a perpetrator of family violence. Not all will have drug use, and not all will be ATSI. I wonder if the most common might be people who have experienced family violence themselves.

Cindy McLEISH: Do you capture that data? Do you tick a box to say they are a victim of family violence themselves?

Fiona BILUCAGLIA: No, that would not form a part of any legislated request that we have got. It would be something that again, like you said, anecdotally we could know, maybe because our organisation has been around for 30 years. I have been in the helping people field for 30 years, to use the term loosely, and some of these people are kids I have worked with in the field and kids I have worked with in other organisations, but it is not a question that we are asked to capture.

Cindy McLEISH: Thank you very much.

Amy CUPPER: Particularly in the context of our frameworks and things, when we are working with adults who use violence, it is very much framed as a conscious choice. So we are usually encouraged not to explore too much further into the whys and more just into the ‘We get that you’ve had a tough time, but what you’re doing is not okay’ channel.

Cindy McLEISH: Okay. Thank you very much. Thanks, Ella.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Cindy. Jackson.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you, Chair. Thank you all for your time and for answering our questions today. In the Mallee region, are there challenges about collecting, sharing and using data while maintaining privacy and confidentiality—which I think has been discussed a bit today—for example, ensuring demographic data for regional areas is sufficiently de-identified so clients living in smaller communities cannot be identified? And if so, how can those challenges be addressed?

Amy CUPPER: Confidentiality in our system, particularly up here in the Mallee, is incredibly fraught. The legislation obviously allows for us to gather and share risk-relevant information about perpetrators regardless of

the level of risk. There is a really strong onus on our agencies—and we work in really small towns across the board. Particularly for our colleagues in the local ACCHO, there is a very strong focus on making sure that the information we hold stays with us and that it does not get out. Unfortunately that does not always happen, but every effort is certainly made to maintain confidentiality. But we do work in an area where it is not uncommon for us to open the local newspaper and go, ‘Oh, such and such has popped up here. Wow, we know him.’ It is very, very common. But great efforts are made to try and prevent that as much as we can.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you. We are just about out of time, so we might look at wrapping up here. But can I just, firstly, say thank you so much, Cindy, Fiona and Amy, for appearing online with us today. We are really grateful for your evidence and also giving us a different perspective of what it is like on the ground in rural Victoria, in particular with some of the challenges that you are facing working across multiple state jurisdictions. Thank you very much for your time. If there is anything else that you think is relevant for the Committee to be aware of throughout the course of the inquiry, please feel free to get in touch with us and pass that on as well. Thank you again for appearing today.

The Committee will now take a short break before our next witness.

Witnesses withdrew.