



Youth Taskforce

Second Action Plan consultation report

Foreword

Commissioner

For too long, children and young people have been left out of the policies, systems and services that have been set up to prevent and response to domestic, family and sexual violence. We have not included them in the conversation on what they want and need from the system, nor did we seek their views in the development of the First Action Plan for the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*.

A key role for the Commission is to ensure that the voice of lived experience is included in the work to shape policy and service delivery. We have identified that the voices of children and young people need to be prioritised in this space. In 2025 Yearly Report to Parliament, the Commission recommended that a Youth Advisory Council be established to ensure that the voices of young people are embedded in the process to develop the Second Action Plan and to provide an accountability mechanism during the implementation of the plan.

The Youth Taskforce achieves the first part of this recommendation and strongly demonstrates the irreplaceable value of lived experience expertise. The young advocates who contributed to this advice provided insightful, considered, nuanced, and practical guidance for policy makers and government to consider when creating policies that will impact their lives and those of other children and young people affected by violence.

It was a great privilege to facilitate the development of this advice with these nine remarkable young people, and to share the convenor role with Rhea, who guided us all admirably with thoughtfulness and grace.

The generosity and hard work of the Youth Taskforce members will be honoured when the Australian Government uses this advice to inform meaningful actions in the Second Action Plan that focus on children and young people.

The Commission will continue to advocate for a long-term advisory mechanism that empowers the voices of children and young people in the work to end violence in a generation.



Micaela Cronin

Commissioner

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission

Youth Taskforce Co-Convenor

Throughout this consultation, the Youth Taskforce consistently challenged individualistic ideologies of domestic, family and sexual violence. To us, violence was and is never understood nor experienced as solely a personal or family issue. Rather, the Youth Taskforce recognised domestic, family and sexual violence as a relational, structural and systemic issue, shaped by colonisation, patriarchy, racism, poverty, institutional responses, technology, education, climate change, social norms and intergenerational trauma. Violence is not inevitable, it is socially produced and therefore can be socially prevented.

Children and young people are not simply victims, survivors or consultees. We, Youth Taskforce members, on behalf of all, argue and stand firm in knowing we are the experts on the impacts of the systems we are required to navigate when experiencing violence.

Through lived expertise, children and young people can and are analysing policy, governance, justice and implementation while demonstrating that healing is not solely an individual journey, but a collective process that is grounded in identity, culture, belonging, Country, relationships, education, employment, financial security, health, spirituality and hope.

Every interaction a child or young person has with a system either contributes to violence or contributes to healing and this society has the power to choose which it will be.

“This report challenges long-held assumptions about where expertise resides. It demonstrates that children and young people are not merely recipients of policy, but producers of knowledge, partners in governance and active contributors to systems and institutional reform.

This report represents an invitation to rethink how power is shared, how justice is understood and distributed, how healing is allowed and created, and how prevention is realised and implemented across every system that shapes a child’s life. If we are serious about addressing domestic, family and sexual violence, we must also be serious about transforming the social conditions that allow it to persist.

Ultimately, this report is about restoring human dignity. It calls for dignity in disclosure, dignity in education, dignity in healthcare, dignity in justice, dignity in policy, dignity in culture, dignity in participation and dignity in healing. These are not separate aspirations. Together, they form the foundations of a society capable of preventing violence before it occurs and responding to it with humanity when it does.”

Rhea Bedi Waia

About the Youth Taskforce

This document contains the advice of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's Youth Taskforce to government on the development of the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*. It reflects the views, priorities and lived experience expertise of young people who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV).

The Youth Taskforce is made up of nine young people aged 18–25 with lived experience of DFSV. The Taskforce was convened by Commissioner Micaela Cronin and a member of the Taskforce.

The Youth Taskforce ran four workshops to develop this advice to government. Taskforce members first discussed the consultation questions focused on children and young people from the Consultation papers provided by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). They then developed a set of discussion questions that target key focus areas for government. Summaries of each of the workshops can be found in Appendix A.

The Commission's role has been to support the Youth Taskforce to develop and present this advice to government. The ideas and recommendations contained in this document belong to the Taskforce members.

With the intention of centring children and young people, the discussions have been summarised here to reflect how a child or young person's experience may unfold over time, through the National Plan focus areas of Prevention, Early Intervention, Response, and Recovery and Healing.

Children and young people have repeatedly told governments what they need to be safe. Too often their experiences are spoken about rather than listened to directly and addressed.

This advice represents the expertise of young people with lived experience of DFSV. Their insights challenge us to think beyond systems and services and focus on what safety, support and recovery actually look like in a young person's life.

We are grateful for their leadership and proud to provide their advice to government as part of the development of the Second Action Plan.

Executive summary

Children and young people with lived experience as partners in reform

Children and young people must be included as genuine partners in the work to end violence. Engagement should move beyond one-off consultations and be embedded through sustainable, meaningful and properly resourced mechanisms that include children and young people from diverse backgrounds. Consistent with the principle of “nothing about us without us”, policies and reforms affecting children and young people should be informed by their direct participation.

Governments and organisations should co-design engagement approaches with lived experience advocates, prioritise wellbeing and safety, and avoid consultation processes that contribute to retraumatisation or consultation fatigue. Children and young people with lived experience of DFSV should be supported to build advocacy skills and provided with accessible opportunities to contribute to decision-making.

Prevention

Violence prevention is everyone’s responsibility and requires awareness and action across families, communities, institutions and government. Education was identified by Taskforce members as one of the most powerful tools to support this. Children and young people should receive age-appropriate, accessible and engaging education from an early age, co-designed with young people and connected to support services. Adults in children’s lives, including parents, guardians, caregivers and teachers, also need the knowledge and skills to identify and respond to abuse.

Young people hold growing concerns about social media, technology-facilitated abuse and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. Interventions to address online safety must be ready to address the possible unintended effects of those efforts, such as those arising from the social media ban for children under 16. Education about healthy relationships and online safety should evolve alongside technological change.

There are links between climate-related disasters, community stress and increased risks of domestic and family violence, calling for these connections to be recognised within violence prevention efforts in the Second Action Plan.

Early intervention

Children and young people should be able to access support with or without parent or guardian approval and disclosure and intervention processes should be transparent, understandable and centred on children's needs. Young people should know what will happen if they seek help and be supported to make informed choices wherever possible. Mandatory reporting processes should not increase risk for children and young people and should be accompanied by meaningful support.

Effective early intervention requires services and professionals to understand the family, cultural and community contexts in which children and young people make decisions about safety.

Accessible information, resources and support options are essential. Systems should communicate in language children and young people understand, rather than expecting them to navigate professional terminology or complex service systems. The responsibility for understanding and responding appropriately should rest with systems, not with children.

Response

The most urgent concern identified by the Taskforce was the lack of accessible, age-appropriate services for children and young people experiencing violence. Responses should be timely, culturally safe, trauma-informed and available without unnecessary barriers.

Across police, justice, health and support systems, children and young people should be treated with respect, kept informed, and supported to participate in decisions that affect them. Police and justice processes must be transparent, accountable and designed around children's needs. Health systems should provide safe pathways for young people to access care and provide for the health impacts of violence.

The Taskforce also emphasised the importance of responding effectively to children and young people who use violence. Responses should address underlying trauma and family dynamics while maintaining accountability and prioritising rehabilitation and safety.

Recovery and healing

The impacts of violence experienced in childhood can affect health, education, relationships, identity and wellbeing throughout a person's life. As a result, recovery must be understood as a long-term, collective responsibility.

Taskforce members identified being believed, validated and connected with peers and other survivors as important elements of healing. They also highlighted the value of lived experience advocacy and opportunities to contribute to positive change.

The long-term recovery of people impacted by DFSV is a collective responsibility that requires sustained investment across government systems such as health, housing, employment, education and social services. Governments should adopt coordinated, cross-system approaches that reduce barriers to support and recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood experiences of violence. Investing in recovery not only improves individual wellbeing but also contributes to breaking cycles of violence and creating safer futures for children and young people.

Children and young people with lived experience as partners in reform

Children and young people have long been calling for their voices to be included in the work to end violence. As is often emphasised in the disability space, “nothing about us without us”, applies to children and young people too.

Not only will engagement support better programs, policies, and responses for children and young people, being able to contribute to work that improves the safety of other young people may assist in the healing of someone who has experienced violence.

While this piece of advice was developed by young people over the age of 18, Taskforce members agree that further and/or ongoing engagement mechanisms should include children under the age of 18 as well. They deserve to have a voice in shaping the policies that are impacting their childhood.

Engagement approaches should be co-designed with lived experience advocates, to support effective and empowering engagement. Engagement should be focused on building on the knowledge and information that already exists, rather than asking questions that have already been asked. It is the responsibility of the engaging entity to be aware of the research, engagement and consultation that has already occurred.

Governments need to be aware of the power imbalance that exists in these contexts and design their approaches accordingly. Safety and wellbeing should be paramount when engaging with children and young people who have experienced violence. This is vital in terms of the immediate and long-term safety of participants in any activity.

For any lived experience advocate working to make Australia safer, sharing their story can take a toll. One Taskforce member described the process of the diminishment of hope as a young advocate shares their story and is consulted over and over again. Repeated consultation without clear action or poorly managed engagement can not only be harmful but creates ‘consultation fatigue’ and reduces faith in the system. Taskforce members suggest the development of guidance material or advice for individuals and organisations who seek to engage with children and young people with lived experience of violence, to help ensure children and young people are not harmed or retraumatised through consultation and engagement processes. These resources will help create more supportive environments for effective advocacy work.

There should be long-term engagement mechanisms for children and young people to inform government policy to address DFSV. Groups with longer tenure provide advocates the time to reflect and explore different issues more deeply. Taskforce members agree that any youth advisory group or mechanism should reflect the diverse population of Australia and proactively include members from rural, regional and remote communities, multicultural and migrant communities, people with disability, and other priority populations. Having a long-term mechanism also allows young advocates to receive regular remuneration for their work, which is crucial in recognising the importance of their advocacy, and helpful for their financial stability and planning around other employment and study.

To support improved engagement, governments should consider approaches for building the advocacy capacity of children and young people. That includes not only opening opportunities to more children and young people but also providing them with the resources to build their knowledge and abilities for advocacy. Governments should be proactive in making advocacy and engagement opportunities accessible, easy to navigate, and beneficial.

Prevention

Preventing violence requires action across government, institutions, communities and families. Prevention efforts must recognise the realities of children's and young people's lives and address the conditions that allow all forms of violence to occur. These conditions include community and structural factors such as the ongoing effects of colonisation and racism, which disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people outside the dominant culture, and other forms of discrimination such as ableism, homophobia and transphobia.

Education should be co-designed, accessible and connected to services

Preventing violence is the responsibility of all Australians, and for the violence experienced by children and young people to be addressed, everyone should be aware of different types of abuse, indicators of abuse and how to respond to them.

Education for children and young people is key for prevention. Age-appropriate education is required for children of all ages, starting at pre-school age, to set up their expectations of behaviour from others, the language to communicate when something is wrong and the knowledge of who they can approach to seek help. As children grow older, it also sets their expectations for their own healthy relationships. Well designed (ideally co-designed with children and young people) and delivered education reduces shame and stigma (including for young people who use violence) and makes it easier for children and young people to seek help earlier.

Schools also play a key role in setting the expectations of children and young people of how an issue might be resolved. A school's culture sets the standard in how issues such as DFSV are spoken about, which influences a child's decision to disclose and what responses they can expect from other authorities. If a child or young person does not see meaningful consequences for bullying by a peer, it shapes what they feel they can expect from police, the justice system and health services. Accountability is required to ensure that DFSV education policies are enacted consistently across Australia.

For education to be effective, it needs to engage all children and young people. That means creating engaging education products that draw people into the conversation and use a range of approaches to engage young people who are disengaged from school or not able to access traditional education. One mechanism for accessing children and young people (and their parents and the wider community) is via media – through awareness campaigns or through fictional portrayals of healthy relationships and/or abuse.

Education for children and young people should be complemented with education for the adults in children and young people's lives. Parents, guardians and caregivers need to be equipped with the skills to reinforce what their children are learning at school, recognise the signs of abuse, and to respond if it occurs. Teachers must also have the skills to respond to a disclosure of violence, which can sometimes occur in response to education on the issues around DFSV.

Social media and technology must be safe and accountable

The social media ban for children under the age of 16 may have a negative impact on prevention. While the risks of children engaging with social media are recognised, there is concern that the ban does not necessarily stop young people from accessing those platforms. When children access social media despite the ban, they become more vulnerable to exploitation as their fear of getting in trouble for their use of social media can be manipulated to facilitate abuse and create a further barrier to them disclosing harm.

With the ban applying to a select set of platforms, predators may adapt their methods to engage with children through platforms which are still accessible. Another concern is that the ban delays the development of the protective skills required to navigate online spaces.

Social media is having an impact on how children and young people relate to each other. Misogyny and masculinist ideologies are shaping men and boys' behaviour from a young age, regardless of the ban. Education and intervention are required to challenge the ideas that proliferate online and result in harm among children and young people.

Social media is only one aspect of technology that can impact a child or young person's safety. Technology is a tool through which various forms of abuse are enacted and approaches are evolving rapidly. The speed at which technology-facilitated abuse can proliferate must be matched by our responses to it. The systems through which prevention, response and support are enacted must be ready to adapt and respond to the changing experiences of children and young people as they navigate online spaces.

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has serious implications for children's safety. As a technology that is largely built and used by men, it inherits male-centred assumptions and stereotypes, which impacts equality in general. These biases are magnified when AI technology is used for harm. Violent pornography, including AI-generated pornography, impacts societal views towards women and shapes young people's expectations of sex. AI-generated child sexual abuse material has proliferated as the technology has become more widely available. Legislation that addresses the harms of AI are vital to protecting the safety of children and young people.

Education on healthy relationships and DFSV should include components on social media and technology, to provide children and young people with the skills to navigate the spaces safely. Education of this type should be reviewed and adapted regularly, to keep up to date with the changing ways that people use social media and technology. Online safety education should also be available to parents to allow them to make informed choices about their own and their children's use of social media and technology, including in regard to their choices to share their children's images and information publicly.

Climate change is amplifying the risk of domestic, family and sexual violence

There is a connection between climate-related disasters and increased domestic and family violence. The impacts of climate change are and will be felt differently across Australia. In the Torres Strait, the anticipated loss of Country as sea levels rise creates anxiety and stress. Without the tools to navigate these stressors, violence proliferates, affecting both adults and children. A changing climate and the subsequent impacts on people's wellbeing is a factor that should be acknowledged and addressed as a prevention focus in Australia's response to DFSV.

Early Intervention

Children and young people should be able to access help early, safely and without having to navigate systems alone. There should be multiple safe adults from whom they have the option to seek help and the systems built to respond must only improve safety for a child or young person.

Understanding family context is vital to providing support

The policy landscape for DFSV has developed in recent years to recognise that children and young people experience domestic, family and sexual violence and are not merely witnesses to it. Responding to the individual should include recognising them within their family and community contexts.

When the person causing harm is a part of a child or young person's family or community context, their relationship with them, with other family members, their cultural or religious responsibilities and other family responsibilities all influence how they make decisions about their safety.

As with adult experiences of DFSV, children and young people can love, have concern for, be reliant upon or be relied on by the person who is harming them. They may have concern and feel responsible for their abuser's wellbeing, feelings and potential removal from the home. Unhealthy family dynamics may result in the parentification of a child, leaving them with feelings of responsibility to multiple members of their family, including their abuser. These concerns are relevant to their assessment of a situation and their choices going forward.

Cultural and religious responsibilities play a role in shaping a child or young person's decisions about their safety. Participation in cultural and religious ceremonies may result in children and young people being in contact with or in close proximity to someone who is causing harm, and intervention against an abuser may result in loss of community and participation in practices that are important to children and young people. Children in migrant and culturally diverse families may have responsibilities like translation for family members. In some cases, the abuser may be the sole financial provider to the family. These complex dynamics, feelings and concerns that a child or young person may be experiencing should be honoured and reflected in system responses.

The communities of different cultural or religious groups can also be a source of support outside of formal police or justice responses. Government could engage with community appointed leaders, some of whom are already supporting people experiencing DFSV, to build understanding and therefore uplift the whole community's response to violence.

Processes to support disclosure and intervention must be transparent for children and young people

When harm is observed or disclosed, the processes that follow should be easy for a child to navigate and provide them choice wherever possible. A number of factors influence a child's decision to make a disclosure and they are often navigating complex dynamics and emotions when they do. The actions following a disclosure need to provide safety, cultural safety, clarity, confidentiality and choice to the child or young person about what happens and when.

One way to support a child is to ensure that they understand exactly what is going to happen, if and when they choose to share their experience. Information about processes should be included in the education they receive about these issues and in information about support services themselves. Not only should they learn about their support options, but what will happen if they access them. Transparency and education about processes also helps to reduce stigma and shame when children and young people have to engage with authorities or services.

Processes and other responses can be made more complex when they are operating close to state and territory borders. Differences in legislation and service offerings can be confusing and disorienting, especially if behaviour that is criminal on one side of the border is not considered criminal on the other. Children in foster care can have limited ability to cross borders, reducing their access to services.

While improving understanding of processes through education is important, the onus should not rest on the child or young person to navigate the complex system of services and justice mechanisms alone. Case managers or system navigators should be proactive in bringing support and justice choices to the child or young person.

Some interventions must occur whether the child or young person wants them to or not. To provide appropriate support, we must recognise that, even when actions are made in the child's best interest and will improve their safety, it can be a disempowering experience for that child. Support provided to the child must recognise that and incorporate it into the healing response.

Mandatory reporting should include mandatory support

For many children and young people, mandatory reporting can be both a pathway to safety and a source of fear. The mandatory reporting process can be fraught with uncertainty and risk for a child or young person. Children and young people hold serious and valid concerns that making a disclosure to someone with a mandatory reporting obligation may place them at greater risk from the person harming them when that person is made aware of a disclosure. Government should consider adapting processes to facilitate reports without the person using violence finding out.

In some circumstances, a child or young person may make a report to a mandatory reporter with the expectation of a response, and nothing happens. To build safety and trust, the system needs to be structured to ensure action that is safe, timely and informed by the child's knowledge of their own experience.

Furthermore, mandatory reporters should be better equipped to navigate their responsibilities and respond to children and young people who need help. That is, they should be both mandatory reporters and mandatory supporters.

Resources should be co-designed and accessible

Children and young people need a range of information and support options to navigate their experiences. Education and information material provided at school is vital. However, children and young people need sources of information and support that they can access outside of school with discretion and privacy. Phone lines are useful, but not all children and young people can access them safely. Members noted that online resources need to be accessible and navigable for children and young people, including resources that are designed for adults, as they may be the first resource listed in an online search.

Jargon and “insider” language should not be a barrier to support

As highlighted above, one of the benefits of education for children and young people is that it can provide them with the language needed to communicate their experiences. Young people highlighted that they are expected to use the correct terminology for their experience in order to get an appropriate response, and the terminology expectations can be different between sectors.

While we should be equipping children and young people with the language they need, our systems also need to be better at meeting them at their level. Adults asking children about their safety need to shape their questions to reflect the age and understanding of the child. For example, if a child doesn't understand what the word 'abuse' means, then asking if they are experiencing abuse is not appropriate or helpful.

Children and young people need to be listened to, believed and helped to express themselves. Government should consider engaging children and young people with lived experience of DFSV directly to assist language development and/or translation tools for children and young people and service responses.

Response

The Taskforce identified critical service gaps to meet the needs of children and young people, in almost every place that children and young people interact with systems. Taskforce members were united in concern that identifying children and young people as service users was just the first step.

There is an urgent need for accessible, age-appropriate services

The most urgent issue identified by the Youth Taskforce is the lack of accessible, age-appropriate services for children and young people experiencing violence. Services for children and young people must be accessible (including without parent or guardian involvement), age-appropriate, culturally competent, resourced appropriately to be able to provide timely care, and be able to recognise the complex dynamics that a child or young person might be facing. It should not be the responsibility of a child or young person to understand the complex systems in place to respond to DFSV. Case managers or system navigators should be proactive in sourcing support, information and guidance to ensure that children and young people are informed and in control of their experience. Cultural liaison officers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people could play a role across multiple systems, including police, courts, hospitals and child protection.

As with their experiences at school, a child or young person's individual experiences with the services, authorities and systems that respond to their experience of violence will inform their choices about how they interact with those or similar entities in the future. In addition, some children and young people grow up in communities that are subject to current and historical systemic racism and institutional violence. This results in justifiable mistrust in systems and institutions which shapes their choices.

Police responses to young people must continue to improve

Children and young people are still having negative experiences with police. All personnel must be trained to interact with children and young people about their experience of DFSV. One Taskforce member suggested that police could benefit from training run by young people with lived experience of DFSV so they can hear directly about how their actions impact vulnerable children and young people. At a minimum, age-appropriate language, trauma-informed processes, care and kindness must be default.

Children and young people must be spoken to with respect as individuals and their needs must be considered in police processes, such as witness interviews. This also includes the environments that children and young people are exposed to in police buildings as cold, unpleasant or scary spaces can compound trauma. The way that children and young people are treated by police will influence their decisions about disclosing and therefore impacts accountability for perpetrators.

Justice systems, including Family Court, must be transparent and accountable

Standards for how children and young people are treated should also extend to the courts. Independent Children's Lawyers and anyone else who may interact with children and young people in the course of their duties should be trained to interact with them in age-appropriate, trauma-informed ways, this includes informing young people about how court proceedings work, what happens during court proceedings and outcomes that may affect them.

The decisions made in family courts have significant impacts on a child's life. While children may be consulted during the court process, once a decision has been made, there is no further contact or follow up. Children should have a mechanism through which they can share how custody arrangements have impacted their safety.

Consideration needs to be given to ways that children and young people can be supported and empowered through their engagement with the criminal justice system. Efforts are being made in some jurisdictions to reduce the often harmful impacts of participating in court proceedings, such as allowing people who have experienced sexual violence to record their witness testimony in advance. Initiatives like these should include and be designed for children and young people as much as possible.

Children and young people can be better empowered in other stages of the justice process. A suggestion from a Taskforce member is for them to be notified when the person who offended against them is being released from prison. This reduces uncertainty and provides the child or young person with time to establish a safety plan and mentally prepare. This is of particular importance in rural, regional or remote communities where there is a greater likelihood of contact in the community. Automatically applied prevention orders or specific parole conditions could support the safety of a child or young person.

The health system must be a place of safety for young people

Healthcare workers are often the first responders to a child or young person who has been impacted by violence, making them vital to early intervention and response efforts. All healthcare workers must be trained to understand the complex dynamics that children and young people are navigating when they experience abuse and the ongoing impacts that trauma can have on their mental and physical health. They must respond appropriately to a child or young person, using age-appropriate language to explain medical procedures and trauma-informed care. Guidelines and processes for medical professionals could improve responses to children and young people and support them to engage with specialist help.

When a child or young person experiences violence or medical neglect, their options for seeking healthcare without a parent or guardian are limited. When a child does access healthcare, their symptoms and pain should be taken seriously and addressed appropriately.

When a parent or guardian will not facilitate a child's access to healthcare, or they would like to access care without their parent or guardian knowing, they should have other options. Options could include healthcare advice services, accessible online or by phone, or medical services that can be accessed without adult approval. When an adult does not assume the appropriate responsibility for the health of the child in their care, the health system should be proactive in responding.

Children and young people using violence should be supported and accountable

There should be multiple systemic approaches to responding to children and young people using violence.

The systems in place to address children and young people's violence must recognise the high likelihood that their actions are a response to their own experience of violence and are often shaped by their family context. Interventions should not create situations where a child is being held to higher standards of behaviour than the adults in their lives. They should treat the child or young person (and their family) holistically and seek to address the root causes of their violence.

This does not negate accountability. Harms caused by children and young people, particularly when against other children and young people, must have consequences. There is concern that retributive justice approaches may cause more harm than good. Considering how often a young person using violence and the person they used violence against attend the same school or community group, restorative and rehabilitative justice approaches should be considered to protect the wellbeing of the person impacted by violence and support the rehabilitation of the person who has used violence.

Recovery and Healing

The effects of violence experienced in childhood do not end when the violence stops. The impacts can affect mental and physical health, identity, education, relationships and financial wellbeing throughout a person's life. For children and young people, these effects can be compounded by the vulnerable life stage they were in when the violence occurred. A child's development of their identity can be interrupted as they focus on safety for themselves and their family. Schooling might be interrupted, impacting their further education and career prospects. Their economic dependence on caregivers means that they are vulnerable to economic abuse.

Children and young people's recovery from violence is interdependent with community healing and a shared responsibility and needs ongoing investment, cultural safety and systemic accountability.

Recovery and healing approaches must be informed by children and young people

Members of the Taskforce told the Commission about experiences that were healing or would have been healing for them. Examples include being believed and validated by others, sharing and receiving support among their peers, and meeting other survivors of violence.

For a child or young person, knowing that they are believed, especially when the justice system is unable to provide accountability, can be validating and healing. Spending time with other people with lived experience of DFSV helps a child or young person feel less alone in their experience and can demonstrate the possibilities of recovery. Knowing that others have shared similar experiences and have recovered can support a child or young person to envision and believe in a positive future.

From experience, Taskforce members know that people who have experienced DFSV can benefit from engaging in advocacy work, drawing on their own experiences to contribute to improving things for others. Governments can draw on their expertise through lived experience engagement.

Life-long support for healing and recovery is needed

Long-term support is vital for meaningful recovery. DFSV experienced as a child or young person can have long-term, and often lifelong, consequences. Government systems should consider and support the additional needs and the accompanying financial impacts of a person recovering from violence. This includes the education, employment, housing, health and social support systems.

Navigating the health system and managing the costs of medical care can be a significant and ongoing burden and difficulties in finding appropriate care are exacerbated in rural, regional and remote locations. The health system can be improved to provide more equitable care options and other systems can mobilise to ensure that the financial needs of people needing extra medical care or other services are being met. For example, one Taskforce member recommended the expansion of the number of bulk-billed mental health sessions available to young people recovering from violence. Another recommendation is for the improvement for financial support options for people experiencing violence could be to extend the Leaving Violence Program to include children and young people, allowing for the financial impacts of violence to be reduced.

A cross-government, multi-system, and proactive approach is required to provide holistic support to children and young people recovering and healing from violence. For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, recovery includes reconnecting back to Country, language, traditional ceremony and culture. Regardless of cultural or ethnic background, a holistic approach to recovery and healing, including consideration of spiritual and cultural needs should be available to children and young people impacted by DFSV. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and community services lead the way on providing holistic support. Other government health, support and community responses could be modelled on these approaches to provide similar benefits to the wider community.

The costs associated with providing the kind of long-term support that the Taskforce is calling for is not insignificant. While supporting the recovery and healing of children and young people who have experienced violence is a valid pursuit in and of itself, Taskforce members note that investing in their recovery helps to break the cycle of violence, which prevents future violence and therefore offers a cost benefit to government.

Long-term recovery requires the cooperation of multiple systems, sectors and networks to reduce the burden on children and young people and support them to build happy and meaningful lives.

We sincerely thank everyone who generously shared their time and insights with us.

