

Engaging Families – Crossing the Service Divide

Despite high rates of comorbidity between family violence, substance abuse and mental illness, services addressing these issues operate from siloed frameworks within Victoria. Indeed, the family violence system can be polarised into services who work with "victims" and services who work with "perpetrators". While perpetrator focused family violence services emphasise perpetrator responsibility and perpetrator interventions, these interventions have limited success in terms of recidivism rates. Alternately services focusing on victims aim to achieve safety and recovery through separation and safety planning. Often the safest course of action for victims is separation from the perpetrator though violence can continue post separation. Conversely, alcohol and drug services operate from a framework where evidence-based best practice maintain and support family relationships. While harm minimisation is a critical underlying feature of all service delivery, when families are facing these comorbid issues, services supporting them can be working in direct opposition.

Windermere and Taskforce have come together to develop a program that addresses the interface of family violence, drug and alcohol and mental health service provision. This model is holistic and includes counselling, outreach, parenting support and group work. It operates in the reality that not all people can or do leave violent situations (including children), and that parental relationships are usually life long, even in absentia. This paper provides an overview of the challenges and concerns faced in implementing this approach and the strategies being trialled to overcome them.