

Tasmania's Third Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan 2022-2027: Survivors at the Centre

Submission¹

School of Education
College of Arts, Law and Education
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¹ Note, this submission is based largely on the report: Hobbs, C. (2022). Young, in love and in danger: Teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania. Hobart, Anglicare Tasmania. <https://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/young-in-love-and-in-danger/>

Acknowledgement

This submission was prepared on *lutruwita* (Tasmania) Aboriginal land in Hobart. The contributors to this submission acknowledge, with deep respect, the traditional owners of this land. We pay our respects to elders past and present. The traditional owners of *lutruwita* belong to the oldest continuing culture in the world. We recognise a history of *truth* including the knowledge about the tragic impacts of invasion and colonisation upon Aboriginal peoples including the forcible removal children from their communities and people from their lands. We recognise the resilience and strength of Aboriginal peoples throughout Australia, their enduring connection with land and waters and their continued care for Country. We stand for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language and history and a continued effort to fight for Aboriginal justice and rights.

About the Trauma Informed Practice Lab

In 2022, the University of Tasmania (UTAS) committed creating the Trauma-Informed Practice Research Lab within the School of Education in the College of Arts, Law and Education. This initiative responded to the increasing recognition in research and practice internationally about how childhood trauma and adversity impacts children and young people's learning, emotions and behaviour. It is important to note that the impact of childhood trauma and adversity extends into adulthood. Burgeoning understanding about the relevance and potential transformational role of acknowledging the impact of trauma, has led to increased research, acceptance and support of a 'trauma-informed practice' approach in early childhood, primary and secondary education.

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Introduction

We thank the Tasmanian Government for the opportunity to make a submission in response to the *Third Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan 2022-2027: Survivors at the Centre* ('The Plan'). We give permission for our submission to be made publicly available.

We commend the Tasmanian Government for their commitment to putting victims and victim-survivors at the centre of the plan. The changes to the plan are evidence of the Governments dedication to ending Family and Sexual Violence in Tasmania, and for ensuring those who are victims and victim survivors have the support and resources they need to heal and recover from the trauma that has been inflicted on them.

However, despite their vulnerability and the life-threatening danger they are in, there is a distinct group of victims and victim-survivors who are missing from the plan. This group of victims and victim survivors are the children aged 12-17 in Tasmania who experience domestic violence and abuse from their intimate partners.

This submission focuses on the voices of this group of young people and the professionals who work with them to highlight the gravity of the issue and make recommendations for embedding actions into the plan that seek to prevent and respond to violence and abuse occurring in the relationships of teens in Tasmania. Throughout the submission the term 'domestic violence and abuse' (DVA) is used to describe the violence and abuse occurring in the intimate partner relationships of teenagers.

This submission is supported by:

- Alina Thomas – CEO, Engender Equality
- Jill Maxwell – CEO, Sexual Assault Support Service
- Jane Gaetani-Black – CEO, Karinya Young Women's Service
- Fiona Barrett – Manager, Huon Valley Domestic Violence Service
- Dianne Underwood – CEO, Colony 47
- Anita Torok – Area Manager Youth Justice Services (South), Department for Education, Children and Young People
- Thomas Caldwell – Family Violence Liaison Officer, Family Violence Counselling and Support Service, Department of Health
- Tania Hunt – CEO, Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT)
- Rachel Dunn – CEO, Karadi Aboriginal Corporation
- Erica Larcombe – Youth Housing Coordinator, Colony 47
- Louise Cornish – Manager, Primary Health Tasmania
- Yvette Dawe – Area Manager Mental Health, Community Services, Anglicare Tasmania

The project, 'Young, in love and in danger' was supported by, and drew on the wisdom and guidance of a reference panel including many of the abovementioned names, as well as the following professionals and representatives of the following:

- Leanne McLean – Tasmanian Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Targeted Youth Support, Bapcare
- Advice and Referral Line, Department for Education, Children and Young People
- Youth Crime Intervention Unit, Tasmania Police

How common is teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania?

In March 2023, the Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study revealed concerning data about child maltreatment in Australia. The nationally representative study found that almost 40% of participants reported being exposed to domestic violence and abuse as children. The reported exposure was similar for men and women (Mathews et al., 2023).

The rate at which teens aged 18/19 in Tasmania report experiencing violence and abuse in their relationships in the previous 12 months is above the national average (39.6% compared with 28.5%),

with girls more likely to report experiencing IPV (Intimate Partner Violence), and more severe IPV than boys (Hobbs, 2022).

We know that teenagers in Tasmania experience violence and abuse not only in their family homes, but also in their own relationships.

Given the ever expanding evidence linking childhood exposure to domestic violence with increased likelihood of experiencing or using violence and abuse in adolescence and adulthood (Capaldi et al., 2012; Curtis et al., 2022; Herrenkohl & Jung, 2016; Pereda et al., 2022) the imperative to break the intergenerational cycle of domestic violence and abuse has never been greater.

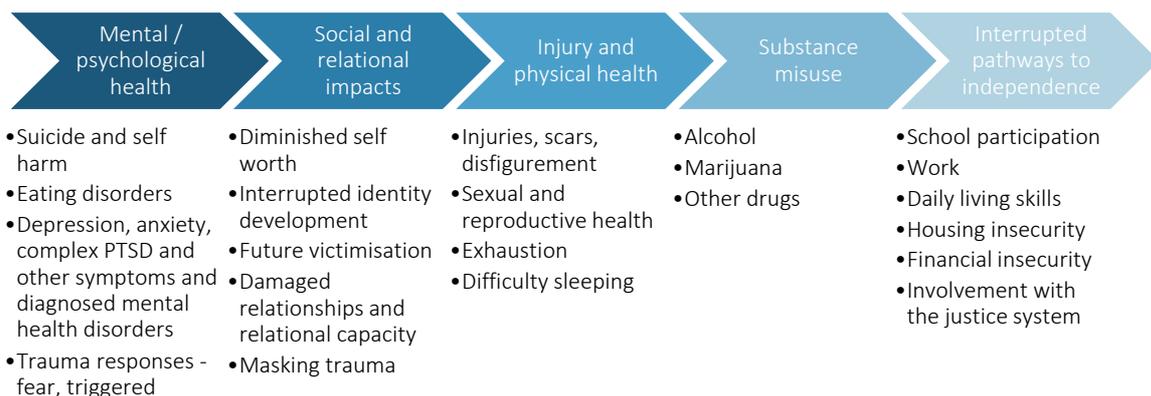
The lives of Tasmanian teens are in danger

In 2021-2022 I undertook in-depth research to understand the experiences of young Tasmanian’s who experienced domestic violence and abuse in their own relationships when they were teenagers. Their stories revealed the harrowing and life-threatening violence and abuse that was common in their relationships.

They recalled multiple incidents where weapons, alcohol and other drugs and choking put their lives in immediate danger. Almost half of the participants reported multiple experiences of life-threatening physical violence in their relationships. In addition to this, over half of the participants had attempted suicide in response to the violence and abuse they experienced.

The devastating impacts of teen domestic violence and abuse include short- and long-term emotional, psychological, relational, social, physical and developmental harm, disengagement from education and early school leaving, involvement with the youth justice system, and an increased likelihood of victimisation and perpetration in adulthood (Banister & Leadbeater, 2007; Barter & Stanley, 2016; Chung, 2007; Eaton & Stephens, 2018; Herrenkohl & Jung, 2016; Hobbs, 2022; Park et al., 2018).

Figure 1² lists the short and long-term impacts of these violent and abusive relationships as reported by young Tasmanians:



² Hobbs, 2022, p.86.

What does teen domestic violence and abuse look like?

Power and control are at the centre of domestic violence and abuse. For teens, this power and control is exerted over them through three distinct but often intertwined strategies:

Controlling what happens to their body through:

- a. Physical violence e.g., violence involving weapons, imprisonment, choking, pushing, hitting, kicking.
- b. Alcohol and other drug use e.g., forced drug use, drug facilitated sexual violence.
- c. Sexual violence and abuse e.g., coerced sexual activity, rape and attempted rape.

Controlling their freedom and choices through:

- a. Isolation from friends, family, work and school.
- b. Monitoring, stalking and surveillance e.g., tracking movements and 'turning up', monitoring of phone and social media accounts.
- c. Enforcing rules and expectations e.g., financial abuse, controlling what you can talk about, servitude.
- d. Outdated beliefs about masculinity driving expectations, rules and justifying sexual violence.

Controlling their thoughts and emotions through:

- a. Manipulation
- b. Gaslighting
- c. Eroding self-worth
- d. Inciting fear through threats and intimidation

Structural and systemic factors that enable teen domestic violence and abuse

In addition to the behaviour of the abusive partner, there are several systemic and structural factors that exacerbate the likelihood of teens being trapped in violent and abusive relationships. This puts the weight of responsibility in the hands of children themselves. These factors were evident in my research and include:

1. Limited availability and access to safe housing.
2. Inadequate provision of Respectful Relationships Education (RRE).
 - a. RRE is not mandatory in Tasmanian schools.
 - b. Young people not regularly attending formal school settings have even less opportunity to access important educational programs designed to prevent domestic violence and abuse.
3. Legislation that limits the formal protections available to young people under 16 (e.g., the *Family Violence Act 2004* (Tas) and the *Relationships Act 2003* (Tas)).
4. An absence of trained professionals and specialist domestic violence services tailored and funded to meet the unique needs of teens experiencing and/or using violence and abuse in their relationships.
5. The normalisation of violence and abuse including:
 - a. Experiencing violence and abuse outside the relationship e.g., through family violence, in the community.
 - b. Violence and abuse being ignored, condoned, dismissed or enabled.
 - c. Social and cultural norms that glorify violence and abuse.
6. Inadequate funding for the prevention of child maltreatment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of prevention and intervention.

What can be done?

There is much to be done to prevent teen domestic violence and abuse from occurring, to support the healing and recovery of victim-survivors, to work with young people using violence and abuse in their relationships, and to provide support to those currently experiencing violence and abuse in their relationships. Domestic violence and abuse during teenage years differs from that experienced in adulthood and requires a tailored response. There is also a need for more research to better understand this issue.

BROAD RECOMMENDATIONS

We call on the Tasmanian Government to act upon the seven recommendations emerging from research on teen domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania (Hobbs, 2022):

1. **Mandate the delivery of enhanced trauma-informed, evidence-based Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) that is co-designed with children and young people and begins when children enter the education system in all Tasmanian school settings.**
2. **Disrupt norms and values that normalise and/or condone violence and abuse.**
3. **Provide tailored support services alongside a sustainable workforce of teen domestic violence and abuse specialists.**
4. **Eliminate the choice between homelessness and violent and abusive relationships.**
5. **Review and, where appropriate, reform legislation to ensure teens are protected from violence and abuse in their intimate partner relationships.**
6. **Provide parents and caregivers with targeted support to build positive relationships with their children and protect them from domestic violence and abuse.**
7. **Increase the financial independence of children impacted by domestic violence and abuse.**

In addition to the broad recommendations above, the table below uses the framework of the plan to define specific actions that are required to protect children and young people and put an end to domestic violence and abuse in Tasmania.

SPECIFIC ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Partnership and transformation

Action 1: Pilot the establishment of two Multi-disciplinary Centres

Recommendations:

- Co-design with young people and ensure centres are accessible to teens.
- Ensure that teen domestic violence and abuse is included in the scope for the MDCs

Action 8. Continue to implement legislative reform to strengthen legal responses to family and sexual violence.

Recommendations:

- Review and reform legislation to ensure all children in significant relationships receive protection from violence and abuse (e.g. *Family Violence Act 2004* (Tas), *Relationships Act 2003* (Tas), *Youth Justice Act 1997* (Tas) and the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* (Tas)). This needs to be undertaken at the same time as ensuring appropriate and effective responses are applied to young people using violence and abuse in their relationships.
- Review and reform the *Relationships Act 2003* (Tas) to ensure that significant relationships are more appropriately defined and recognised.
- Review and reform legislation to further reduce access to firearms and other weapons.
- Consider the role of drug prohibition laws and how these may be modified to increase the safety of children in violent and abusive relationships. For example, strict marijuana laws may prevent children from reporting violence and abuse to police for fear of consequences related to drug use.
- Explore and implement a restorative justice response to children using violence and abuse in their relationships.

Capacity building

Action 12. Provide historic increased core funding to Tasmania's specialist family and sexual violence services with five year contracts to enable funding certainty.

Recommendation: Broaden the scope of existing services with additional funding as required to provide counselling and therapeutic support to children by:

- expanding specialist domestic violence and abuse services already supporting victim-survivors so they can include children aged 12-18 in their client base (not just those who experience family violence from a parent/carer/family member)
- reviewing and where appropriate expanding service provision boundaries to ensure all children have access to services (i.e. they are not 'out of area')

Action 14: Investigate the establishment of a Tasmanian Family and Sexual Violence Peak to improve coordination of family and sexual violence services and advice on policy development and service design.

Recommendation: Ensure that young people are included in the planning and establishment of this peak body.

Action 15. Continue to deliver the Rapid Rehousing Program; 16. Continue to deliver Flexible Support Packages (DOJ); 17. Continue to deliver the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes Program (DOJ); 18. Continue to provide legal assistance to people experiencing family and sexual violence.

Recommendation: Expand the programs and supports named in Actions 15-18 to young people aged under 18.

Action 20: Continue to deliver perpetrator programs

Recommendation: Provide access to evidence-based preventive and restorative interventions for teens identified as perpetrating teen domestic violence and abuse.

Recommended actions that do not fit within existing actions in the plan:

- Increase access to safe and affordable housing alongside income support for teens escaping domestic violence and abuse:
 - Clear housing debt and bad records with housing authorities resulting from violent and abusive relationships.
 - Ensure teens have independent access to the 'Escaping Violence Payment'. Extend the monetary value of this payment, as recommended by the National Women's Safety Alliance (2022) and remove the 'cash equivalent'.
 - Ensure teens living apart from their parents/carers have access to income support and material resources that are sufficient to financially support themselves.
 - Address the gap for teens who may be considered too old for child safety involvement, but not old enough to access other housing options.

- Provide tailored support services alongside a sustainable workforce of teen domestic violence and abuse specialists.
- In partnership with young people, co-design a holistic, case-management-focused support system to meet the unique needs of teens experiencing and/or using abuse in their relationships. This must include a trauma informed, therapeutic, developmentally sensitive, restorative youth domestic violence and abuse support service.
- Ensure adequate funding and resources are provided to response and support services to protect and strengthen staff wellbeing.
- Build a sustainable workforce of teen domestic violence and abuse specialists
- Embed an adolescent-specific team in Child Safety Services / departments. In Tasmania, this could sit in the Advice and Referral (ARL) Service and Child Safety teams
- Invest in the development and delivery of teen domestic violence and abuse modules for all professionals working with teens. This could occur within existing domestic violence professional development programs (e.g. DV-Alert, Safe and Together, Family Violence Graduate Program in Victoria, and university qualifications such as the Graduate Certificate in Domestic Violence Responses).
- Establish a network of teen domestic violence and abuse specialists.
- In Tasmania, revise *Responding to Family and Sexual Violence: A guide for service providers and practitioners in Tasmania* (Tasmanian Government 2021) to directly address teen domestic violence and abuse.

Prevention and early intervention

Action 24: Effectively embed Respectful Relationships and Consent Education in Tasmanian schools and develop a suite of resources informed by key stakeholders and children and young people that builds understanding of consent, coercive control and grooming in the Tasmanian community

Recommendations:

- Mandate the delivery of RRE in all Tasmanian schools
- Develop resources for RRE that explicitly focus on teen domestic violence and abuse
- Develop a quality assessment tool and associated guidelines for ensuring quality, evidence-based RRE is delivered to all children.
- Embed RRE training in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses.
- Ensure school staff are appropriately trained and prepared to be part of whole school approaches to RRE, including the delivery of relevant curriculum and referral pathways.
- Identify and deliver effective educational strategies for teens not participating in formal school settings, including those involved with Child Safety, Youth Justice, and out of home care.
- Embed the delivery of RRE and employment of a liaison officer into state and territory government criteria for independent school registration.
- Embed specialist domestic violence and abuse workers in schools.
- Ensure school, service and workplace policies and processes provide mechanisms for safely identifying and supporting teens who may be experiencing or using abuse in their intimate partner relationships. In the Tasmanian public education system, this could be done by including suspected domestic violence and abuse as a vulnerability indicator.

Action 26: Continue our partnership with Our Watch through the Tasmanian Government's membership of Our Watch and continuing the Our Watch Senior Advisor Role

Recommendation: Disrupt norms and values that normalise and/or condone violence and abuse.

- Develop and deliver primary prevention strategies that explicitly focus on teen domestic violence and abuse.
- Develop and deliver bystander interventions for informal social supports including parents, neighbours and community members.

Recommended actions that do not fit within existing actions in the plan:

- Provide parents and caregivers with targeted support to build positive relationships with their children and protect them from domestic violence and abuse:
 - Provide programs for new parents and carers, ensuring that young parents and those who have experienced domestic violence and abuse in particular are provided with adequate support to access and engage. In Tasmania, this could be delivered through Child and Family Learning Centres (CFLCs), Child Health and Parenting Service (CHAPS), Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS) and specialist domestic violence services.
 - Provide targeted, trauma-informed, therapeutic and practical support to parents and carers who have experienced domestic violence and abuse themselves.
 - Provide targeted assistance to parents and carers supporting their children experiencing or using violence and abuse in their relationships.

- Deliver programs for parents and carers that increase their capacity to talk to children about domestic violence and abuse and access support services if needed.
- Deliver programs that support the development and maintenance of loving, trusting connections between children and their parents/carers.
- Deliver mentoring programs that are affordable, accessible and available to children and young people:
 - exposed to domestic violence and abuse in their family homes
 - involved with Youth Justice
 - involved with the Child Safety system
 - participating in flexible learning options (Tier 4 programs in Tasmania)
 - known to police for their own or their family members' exposure to or use of violence and abuse
 - identified by any support service or school as potentially benefiting from connection with a trusted, caring adult.

Voice and Diversity

Action 31: Establish Tasmania's first Victim-Survivor Advisory Council

Recommendation: Ensure young people with lived experience of teen domestic violence and abuse are members of the Council

Action 32: Deliver funding for community-based projects to support inclusion, access and equity to support diverse Tasmanians who experience barriers for accessing support for family and sexual violence

Recommendation: Invest in programs to improve relationships between children, young people and police.

Recommended actions that do not fit within existing actions in the plan:

- Invest in research and activities that ethically and genuinely prioritise the voices of young victim-survivors and ensure these voices are heard and responded to.

Conclusion

Domestic violence and abuse is experienced by teens in their own relationships across the country. The prevalence and severity of this violence and abuse in Tasmania is currently higher than national figures. Despite this, teen domestic violence and abuse remains an invisible issue. Tasmania can lead the nation in preventing and responding to teen domestic violence and abuse. To do this, we need to include an explicit focus on teens as a strategy for breaking the cycle of intergenerational domestic and family violence.

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