Chapter 2

The Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response to Perpetrators of Domestic Violence: Political Activism in Practice

Edited by Donna Justo

This chapter describes the work of the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response (GCDVIR). Originally established following the pioneering work of Ms Betty Taylor, the GCDVIR has been described as a “community-based integrated response to domestic violence that focuses on agencies working together to provide interventions which are coordinated, appropriate and consistent with a justice reform model of service delivery” (Taylor 2002). The overarching objectives of the integrated response, as it is known colloquially, are to “enhance victim safety, reduce secondary victimisation” (Taylor 2002), and to decrease the incidence of domestic violence through interagency cooperation and collaboration. Through its advocacy and activism activities, the integrated response also aims to hold perpetrators of domestic violence systemically accountable for their behaviour.

The evolution of the service can be directly traced back to substantial political work and advocacy that has occurred since the 1970s. Taylor (2001: 5) describes this in the following way:

Responses to domestic violence have changed and evolved considerably over the past thirty years. Women’s Shelters, first established in the 1970’s provided the first, and for many only, option for women wanting an escape from the abuse that they experienced. Ardent lobbying from shelter workers and women’s advocates was significant in bringing

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1 This chapter is based on work conducted by all of those, past and present, who have an association with the GCDVIR.
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about broad legislative reform, leading to the funding and development of specific domestic violence policies and programs.

The Integrated Response developed from a broad-based community forum held in 1996. Discussions at the time focused on the high incidence of domestic violence and domestic homicides in the area – Southport Magistrates Court consistently records the highest number of applications for domestic violence protection orders in Queensland. The catalyst for change for the Gold Coast community, however, was a period in 1997 in which there were eight domestic homicides in a 12 month period. In some instances, the murdered women had told more than one agency of the threats against them. They called for the funding and establishment of a Domestic Violence Fatality or Death Review Board. This board, as it was envisaged, would review systems and interventions, monitor systems of service delivery, identify gaps and provide support to close them. A defining feature of the Integrated Response, then, is the way in which political activism has helped to shape and guide the development of services.2

Guiding principles

Keeping the safety of the woman victim (and her child or children) is central to the development of any initiative implemented by the Integrated Response (see Taylor 2002). The guiding principles which underpin the development and implementation of the GCDVIR all reflect the understanding that victim safety is of paramount concern at all times. These principles are that:

- Perpetrators of domestic violence must be held accountable for their behaviour
- Domestic violence is a crime that needs a criminal justice response
- Everyone has the right to a life free from domestic violence
- The cultural diversity of society requires that strategies and programs are inclusive and culturally appropriate
- Victims of domestic violence are entitled to access services which are immediate, consistent and which work together to lessen the occurrence of secondary victimisation
- Domestic violence needs to be understood in the political, social, cultural and economic context which creates unequal power between men and women

2 “Other programs which have also provided inspiration and content have been the Quincy Court Model and the Duluth Domestic Abuse Project (both in the United States), and the Hamilton Abuse Intervention Project, New Zealand. These programs, while differing from each other in important respects, all have the core elements necessary for the establishment of a successful multi-agency approach to domestic violence” (Taylor, 2001: 5).
The ways in which these principles have been implemented are central to the goals of program delivery, the means by which systems hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour, and the mechanisms of interagency support that have been developed as part of the Integrated Response. These are described in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Operationalising the Guiding Principles**

The specific goals of the program are to enhance the safety of women victims and their children by:

- Ensuring timely, appropriate and consistent interventions
- Providing adequate legal protection
- Providing ongoing support
- Providing an integrated response which promotes best practice principles
- Providing information to victims which will assist them to make informed choices regarding welfare, health, counselling, medical and legal needs
- Providing services to victims which treat them with compassion, courtesy, respect and in a manner which is responsive to age, ethnicity, culture and linguistic differences or any disability or other need
- Involving victims of domestic abuse in the program development, monitoring and evaluation

To hold perpetrators of domestic violence systemically accountable for their behaviour by:

- Interventions which recognise the criminality of domestic violence and promote the utilisation of the Criminal Code in responding to domestic violence
- Interventions which are timely, appropriate and consistent and which prioritise the safety of victims and their children
- Providing programs which challenge perpetrators of domestic violence to accept responsibility for their abusive behaviour
- Providing individual contact with men to assess lethality and suitability for programs
- Providing a Domestic Violence Offender Program (a fully court-mandated group program for men who are convicted of a breach under the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989)
- Providing programs or groups which adhere to the Best Practice Standards for Men’s Groups developed by the Queensland Department of Communities
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To provide a multi-agency response to domestic violence on the Gold Coast by:
Further developing collaborative working relationships across agencies working with domestic violence to ensure more comprehensive responses
Developing protocols within and across agencies
Continuing to seek funding for the project
Undertake monitoring, evaluation and review of activities and interventions undertaken by the Domestic Violence Integrated Response Project
Provision of training across agencies as well as within the community
Identifying gaps in services and responses
Lobbying for law reform

Governance

The establishment of the GCDVIR governance structures were aptly summed up by Taylor (2001: 5) in her account of the service development work she undertook at the time:

Building an integrated response to domestic violence takes time, energy, commitment and a vision that things can be done better, more safely and more efficiently. The motivation for doing things differently will change from community to community - for some it may be a tragic event that brings the community together, whilst for others it may be scant resources, lack of community cohesion around domestic violence responses, or broader community concerns about crime and safety.

The history of service responses in Queensland shows that programs and policies have mostly developed in isolation from each other. Often there has been little coordination between different services. The Gold Coast experience, for example, showed that “client confidentiality, which some agencies had prized so highly, could result in harm and death” (Taylor 2002).

The programs of the Integrated Response are constantly evolving. There is significant planning and dialogue behind each new initiative and in consultation with other GCDVIR members at the monthly Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response meetings. When reflecting on the achievements between 1996 and present day, Taylor (2001: 5) highlights that “considerable work has been undertaken on the development of clearly articulated principles, aims and protocols, both within participating agencies as well as across agencies”. This is regarded as critical to the sustainability of the Integrated Response and is based on representatives having the authority to act and influence change within their own agency.

The Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response (GCDVIR) Committee meets monthly and holds an additional planning meeting at the commencement of each year to establish three priority focus areas for the coming year. Key personnel in each participating agency sign protocols
and cross-agency agreements, and regularly review these. This gives all members input into the establishment and ownership of the priorities, and ensures their support and financial commitment where relevant. Membership of the committee is described in Table 2 below.

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**Table 2: Committee Structure of the GCDVIR**

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<th>GCDVIR Committee</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GCDVIR</strong> (Director; Manager—Integrated Response; Manager—Counselling)</td>
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<td><strong>Queensland Police Service</strong> (Inspector District Support Services; Officer-in-Charge Police Prosecutions; District Domestic Violence Liaison Officer; Inspector Communications and Operations)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Department of Corrective Services</strong> (Zonal Manager of Gold Coast District; Manager Probation and Parole Southport; Manager Probation and Parole Burleigh Heads)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Department of Communities</strong> (Manager; Community Resource Officer; Senior Resource Manager; Regional Manager)</td>
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<td><strong>Legal Aid Queensland</strong> (Manager, Southport).</td>
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<td><strong>Southport Magistrates Court Registry</strong> (Coolangatta Court Registrar—Southport Court; Quarterly Magistrate or Acting Magistrate)</td>
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<td><strong>Macleod Women’s Refuge</strong> (Coordinator)</td>
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<td><strong>Majella House Women's Refuge</strong> (Coordinator)</td>
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<td><strong>Sanctuary Seven Women's Refuge</strong> (Coordinator)</td>
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<td><strong>Department of Child Safety</strong> (Managers and Team Leaders; Labrador Child Safety Service Centre; Nerang Child Safety Service Centre; Mermaid Waters Child Safety Service Centre)</td>
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<td><strong>Department of Housing</strong> (Regional Manager)</td>
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<td><strong>Centacare</strong> (Men’s Court Information Service; FRC; Family Violence Service Response)</td>
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The committee is divided into seven subcommittees (see Table 3 below) which take responsibility for different areas of activity. The subcommittees meet twice monthly, or as required. Most commonly the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Inc acts as secretariat to the process through the role of the Integrated Response Manager who coordinates these meetings and the feedback and information sharing process. It is through subcommittees that specific processes, protocols, risk assessment and case management occur. They are also the vehicle for developing new forms and risk assessment tools as part of the evolving nature of the DVIR.
Table 3: Subcommittee Structure

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<td>Criminal Justice</td>
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<td>Working Party</td>
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<td>Policy and Planning</td>
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Key programs

The following programs operate under the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response:

**Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program**

In an endeavour to find ways in which the domestic violence court could become safer, more efficient and better coordinated, discussions began between the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast Inc and the Southport Courthouse in 1993. This resulted in the establishment of one of the safest and most innovative domestic violence court support programs in Australia. The location of a specific program within the courthouse has greatly enhanced access to legal protection for victims of domestic violence by assisting with the provision of information about legal and court processes, applications for protection orders or variations to existing orders, safety planning, pre-court visit and orientation, preparation in giving evidence, support in the courtroom, referral and advocacy.
The Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program

The Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program, through the role of the court assistance workers, provides immediate support, information and assistance to victims of domestic violence. Staff can provide the following services:

- Assistance with new applications
- Assistance to revoke or vary an existing application
- The provision of information about the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989
- Pre-court information
- Support in the courtroom and post-court debriefing
- Referral for legal information
- Referral for counselling and support
- Safety planning

Integration within the court is achieved with Police Prosecutions, Court Clerk, Domestic Violence Court Assistance and Registry staff continuing to meet to discuss issues that impact on the smooth running of the program. Court Assistance Program Staff participate in the Statewide Domestic Violence Court Assistance Network (DVCAN) throughout the year and attend the DVCAN conferences and other relevant training and professional development, when available.

Safety 1st Project

The Safety 1st Project aims to increase the safety of women and children who have been accommodated in a women’s refuge in the Gold Coast area. The project involves sharing important information between local women’s refuges and the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre about safety and security needs. With consent upon a woman’s departure from the refuge, a referral form is completed with the current safety plans included and faxed to the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre. This information assists the counsellors at the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre, Gold Coast Inc provide a comprehensive approach to women’s safety on the Gold Coast. The information is not shared with anyone outside the women’s refuges and the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre, Gold Coast Inc unless consent of the client is gained.

Police Fax-Back Program

The fax-back program is a mechanism for providing responses to victims of domestic violence following a police callout. It is an assisted referral process for victims of domestic violence where investigating officers offer the
victim support and assistance. This applies to all incidents of domestic violence. With consent, police fill out a referral form on arrival back at the station and fax it through to the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre on a pre-programmed number. A counsellor from the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre then telephones the victim to offer support, assistance, information and counselling. The project also aims to reduce the number of police “repeat calls for service” through the provision of timely intervention, information and assistance. The fax-back program was first developed in 1998 as a project of the Integrated Response. This partnership has continued to strengthen and develop over the past 10 years, during which time both organisations have undergone a process of education about issues faced by each organisation and have developed a joint problem-solving approach. There are four key elements to the project:

**Interagency collaboration**

The project directly involves police. The fax-back worker liaises closely with the Domestic and Family Violence Court support workers and is able to provide information about any matters before the court. Communication with the domestic violence offender program and women’s counsellors provides a critical component of the project.

**Hospital fax-back**

This process enables the hospital social work team (with the woman’s consent) to forward a fax to the G Prevention Centre to enable support to be provided to the woman during or post her hospital intervention.

**Information sharing**

Regular meetings provide a mechanism for information sharing and problem solving. These are conducted with domestic violence liaison officers from all Gold Coast police stations and the district domestic violence liaison officer in conjunction with staff from the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre. Police station performance is reported on a monthly basis.

**Police training**

Ongoing training is provided to police of all ranks by the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre regarding domestic violence issues and the fax-back program. Training topics have included: Investigating Domestic Violence; Using Risk Assessment Tools; Investigating Attempted Strangulation; and Identifying the Predominant Aggressor.
Table 4: Police Involvement

Queensland Police make between 600-700 referrals each year to the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre. Data consistently shows that approximately 75-80% of victims referred are new clients to the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre at the time the referral is made. Approximately 91% of victims are female. As part of the process of building positive relationships with operational police and the station Domestic Violence Liaison Officers (DVLO) the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre makes regular police station visits. The purpose of this is to make contact with the DVLO, give feedback to each station about the number of referrals made, supply resources including brochures, posters and forms and to discuss any other issues associated with domestic violence.

Project SAFER (Safety Assessment for Every Response)

Project SAFER – Phase 1 and 2 was a joint project between Queensland Police, Gold Coast District, and the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast Inc. The project was developed in response to local needs and issues and draws on international experiences from the United States and Canada. The first phase of Project SAFER was developed in 2003 and was piloted at Southport Police Station from August 2003 until November 2003 as an initiative of the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response. It is described in Chapter 4 of this book.

Men’s Domestic Violence Offender Education and Intervention Program

The Men’s Domestic Violence Offender Education and Intervention Program is a joint project between the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre, Gold Coast Inc and the Department of Corrective Services: Probation and Parole Gold Coast. The program has been operating since 2000. The program runs for 24 weeks and is based on the Duluth model that looks at challenging men to take responsibility for their abusive behaviour and to work towards changing their behaviour and forming respectful relationships with their partners. The men have all been mandated by the courts to attend the group as a sentencing option for breaching a domestic violence protection order. The program requires considerable management and monitoring and complies with the statewide practice standards for working with male offenders developed by the funding body of the programs – the Department of Communities. A part-time coordinator manages the considerable work and monitoring involved in the program, in 2008 the program extended to two group programs. From a management perspective the risk and safety of the women partners and their children is the
significant aspect of the monitoring process. This program is explored more fully in Chapter 7.

Women’s safety has been made visible in all aspects of the program including a pre-group assessment process which aims to determine risk factors and the men’s suitability for the group. Alongside this pre-group assessment, women’s safety was of paramount concern and pre-group sessions were held with the women to give them information about the purpose and structure of the group, the role of the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre, Gold Coast Inc, issues of confidentiality and to work with them to develop a safety plan.

Moving forward

It is an exciting time politically for Australia, in that Federal and State Governments appear to be focussed on reducing violence against women and their children. In March of 2008, the Queensland Premier Anna Bligh stipulated that she wanted to see a reduction in the number of women being injured and dying at the hands of their male partners. This type of public identification of the ongoing severity of the problem ensures commitment across government and non-government or not for profit agencies in their quest for a violence-free Australia.

It is critical at this stage of development in the life of the Integrated Response that time and resources are dedicated to consolidate and review all aspects of the program, and to ensure that protocols and procedures are in place to sustain the response. It is also imperative to consolidate all aspects of the infrastructure to ensure it is solid and focussed. One of the greatest challenges for the Integrated Response, however, has been to retain a feminist agenda and develop services in accordance with the philosophical underpinnings of the feminist approach.

As part of moving forward comes a vision for the future, a Gold Coast Family Violence Justice Centre. How do we get there? Our suggestion is via the introduction of a criminal justice pilot project to establish model parameters, protocols and timelines for full implementation, beginning with the funding of a specialist domestic violence court based at Southport Magistrates Court. The proposed project would seek to reposition domestic violence crimes within a reformed criminal justice system that addresses and supports the safety needs of victims while holding perpetrators of violence systemically accountable. An outline of the project is contained in Table 5 below. The funding for additional resources to the project is likely to be offset with cost savings in reducing the number of repeat police callouts, reduction in court hours, more effective management of offenders and safer communities.
Table 5: Components of the Proposed Criminal Justice Project

The Criminal Justice Project as part of the ongoing work of the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response has the following aims:

- To provide a proactive criminal justice approach to domestic violence interventions
- To provide clearer pathways through the criminal justice system for victims of domestic violence
- To provide a specific framework for the management of domestic violence cases within the criminal justice system
- To provide for the establishment of a specialised domestic violence court using the principles of therapeutic jurisprudence
- To hold perpetrators of domestic violence systemically accountable for their behaviour

**Considerations for the Project are:**

- Victim Support
- Investigation / Evidence Gathering
- Prosecution
- Court Processes
- Sentencing Options
- Offender Accountability – Monitoring
- Development of Multi-agency Responses
- Law

**Criminal Justice Project Partners:**

- Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast
- Queensland Police Service – Gold Coast
- Justice Department - Southport Magistrates Court
- Legal Aid Queensland – Southport
- Department of Corrective Services, Southport and Burleigh Heads

**Proposed Outcomes of the Visions for the Future:**

- Perpetrators of domestic violence are systemically held accountable for their behaviour through criminal justice interventions
- A cost effective judicial management of domestic violence cases
- An integrated multi-agency strategy to coordinate the criminal justice response to domestic violence

The experience of model programs both overseas and in other jurisdictions in Australia has demonstrated this can be achieved without:

- “Clogging” the courts
- Compromising the safety of victims
- The requirement of continued escalating costs
Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the structure and services offered through the GCDVIR (see also Taylor 2000; 2001; 2002). It is the courage, hope and resilience of the many thousands of women survivors of domestic violence who continue to drive the motivation and momentum for this political change.

In the first 15 years of operation of the centre there have been more than 219,000 contacts from women who have experienced domestic violence. The series of case studies described in Chapter 10 establishes further why it is essential that the voices of women continue to inform the development of the GCDVIR, and that their experiences, their reality and, most importantly, their safety (and that of their children), informs all developmental processes of the GCDVIR. It is only by ensuring that the service principles described in the chapter are upheld by all service systems responses to their experiences of domestic violence, that the integrity of the service can be maintained.

Additional references:


Taylor, B (2000), What’s a Nice Girl Like You … Is there are role for women’s services in the provision of men’s domestic violence programs?, National Men & Relationship Forum, Sydney.