



Aboriginal Family
Violence Prevention
& Legal Service Victoria
Standing Firm Against
Family Violence

FVPLS Victoria

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Major report points to the overwhelming link between family violence and Aboriginal children in the child protection system

A highly anticipated report by the Aboriginal Commissioner for Children and Young People “*Always was, Always will be – Koori Children*” Inquiry was released on 26 October 2016 condemning the crisis of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. Drawn from a two year investigation, *Taskforce 1,000*, the Inquiry paints a bleak picture of the landscape for Aboriginal children in care and called out failures by the child protection system to ‘*preserve, promote and develop cultural safety and connection for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care*’.

The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria (FVPLS Victoria) wholeheartedly welcomes and supports the findings of the Inquiry. Revealing substantial evidence on what FVPLS Victoria has advocated on for years – that there is an overwhelming link between family violence and child protection engagement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – the Inquiry provides a lever to call for action that hasn’t previously been recognised by Government.

Describing the Inquiry as ‘harrowing’, Antoinette Braybrook, CEO of FVPLS Victoria points to the facts: the Inquiry reports that 88% of the 980 cases reviewed demonstrated experiences of family violence. Evidence of the link between Aboriginal women and children’s experiences of violence and disproportionate engagement with the child protection system is undeniable and ignoring this has dire consequences.

“There is clearly a cycle of trauma, victimisation and victim blaming that results in Aboriginal women being punished for violence perpetrated against them and their children suffering dislocation and loss of culture” says Ms Braybrook. “At last count of FVPLS Victoria’s clients, there are 500 Aboriginal women with over 800 children. The question I ask myself is what does the future look like for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care when increasingly they experience so much preventable trauma.”

Demand far outweighs the limited resources available and in our submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, we highlighted that our single child protection lawyer has to cover the entire metropolitan region of Melbourne. In 2013-14 this single lawyer experienced a 66% increase in their caseload. Ms Braybrook states that “We need to see national leadership as well as from the Victorian Government on the abuse of our children” states Ms Braybrook.

Earlier this year the Royal Commission into Family Violence reported that “*policies of child removal in these communities have contributed to the mistrust that can make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of family violence reluctant to report family violence.*” A key recommendation of the Royal Commission included that the Victorian Government give priority to ‘providing adequate funding to Aboriginal community controlled organisations for culturally appropriate family violence services for Aboriginal women and children’.

One of the 77 recommendations made by the “*Always was, Always will be*” Inquiry is to ensure that Aboriginal children and their families who have contact with police receive timely referral to their local Aboriginal family violence service. Services like FVPLS Victoria, which is Aboriginal community controlled with specialisation in family violence and child protection, know that cultural safety is key to building trust and breaking down barriers to services.

Calling for action, Ms Braybrook urges “Start respectful relationships with our kids now. Treat Aboriginal women with respect and dignity and treat our culture with respect. Strength in Aboriginal culture enables Aboriginal women to reduce their vulnerability to family violence and connects our kids with a brighter future”.

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Note: FVPLS Victoria provides culturally safe legal assistance, early intervention prevention and community legal education to Aboriginal victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault. Our legal assistance includes intervention orders, victims’ of crime assistance, child protection and family law. Like us on [Facebook](#) or follow us on twitter: [@FVPLSVictoria](#) and Antoinette Braybrook: [@BraybrookA](#)

Media Release