

# NTV Policy Work Update

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## From the Policy Co-ordinator's desk – Part I

Policy work can be difficult at times to describe and express to others. In today's not-for-profit sector world of rapidly changing external conditions, reforms, collaboration and integration, inquiries and submissions, and the plethora of reference groups and committees, this work can so easily seem reactive, time-pressured, indirect and 'bitsy'.

Diving directly into this reactive, time-pressured world of not-for-profit sector policy work has been a very interesting experience. On one level, I have quite liked the pace and pulse of this work, and the wide variety of issues related to male family violence that I am thinking and talking with others about. However, I've become acutely aware that it would be so easy to lose oneself in the bouncy journey of going from one submission to the next, of one reference group to the next.

Doing this would not do justice to an important opportunity to consider the long-term, strategic objectives of policy work, such as to:

- prioritise various policy and practice issues that the male family violence field is attempting to grapple with
- maximise the consultative possibilities in the development of policies
- maximise the synergies between policy work and practice development, skill-sharing and networking amongst services, and workforce development and sustainability across the whole male family violence field.

For policy development work to be useful to the sector, it needs to involve more than the (very important) indirect, behind-the-scenes work involved in writing submissions, attending reference group meetings, etc. It should also have clear connections to practice at the wind farm face, provide opportunities for male family violence services to offer and share perspectives and skills, and make visible contributions to the greater, wider efforts of all to continuously enhance and evolve this complex, difficult work of engaging men.

This article is an attempt to make transparent the first of these two fundamental threads of NTV's policy work: the reactive, time-pressured work of responding to things. In the next edition of *NTV Notes* I will write about the more pro-active, longer-term and creative work of developing strategic policy processes and outcomes that breathe and evolve at the grass-roots of the sector.

## Submissions, submissions. submissions!

One of my earliest tasks as Policy Co-ordinator was to provide some material to the Judicial College of Victoria as part of their update of the family violence bench book used by magistrates when considering family violence related matters. We were asked to contribute text on a variety of issues related to engaging male users of family violence, to assist magistrates to respond

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effectively and appropriately. I am very grateful to all who answered my call to provide advice and suggestions concerning what we should include, and the points we needed to emphasise.

Another significant body of work consisted of NTV's submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission Family Violence Inquiry. As some of you might know, the (excellent) consultation paper was over 1,000 pages, and it took a few hours just to identify which questions and proposals NTV would prioritise a response to! The initial deadline was ridiculous for an inquiry as vital as this, and myself along with no doubt dozens (hundreds?) of other family violence workers throughout Australia was labouring some long nights leading up to the due date to get a submission in ... only to then be informed two days before the due date that an extension of three weeks had been granted. As one fellow family violence worker expressed, I didn't know whether to be glad or mad!

Two significant men's health policies have been released or drafted in recent months, which we decided were too important to pass without comment. As those who have read the previous edition of *NTV Notes* will understand, NTV is very concerned with the National Male Health Policy, due to its lack of any reference to men's use of family violence and its gender blindness in terms of men's gendered power, privilege and entitlement. NTV has written to the federal minister responsible to express our concerns, and at the time in which this edition goes to print we are still waiting a reply.

Soon afterwards, the state government invited submissions to a Men's Health and Wellbeing Strategy background paper. While the paper acknowledges issues of family violence and provides a more sophisticated analysis of masculinities, it was still problematic in a number of ways. For example, it seemed to give support to the widely disputed claim that about one in three victims of interpersonal violence are male.

In addition to submissions and inquiries, there are a number of reference groups and committees that Danny, myself and other staff participate in – too numerous to mention here! Although time-consuming, our participation is often very important to assist a range of stakeholders in government and the community sector to better understand the very complex and challenging work of engaging men, and the different ways in which this work can contribute towards the safety of women and children. At least as importantly, our participation occurs within the context of an important web of relationships with other statewide and specialist family violence agencies, and with government, as we attempt together to navigate through both foreseen and unforeseen challenges resulting from the reform process.

My role has also seen me liaise with a few research and evaluation projects looking at various aspects of the men's behaviour change field. This has ranged from providing input into the current DHS funded evaluation of the enhanced intake service system, the MRS After Hours Service and the men's case management pilots, through to the other, more theoretical end of the continuum concerning a clinical doctorate research proposal to investigate the nexus between psychopathy types, neurocognitive and neuro-emotional functioning and patterns of intimate partner violence.

### **Getting out and about**

Earlier this year I was invited to participate in a forum of men's behaviour change program providers in Gippsland, to comment on issues concerning the use and application of the minimum standards. I found this an immensely enriching experience, meeting some familiar and

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new faces, and hearing about the ways in which programs were addressing various issues on the ground.

I'd be more than happy to come out to other regions holding similar events, to hear about local or regional trends and issues, and to learn innovations that are being crafted to meet particular challenges.

**Rodney Vlais**  
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