



Evaluation of *Men Sustaining Change* Pilot 2021 - 2023

PHASE 2 (FINAL) EVALUATION REPORT

December 2023

Dr Sue Carswell

About the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research

The Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research (QCDFVR) contributes to the prevention of domestic and family violence by informing, promoting, and supporting the actions of individuals, communities, services and governments through research, evaluation and knowledge creation, sector support and education and training. Hosted by Central Queensland University, the Centre's research function is to initiate, undertake and collaborate on innovative and interdisciplinary research and publications to reduce deficits in domestic and family violence knowledge and literature. QCDFVR is also committed to undertaking applied research and evaluation that supports the development of policy and

practice in the field of domestic and family violence prevention.

We are a Zero Tolerance organization and committed to preventing men's violence against women and children. Our vision is: *to influence policy and practice in domestic and family violence prevention through knowledge creation from research; knowledge translation into resources; and knowledge exchange through education and training, in the gendered violence field.*

QCDFVR has a strong commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through building capacity of Indigenous researchers, Indigenous DFV sector workforce and working closely with Indigenous owners.



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work, and recognise that these lands have always been places of learning. We pay respect to their Elders—past, present and emerging—and acknowledge the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to play in responding to domestic and family violence.

Acknowledgement of evaluation participants and stakeholders

I would like to thank the UnitingCare managers and staff who have contributed to the design of the evaluation, shared your insights and practice wisdom, and supported the recruitment of clients to participate in interviews. In particular I would like to thank Joanne Smith who manages the *Men Sustaining Change* program and her team, Chelsea Roberts, Tamara Jones and Rob Blomkamp. My thanks also to Jo Bearman, Dr Chez Leggatt-Cook and Jennifer Williams for their support, expert advice and feedback to implement this evaluation.

A sincere thank you to the 14 men and eight women who took part in confidential interviews to share their experiences of the pilot. Your feedback about what has supported you and your children, the benefits of the pilot and your suggestions for improvements are essential for the future development of this initiative.

A big thank you to the eight stakeholders from services who work with the pilot for your input into the evaluation design and feedback about the pilot implementation.

I would like to thank my colleagues Dr Liane McDermott who started the *Men Sustaining Change* evaluation journey with me and Professor Annabel Taylor for her support and advice.

Dr Sue Carswell
Senior Researcher (Adjunct)
QCDFVR
CQUniversity

Foreword

In Australia, a woman dies at the hands of her partner or ex-partner almost every week. We speak about domestic and family violence as a “national crisis”. We say “enough is enough” and talk about “changing the conversation”, but progress is elusive. Harrowing stories of abuse and control continue to touch our lives, our families and our communities.

UnitingCare has been a provider of men’s behaviour change (MBC) programs in Queensland for over 14 years. MBC programs aim to improve the safety of women and children by increasing men’s accountability for their behaviour and changing their underlying beliefs and attitudes. It’s challenging work. An evaluation of our core program, *Men Choosing Change*, revealed mixed outcomes for men and their partners or ex-partners. This is common for MBC programs, which are typically short-term interventions (16-20 weeks) where men’s attendance is mandatory and court-ordered.

Over the years of delivering *Men Choosing Change*, we heard many men express concern on coming to the end of the program. Any changes they had experienced felt precarious and they worried that old patterns of behaviour would return without the right support. Men frequently asked if they could repeat *Men Choosing Change*. We

struggled to accommodate this due to our long waiting lists and struggled to refer them due to a lack of broader support options delivered within a gendered violence framework.

Based on this feedback, UnitingCare developed a “maintenance” program called *Men Sustaining Change*. This new program is voluntary and provides men who have completed *Men Choosing Change* with an opportunity to continue their journey alongside other men who are seeking to embed new ways of thinking and acting. Partners, ex-partners and children are offered support from an Advocate. A greater focus on referrals, support to develop pro-social relationships, and open-ended engagement (i.e. not time limited) are features of the program.

Beginning in July 2021, UnitingCare embarked on a two-year pilot of *Men Sustaining Change*, with Dr Sue Carswell

(QCDFVR) conducting a combined process and outcomes evaluation. The results show that the program is achieving its stated aim of supporting men’s long-term desistance from domestic and family violence.

Prevention and early intervention are the keys to reducing harm to women and children. To achieve this, we must identify innovative ways to engage men over the long-term and increase their ability to hold each other accountable. *Men Sustaining Change* adds another pragmatic, and much-needed, option to our toolbox.

Thank you to the men and women who participated in the *Men Sustaining Change* pilot and contributed their stories to the evaluation. Thank you also to our dedicated and passionate staff and our valued community partners who helped to make this pilot a success. Change is hard, but together we can make a difference.



Donna Shkalla

Group Executive, Family & Disability Services, UnitingCare

Executive Summary

This evaluation report examines the implementation and outcomes of UnitingCare's *Men Sustaining Change* program during the pilot phase from August 2021 to June 2023. The pilot was conducted at UnitingCare's Maroochydore site in Queensland.

The need for longer term supports for Domestic and Family Violence (DFV)

UnitingCare delivers *Men Choosing Change*, a 16-week Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP), in five Queensland regions. The *Men Sustaining Change* pilot was developed and funded by UnitingCare in response to an evaluation of *Men Choosing Change* (Carswell & Taylor, 2022) which found that internalising men's motivation to change and embedding new behaviours requires more than 16 weeks of support. Further, women and children require more opportunities to receive supports for their recovery from DFV post-*Men Choosing Change*.

Men Sustaining Change program design

Men Sustaining Change aims to provide men with a space to continue their behaviour change journey with other like-minded men by practicing and normalising their learning from *Men Choosing Change*. The initiative is based on a voluntary peer support group structure that is co-facilitated by a female and male Facilitator who deliver psycho-educational content in weekly group sessions and regularly contact men for individual phone check-ins. *Men Sustaining Change* encourages pro-social connections between participants through sharing food at group sessions and attending organised social events. Men's change is further supported by facilitating access to other support services through referrals and information sessions delivered by guest speakers.

Partners and ex-partners of *Men Sustaining Change* participants are offered support from a Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Advocate, including safety planning, provision of information and referrals to other services women and children require. The pilot sat within the UnitingCare Sunshine Coast Integrated Family Safety Response Service (SCIFSRS) that aims to provide holistic support to men, women, and children. This systems approach extends to inter-agency relationships throughout the Sunshine Coast region.

Overall statement on findings

The findings show that the *Men Sustaining Change* pilot operated as intended with men reporting the benefits of the program for supporting them to continue changing their behaviours and develop themselves as a person. The men recognised that changing complex entrenched behaviours takes time and many saw themselves as still on this journey.

While all women thought it was beneficial to have a follow-up program, feedback from women was mixed about the extent of men's change. Women who engaged with the DFV Advocate found this service helpful for providing them and their children with practical, emotional and safety supports.

Other stakeholders interviewed (*Men Sustaining Change* staff and external stakeholders) reported positive feedback about the program concept and implementation and a few suggestions for enhancing program delivery.

Referrals and engagement

Men Choosing Change referred 68 men to *Men Sustaining Change*. Fifty-six men were assessed, 51 were accepted, and 39 attended at least one session during the pilot period. Men attended an average of 15 sessions, with one man attending 59 sessions. In total 51 women were referred to the DFV Advocate (25 current partners and 26 ex-partners) of whom 34 engaged with this service.

Feedback from Men Sustaining Change group participants

Fourteen men (36% of men who attended at least one group session) provided at least one interview for the evaluation and reported the following experiences:

- Men were positive about the facilitation style and the safe space that Facilitators created for discussion and learning.
- The men valued other men in the group, noting sharing their experiences and contributing suggestions to each other supported their learning and accountability.
- Men identified that putting their learning into practice involved small steps which began when they found content relevant and meaningful and was reinforced by the discussions with Facilitators and other men.
- Longer-term engagement with the program gave men the ability to practice new strategies within the group, then with their families, friends, colleagues.

- Men appreciated the information sessions from guest speakers which resulted in some men accessing additional supports.

Key insights into ways men said they were changing

The men identified a number of ways that *Men Sustaining Change* had helped them to change and lessen the risk of future violence towards women and children:

- Nearly all the men interviewed found *Men Sustaining Change* extremely or very helpful.
- Men described how they were aligning and realigning their core values and taking responsibility for their behaviour.
- Men demonstrated an increased awareness of the range of behaviours and patterns that constitute DFV and how rigid constructions of gender shaped their beliefs and actions.
- Men identified ways they were changing their perceptions about relationships and developing compassion and empathy for others.
- Some men were developing self-awareness about their emotional triggers, and the associated feelings in their bodies, and applying strategies to manage these emotions.
- Some men said they were learning to communicate better and more openly.

Feedback from Men Sustaining Change partners and ex-partners

Eight partners and ex-partners (23% of women who engaged with the DFV Advocate) provided at least one interview for the evaluation. Their experiences reflect the different stages of men's journeys:

- Five of the women felt somewhat to very safe. Three

still felt somewhat unsafe. Some women acknowledged that their ex-partner not knowing where they lived and having a DVO contributed to their feelings of safety.

- Children's feelings of safety (as reported by women) varied.

Key insights into women's perspectives on men's behaviour change

- The women identified the benefits of psychoeducational content in *Men Sustaining Change* for developing men's understanding of how their behaviours impacted on their family.
- Some women identified benefits of the program, including hearing other men's experiences, accessing broader supports and developing pro-social networks.
- All women emphasised the importance of men being willing to change and utilise the knowledge and skills learnt from the program.

Key insights from women's experiences of the DFV Advocate

The Advocate supported women and children through:

- Access to services through information, referrals and assistance to connect with services.
- Safety planning and accessing services that assisted with safety; for example, help to report breaches of orders.
- Providing emotional support when women felt distraught.
- Providing women with a voice to inform program delivery by disclosing men's current behaviours. This enabled the Facilitators to understand men's progress, monitor risk, and where appropriate, tailor session content.

Feedback from Men Sustaining Change staff

Nine members of the *Men Sustaining Change* delivery team were interviewed for the evaluation, with the practitioners providing at least two interviews each. Key findings include:

- Referrals to the program work well when Facilitators promoted *Men Sustaining Change* at *Men Choosing Change* group sessions.
- Delivery of psycho-educational content is flexible and responsive to men's needs. This is beneficial for men's learning but requires Facilitators to constantly adapt session content and source new material.
- Facilitators observed that the group dynamic had evolved into collective learning as the group interacted and supported each other, alongside the individual learning of each man.
- Providing monthly guest speaker sessions have successfully raised men's awareness about a range of services and led to self-referrals.
- Social events with the men work well to provide opportunities for the development of pro-social connections but require careful planning to identify appropriate activities.
- Women's referral to the DFV Advocate was supported by appropriate referral information and risk assessment tools that reduced the requirement for women to repeat their stories.
- Limited services to support women's long-term recovery from DFV was a barrier to referrals. However, the Advocate was able to work with women for months, and in some cases for over a year, to help them feel more empowered.

- Some children were referred to *Safe Spaces*, UnitingCare’s specialist DFV counselling service for children; however, there are few specialist supports available for children.

Feedback from external stakeholders

Eight stakeholders representing six organisations were interviewed for the evaluation:

- All stakeholders recognised the importance of men addressing their DFV behaviours and that embedding change takes time.
- Stakeholders regarded *Men Sustaining Change* as a positive addition to local service options and considered that it had greater potential than *Men Choosing Change* alone for breaking intergenerational cycles of violence.
- Stakeholders agreed that appropriate long-term recovery supports for women and children were still lacking in the region.
- Many of the stakeholders interviewed had delivered guest speaker sessions at *Men Sustaining Change* groups. They spoke positively about men’s receptiveness to the information and their ability to support each other’s understanding.
- Guest speaker sessions sometimes resulted in men taking up new supports.
- Several of the stakeholders recounted positive outcomes for their clients that had been to *Men Sustaining Change*. One stakeholder, whose program received new referrals from *Men Sustaining Change*, commented on men’s ability to take responsibility for their mistakes.

Suggestions for developing *Men Sustaining Change*

The following suggestions for enhancing the delivery of the program were made by participants in the evaluation:

- Develop a *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitator manual to support program sustainability and new staff recruited into the program.
- Extend group sessions by an additional 30 minutes to enable more time for discussion and men’s connections.
- Implement behaviour change reminders, e.g. provide a small card that men can keep in their wallet with ‘my values’ on one side and ‘my goals’ on the other.
- Men are interested in accessing program resources online to conduct their own reading and to access material when they have missed a session.
- Investigate ways to strengthen supports for women, such as providing group information sessions for women and enabling the Advocate to meet women and children face to face.
- Expand the program to other UnitingCare locations. (As of 1 July 2023, *Men Sustaining Change* is also being delivered within UnitingCare’s Moreton Bay region.)
- Consider broadening referrals by accepting men who have attended other behaviour change programs (provided that these programs align with the Queensland Practice Standards (Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, 2020)).

- Provide additional child-focused content and parenting information in the program.
- Strengthening interagency information sharing to enhance risk monitoring.
- Continue developing and deepening interagency connections to support collaboration and referrals.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This report concludes the evaluation of UnitingCare’s *Men Sustaining Change* pilot program. The pilot started group sessions in August 2021 at the UnitingCare Maroochydore (Sunshine Coast, Queensland) site and the pilot period ended on 30 June 2023.

UnitingCare’s overall goal for the evaluation of *Men Sustaining Change* was to understand “the success of implementation (process evaluation questions) and outcomes for participants (outcomes evaluation questions) to provide lessons and insights,

informing and strengthening processes and procedures for all men’s behaviour change programs” (Men Sustaining Change Pilot Project Prospectus, 2019:9).

1.2 Overview of *Men Sustaining Change* pilot program

Men Sustaining Change aims to provide men with a space to continue their behaviour change journey with other like-minded men by embedding and normalising their learning from *Men Choosing Change* (UnitingCare's initial 16-week men's behaviour change program (MBCP)).

Men Sustaining Change is based on a voluntary peer support group structure that is co-facilitated by a female and male Facilitator who guide group discussions and deliver psycho-educational content in weekly group sessions. To support the normalisation of new ways of thinking and acting, *Men Sustaining Change* encourages pro-social networks between participants through group discussions, time to share food at group sessions, and organised social events with the Facilitators. The program also aims to further support men's change by connecting them through referrals to other supports they may require, and

hosting guest speakers from appropriate services to deliver information within *Men Sustaining Change* group sessions.

Partners and ex-partners of *Men Sustaining Change* participants are offered support from a Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Advocate, and for some, this continues the support they initially received during *Men Choosing Change*. Supports include safety planning and enabling access to further safety measures, provision of information and referrals to other services that women and children require.

Men Sustaining Change sits within the UnitingCare Sunshine

Coast Integrated Family Safety Response Service (SCIFSRS) which provides the following services: *Men Choosing Change*; DFV Advocate; Safe Spaces (a specialist DFV counselling program for children); and Court Support for men. The manager and staff members from SCIFSRS also attend a number of interagency DFV forums to link with other services to make referrals and monitor high risk cases. This service system approach aims to provide a more holistic way of addressing DFV for the whole family as well as allowing for better monitoring of risks for women and children.

1.3 Outline of report

Section 2 provides an overview of the evaluation approach and methodology used to collect and analyse data for this report.

Section 3 details the *Men Sustaining Change* program design and components of this intervention. This section then provides the findings from the Theory of Change and Intervention Logic model developed at a stakeholder workshop in December 2021 and reviewed at a second stakeholder workshop in February 2023.

Section 4 examines the process for developing and establishing the pilot to identify what worked well with this process and learning for UnitingCare for future development of initiatives. This section also examines the

implementation of the pilot from the perspective of UnitingCare managers and staff and several external stakeholders.

Section 5 provides analysis of the pilot monitoring and outcomes data.

Section 6 provides feedback from interviews with 14 *Men Sustaining Change* participants, some of whom had been attending for over a year when interviewed. The men reflect on their reasons for attending the pilot, what motivated them to stay or leave, their experiences of the pilot, and how going to the group has supported their behaviour changes.

Section 7 provides feedback from interviews with eight partners/

ex-partners who reflected on any changes in men's behaviour and to what degree this had improved their and their children's feelings of safety and wellbeing. The women who engaged with the DFV Advocate provided feedback on the support they and their children received.

Section 8 provides feedback from eight key stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation. The stakeholders represent six external organisations that work with UnitingCare, and one internal program provided by UnitingCare.

Section 9 concludes the report by reflecting on the findings and considerations for future development of *Men Sustaining Change*.

2 Evaluation approach, methods and sample

2.1 Collaborative evaluation approach

The Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research (QCDFVR) was commissioned by UnitingCare to independently evaluate *Men Sustaining Change*. This follows the longer-term evaluation of UnitingCare's 16-week core behaviour change program, *Men Choosing Change* (Carswell and Taylor 2022). The evaluation approach was based on a collaborative partnership with UnitingCare to ensure that the evaluation provided relevant information to inform the ongoing development of the pilot.

Our collaborative/participatory approach involved working closely with UnitingCare by:

- Co-designing the *Men Sustaining Change* evaluation framework with UnitingCare staff and stakeholders, beginning with a Theory of Change and Intervention Logic workshop (December 2021) and additional staff and stakeholder workshop in February 2023 to share the interim report findings and review the Theory of Change.
- Development of evaluation tools in consultation with UnitingCare.
- Consulting with UnitingCare to identify the best ways to implement the evaluation at the pilot site.
- Monthly project meetings with UnitingCare managers.
- Provision of findings to UnitingCare staff and stakeholders to inform continuous improvement and ongoing development of the pilot.

This section provides an overview of the evaluation methods used for this report. Further information about the evaluation design and methods is documented in the evaluation proposal (Carswell & McDermott, August 2021).

2.2 Ethical considerations

There are important ethical and safety considerations when conducting research and evaluation with domestic and family violence services and service users. To ensure that our tools and processes were appropriate, relevant, and safe for all participants we collaboratively developed the ethics proposals and tools with UnitingCare managers and staff. We then received ethical approval from the CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 0000023169) and the UnitingCare Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 20210916). Key ethical and safety concerns, and processes to mitigate risk of harm, are outlined below.

Evaluation recruitment processes

The recruitment process for women involved the DFV Advocate contacting them to explain the evaluation and seeking their permission for an evaluator to contact them. If permission was granted, the evaluator phoned the partner/ex-partner to explain more about the study. If they consented to take part, a telephone interview was arranged at a date and time that was convenient for them.

A similar recruitment process was followed with the men, with the program Facilitators explaining the evaluation and seeking their permission for an evaluator to contact them to discuss taking part. For safety and confidentiality

reasons, *Men Sustaining Change* participants and their partners/ex-partners did not need to agree to the other party's participation in the evaluation.

Recruitment of UnitingCare staff and representatives from key external stakeholder organisations was undertaken by the evaluator emailing an invitation (including information sheet and consent form) with the support and prior endorsement of the UnitingCare project team.

Informed consent process

Prior to the interview the evaluator engaged each participant in a discussion based on the information sheet and consent form to ensure they had all the necessary information to provide informed consent. This included an explanation of the purpose of the evaluation and what their involvement would require; their rights regarding the interview process; how their information would be utilised; confidentiality measures; and secure storage of their information. Participants were informed they could choose not to answer any questions and that they may withdraw from the interview at any time without explanation or penalty.

Arranging and conducting interviews

When securing interviews with partners/ex-partners, confidentiality and safety is a priority and measures to minimise risks included checking with the

Advocate if it was safe to leave a message/text for partners/ex-partners and a preferred time of day to call. We arranged interviews with partners/ex-partners at a time that suited them, and importantly when they could maintain privacy and confidentiality.

There is a risk of discomfort and potentially re-traumatisation for women participating in an interview which asks them to reflect on changes to their (and their children's) safety and changes in abusive behaviours of partners and ex-partners. The evaluator was sensitive to any signs of distress and reminded women they did not have to answer questions they did not want to and they could pause or stop the interview at any time. If a woman did require further support after the interview, those who are engaged with the DFV Advocate or other services such as counselling were actively encouraged to access these supports. If a woman was not engaged with the Advocate, and expressed that they would like information and support, with their permission the evaluator offered for the Advocate to ring them. The evaluator also offered to ring them after the interview to check how they were and if they required connection to professional supports.

There may also be a risk of discomfort for men. The men who were interviewed could access further support from the *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators who

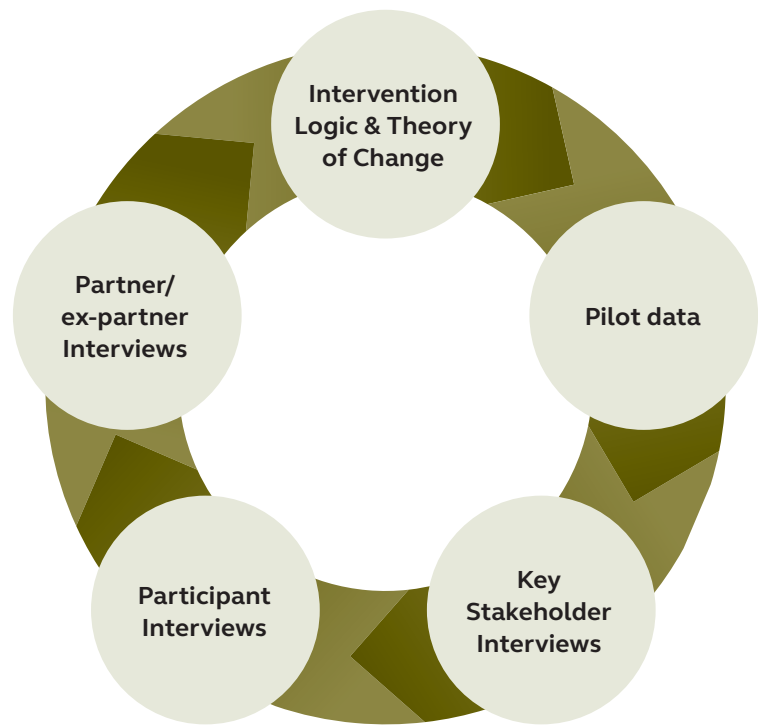
may also connect them with other specialist services. The evaluator provided all interviewees with appropriate helpline numbers including 1800 RESPECT; DVConnect; and Lifeline.

UnitingCare staff and key external stakeholders were contacted by the evaluator and phone or online interviews were arranged at times and dates convenient for stakeholders to minimise disruption. While it was considered a very low risk that staff and key stakeholders might experience discomfort during their interviews, they were provided with the same options to pause or withdraw from the interview and only answer questions they were comfortable with.

Reporting findings

We have been careful to report in nonidentifiable and aggregated ways to maintain confidentiality and anonymity for service users. For safety reasons we did not triangulate information from couples/former couples, but rather reported on the key findings for women, men and children as separate groups. Where interviews with professionals involved with the pilot may be identifiable due to their specific roles, we gave them the opportunity to check their quotes and relevant sections of this report prior to publication.

The *Men Sustaining Change* pilot monitoring and administrative data analysed for this report was de-identified by UnitingCare prior to providing this information to QCDFVR evaluators.



2.3 Evaluation methods

The evaluation data collection and analysis methods included:

Review and refinement of Theory of Change and Intervention Logic model

The Intervention Logic (initially developed by UnitingCare) was reviewed at a Theory of Change workshop in December 2021 and again at a workshop in February 2023. Section 3 provides an overview of this process and the final Intervention Logic and Theory of Change model.

In-depth interview sample

UnitingCare interviews

In total nine individual staff and managers were interviewed for this evaluation. Fourteen interviews were conducted as four staff (the *Men Sustaining Change* Local Service Manager, Facilitators and DFV Advocate) were interviewed two or more times.

Key Stakeholder interviews

Eight individual stakeholders representing seven organisations were interviewed. Most of the stakeholders had presented as guest speakers at *Men Sustaining Change* group sessions.

Men's and Women's interviews

To assess emerging outcomes for *Men Sustaining Change* participants and their partners/ex-partners and children we conducted interviews with a sample of 14 men and eight women. As only one *Men Sustaining Change* group per week was offered throughout the pilot this limited the population size from which to recruit participants:

- The interview sample size for men is good considering 14 men is 36% of the 39 men who attended at least one session, and 27% of the 51 men who were approved to access *Men Sustaining Change*.
- The interview sample size for women is more modest and the eight women represent nearly a quarter (23%) of the 34 who engaged with the DFV Advocate and 16% of the women referred to the DFV Advocate service.

Review of pilot documentation and monitoring and administrative data

The proposal for the *Men Sustaining Change* pilot and the pilot Practice Manual were reviewed to inform the evaluation

design and understand the pilot's policies and procedures.

Analysis of the pilot monitoring and outcome data during the pilot phase was provided in deidentified form to the evaluator and analysed. To provide additional information the men and women interviewed were asked for their consent to access their files to review assessment data. See Appendix 2 for an overview of the pilot monitoring and outcome data sources for *Men Sustaining Change* participants and partners/ex-partners and children.

Data analysis and reporting

The findings from the different data collection methods were synthesised to identify emerging outcomes for participants (men, women and children) and to examine the implementation of the pilot. As this is a pilot initiative, the UnitingCare team adjusted and refined processes, addressed challenges and responded to feedback from the men and women taking part. This evaluation aimed to support that process of reflection through a continuous feedback loop throughout the pilot phase.

3 Men Sustaining Change pilot design

3.1 Overview of Men Sustaining Change Pilot

UnitingCare had long identified the need for follow-up support for men after completing the 16-week *Men Choosing Change* program. The evaluation of *Men Choosing Change* added evidence to support this need, with *Men Choosing Change* participants, their partners/ex-partners and practitioners consistently arguing that 16 weeks was not long enough to change complex entrenched behaviours (Carswell & Taylor, 2022). This is supported by other studies on men's behaviour change that found at end of program, “[men] spoke of...how precarious they felt their successes were” (Brown, Flynn, Fernandez-Arias & Clavijo, 2016:ii).

In 2019, a group of UnitingCare managers, practice advisors and researchers collaborated to develop the program model, practice framework and an initial Intervention Logic. In late 2020, the business case to pilot *Men Sustaining Change* was approved by UnitingCare's internal innovation scheme. The program received funding to be piloted at Maroochydore (Sunshine Coast) over a two-year period from 1 July 2021 – 30 June 2023.

The vision for Men Sustaining Change

To support Queensland families to be violence-free by embedding a changed culture where male peers role model respectful relationships and support each other to sustain change.

The *Men Sustaining Change* working model describes how

the vision for the program will be achieved:

Men Sustaining Change will create a changed culture and supported environment where men are encouraged to maintain the changes to their attitudes and behaviours adopted during Men Choosing Change. Men Sustaining Change will continue to reinforce accountability and ongoing use of tools and strategies provided in Men Choosing Change. This program will also allow opportunities for the development of new positive social networks with peers who have embraced the changes.... There will also be opportunity to refer families as needed to the many supports available within the region. (Men Sustaining Change Pilot Project Prospectus, 2019:4)

Key elements of Men Sustaining Change design

Eligibility criteria

Eligibility to take part in this program includes men over 18 years who have previously used violence in their intimate and family relationships and have completed UnitingCare's *Men Choosing Change* program. Men are individually assessed during a transition interview to determine if they are motivated and suitable to attend *Men Sustaining Change*.

Voluntary access and attendance requirements

Program attendance is voluntary and flexible to a point. Where a man misses four consecutive sessions a Facilitator will attempt to contact them to check how they are and if they intend to continue attending group. The Facilitator may support them with regular calls if a man is unable to attend in person. However, if the man indicates he does not want to continue to attend or if the Facilitator is unable to contact them after three calls and sending a please contact letter, then his case is closed.

Design of group sessions

Men Sustaining Change involves a two-hour standalone group session held weekly that is co-facilitated by a male and a female Facilitator. The Practice Manual (V.1 2022:17) outlines the minimum components of a group session:

Mindfulness exercise -

Mindfulness can be a good strategy to reduce stress, rise above self-limiting beliefs, improve focus, develop self-awareness, facilitate calmness and handle difficult emotions

Full values contract - Both Facilitators and the group will complete a “living” document to ensure group safety. This will be visible in each group session and can be added to and changed by negotiation. The contract will include basic agreed principles of engagement in the group session.

Check in (captures check-in on how the client’s week has been) - Check in is where each participant is given the opportunity to share how they are doing in the present moment

– what’s happening physically and emotionally for that person as well as any sensations they may be experiencing. The focus is on the “here and now” and also may include “highlights” and “lowlights” of behaviours through the last week.

Social Interaction break - *Men Sustaining Change* groups combine a socio-ecological framework [and each] session will include social interaction with food and non-alcoholic beverages provided to facilitate social support among the participants. Alongside the interactions with other *Men Sustaining Change* participants offering empathy, shared experience and support, there will also be a formal focus on practical and social support.

Psycho-educational component (this includes the group topic and occasional guest speakers) - Drawing on our extensive connections with other providers, and forming new partnerships if required, we will host guest speakers (e.g. health professionals, social workers, housing officials and a past *Men Choosing Change* or *Men Sustaining Change* client where appropriate) to present at *Men Sustaining Change* sessions. Not all session topics will be set but will be arranged in response to needs identified by men during their transition interview. Topics are likely to include parenting, financial counselling, healthy relationships, drug and alcohol impacts, well-being and managing conflict. This list is not exhaustive.

Availability of individual support

Once accepted onto the program, additional support from brief one-to-one sessions with a Facilitator via regular phone check-ins is provided. The Practice Manual advises:

The Men Sustaining Change team may identify that a client may need different or additional supports, such as if a client has missed sessions or through observing that the client in group is:

- *Appearing upset or distressed or additional support needs have been disclosed*
- *Displaying low mood*
- *Not proactively participating*
- *Presenting in a negative way*
- *Displaying disrupting behaviours (not an exhaustive list)*

In these instances, the practitioners will provide a follow-up call to discuss additional resources and services. (Practice Manual V.1 2022:18)

Facilitating connections to other services

To further support men to address their needs the *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators may refer men to other support services such as individual counselling, financial advice, homelessness support, substance use advice and support. Information about other services is also provided to men by guest speakers, which enables connections to these services.

Encouraging pro-social networks through group sessions and social events

A core part of the design of *Men Sustaining Change* is a peer group approach that encourages pro-social connections between men that support them to normalise and embed changed attitudes and behaviours. The Practice Manual (V.1 2022:18) describes the intentions of the group process:

Men Sustaining Change clients have the opportunity to:

- *Build sustainable pro-social connections between men.*

- *Empower sharing of successes and challenges.*
- *Role model skills and strategies within a supportive peer group environment.*
- *Access psycho-educational and practical content as informed by male participants needs, guided by Facilitators/guest speakers.*

Provision of DFV Advocate service for partners, ex-partners and children

Partners, ex-partners and any newly acquired partners of the men attending the program are offered the opportunity to access the DFV Advocate. The role of the Advocate is to offer phone support to navigate the systems and services to respond to their and their children’s needs. This includes conducting a safety assessment and plan and ongoing risk assessment guided by Queensland Practice Standards principles (Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, 2020).

3.2 Intervention Logic and Theory of Change

UnitingCare staff had drafted an intervention logic in the early stages of developing the pilot. In December 2021 the evaluation team, in collaboration with UnitingCare researchers, conducted an online workshop with 14 participants to review the draft Intervention Logic and develop a Theory of Change. The workshop included nine UnitingCare staff involved with the pilot and five external stakeholders from Child Safety (CSYJMA) and Sunshine Coast DFV services (Centacare, Kyabra, Act for Kids and IFYS Ltd).

In February 2023 the Intervention Logic and Theory of Change was reviewed at an in-person workshop held at the UnitingCare Maroochydore site. The workshop was well attended by UnitingCare

staff and stakeholders from a range of external agencies. The interim evaluation findings were presented along with presentations by the *Men Sustaining Change* team. The Intervention Logic and Theory of Change were slightly refined in light of these findings and the expertise of the workshop participants.

See Appendix 1 for the Intervention Logic model which includes the resources to operate the program, the program activities, the outputs from those activities and expected outcomes. The outcomes in this case are the benefits for participants and are best described as a trajectory from short, medium, and longer-term outcomes. This helps to identify realistic outcomes over different time periods and levels of engagement with the pilot

and informs the development of evaluation measures.

Below is the updated Theory of Change model which explains ‘why’ and ‘how’ the pilot resources, activities and outputs are expected to achieve the stated outcomes. As a model, this is a simplified version of reality and there are many factors that may influence the outcomes for men, women and children both positively and negatively. For example, structural factors external to *Men Sustaining Change* such as the local service system that has appropriate supports for families experiencing DFV. Such as access to safe housing and longer-term recovery services including therapeutic counselling where practitioners are well versed in DFV.

Theory of Change – why and how the *Men Sustaining Change* pilot influences positive changes

How *Men Sustaining Change* can influence change for men

If men are motivated to engage in longer-term behaviour change this will lead to more active participation and willingness to learn and try new behaviours.

If *Men Sustaining Change* recruits men who are motivated to continue their behavior change journey, then this will create a positive dynamic in the group that supports listening, learning and productive group discussions.

If *Men Sustaining Change* makes access to the group sessions and individual check-in’s as flexible and accessible as possible then this will support men’s attendance at the group.

If group sessions are facilitated professionally by co-gendered Facilitators to create a safe space for men to open up, share their experiences, and connect with each other, then the group will function as a peer support group fostering pro-social connections, attitudes and behaviours.

If the *Men Sustaining Change* psychoeducational content is informed by men’s expressed needs, then this will support engagement as material is of interest to them, relevant to their situation, and they are more likely to utilise the content.

If the *Men Sustaining Change* group allows flexibility to discuss psycho-educational topics in depth this allows men to build on *Men Choosing Change* learnings to understand and relate these insights and strategies to their situation.

If the rolling group offers new participants positive role models of established participants, this leads to the group holding each other to account, supporting and mentoring each other to develop and normalise positive behaviours.

If *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators connect men with services they require to support their journey of change, then this further enables men to sustain longer term positive changes to their attitudes and behaviours. (The program supports connections with services with the Facilitators individual check-ins with men where their needs can be identified and service referrals agreed. Regular guest speakers from services of interest to men further enable connections and referrals.)

How *Men Sustaining Change* can benefit partners and ex-partners

If the Advocate has the capacity to contact partners/ex-partners and build rapport, then women begin to develop trust and feel more confident and empowered to disclose experiences including current risks to safety. Women trusting that their personal information will not be passed onto men is important for them to engage with the Advocate.

If a woman does disclose risks to safety and continuing abuse to the Advocate, then the Advocate can support her and her children with safety measures. This is supported by strong risk management policies and processes internally and a collaborative approach with the manager and Facilitators to determine the best course of action with the family. External processes include strong interagency relationships with Police, Child Safety and DV Crisis services.

If women's experiences and concerns can directly inform the work of Facilitators with the men, then this supports keeping men accountable. This is via the Advocates confidentially passing on relevant information from their discussions with women to the Facilitators so that they are aware of safety issues and men's progress. This feedback loop gives Facilitators a much more in-depth understanding of men's behaviour changes and also informs areas to focus on in group sessions. This is done in a general way that does not expose the identity of women.

If women feel they are listened to and the Advocate is offering them information, support and referrals that are relevant to their and their children's needs (safety, practical needs, therapeutic, community engagement) this will benefit women and children in terms of their safety and wellbeing.

How *Men Sustaining Change* can benefit children

If children's needs are identified then the Advocate can support mothers to address their needs through referrals to children's programs (e.g. Safe Spaces, NDIS, Community Centre), counselling and other specialist services which support the recovery and wellbeing of children.

If the Advocate can provide psycho-education to the mother around the impact of DFV on children this will benefit children's safety and emotional wellbeing.

If *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators work with men in group to strengthen their parenting and positive role modelling for children (and men attend parenting programs if referred), this will benefit children's safety and wellbeing.

If children are living in a safe loving environment, including not being exposed to DFV, then they will feel less fearful and anxious.

If children know their mother is safe, then they will feel less fearful and anxious.

If children see their father treating their mother respectfully and hear their parents communicating in a respectful way, then they will feel less fearful and anxious and feel more secure, loved and confident.

4 *Men Sustaining Change* pilot service delivery and staff feedback

4.1 Introduction

This section examines the implementation of the pilot to identify what worked well and areas to further develop and strengthen. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with nine UnitingCare managers and staff conducted for the interim evaluation phase (July 2021- March 2022) and the final evaluation phase (April 2022 to June 2023). Members of the *Men Sustaining Change* team were interviewed several times to reflect on different stages of the pilot.

4.2 Designing the pilot and developing practices, policies, and processes

The *Men Sustaining Change* pilot was initiated by the Sunshine Coast Local Service Manager (LSM) who was aware of the research and what men were sharing about wanting more support after completing the *Men Choosing Change* program. The concept for a follow-up men's behaviour change program was supported by their Regional Manager and they recruited other UnitingCare staff to jointly design the pilot proposal. This included members of the Practice Improvement and Development (PID) team.

Staff interviewees thought the pilot design phase worked well due to supportive management who enabled a collaborative approach that drew on the knowledge and expertise of staff. Reflecting on what improvements could be made to the design phase to inform the development of other pilots, it was suggested that more practitioners could have contributed towards the initial proposal to add their insights and expertise. As the pilot evolved, practitioners did have opportunities to fine-tune the pilot processes and delivery.

Development of practices, policies and processes

An advantage for the development of *Men Sustaining Change* policies, processes and tools was being able to use and adapt material from the *Men Choosing Change* program. There are areas of the pilot that differ from *Men Choosing Change* which required new tools and processes to be developed. The final suite of guidelines/policies, practice and monitoring tools for *Men Sustaining Change* were shown to be robust with minimal changes made by the team throughout the pilot phase.

Table 1: Existing tools adapted for *Men Sustaining Change* and new tools developed during the pilot phase

| Existing tools adapted for <i>Men Sustaining Change</i> | New tools developed for <i>Men Sustaining Change</i> |
|---|--|
| Participant Agreement form/Intake Assessment | <i>Men Sustaining Change</i> Practice Manual |
| Consent to Share Information – used to make referrals to other services and share information for the purposes of case coordination and risk management | Progressive feedback surveys tailored for men and women |
| Please Contact Letters | Event risk assessment to assess and prevent risk for social events which is submitted to the <i>Men Sustaining Change</i> manager for approval |
| Facilitator debrief tool about how the group went | |
| Client case debrief tool | |
| DFV Advocate Referral Form | |
| Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT) – risk assessment form for women and children | |
| Change Star outcomes assessment tool - used with men after every 8 sessions | |

As *Men Sustaining Change* moves out of the pilot phase and expands to another site this will necessitate a review of the *Men Sustaining Change* practice manual and tools to ensure they fit well with both sites and there is consistency in delivery.

Continuous improvement of pilot and information sharing

The pilot established comprehensive processes for the *Men Sustaining Change* team to share information and reflect on how the program was operating and what areas required improvement. This enabled the *Men Sustaining Change* team to develop new ways of working and adjust policies and processes where necessary.

- **A Case Review, Team Update and Continuous Improvement Planning meeting** is held fortnightly with all team members. Sharing information in case reviews is vital for risk management as well as reviewing the status of cases in general. This meeting is also utilised for discussing operational and policy matters and refining processes.
- **The *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators and Advocate have a weekly case review meeting** which is important for risk management. This feedback process is important for informing Facilitators about any areas that need to be addressed and they can introduce any topics that need to be reinforced by reintroducing relevant content in group sessions. Where safe and appropriate, Facilitators can work with men individually to address risk and offer referrals. Where high risks are identified it may no longer be appropriate or safe that a man continues to attend the group.
- ***Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators session debriefs** (held after each group session)
- **LSM and individual team members regular supervision meetings**
- **Independent evaluation** (QCDFVR) during the pilot phase included theory of change and reflections workshops; monthly evaluation meeting between evaluator and UnitingCare managers; presentations of data collected during the evaluation; and evaluation reports.

4.3 Workforce recruitment and development

As stated, the *Men Sustaining Change* team is managed by the Sunshine Coast LSM, and the practitioners include a female and male Facilitator and a DFV Advocate.

Facilitators

As *Men Sustaining Change* is a continuation of *Men Choosing Change*, albeit in a more informal structure that allows for more client-informed content, it is important for Facilitators to understand what has been delivered in *Men Choosing Change*. It was suggested that new Facilitators to UnitingCare could observe *Men Choosing Change* prior to working on *Men Sustaining Change* to learn more about this program's content as this would inform the topics in *Men Sustaining Change* which men often wanted to discuss in more depth.

Throughout the pilot there has been liaison between *Men Choosing Change* and *Men Sustaining Change* programs which has had a number of benefits. This includes *Men Choosing Change* Facilitators having a greater understanding of *Men Sustaining Change* and promoting this to men who are completing *Men Choosing Change*. Facilitators are able to fill in for each program when staff are on leave or when there has been a gap in recruiting Facilitators. The LSM said that the vision is to multi-skill the "*Men Sustaining Change and the Men Choosing Change practitioners so that they can support each other's programs and you would have that continuation of service delivery, so there is that consistency and that trust that flows through for the client.*"

DFV Advocate

The *Men Sustaining Change* DFV Advocate is employed by UnitingCare and this role was initially allocated one day a week. To catch up on the caseload the DFV Advocate was working an additional four hours a week. The Advocate also provides advocacy services for *Men Choosing Change*. An advantage to covering both roles is this provides continuity of support for women who were *Men Choosing Change* clients.

Training and professional development

The organic nature of *Men Sustaining Change* group sessions with their rich check-in sessions and deep dives into psycho-educational topics means it is important that staff are well supported and have the training, professional development and supervision they require to work in this complex violence prevention space. Training and professional development provided to *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators includes Ken McMasters HMA¹ family violence training and David Mandel's Safe and Together² training.

UnitingCare has funded the DFV Advocate to attend the Blue Knot Foundation trauma-informed training and the SPEAQ (Services and Practitioners for the Elimination of Abuse Queensland) conference. Likewise, it is important to continue to support the professional development of the DFV Advocate to support their practice and connections with other DFV Advocates in the sector.

External Supervision

Men Choosing Change and *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators and DFV Advocate and Safe Spaces staff have an opportunity to engage in an internal community of practice. External supervision may also be important for *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators, particularly as *Men Sustaining Change* is breaking new ground and has a number of differences to *Men Choosing Change*. For example, some men attend the program for far more than the 16 sessions required in *Men Choosing Change*. The men are more prepared and motivated to have in-depth discussions, as they have foundational knowledge and skills from completing *Men Choosing Change* and the flexibility of *Men Sustaining Change* means that topics can be discussed over several sessions if required. These factors combined with social outings in *Men Sustaining Change* mean that the relationships built between Facilitators and the members of the group can become deeper. While the depth and integrity of the relationship supports men's behaviour change, extra care is required by the Facilitators to ensure that professional boundaries are well maintained.

A consideration would be supporting similar group supervision for the DFV Advocates who are working with *Men Sustaining Change*.

1 Hall, McMaster and Associates Ltd provides DFV training for MBC programs. <https://www.hma.co.nz/>
2 <https://safeandtogetherinstitute.com/the-sti-model/model-overview/>

4.4 Implementing referral processes

Recruitment strategies

The eligibility criteria for attending *Men Sustaining Change* has remained the same as described in section 3.1. *Men Sustaining Change* participants were recruited from UnitingCare *Men Choosing Change* program sites in the Sunshine Coast region. The *Men Choosing Change* Facilitators informed their groups about *Men Sustaining Change* and referred men who had completed the 16-week program and indicated that they would like to continue their change journey. Several strategies supported this process including the Facilitators working across both programs which led to *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators having the opportunity to promote their program and *Men Choosing Change* Facilitators becoming exposed to the pilot program.

Another strategy that worked well was *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators presenting to *Men Choosing Change* groups and, on several occasions, this included taking along a *Men Sustaining Change* participant to speak to the group. Feedback from several men interviewed indicated that these group presentations were an effective way of communicating the benefits of the group and encouraged them to attend. A Facilitator described the experience as follows:

We took an MSC participant into an MCC group. The participant spoke about his experience, his journey, and why it is important to continue the change journey - because it doesn't stop after 16 weeks. Prior to the presentation, MCC Facilitators had explained to MCC participants that if they knew the MSC participant, or if they felt uncomfortable at any time, that they were free to sit outside. Similarly, MSC Facilitators had explained to the MSC participant that if he

knew anyone inside the MCC group, the same confidentiality principles applied, they don't share any names outside of this space. (Facilitator)

A strategy to increase referrals during the early phase of the pilot was to contact all suitable men who had completed *Men Choosing Change* in the previous 12 months, which yielded some further participants. This indicates that there is a proportion of men who are motivated to access follow-up support and this recruitment strategy has the advantage of creating an opportunity for additional men and their partners and ex-partners to access this service.

Referral process from Men Choosing Change to Men Sustaining Change

The pilot design proposed a warm handover where a *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitator would attend a man's exit interview from *Men Choosing Change*. This in person handover did not eventuate for several reasons. In the early stages of the pilot COVID-19 pandemic restrictions meant that handovers were conducted over the phone with three-way conversations between the client and the *Men Choosing Change* and *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators. The main challenge to conducting in person handovers was balancing the Facilitators workloads and work schedules to identify suitable times. External stakeholders thought that trying an in-person hand over may encourage more men to attend *Men Sustaining Change*. A suggested strategy was when a man was in his 15th week at *Men Choosing Change* that a *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitator could visit him at group to discuss attending the program.

Reflections from the men interviewed suggest that having a gap between completing *Men*

Choosing Change and beginning *Men Sustaining Change* was not an issue for them. Findings from the *Men Choosing Change* longer-term evaluation (Carswell & Taylor, 2022) showed that, for men who wanted follow-up support, some wanted to continue weekly support while others reflected that they would appreciate a break before accessing further support when they felt like they needed it.

Assessment process and participant agreement

Once men are referred, they are assessed by a *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitator for their suitability to attend this group, including the level of risk indicated by their accountability and motivation to change. Assessing risk includes listening to men's language and if they are accepting responsibility. The Change Star is used to assess motivation across the five domains identifying areas a man needs to focus on and goals they wish to achieve. A Facilitator described the assessment process:

To begin the MSC intake, Facilitators discuss what the MSC program is and confirm the participants understanding of the MSC participant agreement. Throughout the intake, the Change Star is completed, identifying any goals or key focus areas. The latter discussions allow us to explore the participants in-circle supports and any services or programs that they would like to connect into or hear from as a guest speaker. To underscore collaborative stakeholder relationships and support continuity, we encourage participants to provide their authority to disclose with any services they're working with, or that are relevant to service provision. (Facilitator)

The following statements in the Participant Agreement form

relate to access and attendance to *Men Sustaining Change*:

The program is free and voluntary. I can withdraw my consent and attendance any time.

I understand I can participate in Men Sustaining Change either on a weekly basis or when I need to. I can engage at a pace that I feel comfortable with which involves talking about myself, listening to others, and interacting with others in a respectful manner.

Practitioners will contact me outside of the weekly group if I

miss four consecutive sessions to offer any support needed and explore my interest in still participating. (Men Sustaining Change Participant Agreement Form)

The Facilitators may further explain during intake that attending at least eight sessions is encouraged. If participants do not attend four consecutive sessions it is not clear in the Participant Agreement form that after three attempts to contact by phone, and a 'please contact letter' that their case file will be closed. This highlights a tension between

maintaining the flexible 'drop in' nature of the group and the requirements for UnitingCare to have processes to manage case numbers and close cases. If cases are closed, men can re-enter the group within three months without having to go back to an intake process. Research identifies that men's behaviour change for domestic and family violence is an incremental process and it takes time to change entrenched behaviours (Brown 2016; Carswell and Taylor, 2022; Kelly and Westmarland, 2015).

4.5 Delivery of group sessions

As noted, a core part of the design of *Men Sustaining Change* is a peer group approach that encourages pro-social connections between men that support them to normalise and embed changed attitudes and behaviours. This section examines UnitingCare staff feedback about how the delivery of the group sessions achieves this intention. Feedback from interviews with men in section 5 provides more detail about their experiences of the group.

Men Sustaining Change Psycho-educational content is responsive to men's needs and can be covered in-depth

Unlike *Men Choosing Change*, *Men Sustaining Change* does not have a set curriculum to be delivered within a specified timeframe. The psycho-educational content of *Men Sustaining Change* is informed by the *Men Choosing Change* frameworks and sessions and other content the Facilitators determine would be beneficial for men in the group. The Facilitators ask men what topics they want to discuss as well as identifying topics that come up in group and individual

check-ins. Content selection may also be informed by feedback from the DFV Advocate about issues that partners/ex-partners are experiencing. The Facilitators work together to develop tools drawing on their existing resources and discussions with *Men Choosing Change* colleagues.

The major benefit of the pilot design and implementation identified by interviewees (staff and participants) is that the weekly psycho-educational content is responsive to the needs of the group and there is flexibility to discuss topics more deeply than is possible in the *Men Choosing Change* structured sessions. This allows men to gain a deeper understanding of the material, which is further strengthened by listening and discussing with other men and the Facilitators. A Facilitator reflected on how they discussed *Men Choosing Change* material in *Men Sustaining Change*:

That is one of the beautiful things about MSC Topics that aren't given the depth that they could in MCC, we can cover, such as 'The Four Horsemen' (John Gottman) ...that they use within

the MCC courses..... we have also done John Gottman's Five Steps to a Repair Conversation. I have gone and bought five of his books and there are little bits of things that I am picking out that I go, "oh! That would be relevant to so and so, who was talking about XYZ the other night. That might be helpful for them to hear." (Facilitator)

[Other Facilitator] has got a plethora of videos which are so helpful to really beef up some of the content as well. I have certainly, and just recently observed that sometimes the men are able to better identify things that need to be happening by watching a video than when they are thinking about themselves. I think it is easier for them to identify ... I think that is a nice bridge to the actual introspection that they need. (Facilitator)

A Facilitator commented that this flexible approach did involve more work than delivering *Men Choosing Change* as it required designing and developing content to be responsive to the group needs:

I can't think of anything to improve it because I think it goes

well, but it actually is more work. Because when it is structured, it has already been developed, you have rolled it out, and I can drop into week 16 and say what are we doing tonight and you can roll with that. Whereas this one, okay what are we going to do and how are we going to present this? ... Sometimes you have got to design it and do things. It has got to fit with what they want and also fit with the program. (Facilitator)

A major focus of the psycho-education material was related to communication and being able to examine and practice good communication in different situations:

Mainly around communication. That is probably the big one. But you can't do communication all the time, and most of the stuff all relates to that anyway. You know your negative bias and things like that. But sometimes around just doing basic "I statements" ... I know they have done that before, but they want that again. So, we don't repeat the same thing. We were just making new ones up. You know, different scenarios, different things like that. So, it is same but different. (Facilitator)

Many of the men interviewed for this evaluation and the evaluation of *Men Choosing Change* (Carswell and Taylor, 2022) commented on the quantity of information that is shared in the programs and reflected that they could only absorb information that was relevant to them at the time. They welcomed the opportunity provided by *Men Sustaining Change* to refresh their memory about different topics and/or to examine them in much more depth.

Group check-in process

The group check-ins are regarded as a valuable component of the session by the men interviewed and were an opportunity for men to discuss issues and topics important for them. These discussions were guided by the Facilitators and also

gave other men in the group an opportunity to hear others' stories, provide input and sometimes challenge other men's perspectives and behaviours.

The check-in discussions also helped the Facilitators to identify psycho-educational topics for future sessions. Earlier in the delivery of the pilot some men thought that the check-in process could be too long and there was not enough time to discuss the topic for the evening. While some men still commented that the check-ins could be too long, the Facilitators were endeavouring to manage this. A strategy they used was beginning the check-in by asking each man to rate their wellbeing out of ten and two words to describe how their week had been (themes or feelings). This captured how all the men felt and alerted the Facilitators to who may require further follow-up.

Encouraging pro-social networks through group sessions and social events

Part of promoting peer interaction during the group session is the provision of food and non-alcoholic drinks. In November 2021 a Facilitator organised Dominos 'Feed the Knead' program to fund mini value pizzas to be provided for weekly sessions with free delivery. This arrangement was influenced by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) status of *UnitingCare*, and that *Men Sustaining Change* is a support-based group. This arrangement was sustained throughout the pilot phase.

Social events have taken careful planning to identify appropriate activities. The Facilitators found that an activity with an element of competition worked well as it provided a mutual focus where men could connect.

Something to connect you over. Playing pool or something. It is a mutual activity that takes out the heaviness of the actual connecting part. It is like playing

a boardgame. You focus on the game and any banter that comes in addition is awesome. (Facilitator)

... the events. We have only had a couple, but the comradeship and the fun. We always try and have a little bit of competition in there because they love that. That really builds relationships too. Rather than just going for instance to the movies or something like that. Do something where they have got to interact and have fun and there is a bit of competition in it....And it is not as though they are focussed on it 100%...when they are not bowling because the other team is bowling, they are having those chats and that connection between them. So that works really well. (Facilitator)

Guest speakers' information sessions

Throughout 2022 and 2023 a guest speaker presented an information session to the *Men Sustaining Change* group each month. The preference for monthly guest speakers was related to connecting men to services they would find beneficial. This included *UnitingCare* services and external local providers. Six guest speakers were interviewed for the evaluation and their reflections on presenting to the group are in section 8.

The Facilitators thought the guest speakers were a valuable part of the program and helped connect the men with community organisations and supports. They observed that men benefited from the guest speaker sessions by hearing about services and programs that they were unaware of. One Facilitator said this can have a ripple out effect as men had said they had told other men about these services:

The amount of times you might have a man in group say, 'I don't really need to know about that service', 'That service actually isn't relevant to me. But I have

a friend outside of group who would really benefit from hearing about that program.’ I like this because I feel like we’re extending that community connection for other men and maybe that might be what is needed to stop it where it starts. it is really nice to see that the reach is beyond even what we are doing. (Facilitator)

Availability of individual support and referral

Men received regular phone check-ins by the Facilitator which allows

for a more tailored approach to support men’s behaviour change journey. For example, interviewees noted that men often needed individual therapeutic counselling and *Men Sustaining Change* could refer men to the counsellors at the UnitingCare Maroochydore hub. A Facilitator said that if something came up in group which indicated a man required service support they would get their consent to share their information at the end of the group session so they could make a referral as soon as possible.

Facilitators aimed to conduct fortnightly individual phone check ins, but sometimes this timeframe was extended to monthly. A challenge for Facilitators was to schedule times for check-in calls with men to fit around the men’s work commitments and the hours that Facilitators worked. Often men would want a call after work when Facilitators finished at 4.30pm. A suggested solution was to have more flexible work hours for Facilitators.

4.6 Facilitators reflections on successful elements of *Men Sustaining Change*

A Facilitator had observed that the group dynamic over the course of the pilot had evolved into collective learning as the group interacted and supported each other alongside the individual learning of each man. Reflecting on the elements that support this the Facilitators said:

I do think that those foundations were laid very well and I actually credit [first male Facilitator] for that. I think the energy/vibe/ space that he created as a person I think really significantly helped us as Facilitators develop this safe group. Because I would say, that yes, whilst there are key people that do come, they had to start somewhere... there is always someone in the group who has been before who can model the safety of that space, and I feel like that is what helps. (Facilitator)

I feel like it is a camaraderie. That is the best way for me to probably look at it. I feel like it is “I don’t want the guy that is in the trench with me to fall down”. I guess kind of similar to AA ... You don’t want to see that person fall back and you want to really keep them buoyant. (Facilitator)

I think what works is just having that sort of safe environment. The guys get to know each other, that peer support and support each other, and talk about things. The proof is there because they will connect with each other, between themselves. When one is in crisis, they will ring another one. There is a lot of support within the group. The guys who have maybe had a relapse or where they have done well or haven’t done so well there is a lot of support there. There is no judgement around anything from any of them. (Facilitator)

Well it gives them that further connection and it gives them the space that we all yearn for, that space which is to be able to talk about stuff you wouldn’t talk to other blokes about. That is why I think they come because they can. When they have an issue. Even with some of them that aren’t having issues. They have still been here for 30 odd times because they like that connection I think. They like the conversation, whether they are contributing or drawing from it. (Facilitator)

Other supporting factors the Facilitators identified were a regular meeting time each week at a set venue which provided a reliable and dependable ‘safety net’ for participants. The format of sessions similar to *Men Choosing Change*, starting with core values and a mindfulness activity, then check-in and the psycho-educational component which further provides a sense of safety as the men know what to expect.

However, there are differences to *Men Choosing Change* as the psycho-educational component is not structured and there is more flexibility and responsiveness to what is happening for members of the group. There is flexibility too in terms of being able to discuss a topic in-depth over several sessions if need be.

Other successful elements included more focus on encouraging peer support, including having social events, and taking a longer break mid-session to allow more time for men to connect. Providing food was also important as many men come straight from work. The guest speakers provided information,

awareness and opportunities to connect with other services.

The individual check-in calls and availability of the Facilitators was also identified as a successful element:

Another thing I think, a successful part of it, is the check

in calls that we do with them. It gives you that opportunity to really talk about it. The men if they feel they need support can call us or send us a text any time. It doesn't mean to say we are going to respond immediately, but they do reach out when

they need it and they appreciate getting the calls. (Facilitator)

Men interviewed provided positive feedback about facilitation, group sessions, guest speakers, social outings and individual check-ins (see section 5).

4.7 Suggestions for strengthening the implementation of *Men Sustaining Change*

Extending the session by half an hour to two and half hours: This was suggested by both Facilitators and many of the men. A longer session would accommodate the check-ins, psycho-educational session and allow for a reasonable break for men to talk and eat a light meal to facilitate peer support. The Facilitators thought an optimum number of group participants was approximately ten and no more than twelve to allow for the depth of discussions and everyone's participation.

Consideration of accepting men who had completed other MBCPs into the group: *Men Sustaining Change* has received queries from men who have attended MBCPs delivered by other providers and wanted to access further supports to continue their journey of change. They were not accepted as there was uncertainty about the continued funding of the pilot at that stage. Now that funding has been received, UnitingCare may be in a position to consider referrals from other MBCPs as long as they can be assured the program adheres to the Queensland Practice Standards (Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, 2020).

Development of a *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitator manual: Now that the pilot has become business as usual, a Facilitator manual would support new Facilitators to understand how sessions are developed in response to the needs of the group rather than delivery of a set curriculum. Throughout the pilot the Facilitators had developed and adapted resources for the group which have been collated. These resources will also be useful for new Facilitators to draw on, noting that they should also be expected to adapt sessions and source and develop new content.

Access to online material: Men suggested they would like access to program resources online as a refresher and to access material when they have missed a session. The development of online resources and handouts for men would be a valuable addition to the program. Some men have indicated interest in doing their own research and providing suggested readings and websites would also be helpful.

Behaviour change reminders: The *Men Sustaining Change* team have developed a small card that men can keep in their wallet with 'my values' on one side and 'my goals' on the other. This card was not implemented during the pilot phase and it is suggested it is rolled out and feedback sought from participants about its utility. The use of behaviour change

reminders is utilised by the *Men Choosing Change* program who give men a key ring in the shape of a house with 'Be the Change' printed on it to remind them of the journey of change that they have started and how they are now responsible for sustaining those changes. The evaluation of *Men Choosing Change* found that some men were indeed using the key ring as a daily reminder to be a better man and draw on the knowledge and tools they had learnt during this program (Taylor et al., 2020).

Enhanced monitoring of cases: A proposed change to the implementation of the Facilitator and DFV Advocate case review meetings is a recording system similar to that used in *Men Choosing Change* to enhance monitoring of cases and required follow-up actions. For *Men Sustaining Change* this would involve designing a method of tracking each case and any concerns, including highlighting risk levels to self and others, and follow-up actions required. This would ensure that the same case review notes and follow-up actions are recorded in the men's and women's files and are able to be monitored. The case notes that go into this tracker are then able to be transferred into UnitingCare's client information management system (MyCMS) supporting more consistent recording.

4.8 Provision of DFV Advocate service for partners, ex-partners and children

The *Men Sustaining Change* program employs one part-time DFV Advocate. Two Advocates held this position during the pilot phase with the first Advocate handing over to the second Advocate in early 2022. The second Advocate held the position for the remainder of the pilot phase and beyond and also works for *Men Choosing Change*.

The Advocates reported that women were appreciative and surprised that there was continued support for women with the *Men Sustaining Change* pilot. The women were also pleased that there was continued support for men after *Men Choosing Change*.

Women's engagement and transition from *Men Choosing Change* to *Men Sustaining Change*

Women are referred to the *Men Sustaining Change* Advocate when a man is accepted onto this program. Where a woman has previously engaged with the Advocate from *Men Choosing Change*, there is a transfer from one program to the next. Where the Advocates are different, it is important to have a comprehensive handover process so that the new Advocate understands the background, including the safety planning and support that has been put in place, and how things may have changed for the woman and her children over time. The *Men Sustaining Change* referral tool was reported as being very clear as it sets out the details of woman and children, if she has children, and a snapshot of the DFV they have experienced. A DFV Advocate said:

Ideally it would be a handover. You know the MCC Women's Advocate talking to her about the MSC program, telling her this is the Women's Advocate's name and asking for that consent for the MSC Women's Advocate to be able to look at the file that was created for MCC. I think it is more trauma-informed as well to do that. (DFV Advocate)

An Advocate said that a woman's transfer should be seamless and trauma-informed as women do not want to repeat information they provided during *Men Choosing Change*. The *Men Sustaining Change* Advocate can only access a woman's *Men Choosing Change* file with her permission. The ability to check the *Men Choosing Change* file with the previous DVSAT risk assessment minimises the potential for women having to repeat information. This tool can also be used to monitor current risk.

The DFV Advocate found that the women who were not experiencing risk and reported that things were going well were more difficult to contact as they felt they did not require the Advocate's support:

The women who say that there is absolutely no risk are normally harder for me to connect with. There have been a couple of women that have been tricky to connect with recently, ... when I do catch them they say "no, no, no, there is no risk and things are going well". (DFV Advocate)

However, this is not always the case as a few women hesitated to engage with the Advocate while the man was still attending the program.

How women are supported by the DFV Advocate

The *Men Sustaining Change* DFV Advocate role is very similar to the *Men Choosing Change* role in terms of risk assessment, safety planning and safety supports such as distress alarms, offering supports, referrals, and ongoing check-in calls. The Advocate may provide women with emotional support, talk to them about men's behaviours and validate that abusive behaviours are not okay.

Once a woman agrees to engage with the Advocate, they specify their preferred frequency of contact (e.g. weekly, fortnightly, monthly). An Advocate observed that the regularity of the check-in calls could be more sporadic for *Men Sustaining Change* depending on how safe women felt and what their needs were. Women's needs were mixed with some feeling comfortable to discontinue the Advocate support after the man completed the *Men Choosing Change* or to just phone the Advocate when they needed to. Other women appreciated ongoing contact while the man engaged with *Men Sustaining Change*.

As *Men Sustaining Change* is less structured than *Men Choosing Change* and men are not required to attend weekly, the Advocate found that women asked to be contacted less frequently than during *Men Choosing Change*. This may reflect the differences in some women and children's situation over time. During *Men Choosing Change* they may have been experiencing more abuse or were recently separated and their need for referrals and supports would likely be higher.

The Advocate reported a mix of situations for women in terms of safety and their needs for support which reflects the feedback from the eight women interviewed for this report. This confirms the findings that the journey for women and children to feel safe, recover from trauma and feel a sense of wellbeing is not straightforward and can take a long time (Carman et al., 2023), particularly if they are still experiencing some forms of abuse.

The evaluation found that the provision of DFV Advocate support for women and children via *Men Sustaining Change* is extremely valuable, as there are limited service options providing specialist longer term support. During a DFV crisis women are eligible for supports from crisis services, however these are relatively short interventions.

The DFV Advocate can work with women for months and in some cases, over a year. This work has supported some women on their journey of regaining their sense of self, becoming more confident and feeling more empowered. In some of these cases women are reporting minimal or no change in men's behaviour, however they feel more empowered and connected into appropriate supports and their lives are improving which is a successful outcome. The DFV Advocate reflected on one case (the wording has been changed to protect identity):

He really hasn't changed, [but] she has. You can see that self-confidence in her, that ability, that real strength to advocate for her children more and advocate for herself. You can hear her tone in her voice change. She sounds hopeful about the future rather than, "I am so worried and no hope for him to change because he just won't". I am quite elated for her that at least she is in a place where she recognises that what happened to the family is not okay. It is not about

her behaviour. It is about his behaviour. I think that is the real success. (DFV Advocate)

An Advocate noted there are limited options for referring women to therapeutic and DFV-informed counselling. They do refer some women to Centacare (DFV crisis team) which offers around six sessions of counselling with some flexibility for extension. While they found Centacare responded promptly to referrals and do a great job, the counselling offered was relatively short-term:

One of the big gaps here is not having a funded therapeutic counselling service. Centacare do a great job but they are limited. They do short intervention in regards to counselling, and things like safety upgrades and safety planning and things like that. That is one of the real gaps here that we don't offer that therapeutic counselling. (DFV Advocate)

In Maroochydore the Advocate has been able to refer women to Women's Space at Laurel Place which is State funded to provide longer-term recovery services for women recovering from gender-based violence. Previous evaluations of this service have found high demand from women highlighting the need for increased capacity and the development of similar services in the region (Carswell and McDermott, 2020).

Supporting children's safety and longer-term recovery

Men Choosing Change and *Men Sustaining Change* provide referral pathways for children who have experienced DFV to receive specialist DFV counselling. These MBCPs also provide referral pathways to parenting programs such as the Parenting Support Program provided by UnitingCare. However, the options are limited, and the challenge is ensuring there is enough capacity to respond to the demand and

that services are as accessible as possible in terms of location and opening hours.

If there are children under 18 years, the Advocate will tell women about the potential supports available both within UnitingCare and external local services. The Sunshine Coast Integrated Domestic and Family Violence includes a specialist DFV counselling service for children, Safe Spaces. Referrals from *Men Choosing Change* and *Men Sustaining Change* are prioritised as this service is in high demand resulting in a waitlist. The DFV Advocate noted there were fewer referrals from *Men Sustaining Change* as the children had either been referred during *Men Choosing Change* or they are engaged with a private psychologist:

I don't think the amount of referrals into Safe Spaces has changed and that is because some of them have been engaged with Safe Spaces when he was referred into MCC. I still offer Space Spaces to everyone because sometimes they go for a period of time and then the file is closed. They have either gone to Safe Spaces or they are linked with private psychologists. (DFV Advocate)

Men Sustaining Change covers a relatively large region and a challenge for parents is taking their children to counselling within working hours. This can mean that children may miss out on school. It was suggested that an outreach service for children would help to overcome this barrier.

Some parents interviewed for this evaluation have accessed private psychologists and counsellors for their children or accessed public mental health services for their children. Waiting lists and the time it takes to access some of these services was also noted. It is important that children and young people receive counselling from specialists that understand DFV and the impacts on children (Taylor and Taylor, 2018).

Where safety concerns for children are identified the Advocate will first discuss the situation with the Local Service Manager to jointly decide if a notification to Child Safety is required. If so, the Advocate will make an online Child Safety notification and follow-up with a phone call to Child Safety to ensure they have received it.

A referral is also made to Policelink, which is a telephone line for reporting non-urgent information to police so they can follow-up with *Men Sustaining Change* participants and partners/ex-partners. To further support women and children's safety the Advocate asks Policelink to make a note that the informant's name and workplace (i.e. DFV Advocate from UnitingCare) should not be disclosed to *Men Sustaining Change* participants as then they will know their partner/ex-partner has expressed safety concerns. The Advocate will conduct further safety planning with women to further minimise the consequences of the man blaming her for police and/or Child Safety involvement.

The Advocate's preference is to advise women prior to making a notification to Child Safety and Policelink. Only in very limited circumstances would she not do this, for example if there was a likelihood the woman may disclose that a notification was going to be made to the man.

The Advocate completes an incident report in UnitingCare's risk information system, RiskMan, and attaches it to the women's file. From September 2021 to July 2023 six notifications were made to Child Safety and seven referrals were made to Policelink.

Risk management - providing women's feedback to Men Sustaining Change Facilitators

The Advocate role is important for conveying the concerns and experiences of women and

children to the Facilitators. This helps to keep men accountable as Facilitators may not know otherwise if abuse is still occurring. The Facilitators may also tailor group psycho-educational content to address issues that women raise in a way that does not identify individual women:

If MSC Facilitators are approaching a client closure, MSC Facilitators can blind copy the Women's Advocate into 'please contact letter' emails, if after this he doesn't respond, we can then advise the Advocate that we're closing and where we have client consent, we can confirm or disconfirm his engagement with any other services at the time of closure. This allows the Advocate to pass that information on to the woman for the woman's own peace of mind if needed... And we keep them accountable to that. By wanting that support you are accountable to your change journey. ... The change journey doesn't start and stop with us. It takes a village. (Facilitator)

A Facilitator said if an issue occurs in between the weekly case review meetings with the DFV Advocate they will notify the Advocate and work together to address that immediately.

There is flexibility to keep supporting women when a man's Men Sustaining Change file is closed

When a man's file is going to be closed, the Advocate will contact his partner/ex-partner to discuss this and offer alternative supports. If there are no other supports for a woman, then the Advocate talks to the manager about continuing to work with her so there is flexibility in the closures of women's cases.

Feedback from women about men's behaviour changes

The Advocate said some women have spoken positively about men's engagement in the program and changes to their attitudes and behaviours. However, the Advocate found it difficult to generalise due to the small size of the case sample. The findings were mixed and different for each woman:

It is hard to tell ... with MSC it is a smaller group, so it is harder to speak more generally. You are really down to each particular client. Some clients have resumed their relationship. ... For those who were thinking about working on the relationship it seems to have provided him with that extra opportunity for support and to continue their journey around positive behaviour change. That seems to have worked well for their relationship. Then for the couples that are together, and it is a little bit harder to tell as the information that they provide is really quite broad and they say everything is really great. (DFV Advocate)

4.9 Suggestions for strengthening the Advocate role and service

A suggestion was expanding DFV Advocate role to be able to do outreach and meet women face to face in their home or a place they felt comfortable which could strengthen engagement. Going into the home also provides an opportunity to see how women and children are doing. There are safety concerns regarding home visiting and for that reason it was preferred that if there are face to face meetings that they be conducted in the office:

We have had some conversations about if it is possible for me to do home visits or at least somewhere in the community that I can meet with women if they want. ... I can see the benefit for women, and I can also see the benefit of being able to see the children as well. So I am hoping that that is something that we can work through. (DFV Advocate)

The findings suggest that the Men Sustaining Change service provision for women and children could be enhanced to support their longer-term recovery journey, just as this program is supporting men's longer term change journey. For example, the Men Sustaining Change team have discussed providing information sessions by guest speakers for the women so they would have access to this information and service contacts. The DFV Advocate said:

It could add another layer of support and information and connection to the women, just to be able to at least have that option. Even if, depending on the capacity of the speakers and things, maybe offered during the day or at night once every couple of weeks or something. It is not even something I have broached with the women yet because it hasn't been an option. So, to be able to at least

be able to speak to the women about what sort of information "do you think would be important and when might you be able to attend a presentation or an information session". (DFV Advocate)

Some of the guest speakers to the men's group provide information sessions for victims/survivors of DFV and there could be opportunities to invite women to these events as well as tailoring events for women. This suggestion was also well supported by the Facilitators:

It would be really nice to see the women have a support like a bi-monthly event for themselves. I really would love to see that because I also feel like that can help keep men accountable too... I feel like it might empower. If you have women who have been in that space, I would hope that that would empower them to empower one another, where safely, and appropriate to challenge some of the things that they hear or that they see, in a safe way. (Facilitator)

5 Pilot output and outcome data

5.1 *Men Sustaining Change* service user demographics and output data August 2021 – June 2023

UnitingCare collects monthly output data about the men, women and children accessing the *Men Sustaining Change* pilot. These data include the number of referrals, the number of engagements and client related hours and demographic information regarding age and ethnicity. The following section provides output information for the pilot period August 2021 – June 2023.

5.1.1 Men's referral and acceptance into *Men Sustaining Change*

Referrals and acceptance onto pilot

The *Men Choosing Change* programs referred 68 men to *Men Sustaining Change*. Fifty-six men were assessed, and 51 men were accepted into *Men Sustaining Change* between 24.8.21 to 30.6.23.

Table 2: Number of men referred to *Men Sustaining Change* and outcome of referral

| | |
|---|----|
| Men referred from <i>Men Choosing Change</i> | 68 |
| Men Declined | 11 |
| Assessments completed | 56 |
| Men not suitable | 5 |
| Men Accepted | 51 |
| Men Attended program | 39 |

Of the 68 referrals, 11 men declined, and it appears that most of these men did not get as far as the assessment stage as they either declined further support or they could not be contacted for an assessment. Five men were assessed and deemed unsuitable by a *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitator.

Information about the 68 men referred into *Men Sustaining Change*

Men's ethnicity

Most men were of Australian European ethnicity. Four men identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander were referred during the pilot period. Three of them were accepted into *Men Sustaining Change*, and one was deemed unsuitable. Seven men who identified as having a CALD background were referred to the pilot and six men were accepted onto the program. Their ethnicities included: Indo-Fijian; South African; English; Pākehā and Māori.

Men's relationship status at the time of referral to *Men Sustaining Change*

The pilot data recorded that 25 men had current partners and 21 men were not in a relationship when referred. There was no partner information recorded for five men. The relationship history of men was often complex. Where possible, both current and ex-partners were referred to the DFV Advocate and for some men this could entail two or three women being referred. The exception was when an ex-partner had not been in a relationship with the man for the past five years. In total 25 current partners and 26 ex-partners were referred to the DFV Advocate.

Men's children under the age of 18 years

Many of the men had biological or step-children with current and ex-partners and 109 children under the age of 18 years were recorded for the 68 men referred in the pilot period. This provides an indication of the number of children and young people affected by DFV. Some of the in-depth interviews with men and women highlighted how adult children were also impacted. There is also feedback about how adult children have commented on the changes to some of the men.

- Men with current partners – 50 children (biological and step) under 18 years
- Men with ex-partners – 59 children (biological and step) under 18 years

Information about the number of sessions attended by the 51 men accepted into *Men Sustaining Change*

Men Sustaining Change is voluntary and does not follow a set curriculum and there is no requirement to attend a certain number of sessions. The number of sessions attended by the men provides a good indication of their level of engagement with *Men Sustaining Change*. Men have different needs, and some require more support than others on their behaviour change journey which is accommodated by the flexible design where men can attend

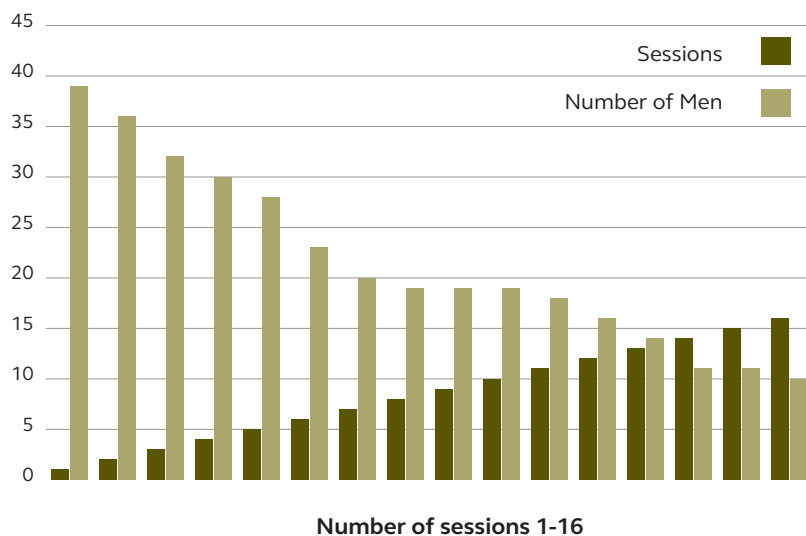
for as long as they feel they require support to make positive behaviour changes.

The pilot data records that of the 51 men accepted onto the program, 39 attended at least one or more sessions. There has been a wide range of use of the program from attending a few sessions to attending 59 sessions. During the pilot period the average number of sessions men attended was 15.

Twelve of the men accepted onto the program did not attend any group sessions. There could be various reasons for this such as work or other commitments, travel time to attend or shifting out of the area, or lack of motivation. Of the men who were not motivated enough to attend there is a potential opportunity to do more individual work to encourage them to attend. Interviews with men who only attended a few sessions provides insights into why they decided to stop attending.

Graph 1 provides a snapshot of the number of individual men who attended one session, two sessions, three sessions and so forth up to 16 sessions. Sixteen sessions was chosen as a point of interest as this is the number of sessions for the *Men Choosing Change* program. As stated, 39 men attended at least one session and this slowly decreases and plateaus at between 20 to 18 men attending up to 11 sessions. The number of men attending more than 11 sessions then slowly decreases to stabilise at 10 to 11 men attending up to 16 sessions.

Graph 1: Number of men who attended up to 16 sessions.



The pattern of attendance continues to slowly decrease with a core group of men attending for well over a year. Table 3 clusters the number of sessions (over 16) attended by the number of men.

Table 3: Clustering of sessions 17 to 59 by number of men attending.

| No. sessions | No. men attending |
|--------------|-------------------|
| 17-18 | 8-9 |
| 19-28 | 7 |
| 29-30 | 6 |
| 31-37 | 5 |
| 38-40 | 4 |
| 40-48 | 2-3 |
| 49-59 | 1 |

Information about men’s involvement with the child safety and justice sectors

Child safety involvement: nine men referred to the pilot had Child Safety involvement, however three were deemed unsuitable for the program and a further three did not attend the group.

Community Corrections involvement: 12 men referred had Community Corrections involvement of which 11 attended the program.

Intervention orders and breach notification: ten men referred to the program had an Intervention Order of whom six attended the program. Three of the men did not attend and one man was deemed unsuitable.

Information about men’s referrals to UnitingCare services and external services

This section analyses the referrals recorded by the Facilitators who referred men to UnitingCare services and external services to support a variety of needs. These services included counselling, relationship mediation, parenting and child programs, legal services, financial counselling and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family wellbeing service.

In total 25 men received 33 referrals to a variety of services. Ten men were referred to services within UnitingCare and fifteen men were referred to external services. Table 4 summarises how many referrals were made to different types of services.

Table 4: Summary of the number of men referred to different types of services

| Services | Number of referrals |
|---|---------------------|
| Therapeutic counselling with DFV lens | |
| Relationships Australia Queensland (counselling) | 6 |
| 'Older, Wiser, Stronger' (men's behaviour change counselling in the South Burnett) | 1 |
| UnitingCare internal counselling | 1 |
| Relationship mediation and dispute resolution including for child custody issues | |
| UnitingCare Family Relationship Centre - Mediation for Parenting plan | 2 |
| UnitingCare Family Dispute Resolution | 1 |
| UnitingCare Parenting Order Program | 1 |
| Family Intervention Program | 1 |
| Parenting and child related programs | |
| UnitingCare Safe Spaces | 5 |
| UnitingCare Parenting Support Program | 3 |
| UnitingCare Family and Relationships Service | 1 |
| Addressing economic and emergency relief needs | |
| Salvation Army – Money Care Financial Counselling Service | 3 |
| Homelessness service | |
| Financial emergency relief Co-op subsidised food outlet for low-income families and community centre for emergency relief | 2 |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family services | |
| Re-Focus: Family Wellbeing | 1 |
| Legal advice and justice services | |
| Suncoast Community Legal Service Inc. | 4 |
| Queensland Police Domestic, Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Unit (DFV & VPU) | 1 |
| Alcohol and other Drugs (AOD) rehabilitation services | |
| Queensland Injectors Health Network (QuIHN) | 1 |
| Total referrals | 33 |

5.1.2 DFV Advocate output data

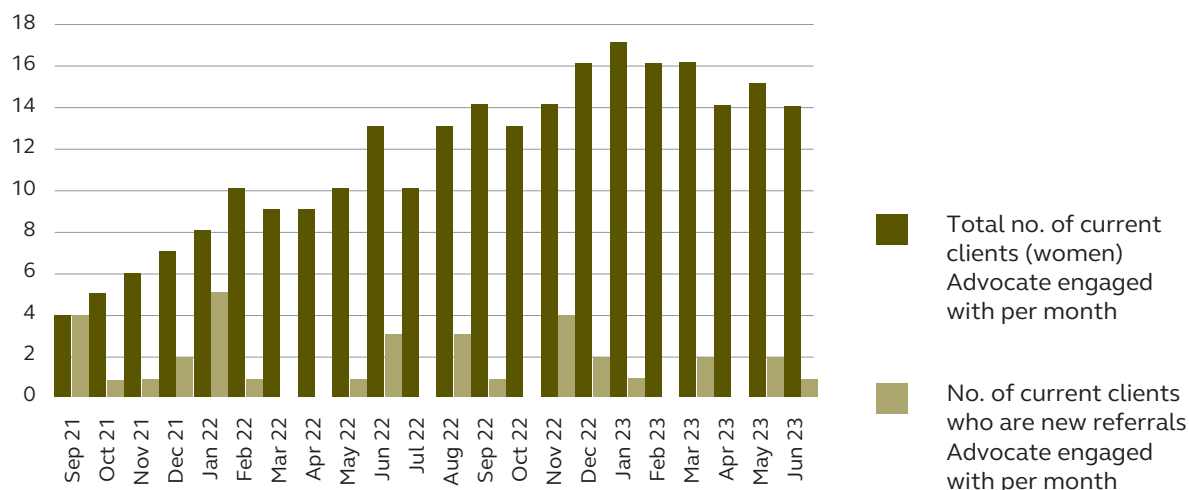
The graph below shows the total number of clients the Advocate engaged with each month during the pilot from September 2021 to June 2023 and the number of current clients who were new referrals each month.

In total 51 women were referred to the DFV Advocate (25 current partners and 26 ex-partners) of whom 34 women engaged with this service. A barrier to

engagement is that some of these women could not be contacted. Other women declined support for various reasons.

The 34 women who did engage had 48 children under the age of 18 years and 14 adult children over 18 years old. Most women and children identified as Australian of European descent. Two women and three children identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Three women and six children identified as CALD and one child identified as LGBTQI+.

Graph 2: Total number of clients and new referrals the DFV Advocate engaged with each month



The data show that the Advocate case load started to increase over time as more women engaged with the service than there were case closures. The Advocate records the frequency of contact that women prefer, which could be weekly, fortnightly, or monthly. This may change over time, for example, sometimes women initially decline, or stop support, only to come back and reengage as their circumstances change.

Referrals to other services

The Advocate offers women referrals to UnitingCare services and external services for themselves and their children which they may choose to accept or decline. As noted, women and children may already be engaged with services or feel they do not need those services at the time. Table 5 summarises how many referrals were offered to women and children and how many accepted referrals.

Table 5: Summary of women and children offered referrals to services and number that accepted referral

| Services | Number of referrals offered to clients | Number of referrals clients accepted |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| Parenting and child related programs and services | | |
| UnitingCare Safe Spaces | 11 children | 5 children |
| DFV Services and legal services | | |
| Centacare DFV Service | 14 | 3 |
| SCRDFVS (Sunshine Coast Regional Domestic and Family Violence Service) | 1 | 1 |
| CISP (Court Integrated Services Program) | 2 | 1 |
| Family Dispute Resolution | 3 | 0 |
| Policelink | 1 | 0 |
| Community Action Gympie (DFV Service including for women, children, young people and CALD community members) | 1 | 1 |
| Longer-term recovery services from gender-based violence | | |
| Women's Space at Laurel Place (1 accepted referral and 4 declined) | 5 | 2 |
| Adult Counselling provided by UnitingCare Family and Relationships Service (FARS) or Centacare | 3 | 1 |
| Salvation Army | 1 | 0 |
| Total referrals offered and accepted | 42 | 14 |

5.2 Delivering during prolonged disasters

During 2020 – 2022 Queensland was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in a number of lockdowns and mandatory measures to reduce the spread of the virus. This impacted on the way the pilot operated and included measures such as physical distancing (spaced chairs at group session), compulsory wearing of masks, and limited sharing of food and beverages and social outings.

While the whole population was impacted in numerous ways by

the virus and the measures to contain it, these broader stressors would have also impacted *Men Sustaining Change* men, partners and ex-partners and children. Interviews for the interim report conducted in 2022 revealed additional stress on families regarding employment, housing, education and anxiety about the virus and vaccinations.

During 2022 Queensland also faced severe flooding. These disasters impacted on client engagement and it is a credit to

UnitingCare and the staff that they continued to develop and implement a new initiative such as *Men Sustaining Change* during this period. By early 2023 the referral numbers had increased reflecting both the ongoing strategies to promote *Men Sustaining Change* as well as the easing of restrictions as life resumed some normalcy following these disasters.

5.3 Outcomes for men and women - progressive survey findings

To monitor program outcomes, two surveys were developed, one for *Men Sustaining Change* participants and one for their partners and ex-partners. The intention of the survey was for it to be completed by the participants at intervals to identify changes over time. The survey was anonymous unless participants indicated they would like to be contacted by UnitingCare for follow-up support.

The design originally specified that men and women would be invited to fill in the survey after men attended every eighth session, during group for men, or during phone calls for women. In practice this was not how the survey was administered and there are several learnings and considerations for implementing this survey going forward:

- Ease of administering the survey: for women it is easier for the DFV Advocate to text them a link to the survey rather than sending a QR code. For men it would be easier to align the survey with their Outcome Star assessments.

- Consider if every eight sessions is too soon for men and women to fill in the survey.
- Consider the purpose of the survey and the implications of it being anonymous. The survey is a mix of questions about satisfaction with the services received and suggestions for improvement, and outcome indicators to track changes in safety for women and children and behaviour changes of men.

Eighteen progressive surveys were filled in by men and 16 surveys by women. Below are key findings as they relate to outcomes for men, women and children.

5.3.1 Progressive Survey findings for men participating in *Men Sustaining Change*

Current relationship status:

14 out of 18 participants were in a relationship.

12 men who have children under 18 years

Safety of women and children:

One man thought his partner

and children would feel unsafe, most men thought they would feel 'always safe'. Three responses indicated 'rarely unsafe'.

Helpfulness of the *Men Sustaining Change* program to make changes:

12 responses were 'extremely helpful' and one 'very helpful'. One response was 'helpful' and one response was 'not helpful at all'. Three responded 'don't know'.

Men identified the most helpful parts of the program related to three broad themes:

1. ***Ways the program has been helpful for men***

The group has facilitated men continuing their learning to support behaviour changes and reinforce the changes they had started to make during *Men Choosing Change*. This includes discussions on the psycho-educational topics and discussions during check-ins where men listen and respond to other men's stories. Men appreciated being pulled up for their actions by the group and then being able to discuss that with a Facilitator during one on one sessions.

2. **How the program has enabled learning**

Over half the men identified that the group itself, including the Facilitators and the other men, made the experience helpful for them as it enabled them to feel supported to learn, discuss, share and listen. Several men specifically identified that it was a safe space where they felt comfortable to connect with other men.

3. **The changes men identified to the way they think and act supported by attending the program**

Three men said ‘accountability’ and another man identified his own changes as evidence of what the program was doing, “*from where I was to where I am now is what the course is doing*”.

One man said “*Everything. Family, work, play*”. The other men’s responses can be broadly grouped under the following themes:

- Improved self-awareness and self-belief
- More empathetic view and treatment of others
- Improved management of reactions and behaviours

5.3.2 **Progressive Survey findings for partners and ex-partners**

Current relationship status:

10 out of 16 participants were in a relationship.

11 women have children under 18 years and four of these women have shared custody

Shared custody arrangements of children can be a point of tension

between separated parents and where there has been DFV there can be risk to women and children. While the survey did not capture details about parenting orders, DVOs and access arrangements the variety of responses of this small sample about the level of contact and women’s feelings of safety for their children and themselves highlights a wide variation of experiences. Below is a summary of findings across relationship status, shared custody of children, and safety.

The four women who had shared custody of children under 18 years responded with different variations in their contact with their ex-partner over the last month ranging from ‘all the time’, ‘often’, ‘sometimes’ to ‘never’. These four women provided different safety ratings for them and their children.

Table 6: Women with shared custody of children rating of their and their children’s safety

| Shared custody of children – contact with ex-partner over last month | Rating of safety for children | Rating of safety for themselves |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| All the time | Always safe | Rarely unsafe |
| Often | Rarely unsafe | Rarely unsafe |
| Sometimes | Sometimes unsafe | Sometimes unsafe |
| Never | No rating as did not see ex-partner | No rating as did see not ex-partner |

The other two women who were not in a relationship and did not have shared custody of children said their contact with their ex-partner over the last month had been ‘often’. Again, their different ratings of safety for themselves showed there very different experiences of seeing their ex-partner ‘often’. One woman said she felt ‘always unsafe’ while the other woman said she felt ‘rarely unsafe’.

Women’s feelings of safety over the past month: ten women felt either ‘always safe’ or ‘rarely unsafe’. Three women felt ‘sometimes unsafe’ and two women felt ‘often unsafe’ or ‘always unsafe’.

How safe women thought their children felt over the past month:

ten women who had children under 18 years old responded with six women saying their children felt either ‘always safe’ or ‘rarely unsafe’. Four women thought their children felt ‘sometimes unsafe’ or ‘always unsafe’.

Women rating helpfulness of Men Sustaining Change supporting changes:

14 women responded and six women said ‘extremely helpful’. Two responded the group was ‘helpful’ and one response was ‘not helpful at all’. Five responded ‘don’t know’. A woman who responded ‘not helpful at all’ explained “*I expect this is not a problem with the program, more the individual*”.

Women identified how they experienced men’s changes and to what extent he had changed:

Significant changes

Development of empathy, understanding abusive behaviour, understanding cycles of abuse, understanding entitlement, learning new ways of coping with stress and anger.

His dealing with his anger better and not yelling at me as much.

Encouraged empathy Education surrounding abusive behaviour. Encouraged self-awareness. Illustrated options. Included him in group work and group friendships. Broadened his perspectives. Educated on cycles of abuse. Explored

family relationships. Explored entitlement and patriarchally defined roles and attitudes.

Some changes

He has more learning to do but he's much, much better than he used to be. I used to fear bringing up anything that I thought would aggravate him. Now, he needs to understand that I have feelings and a point of view.

I think UnitingCare helped [ex-partner] to a point but [ex-partner] always thinks he knows better and won't take things on board.

Keeps in check

It keeps him on track and attempts to remind him of the conditions outlined in the DVO. Some advice he adheres to, some he does not.

No change

I haven't seen or heard of any change in [partners] behaviour or attitude towards his and my relationship or his with his child. [Partner] hasn't discussed anything with me that has stemmed from his involvement with MSC!!!!

There has been no change.

Five women identified how men's behaviour changed towards the children: one woman said there had been no change. Four women said their were improvements related to two broad themes:

- Calmer and dealing with anger better – more understanding that they are children
- Better interaction with children

14 Women rated the helpfulness of the support they received from the DFV Advocate:

ten said the support provided the DFV Advocate had been 'extremely helpful' (six) or 'very helpful' (four). Three women said the support was 'helpful'. One woman said it was 'a little helpful'.

Women identified the DFV Advocate helped them by listening to them, providing emotional support, education about DFV, advice and suggestions for practical supports. One woman said she appreciated that the DFV Advocate checked up on how she was doing.

5.4 Utilising Change Star to monitor outcomes for men

The Outcome Star tool was developed by Triangle Consulting³ in collaboration with UnitingCare to monitor outcomes across the Family and Disability Services. A bespoke tool, named the Change Star, was developed with UnitingCare *Men Choosing Change* to monitor outcomes for participants. UnitingCare saw an opportunity to continue to monitor changes in men's behaviour for the men attending *Men Sustaining Change*. This could eventually provide a longitudinal aggregated data set for UnitingCare to assess the effectiveness of their men's behaviour change programs.

The Change Star is administered by the Facilitator in a collaborative discussion with a man to

reflect on their behaviour and wellbeing across six domains: taking responsibility; thinking and attitudes; safe actions and reactions; communication; being a good father; your wellbeing. A five-point scale is used to rate how they are doing in each domain.

The scale is:

- 1 = Stuck
- 2 = Engaging
- 3 = Acknowledging
- 4 = Learning new ways
- 5 = Being respectful

An easy-to-read description of the domains and the scale terms is provided to the men. The Change Star is co-produced between the man and Facilitator with the potential to build a shared

perspective on the issues and possible actions. It can also act as a motivational tool and a way of identifying with men their goals and actions to take and identify service supports that Facilitators could refer men to.

The *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators complete a Change Star with men during assessment and then after they have attended a block of eight sessions. The total number of Change Stars completed during the pilot is 93. The table below shows how many Change Stars were completed at eight session intervals up to 56 weeks. Note that men may attend weekly, fortnightly or more sporadically so some men take longer than others to engage in a Change Star session.

3 For information about Triangle Consulting and the Change Star tool see: <https://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/using-the-star/see-the-stars/change-star/>

Table 7: Number of men completing Change Stars during pilot phase

| Timing of Change Star session | No. men completing Change Star |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Transition interview to enter <i>Men Sustaining Change</i> | 56 |
| 8 sessions | 17 |
| 16 sessions | 7 |
| 24 sessions | 5 |
| 32 sessions | 3 |
| 40 sessions | 2 |
| 48 sessions | 2 |
| 56 sessions | 1 |
| Total during pilot | 93 |

Detailed findings of the Change Star were accessed for eight men who gave their permission for their files to be viewed. Overall analysis of the eight men’s Change Stars show their scores are considerably more positive when they exit *Men Choosing Change* compared to when they began. This means they are entering *Men Sustaining Change* with predominantly higher scores ranging from 3 to 5 on each domain. The scores further improve during *Men Sustaining Change* or high scores are

maintained. There are exceptions, as some men learn and reflect on previous scores and downgrade them as they realise they were not doing as well as they thought.

These findings show that men’s process of learning and reflection across the Change Star domains can highlight areas they still want to improve. Improved scores and/or sustaining high scores indicate the value of *Men Sustaining Change* to build on and embed the learning and behaviour changes from *Men Choosing Change*.

6 Feedback from men participating in *Men Sustaining Change*

6.1 Introduction

This section provides feedback from 14 men who participated in *Men Sustaining Change* during the pilot phase. Eight of these men were interviewed for the interim evaluation report during 2022, of whom two were interviewed again for the final report providing further insights into their journey of change. A further six men were interviewed for the final report in 2023, and two of these men were interviewed twice.

The 14 men had attended a different number of *Men Sustaining Change* sessions at the time of interviews and so had different levels of experience of the group:

- one to five sessions: five men
- six to 16 sessions: four men
- 17 or more sessions: five men

While most men planned to continue attendance, several of the men had exited the program. The differences in attendance has informed the analysis and examination of how men utilise the program, and their motivations for and barriers to attendance.

Of the 14 men interviewed, 12 were no longer in a relationship with their ex-partners. Some of these men had established new relationships. Twelve of the men have children and nine of these men have shared care and access arrangements with their ex-partners.

6.2 Perceptions of women’s and children’s current safety

Men were asked how safe they thought their partner or ex-partner felt based on their current behaviour. A few men said they had minimal or no contact with their ex-partner and therefore did not know how safe they felt.

Table 8: Men’s perceptions of partner/ex-partners current feelings of safety.

| Rating | Number of men |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Very safe | 4 |
| Somewhat safe | 3 |
| Somewhat unsafe | 3 |
| Very unsafe | 0 |
| Do not know | 4 |

Men who had children under 18 years of age were asked how safe they thought their children felt. Three men who had more than one child said each of their children may feel differently.

Table 9: Men’s perceptions of their children’s current feelings of safety.

| Rating | Number of men |
|--|---------------|
| Very safe | 5 |
| Somewhat safe to very safe | 2 |
| Very unsafe (due to ‘what they have been told’) | 1 |
| Different children in the family have different feelings of safety | 3 |

6.3 Motivation to attend and transition to *Men Sustaining Change*

Key insights about recruitment and men’s motivation to attend *Men Sustaining Change*

Men’s feedback about the pilot recruitment process highlighted they were well informed about *Men Sustaining Change* by UnitingCare Facilitators. They also appreciated hearing from *Men Sustaining Change* participants who presented at *Men Choosing Change* sessions.

Men decided to attend for a variety of reasons including:

- They appreciated what they had learned in *Men Choosing Change* and they wanted to learn more and build on their knowledge as they felt they still had a way to go on their journey of change.
- Many of the men found the group environment engaging and supportive and a safe space to open up and wanted to continue group work after *Men Choosing Change*. Men identified they still had a lot going on in terms of their relationships and wanted to access ongoing support to help them deal with things in a more positive way.
- The description of *Men Sustaining Change* resonated, and they felt inspired about what they heard about *Men Sustaining Change*.
- Men said the communication they received from the UnitingCare Facilitators about *Men Sustaining Change* was good and that the transition to the pilot program went well.

6.3.1 Communication provided to men to access *Men Sustaining Change*

Men provided feedback about what motivated them to go to *Men Sustaining Change* after they had finished *Men Choosing Change* and how they found the communication and process for accessing the pilot program.

At the beginning of the pilot a recruitment strategy was to invite men who completed *Men Choosing Change* over the last 12 months to attend *Men Sustaining Change*. This strategy was used again in early 2022 when referral numbers were low. Several men interviewed accessed the program this way and said the communication about *Men Sustaining Change* was good with a Facilitator ringing them to tell them about the pilot and keeping them informed.

The other men interviewed found out about the pilot while they were attending *Men Choosing Change* as the Facilitators had informed them about it and they thought there was good communication about the pilot. One participant said a main driver for him was how a Facilitator at *Men Choosing Change* talked about *Men Sustaining Change*, saying that it inspired him to go as some of his comments were quite insightful.

Several men said that a *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitator gave a presentation to the *Men Choosing Change* group which inspired them to go. A participant said:

I liked the bloke to start with. Plus he just sold it to me with just explaining it. A group of blokes that are in a bit of a situation get together and have a chat and a feed of pizza. I could just see it benefitting out of the group because it is not as formal as Men Choosing Change and you have got time to have a bit of a chat with people that are going through similar sort of things with DV or relationships, kids.

One man said he enjoyed when a participant from the *Men Sustaining Change* group accompanied the Facilitator to tell them about what it was like going to *Men Sustaining Change*.

The men interviewed reported that their transition from one program to the next was seamless. All the men felt they

were well informed, that the recruitment/referral processes were good and they had no suggestions for improvement.

6.3.2 Why men decided to go to Men Sustaining Change

While the men interviewed gave a variety of reasons for why they wanted to attend *Men Sustaining Change*, an underlying factor was their appreciation of *Men Choosing Change* and they wanted to continue to access this type of support. They talked about the benefits of *Men Choosing Change* and in particular, what they had learnt and the insights they gained from the discussions with the Facilitators and other men in their group. Their decision to go to *Men Sustaining Change* was primarily to continue their journey of learning and making positive changes in their lives and relationships:

The Men Choosing Change, I thought was a brilliant course ... I learnt a lot of things in that 16-week course. It was a real eye-opener.

I have still got a lot going on. I really enjoyed the Men Choosing Change and I learnt so much. So I wanted to continue my, I call it education because I wanted to continue learning, and having that safe space as well ... When I found out that there was somewhere I was all for it.

Many commented that there was so much information provided in *Men Choosing Change* that they wanted to hear information again to gain a deeper understanding. Many of the men expressed that 16 weeks was not long enough to make substantial behaviour changes, for example, one man said:

I was always keen, and I think often a lot of the guys from MCC said when they finished that 16 weeks wasn't long enough. They needed that ongoing support and that outlet to gain what they need; everyone has a different reason for going. I found it really

beneficial and I didn't want to stop going.

It took me a while to sink it all in [Men Choosing Change information]. I am like I need to know more. I need to know more.

Another man expressed his relief when he found out about *Men Sustaining Change* as he was worried about *Men Choosing Change* finishing and was looking for further supports:

I am thinking what am I going to do now because I have had support whether it be counsellors and psychologists and that. So I try to fill my week with stuff like that. When I heard about this [Men Sustaining Change] it was sort of hitting the jackpot because it was a flow on from everything else I have been doing. I was getting a bit worried about that [Men Choosing Change] finishing just getting shut off like that.

6.3.3 Preparedness to engage in Men Sustaining Change

An important factor was men's preparedness to engage in group work that had a less formalised program and was premised on men having some foundational knowledge of DFV and the motivation to continue their behaviour change journey. Completing *Men Choosing Change* was a requirement and this equipped men with the foundational knowledge, self-awareness and strategies to change their attitudes and behaviours. The evaluation of *Men Choosing Change* identified that the program supported many participants to feel comfortable sharing their stories and participating in group discussions with the Facilitators and other men (Carswell and Taylor, 2022). The participant below described how *Men Choosing Change* prepared him to feel more comfortable in the *Men Sustaining Change* group with the Facilitators:

after going through Men Choosing Change, getting sort of educated on how you speak and how you act and be responsible for things, and then I sort of feel even more comfortable now just to sit in

that group [Men Sustaining Change] in front of two Facilitators.

Other participants thought it was important to attend *Men Choosing Change* first so men have a core

understanding of DFV and the knowledge and tools to help men change. One participant raised “preparing to be vulnerable” as important for men coming into the group.

6.4 Reasons why men continued to attend *Men Sustaining Change*

Key insights for enabling men’s ongoing attendance at *Men Sustaining Change*

Men’s feedback identified a combination of program and personal factors that motivated them to continue attending *Men Sustaining Change* including:

- Relatability of group session content and discussions to their lives and situations, including psychoeducational content, guest speaker information sessions, and group discussions with other men and Facilitators.
- Interested in learning from other men’s experiences and found it supportive to journey with other men.
- Benefited from applying what they learnt at group sessions, refining their understanding and practice of strategies and tools, and embedding new behaviours as their new normal.
- Some men appreciated continuity of learning and support which provided a safe space to talk about what was happening for them on a regular basis and receive feedback from the Facilitators and group.
- The group sessions helped men to align and realign their core values such as accountability and taking responsibility, respect, boundaries and listening to other points of view.
- The Facilitators and other men in the group provided support, knowledge and a safe space to open up, which fulfilled emotional needs and gave them a sense of hope.
- The design of *Men Sustaining Change* made it easy to attend the group sessions as it is voluntary, free, with flexibility about attendance which allowed men to attend when they were able to or felt like they needed to.

Men’s feedback about why they continue to attend *Men Sustaining Change* relates to a combination of their motivation to attend and how they are engaging with the Facilitators, other men in the group and the content. This continuity of engagement is enabled when men feel they are benefiting from attending. These findings closely align with the rationale identified in the Theory of Change and earlier findings from the *Men Choosing Change* evaluation.

Where the men found that the group sessions related to their lives and situation, this

encouraged their interest and engagement in group discussions. The ability to discuss their own situation during the check-in gave them a safe space to express themselves and receive constructive feedback from the Facilitators and other group members. This allowed them to continue learning as well as accessing emotional support and gaining other perspectives about their situation:

Obviously, everyone is an individual, but everyone has got certain things that they struggled with before. So, you go in and you can really go

deep into it. Some sessions ‘a’ and ‘b’ will really be involved in it because this is an area that perhaps they struggle, that they relate to a lot. Then the next week it will be some other people.

For me I try not to leave it more than a week without missing a session, so I try to go every second session. I really rely a little bit on having that space to kind of express myself and self-care. Sometimes, some weeks I don’t get a lot of that. I do rely on it and part of me wishes I didn’t need to and part of me is really grateful for it.

The men who had been going for some time benefited from the ongoing support, learning and enjoyed being able to speak with other men:

I think one of the biggest things with Men Sustaining Change is that it gives people a chance to open up about what is going on which is the only way you sort of overcome the problem you have got.

A further support for men's engagement was the relatability and relevance of the topics chosen for the psycho-educational portion of the session. These topics were informed by what the men were interested in as well as what the Facilitators thought men would benefit from (this was also the way guest speakers were chosen). One participant described the Facilitators' process

of consulting men, which he thought was very positive, and identified that the pilot content was more 'peer input' than 'peer driven':

[The Facilitators] would toss it out there; well what do you guys want? What do you think would be helpful, what is something that you think would be helpful for you? That is where they came up with the idea of bringing government sources that were available to people that they may not have been aware of. As I said before, they would invite specific targeted services to say well you may not need us now but if you do this is what we do.

Men also identified that *Men Sustaining Change* was voluntary with some flexibility about attendance which meant it was

easier to fit in with their work and family commitments.

Men valued the individual support from Facilitators during the phone check-ins.

Like Facilitator will ring me and say 'I felt you were a bit upset on Tuesday night. I felt you wanted to express more and we cut you off short. Are you okay?' 'Dude, thank you.' So that means a lot. It is 100% support. You just know they genuinely care and that is what is so powerful about it.

[Facilitator] makes me feel comfortable to talk as well. There are not too many people that I get comfy with. I share things with them that I don't share with others...

6.5 Barriers to attending *Men Sustaining Change*

Key insights about barriers to men attending *Men Sustaining Change*

- Some men encountered logistical barriers including work commitments and travel distance and time.
- Some men had to make a choice between family commitments or going to

group and they managed this by alternating and going to group fortnightly.

- Running only one group per week meant that the timeslot could clash with other activities men were committed too.
- A few men reported that they had moved on from

where other men were in the group and that the program did not align with where they were in their journey.

- During 2021 and early 2022 COVID-19 restrictions were a barrier to attendance for some.

Three of the men interviewed had attended only a few sessions and then decided not to continue for a variety of reasons. Often it was not just one factor, but several factors together that made them decide not to continue attending. The logistics of attending on a Tuesday evening (6pm-8pm), with travel time combined with a long

day at work, put some men off attending.

A few of these men felt that they had moved on in their journey compared to the other men in the group and therefore they did not relate to the group. Some noted that they had other people to support them and that they were in a 'good place' and did not need the group.

During 2021 and early 2022 COVID-19 restrictions were a barrier for some due to both personal circumstances creating additional stress and how the restrictions impacted on group delivery (e.g. sitting apart and wearing masks).

For some of the men that continued to attend, a common challenge was the difficulty of

juggling the group with their other commitments to family, work and other activities. This participant described it as follows:

I feel very torn because going to the group is so beneficial but sometimes, I choose not to just so I can spend more time with kids and partner. It is hard to find that balance.

Some of the men managed this tension by alternating the group with other commitments and attending every fortnight. This highlights the importance of flexible attendance. Attending fortnightly could have its challenges as some of the psychoeducational topics were discussed over two consecutive

sessions. One man said that he either missed the first or second session on a topic which could be frustrating, however it was possible to catch up. This is an area where online resources could assist men to catch up and is discussed further in section 6.10.

6.6 Men’s feedback about Men Sustaining Change group

Key insights from men’s experiences of Men Sustaining Change

- Men were very positive about the facilitation style and the safe space that Facilitators created for men’s discussion and learning.
- The men valued other men in the group, noting that the supportive environment and discussion gave them

another perspective and deepened their sense of empathy which is important for establishing respectful healthy relationships. Men also noted that men respectfully contributed suggestions and strategies to other men, which supported learning and accountability.

- Men valued the check-in process where each

man reflects on what has happened in the previous week.

- Having information sessions from guest speakers was appreciated by the men as it increased their knowledge about the types of services available to them, their families and peers resulting in some men accessing these services.

6.6.1 Strengths of facilitation to enable men’s behaviour change

The men interviewed were very positive about the facilitation style and the safe space that the Facilitators created for men’s discussion and learning. Qualities of the Facilitators that stood out for men were that they were non-judgemental, knowledgeable, supportive, able to guide the group discussion, were flexible rather than prescriptive and good to talk to one-on-one during phone calls:

They are both very good. [Facilitator] is very good at validating how you are feeling. Then they will take you down the path of like what could you do better. I really find that is a really good skill as a Facilitator I

think because we all want to be validated ... having the female is a real Ying and Yang. I think it just works well ... half the group will go towards [one Facilitator] being the person that they want to talk to and then the other half will go towards [other Facilitator]. So it sort of gives people the option of having different people.

They [Facilitators] put it into perspective. If I say something negative they will put it into a positive. I go, oh I didn’t think of it that way. So every week I learn something ... that is why it is so powerful.

It is the Facilitators that have made it so good. It really is. They have just been incredible. An incredible support.

Very non-judgemental, very supportive, very knowledgeable, the Facilitators are really good. Very, very impartial, they are very level-headed. I think it is probably one of the hardest things in the world to hold space for people while we are going through something like this where we need to talk and vent... not only holding that space for them but being able to help them when they are in that space. It is incredible, what they do is amazing.

The Facilitators are just amazing to be able to talk to, even outside group [phone check-ins].

I think as far as being in a group and the Facilitators go, I don’t think any of the guys in the group ever feel unable to

... speak or ever feel threatened or intimidated. The Facilitators do a really good job of creating a safe space.

6.6.2 The benefits and value of talking to other men in a facilitated group

The men expressed how much they valued the other men in the group, noting that the supportive environment and discussions gave them another perspective:

I think the more people you interact with the more it strengthens. I really appreciate the way it is very interactive and very supportive. The guys, from all different backgrounds, but they are all respectful, you know they will see the point of view.... Everyone is really understanding. We all sort of learn through different situations.

The first half of the session is the mindfulness and the check ins. It is just really good to be able to talk about what has been going on, what is bothering me, and to listen to other people and to hear their experience and to be able to share. ... I consider quite a few of them friends now. I haven't met up with any of them outside but that is okay because we do our thing there.

I find you sit there, and you feel sort of part of a family sort of thing. Because you have got blokes talking and you can pick up a bit off them. I have said a lot of things in groups. I share a lot. Other people have learnt from that and actually I have got a few compliments from people which makes you feel yeah.

A participant reflected on how the men built trust within the group:

You meet someone for the first time, and you don't know anything about them, and usually it takes you a while to feel comfortable around them. But after ... one or two groups and you are talking like you are good mates. I think that

connection is there because of the group, helps you to learn a lot more and grow a lot more because you feel comfortable for one. You start to trust within a week or two. That is when you sort of open up to people and you tend to take in a lot more from what they have got to say.

This process of building trust when new people come into the group is actively supported by the way the Facilitators welcome men into the group putting them at ease as this man explains:

If a new person comes in [Facilitators] will explain where we are at and make the person feel comfortable, at ease.... [Facilitators] will always say to the person their first week 'you don't have to open up, you can just watch what we do.' I have never seen one not open up straight away.

Men also talked about how they make suggestions to other men in a respectful way, offering an alternative perspective or strategy:

If they are talking about something and you have got something to say about how it could help them, you would sort of come into the conversation. You wouldn't so much challenge what they are saying. But you would suggest something to them on what may help to overcome that problem.

The men interviewed talked about the group being a space to open-up with people in similar situations and be honest:

A space to take responsibility for what you have done and try to become a better person.

Last week's group I think everyone said that you guys were actually real men by coming here and talking about your problems. So it takes a man to come and do that. In my point of view it does.... And to say you have done the wrong thing. ... But you are correcting it and you are saying look I am responsible for my part in this.

But the way to move through this is to keep on educating yourself on how to be a better person to start with, or how you are going to react to certain things that might pop up in the future to do with your kids or court or whatever it may be.

The openness of it and just letting me speak my mind. Every time I walk out it feels like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders again.

I like the fact that the men that are there, we are all open and we are honest. Obviously, we respect each other. Names are not given out into the world for private reasons of course.

Several of the participants were going through family court regarding child custody and they appreciated being able to talk about their issues with other fathers and the Facilitators:

You talk to other people. My biggest thing is how am I going to react when I see my kids after a certain amount of time. So, talking to other fathers about their situation, what they have done, how they have overcome it.... It is helpful because you are with people that are in similar situations, so you feel comfortable to talk about it.

A participant described how the group dynamic benefits him to change which in turn helps his relationships:

I think like anything, like I've never been involved in AA or NA and those sorts of groups but I can understand and I can see having the structure and support and that sort of dynamic works. I think for someone like me who feels a bit lonely in life and isolated at times I think having those other people around in those groups and gaining that perspective, it is really beneficial. I think it is helping me with myself which is helping me with my relationships.

Another man explained how feeling understood is comforting and that the group discussions reinforce his learning and encourage him to try different approaches. Role modelling behaviour changes and sharing experiences with other men is a practical and powerful way of learning and motivating men:

I have no issues talking about things with my friends and that. It is just more there was no sort of understanding there. It is not a common thing. But being understood, it is very comforting. Then hearing about what everyone else has been going through. It is really reinforcing... You learn things yourself and you try and apply it. But when you hear someone else say it, it is like an exercise in applying what we have learnt to other people as well. It sort of reinforces your own belief ... you think, oh okay I recognise that in what that person did. Maybe I can apply that more myself.

This was reinforced in interviews with other men who talked about the importance of journeying with others. This not only creates a supportive environment and network, but also can deepen a sense of empathy which is important for establishing respectful relationships:

You can just sort of journey with people I guess in a sense. You can really feel for them because sometimes they are going through a really tough time. Sometimes you might say something that is helpful, and they can relate to it because they know that you are in a similar situation and vice versa.

This same participant had the important message that everyone can improve and change:

I bang on a little bit about that we have made a mistake, but it doesn't have to define me. We can improve and move on, change, whatever.

Encouraging pro-social networks within the group

Men Sustaining Change encouraged pro-social networks through social outings and also providing a break and a chance to share food together during group sessions. The Facilitators also encouraged men to exchange phone numbers if they wished to. Some of the men interviewed had been on a social outing organised by the Facilitators and provided very positive feedback about the experience. For example, one man said:

We went Tenpin bowling. There were four of us and [Facilitators]. It was great. Everyone laughed. It was a good night actually. I don't think I have laughed so hard in a long time. ... actually, really enjoyed it.

6.6.3 Feedback about the group session structure and content

Group sessions start with reviewing the core values of the group that help to establish boundaries and the way the group interacts with each other. A participant describes his experiences of this process:

We do the same core values at the start [as Men Choosing Change]. ... We are going to set up the meeting and what are our boundaries. We might talk about accountability because you can't change anything if you don't accept accountability.... Respect, confidentiality, honesty, vulnerability; those types of things are discussed. It is not in length. ... it is just to reinforce that we have got boundaries. If you are talking about the police, it is not some derogatory term that you use. It is being respectful to those people as well. So that is kind of a platform, I guess.

Another participant said repeating and practicing the values such as being honest, respectful and genuine in the group was also a way of reinforcing those values in your everyday life, “so you are practicing what you are preaching”. The benefits of repeating the core values was also identified by

another man who said, “*I still love how we bring up the accountability and the honesty and the ‘I’ statements. Everything. It just sort of keeps cementing it.*”

Another man specifically mentioned how the mindfulness activity helped with stressful situations:

The more that you do it [practicing core values], especially when we get there and we do a bit of mindfulness, I haven't heard one person that has said they didn't feel relaxed after it. I think just simple things like that help you get through stressful situations. Things that I used to even say, look that is all a load of shit, why would you bother doing that. Until you start doing it.

Men valued the check-in process where each man reflects on what has happened in the previous week. They found this beneficial as they were able to talk about their issues with the group, hear other perspectives, and learn from other men's experiences. Below is men's feedback about the value of check-in:

[Facilitator] might have a certain topic for the evening in general, but because we take turns in going around and everyone gets their say – how has your week been and have a chat about that – regardless of the topic everyone sort of says what is on their mind. [Facilitator] does a good job to talk about that, covering most things with relevant things we have learnt. She doesn't tend to get bogged down. It is not like a classroom situation where you have got to try and get back to the main topic. [Facilitator] is quite flexible in that way. Everyone gets their needs addressed. It is not just a sort of question and answer. If I am saying my bit, then often a few of the other guys will chip in and say oh yeah, I have that, you know they can relate to it, or gave a point of view. So it was quite rounded.

I actually like it. Sometimes we can talk for too long and all of a sudden, we have almost got only 15 minutes to talk

about what they wanted to talk about. But I actually find the dynamics very interesting. With everybody not attacking anybody but we are also giving our own, well have you tried this. So, it is like oh yeah, I didn't think about it that way. Then we go into the structure. But yeah, it is very different [from MCC] and I actually enjoy it.

A lot of us have got different things going on. Every man that is there has a story that either

affected me personally or I know somebody that is going through that same issue. As a group I was able to learn.

It is great because we can all have a chat to each other and learn off one another, and I feel it is an expression of not just knowing about them. Like we all support one another. That is how I feel, and it means a lot.

The only criticism was that the check-in process could be lengthy leaving less time for the psycho-

educational component. The Facilitators were aware of this and put in place strategies such as rating feelings from 1-10 and a few words at the beginning of the check-in process. This process not only alerted the Facilitators to how everyone was feeling but also alerted other men in the group. One man said if he heard other participants needed the check-in time more than him, he reduced the amount he talked to give them more time.

6.7 Men's processes of learning and translating that into behaviour changes

Key insights from men's experiences of Men Sustaining Change

- Men identified that putting their learning into practice involved small steps which began when they found content relevant and meaningful and was reinforced by the discussions with Facilitators and the men in the group.

- Longer-term contact with the program gave men the ability to put new learnings and strategies into practice within the group, then with their families, friends and colleagues between sessions, and then reflect on what went well and areas to improve. This helped men to embed and normalise changes in beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

- Some men reflected on how they were developing self-awareness of emotional and mental triggers and how that feels in your body, and then applying strategies to manage those emotions in different situations.
- Most men found it useful to understand how gender constructs and roles shaped their beliefs and behaviours.

6.7.1 An opportunity to build on learning from Men Choosing Change

Men identified that their process of learning and putting this into practice involved small steps. The process began when they found content relevant and meaningful, which gained their interest and engagement and was further reinforced by the discussions with Facilitators and the other men in the group. The ability to put these new learnings and strategies into practice within the group setting and between sessions and then reflect on them, helped to embed and normalise changes in beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. These

findings strongly reflect those from the *Men Choosing Change* evaluation. As one man succinctly put it:

It is one thing to hear it and it is another thing to kind of internalise it and kind of grow from it.

Many of the men reflected that the psycho-educational content in *Men Sustaining Change* enabled them to refine the tools and strategies they had learnt in *Men Choosing Change*. As one man put it, it feels like a fine-tuning exercise:

To me it feels like a fine-tuning exercise. You do learn a few new things of course, but of the basics, the main stay type areas,

it is refining.

And the tools they talk about. Like if you are getting upset or fired up about something, how to control all that type of thing. That was Men Choosing Change. But those sorts of tools are talked about a bit and reinforced.

A participant reflected that the flexibility of the program meant they could delve into a topic more to really understand it and continue the discussion the following week if required. It also provided men with an opportunity to catch-up on topics they may have missed in *Men Choosing Change*:

When you say to the guys 'can

we do this one again?’ They go ‘yeah, I will do it again’. Or we want to know more. That is why I love the group because we can hit a subject and really nail it and soak it in and understand it.

An important part of this process is men discussing the tools, strategies and concepts with other men and learning from each other:

What is happening to you might be happening to someone else. It is good to hear how this person has handled it or how they got in that situation and how it can relate to you. You might even be able to offer some advice or vice versa. Just because you finish Men Choosing Change it doesn't mean that everything is automatically fixed or changed ... It is still good to be able to have somewhere that you can go, and men that are in similar situations, to just sort of have a bit of a sound-board or get some advice that is actually solicited.

One man gave an example of complementary learning processes of Men Choosing Change and Men Sustaining Change and how group process reinforces learning and expands men's perspectives:

Men Choosing Change - well we did this thing where they put pictures on the ground. One path was the path that you would usually take; going off and going down to the pub and complaining to the boys about your partner. Then you go back home. That flow on effect too... There was another path you can take... try and sort it out without any violence . . . and you can visualise it.

Men Sustaining Change - we don't do as much as what it was in the Men Choosing Change but we touch on the subjects that

we have done and then have a generalised discussion about it, and then ask people how it has benefitted them at home and stuff like that. So you can sort of see in real life how it is working with people.... So overall I think for this program is that money can't buy you know talking to blokes that have tried it.

6.7.2 Developing more self-awareness and appropriate responses

Some men reflected on how they were developing self-awareness of emotional and mental triggers and how that feels in your body, and then applying strategies to manage those emotions in different situations. Part of developing that self-awareness was understanding how the brain works and effects your physical reactions and becoming attuned to that:

... like everything else, you tend to forget things. How your brain works or something. They talk about the smart brain and the emotional brain and going with the flight or fight, that type of thing. Recognising those triggers and putting stuff into place before; if anything gets into a silly situation, walk away, time out. ... recognising how you are feeling when something is not going well.

Just how your physical body is reacting as well. You can feel if your tummy is doing churns and that type of thing. Getting a bit hot under the collar, all of that type of stuff. So, from that side of it, yeah it was pretty good in my opinion. I found it helpful. You are getting reminders. I guess it is like people that go to church, and they get reminders of how they should behave as a Christian. What the expectation would be kind of thing.

6.7.3 Understanding where some of their negative behaviours come from

Some of the men talked about how useful it was to understand how gender constructs and roles shaped their beliefs and behaviours. As one man said, dominant constructions of masculinity (referred to in group as the ‘man box’⁴) were not an excuse for abuse and Men Sustaining Change provides a practical and supportive space to learn how to do better. Another man provided an example of how his expectation of being respected led to violence and the group helped him to understand this and adjust his perspectives and responses:

We were talking about the Man Box see, and where these things come from. From your parents or your peers or your mates, religion or whatever background it was from. Some of it is true. Some of it they still don't justify bad behaviour. ... I think if someone is paying the bills for you, you probably should respect them. That is a pretty good thing to do for someone. It was kind of putting things into perspective. ... That is the key word you just said then, the expectations. That is really to lower expectation of other people. That is probably one of the key takeaways for me to diffuse a lot of stuff. Because expectation in some sense it is not necessarily a right or a wrong, it is an opinion.

4 The “Man Box” refers to a rigid set of expectations, perceptions, and behaviours that are considered “manly” and/or a “real man’s” behaviour, imposed on men by the society, such as superiority, cruelty, emotional suppression, lack of physical intimacy with other men, and expectations of socially aggressive and/or dominant behaviour. Gender-based types of aggression and violence are central in the production of dominant heterosexual masculinities and male superiority that impose the dominating and violating behaviour on men, and make these behaviours acceptable and naturalized. Therefore, adherence to the Man Box is one of the causes of violence against women, and to the creation and reinforcement of social environments conducive to domestic violence. (Alsawalqa, Alrawashdeh, Hasan, 2021)

6.7.4 Increasing awareness of how domestic violence can impact children

One participant described how watching a video about the effect of domestic violence on children really impacted him and increased his awareness:

That is one thing that really hit home with me is noticing how much it affected the children ... So that sort of woke me up a lot too, how you speak to people and how it affects them. That is probably the biggest thing that I have got out of it is that wake up ... might be shouting and swearing or whatever but that is enough to affect your child really badly.

This man acknowledged that he “did not think about it at the time. Until you are pulled up and you are looking at it.” The group provided a space for men learn about the impacts of their behaviours and then to talk about it. This has made him more mindful of how he is speaking to people now: “I think that is what helps me to speak to people differently. So, I look at life through a different lens. I try to talk to everyone the same. I don’t judge no more. I used to judge people all the time.”

This participant said he would like more information about child development and identifying behaviours that children may develop after being exposed to DFV:

*I had never thought that a small child, especially a two or three year old, it can change their behaviours as they are growing up from how you have been in front of them. So just little things like coming home, getting shitty because dinner is not cooked, slamming a door and cracking open a beer. That sort of thing, I used to always think oh it is her F*** fault you know, and that is the way I was. Meanwhile the two kids are sitting there, probably shit scared, I don’t know what Dad is going to do. It has woken me up a lot.*

6.8 Feedback about guest speaker information sessions

Key insights from men’s experiences of guest speakers

- Men provided positive feedback about the guest speaker sessions which they found beneficial as they increased their knowledge about the types of services available to them and their families.
- Listening to the guest speakers resulted in some men self-referring to services.

The men provided positive feedback about the guest speaker sessions which they found beneficial as they increased their knowledge about the types of services available to them and their families, many of which were previously unknown to them. As a result, some of the men had connected with these services either through self-referral or referred by a Facilitator. A few men commented that while not all the guest speakers were relevant to their situation, they often could get some useful information from the session:

I think it depends on what you are wanting to get out of it, some of them are applicable. It is all beneficial there is never any harm in learning something new it just depends on if you think it is useful, ... I’ve got no problem sitting there listening. There have been a couple that have been absolutely mind blowing.

The following are examples of men’s feedback about some of the speaker sessions.

Harmony House is a Family Contact Centre service that provides a safe venue for child-parent contact for parents or guardians who are in conflict. One participant said he had not realised this type of service existed and thought it would be a lot easier for the handover of their children if they were able to use a service like that.

A participant said as a result of hearing the speaker from the Parenting Support Program, they accessed their online communication course:

When I heard [Parenting Support Program] speak at the Men Sustaining Change group my ears just picked up straight away. ... It was what it was, and it did a good job. I can’t put too high a value on it basically. It was great.

Another participant talked about the Suncoast Community Legal Service speaker:

That was very helpful. It was just some information she had about what services were available if you go down that road of separating formally; financially and that sort of thing.... So, I haven’t actually done that, but it was interesting to know how they work it... They were certainly helpful some of those people that came in.

Many of the men noted the variety of experiences among men attending *Men Sustaining Change* with some having more experience of the court system, prison and attending previous MBCPs from other providers. One participant who had not had experience of the justice system was impressed by the Facilitators knowledge of these processes and the guest speakers that provided information sessions.

6.9 Outcomes for men participating in *Men Sustaining Change*

Key insights into the ways men said they were changing

- Nearly all the men interviewed (12 of 14) found *Men Sustaining Change* extremely helpful or very helpful.
- Men talked about aligning and realigning their core values and taking accountability and responsibility for their behaviours.
- Men had an increased awareness of the behaviours and patterns that constitute DFV and problematic gender constructs.
- Men identified ways they were changing their perceptions about relationships and developing compassion and empathy.
- Some men said they were learning to communicate better and more openly.
- Some men were said they had a deeper understanding of themselves and opening up to new ways of thinking about self and others.

6.9.1 How men perceived they had changed their behaviours and attitudes

The men identified a number of ways that *Men Sustaining Change* had helped them to change and make a difference in their lives and consequently to their relationships. These positive changes can be regarded as protective factors that lessen the risk of future violence towards women and children, which is the primary goal of the pilot. The

program aims to reduce this risk by motivating men to think and behave differently and equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to achieve this. Such fundamental changes in thinking and behaviours are not easy and the men interviewed articulated this struggle. Some men acknowledged they were not there yet.

In some cases, the men interviewed noted that their changes were resulting in improvements in the quality of

their relationships with children, partners and ex-partners. For women and children to feel truly safe and improve their quality of life and wellbeing requires more than men not to be abusive; it also requires men to authentically engage in respectful relationships. The pilot is supporting men to do this.

Nearly all the men interviewed (12 of 14) found *Men Sustaining Change* ‘extremely helpful’ or ‘very helpful’. One man indicated it was ‘helpful’ (see Table 10).

Table 10: Men’s rating of helpfulness of *Men Sustaining Change*

| Rating | Number of men |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Extremely helpful | 8 |
| Between extremely and very helpful | 1 |
| Very helpful | 3 |
| Helpful | 1 |
| A little helpful | 0 |
| Not helpful | 0 |
| Not applicable | 1 ⁵ |

5 One man had only attended one session and was unable to provide a rating of helpfulness.

Below are the key themes emerging from the interviews with men about how they had changed their thinking and behaviours and how this changed the ways they related to partners/ex-partners, their children and other relationships in their lives. The themes are illustrated with quotes from the men interviewed.

Taking responsibility and being accountable for actions

I think the main rider of it is being accountable. Sometimes things happen and there is a bit of a back story that has happened, whatever. It is no excuses. It is just that behaviour at that time was out of order. It was just way beyond acceptable. There are other ways of handling problems... So that is probably my takeaway from it.

Learning better communication skills and being more open

One man found the use of 'I statements' a very useful tool for changing the way he communicated which he thought was in a more relatable way instead of the more authoritative way he used to communicate:

I remember one time in the Men Choosing Change, when they talked about 'I statements' -- literally I think a week later I applied that at mediation. I like to be quite factual in life about things but the way I was putting it across wasn't the right way. So yeah, the 'I statements'. I can get what I want to get across in a more absorbable way, a more relatable way.

A participant said it was helping his communication with his ex-partner and he would like to continue learning about non-violent communication:

My and [ex-partner] our communication I feel like it is getting better at times. I have been finding out about non-violent communication. I am actually going to ask at court that we both go and do that. But that is something that if I

hadn't have done this course, I would have never heard of it. I would have just continued thinking that I was right, and [ex-partner] was wrong. But now I am open to different things and how my reaction can affect things.

Another man said Men Sustaining Change had taught him "to be a better person all round. With communicating with work, with my job, with people. . . . It has a big change for me because otherwise I would be closed up and wouldn't speak my emotions and hide a lot of my emotions. So this has really shown me, how to express myself."

A participant talked about feeling more positive about himself because he was being honest with people and communicating a lot better: "It is like now I am more engaged with everyone around me. It has been huge. . . . That is what Men Sustaining Change has helped me with."

Gaining a deeper understanding of self and their behaviours essential for making changes

The group provided a space for men to discuss what was going on and gain other perspectives and a deeper understanding of themselves and their behaviours which is essential for starting to make changes:

For me especially just verbalising what is going on in my head and not getting so caught up in my own head and being able to express it out loud. It has a really good impact, I find I'm a lot less stressed when I can say what I'm feeling. I definitely feel supported and definitely feel I gain a lot of perspective. I think the greatest thing for me is just some awareness around what is actually going on in my head. Having a Facilitator with really good training and really good understanding of how we think in a person's mind... it is really great to gain that insight. You talk to [a Facilitator] and tell them how you feel, and they say that could be because of this or

because of that and you go 'you know that makes sense'.

I would probably say having that space to just talk through things with people that understand the struggle . . . So just for me personally where I am at in life and how I am trying to move away from learnt behaviours of how I have naturally reacted to certain stimulus, it is bringing that up... Then I can say would we be able to get more information on this or can we talk about that. Because I am obviously there because I don't have all the answers and I am trying to find different ways or different modalities or skills to improve.

It has given me a lot of awareness about myself and my behaviour and I'm able to have now a more of an outside perspective on this. It has been really beneficial for my own growth and to try and understand you know the reasons and the emotions behind some of the things that have caused me to be in that place in the first place.

I think maybe when it comes to relationships, I am still in the middle of reassessing a lot of things and trying to figure out my values and I'm probably doing a lot of soul searching and a lot of introspection... yeah it is a behavioural change program at the end of the day... you know it is not easy and some weeks are really hard.

Developing pro-social networks with other men in the group

So what is my community? I suppose now I would say that the Men Sustaining Change group is my community. Like that is my place. That is my safe place where I feel supported and loved. I know that if I have had a rough week and if I would say something, I know that they would all be hoping that things go well for me that week. . . . A sense of belonging. It is what so many people are missing. It is what so many men are missing.

Men sharing their knowledge from program with other men

Several of the men talked about how they shared the knowledge they learnt in *Men Choosing Change* and *Men Sustaining Change* with other men and also their sons. For example, one man talked about sharing information with the apprentices at work:

Also talking to apprentices at work – 18, 19-year old's.... I think sometimes they think like they feel like they have to act like this big tough man because they are going to become a carpenter and they are trying to show off to us seniors.... So sometimes I think they enjoy when I ask them to reflect on whether what they are saying is right or if they could have done it differently. They are still at an age where they are still learning.

Men valued the ongoing support of the *Men Sustaining Change* group emphasising that change takes time

But it is the same with anything, if there is something about you that you want to change, it doesn't automatically happen after say four or five months. It has got to be something that is I reckon at least 12 months to two years.

Men observed that some participants used the program when they needed advice

There are blokes that have come in and I have only met them once or maybe twice. They don't come for a few weeks and then come again. But I have noticed they come back in as soon as they are in a position where they are in a bit of trouble or there is something going on with their partner ... It is good that the door is open. So you imagine if that wasn't there for them to come into where do you think they would end up? Probably in the shit again.

They have come to the group to obviously talk and get some advice or help. If they didn't have that to come to there is a high chance of them sort of getting into more trouble. There was a bloke who came in the other week and he was getting messages from his ex-partner, and he was thinking I should do this or I should do that. But if he didn't come and talk about it he would have done what he said he was thinking about and he would have been breach (DVO conditions).

Other themes highlighted by men that have been previously discussed were: increased awareness of range of behaviours and patterns that constitute DFV (see section 6.7.3); unpacking gender constructs such as the 'man box' (see section 6.7.3) and increased self-awareness and skills to manage self and regulate their emotions (see section 6.7.2).

6.10 Men's suggestions for developing and improving the pilot program

Suggestions to enhance service delivery

The men interviewed provided the following suggestions to enhance the delivery of *Men Sustaining Change*:

- Extend the session to 2.5 hours as this would allow more time for all the components of the session that men valued – the check-in process, psycho-educational content, break time to eat and connect.
- Keep managing the check-in process to allow more time for the psycho-educational component. The Facilitators addressed this in the latter half of 2022.

- Continue running *Men Sustaining Change* and deliver the group at other locations.
- Consider how to promote pathways into Men's Behaviour Change programs earlier to prevent more serious violence.

Need to continue *Men Sustaining Change* and deliver at other locations

Men expressed the need for this program to continue and the hope that it could be delivered nationwide to benefit other men.

Given the time it takes for many of the men to change and embed new behaviours one man reflected on the length of *Men Choosing Change* and opportunity

to transition to *Men Sustaining Change*. He concluded that 16 weeks was a good start and that it was good there are two different programs:

For me the level of change I needed to make and the depth of emotional awareness I wanted to gain, I think 16 weeks isn't long to make significant life changes. But it's definitely a good length of time to create awareness, to stop you in your tracks sometimes and give you perspective. I think that's why it works, it is short and sharp and to the point. It is a safety barrier to me, things in my life aren't going well and this is creating kind of a safe space to

express that and where to there for them. I like that there is two different programs. You could maybe make it (Men Choosing Change) a bit longer but there are also a lot of guys who drop out before the 16 weeks.

Men interviewed in early 2023 when there was uncertainty about whether the pilot would continue were very keen for it to keep going and some were discussing how they could create their own group:

I hope that UnitingCare and other Facilitators around the country can get this pilot program to actually be something approved and give us some light at the end of the tunnel.... I hope that it gets approved down in Canberra and funding becomes available.

I hope that the program gets funding and continues ... the program has been very beneficial for me and I hope helps a lot of other guys and I really hope it gets to continue. All the best to everyone involved.

A participant strongly recommended that everyone should be told this information to stop intergenerational violence and protect children:

You need to know this. Like we are just not shown it. Like we are just treated as shit when you are a kid and you realise you are peeling back the layers. That is what I have been doing every week with Men Sustaining Change, is just peeling back the layers of shit that you have manifested in your own brain. It just clears it.

Development of online resources

Participants suggested the development of online resources which they could access to refresh their knowledge but also to share with others. This suggestion was also made by men in the *Men Choosing Change* evaluation and is an opportunity for UnitingCare to provide information and resources to a larger number of people:

I actually do think that that idea of having online resources is a very good one because you can go back check things. I like the fact that, like the other day we did River of Cruelty.⁶ I have been sharing it. ... So it is about not continuing the cycle of domestic violence. You are in it and you have to get out. But I have spoken to so many people this last two weeks about that, and really a resource would be good to be able to share that with people. Because I do always share everything that I learn. Especially my workmates. They always hear about it.

Suggestions for other types of related services

There were several suggestions for other types of services including a service for young people. UnitingCare is currently developing a MBCP for young men. Another suggestion was specialised help for blended families. This suggestion is also being followed up and the *Men Sustaining Change* team are gathering resources and making connections with services that work with families to see what kind of supports can be provided for blended families.

Quite a few men recommended that this information should be shared broadly and be taught in schools. One man suggested that it could be re-packaged as a program about healthy, respectful relationships, which is more of a primary prevention focus.

Final reflections

Without a program like this for men to go to, I think that domestic violence is just going to keep on getting worse than what it is at the moment. Because this is a start. If this is happening I am going away to talk to people about it. Once I get on a construction site again I know a lot of blokes that are going through heavy times and you start talking to them about it and I think this group is going to be more demand for it, because people are starting to hear about it.

Thank you. Thanks for having this group.

⁶ “The Family Peace Initiative believes that acts of domestic violence are always acts of cruelty. We also believe that people who use cruelty in relationships were almost always treated cruelly first. This is the metaphor of the “River of Cruelty”. To stop cruel behaviors, we must be willing to be responsible for the cruel acts we have committed towards others while also being responsible for the impact of the cruelty that we experienced; only then can we find refuge from “The River.” <https://www.familypeaceinitiative.com/9-uncategorised/342-welcome-to-the-family-peace-initiative> The following video on the River of Cruelty, developed by the Family Peace Initiative, has been shared with the *Men Sustaining Change* group: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fenj-Zv1raQ>

7 Feedback from *Men Sustaining Change* partners and ex-partners

7.1 Introduction

This section provides feedback from eight partners and ex-partners. Their experiences reflect the different stages of men's journey of change and are very similar to the findings from the evaluation of *Men Choosing Change*. Two of the eight women were interviewed twice, for the Interim evaluation report and this final report.

Three of the women were ex-partners; three women were current partners; and two women said they were separated but that both parties may reconcile in the future. Six of the women had children under 18 years,

three of whom were in a shared parenting situation with a *Men Sustaining Change* participant. Due to the small sample size and the possibility of identification, the age and ethnicity of women and children are not provided.

7.2 Women and children’s feelings of current safety

Women were asked how safe they and their children felt based on their partners or ex-partners current behaviour. The range of responses show that while most of the women felt somewhat safe to very safe, several still felt somewhat unsafe (see Table 11). One woman said she felt right in the middle between somewhat safe and somewhat unsafe. None of the women felt very unsafe which in several cases was due to their ex-partner not knowing where they lived and having a DVO.

Table 11: Eight women’s rating of how safe they felt based on their partners or ex-partners current behaviour

| Rating | Number of women |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Very safe | 2 |
| Somewhat safe to very safe | 2 |
| Somewhat safe | 1 |
| Somewhat unsafe | 3 |
| Very unsafe | 0 |

The six women who had children under 18 years of age were asked to rate how safe their children felt. The women’s perceptions highlighted the variability of children’s experiences, including within the same family. Three women thought their children felt very safe. One woman said her children felt differently, and another woman said her child’s feelings of safety depended on the man’s mood. One woman thought her children felt right in the middle between somewhat safe and somewhat unsafe.

Table 12: Six women’s rating of how safe they thought their children felt based on their partners or ex-partners current behaviour

| Rating | Number of women |
|---|-----------------|
| Very safe | 3 |
| Dependant on man’s mood | 1 |
| Mixed within family with children feeling somewhat safe and somewhat unsafe | 2 |
| Somewhat unsafe | 0 |
| Very unsafe | 0 |

7.3 Women's perspectives on men's process of changing behaviours

Key insights into women's perspectives on men's process of behaviour change

- All women thought it was very beneficial to have a follow-up program after *Men Choosing Change*.
- Women had diverse experiences and perspectives on the helpfulness of *Men Sustaining Change* to support behaviour change.
- All women emphasised the importance of men being willing to change and utilise the knowledge and skills learnt from the program.
- The women identified the benefits of psychoeducational content to develop men's understanding and self-awareness of their behaviours and the impacts on their family and the importance of developing a deeper sense of empathy for others.
- Some women identified the benefits of group delivery, hearing other men's experiences, and the opportunity for men to get support and develop pro-social networks.

There were differences in the frequency that the women's partners and ex-partners had attended *Men Sustaining Change*, with two of the women indicating their ex-partners had only been to several sessions at the time of interview. Therefore, it was too early to assess the effectiveness of the pilot for these men. Two of the women had very limited to no contact with their ex-partner which made it difficult for them to assess changes, although there were some indications based on their contact with their children.

All the women interviewed thought that it was beneficial to have a follow-up program to *Men Choosing Change* so that men could continue to work on making positive changes and embedding them. Women emphasised the importance of men's willingness to change so they would utilise the knowledge and skills they had learnt from both programs and fundamentally change the way they treated them and their children. One woman reflected on the importance of group programs for men:

I think the men's programs need to be ongoing and in-depth. Maybe smaller groups. Maybe more in-depth. I know men's counsellors and especially in this area are extremely hard to find. But I think the more males you can get to actually tap into things the better it is.

The same woman also reflected on the importance of having psychoeducational and therapeutic group programs for women:

But as far as the female support I think even in group work. Therapeutic group work to try and let people know what is healthy, what is unhealthy, what is abuse, what is not abuse, what are boundaries. All of the things that I have been learning as I was going on and getting a depth of knowledge, they need to be there for most women. Because most women who are in these situations don't even realise they are being abused.

Another woman emphasised that for change to occur, a deep change in consciousness is required that included men being consciously reflective and developing self-awareness. This was in order for men to understand how their

actions affected women, children and other family members and to respond in a more empathetic way.

Changes in men's behaviour

The women were asked if they had noticed any positive impacts from men having the opportunity to continue their change journey through *Men Sustaining Change* and rate how helpful they thought the program was at facilitating changes. Three women thought *Men Sustaining Change* **was very helpful** and one woman said **extremely helpful**.

Two women said a **little helpful**, as the man had only gone to a few sessions of *Men Sustaining Change*, so it was too early to tell.

Two women said that *Men Choosing Change* or *Men Sustaining Change* programs were **not helpful** as they had not seen any changes. One of these women said it was her ex-partner's lack of willingness to change rather than a problem with the program.

Table 13: Women’s rating of how helpful *Men Sustaining Change* was for supporting men’s behaviour change

| Rating | Number of women |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| Extremely helpful | 1 |
| Very helpful | 3 |
| Helpful | 0 |
| A little helpful | 2 |
| Not helpful | 2 |

Four women who rated *Men Sustaining Change* as **very helpful** and **extremely helpful** identified ways the program had supported men to change and the consequent changes in the way men treated them and their children. Two women said he was more aware that what he was doing was DFV and taking ownership of his behaviour:

He is more accountable for it. Like I think he is realising that it is happening and yeah taking ownership.

Extremely helpful. It is vital. Because it keeps that accountability and it reaffirms all of those new learned behaviours. You are not going to get it straight away. You are not going to change yourself straight away and not make a mistake. . . But also the acknowledgement of his previous behaviours. Acknowledgement and accountability. His accountability, so everything that has happened. That was a big one.

Another woman thought the group had helped him to develop self-awareness as he now understood why he acted the way he did. She said this was not an excuse for his behaviour, but it gave him more understanding about how he could change it.

This increased self-awareness also led him to understand the impact that his behaviours were having on her and the children and the importance of breaking a potential cycle of intergenerational violence by acting differently with the children.

From *Men Choosing Change* to *Men Sustaining Change* – an opportunity for men to continue their change journey

Most of the women interviewed described the journey of men’s behaviour change from *Men Choosing Change* to *Men Sustaining Change* and emphasised the importance of men being given the opportunity to continue this journey in a supported safe way:

*It keeps them accountable by being able to do this follow up. They have really got to want to do it and to really make a change in their lives to continue on and to volunteer to do the *Men Sustaining Change* which I think is very admirable, especially for a man to be able to open up and disclose some of the things that they do. It becomes like therapy for them. They look forward to it.*

One woman said she started noting the changes halfway through *Men Choosing Change* as he started to ‘internalise’ wanting to make changes as he was resistant at the beginning:

Well, it probably would have been about halfway through the course. That exact word, internalise. He used that exact wording. He felt forced to internalise and say these things. He even said that was a big one for him. That broke down that barrier.

One of the women interviewed twice shifted her appraisal of the *Men Sustaining Change* from ‘very helpful’ to ‘extremely helpful’ in the second interview. She highlighted his increasing self-awareness and understanding

about DFV and how this was facilitated by listening to the stories of other men in the group. This had resulted in him having better control of his behaviour. She also described one of the deep changes occurred after he watched the River of Cruelty YouTube video (see footnote 6, pg. 54) shown in group, which had profound effect on him and reportedly other men in the group:

On the most basic fundamental deep changes came after they viewed the video, River of Cruelty... So that really had a profound effect on him and he came to me. That was one of the very first times that I really saw a profound change. He said to me ‘I realised that I have been cruel to you, really cruel to you and the children’... He said that that River of Cruelty actually affected a lot of the men in the group in a very big way.

She thought that the group work was particularly beneficial:

*I think the *Men Sustaining Change*, the group work, is absolutely brilliant. It is a bit like Alcoholics Anonymous. If you are trying to do it by yourself it isn’t going to work. But the minute you get into group work and you have got that sort of support and you have got that realisation that there is a lot of men out there doing this and it is not just a criminal who has been in jail or whatever. It is all walks of life. It is all men. It is inground. It is like entitlement and misogyny...*

Another woman described the changes as an incremental process as he learnt from the programs, and this resulted in changes in the way he spoke to her:

Just little things in the way that he would speak to me.... he still stumbles but nowhere near to the severity that he was. Slowly saw a very broken and hurt man and very confused man learn what is really right and what

is really wrong. The difference between right and wrong I think was that major player initially that started to make the changes.

One woman said that her partner now listens to her more. She feels that *Men Sustaining Change* has given him hope that he could change, and he can now see a future. Several women noted that a significant change was that their ex-partners were no longer being physically violent towards them or their children.

One woman said the *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitator played an important role in supporting positive changes as he really cared and went 'above and beyond':

That man has played a very big part in our lives... It is more than just a job for him. It really is. He really genuinely cares and that as well I think makes a huge difference. They need people like that, that do care about these guys when they feel like they have got nothing left.... Above and beyond when it comes to our family. Because [Facilitator] has seen the changes in [man] as well and he has seen the hard work. [Facilitator] has been there every step of the way and he knows our story inside and out. ... I can't thank that man enough. I really cannot.

Where men had only gone to a few sessions of Men Sustaining Change

Two women thought that *Men Choosing Change* was a little helpful as they identified some small incremental changes. One of these women thought that the program provided a start to the journey of change, but she thought based on her ex-partner's current behaviour, that he needed continual growth. She thought he had only been to one or two sessions of *Men Sustaining Change*. Another woman said she could not comment on *Men Sustaining Change* as he had not gone to many sessions at the time of interview.

Why women had not found the programs helpful for men's behaviour change

Of the two women who said the programs were **not helpful**, one woman said she had seen very minimal changes in her ex-partner from attending *Men Choosing Change* or *Men Sustaining Change*. She did not know how many sessions of *Men Sustaining Change* her ex-partner had attended:

I guess there has maybe been like some slight changes in that his behaviour has changed a little bit based on what he picks up there. Like he sort of does see things a different way or a bit more understanding you know when something is not sort of going his way or someone has got a different opinion to him. . . Sometimes you will say something, and he doesn't react well to it at all. But then after he has time to

process it then he comes back, and he is like yeah I get what you are saying. Sorry for pushing my opinions on you or whatever it was that he was doing.

The other woman identified the man's reluctance to change and lack of acknowledgment of any responsibility as an ongoing barrier for him to make any changes. The DFV Advocate was supporting her, and the Facilitators were informed of her concerns enabling them to tailor their approach with the man.

Three of the women interviewed talked about their experiences of manipulation, such as men saying all the right things to get what they wanted. Two of these women said their ex-partners had manipulated some of the information they had learnt in the program and used this against them. This has been found in other studies as noted by Chung and colleagues (2020) who state this has important implications for the role of DFV advocates:

This finding corroborates previous research showing how perpetrators can use their participation in an MBCP to further control and entrap their (ex-)partner in a variety of ways (Opitz, 2014). This has important implications for the provision of partner contact, such as the need for vigilance by partner contact workers in proactively assessing for indicators that the perpetrator's participation in the program is being used against their (ex-) partner. (Chung, Anderson, Green, & Vlasis, 2020: 120)

7.4 Experiences of accessing the DFV Advocate

Key insights from women's experiences of the DFV Advocate

Five of the women interviewed had engaged with the DFV Advocate during *Men Choosing Change* and then *Men Sustaining Change*. These women found the support provided by the Advocates as **very helpful to extremely helpful** and they described the following

ways that the Advocate had supported them:

- Supported women and children's access to services as the Advocate provided information and referrals and assisted women to connect with services.
- Supported women with safety planning and accessing services that assisted with their safety,
- Provided emotional support by being there to listen when women felt distraught.
- The Advocate provided women with a voice to inform the program as they could tell their Advocate about men's current behaviours, enabling group content to be tailored in response.

Five of the women interviewed had engaged with the DFV Advocate during *Men Choosing Change* and then *Men Sustaining Change*. These women found the support provided by the Advocate as **very helpful to extremely helpful** and they described the following ways that the Advocate had supported them. One of the women interviewed twice shifted her appraisal from 'very helpful' to 'extremely helpful' in the second interview.

Women appreciated the practical and emotional support they received from the DFV Advocates

Women appreciated the way the Advocate would listen to them and provide emotional support at times when they felt distraught:

Very helpful. Between very helpful and extremely helpful in different situations yes. Sometimes they rung me, and I am just absolutely broken. So, they have been really, really supportive.

I thought it was good because [ex-partner] can do all of these things [programs] but for me to have a sounding board as such, and a backup to know that during those tough times where he was learning to change that

just because he was doing that didn't make his behaviours okay at that time. Because he was still not being very nice to me. DFV Advocate, I think she was my first Advocate. She really helped me and guided me and was just there for me. Just that reassurance that hey look you have got this, that it was not okay.

I mean it sounds cliché and lame but she has seriously just been like a friend. Just like a listening ear, but not just a listening ear. She helped. She helped in ways that nobody else has and has kind of guided me through a crappy time. . . Everything that I think of when I think of [DFV Advocate] it sounds so cliché but I feel like she saved me in so many ways. It is hard to talk about her without getting emotional. I just don't want to stop talking to her. She is like the best person, just an absolute God-send.

Extremely helpful. Because she is just a really good sounding board. She always suggests that I sort of take it one step further either through Relationships Australia, or she has always got good helpful suggestions that are supportive. . . . You need to turn your position and

have a better look at it, or have a look at it from a different perspective. DFV Advocate is very gentle, very gentle about it which is absolutely brilliant because it allows you to sort of let down your defences. She is good, very supportive. She gives me things to think about. She always is interested in my support, the support framework around me.

DFV Advocate role allowed women a voice to be able to inform men's programs

Two women appreciated being able to provide feedback to the *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators via the Advocate, that informed the content of group sessions. One woman said this was a 'brilliant' feature of the service design. Women tell the Advocate about men's current behaviours, and the Advocates could then inform the Facilitators. This enabled Facilitators to have a fuller understanding of men's progress and issues, monitor risk, and where appropriate tailor the group sessions:

I think it was really great I would get that phone call we'd go over things that weren't going well so they could tailor it within the classes, and I thought that

was so brilliant. Because I'm sure every family is different, where their needs are, and I just thought that was so clever. I don't know how it went on the other end... I just thought that was really great.

Contacting and supporting women who may not reach out for help

Women appreciated the Advocate checking in on them when they said they would, and one woman said for her this was really important as she found it hard to reach out for help:

Checked in always when they said they were going to check in. It is harder for me to ring and ask for help so that was actually really good that they would always ring when they said they would, and I think that is really important.

Connecting with services and providing support such as help reporting breaches of orders

They also appreciated the Advocate providing information about services they and their children could access, providing referrals and helping them to connect with services. This included supporting women with safety planning and accessing services that assisted with their safety, for example, help to report breaches of orders:

Very helpful. Been good because not only been a listening ear and to gauge what is going on but also putting me in contact with different services so that's been good.

Continuity of support between Men Choosing Change and Men Sustaining Change

The transition between *Men Choosing Change* and *Men Sustaining Change* was generally seamless for women who had engaged with the DFV Advocate during the first program. However, there could be a gap dependent on when men finished *Men Choosing Change* and started *Men Sustaining Change*. The process

for discharging women allows Advocates to continue to support clients up to three months after the man has exited the program if required.

For most of the pilot period there has been one Advocate who covers both programs, enabling continuity for women. Several women talked about the positive experiences of transition from one Advocate to another when there were different Advocates for each program:

It was just so good to have not just a listening ear, and like I said I am not downplaying (Men Choosing Change Advocate) at all. Again, I think that it was like my trauma brain that got in the way of that. But I know that she was very helpful as well. I remember that I was sad when she said that she was leaving and handing me onto [Men Sustaining Change Advocate]. But then when [new Advocate] got on I was like oh, just perfect, just what I needed.

Women's experiences highlighted the complexity of their needs and how it was important to have the support of DFV Advocate at different times. Whether that be during times of crisis as well as post-crisis when they were going through various issues and trying to seek longer term supports for themselves and their children.

Suggestions for improvements

All the women interviewed were keen to see *Men Sustaining Change* continue and be well funded. They valued the opportunity for men to continue their behaviour change journey and the opportunity for women and children to be able to access longer term support from the DFV Advocate.

One woman suggested that a beneficial addition to what she considered was an already perfect service would be to link in more with one on one counsellors and alcohol and drug counsellors.

They need to keep this whole, I don't know if it is a pilot group, but they need to keep Men Sustaining Change going. What they are doing is perfect. They need to link it in with one-on-one counselling. They also need to link it in with drug and alcohol counselling. What they are doing is perfect. They are offering these people every opportunity and that is brilliant.

One woman suggested face to face contact with the DFV Advocate would be beneficial if both parties agreed, as it would be nice to thank them in person for the help they have provided. This supports developing more options for face to face supports for women:

I think it would be nice to know that somewhere down the track, I know it is safety and everything like that, but that we are allowed to meet these people, or have some sort of face to face interactions, that they are allowed to actually interact with you. . . . You know this is the person that you are sharing some very very deep and intimate private details with, and it would just be nice to be able to... to thank her face to face. You know the guys get that option when they are in group with the Facilitators, but we don't get that option to be able to thank the people that helped change our lives too.

Final reflections

The biggest thing I want to say is just thank you. Thank you to everybody involved in this. It desperately needs to keep going. It is worthwhile and it is working and it is working not only for the male but also for the female.

8 Feedback from key stakeholders

8.1 Introduction

This section provides feedback from eight key stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation. The stakeholders represent six external organisations that work with UnitingCare, and an internal program provided by UnitingCare. The range of organisations represented by the stakeholders interviewed included:

- Centacare Family and Relationship Services Sunshine Coast – Family and Relationships Care⁷
 - Queensland Police Domestic, Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Unit (DFV & VPU)
 - Department of Child Safety who provide Walking with Dads (utilises Safe and Together framework⁸)
 - Harmony House who provide family contact and supervised access of children
 - Salvation Army MoneyCare who provide a financial counselling service
 - Suncoast Community Legal Service Inc who provide free legal advice, referrals and education
 - UnitingCare Parenting Support Program (PSP) who provide Circles of Security program⁹
- Six of the stakeholder organisations had presented at least once to the *Men Sustaining Change* group as guest speakers and were able to reflect on that experience. Stakeholders were

also asked about how their organisation worked with *Men Sustaining Change* and their general feedback about what was working well and areas to strengthen. Specific areas explored were referral pathways and engagement with men via the guest speaker sessions.

The section begins with stakeholders' general feedback about the DFV service system on the Sunshine Coast and where they identified strengths and service gaps for men, women and children.

7 <https://centacare.com/family-and-relationship-care/>

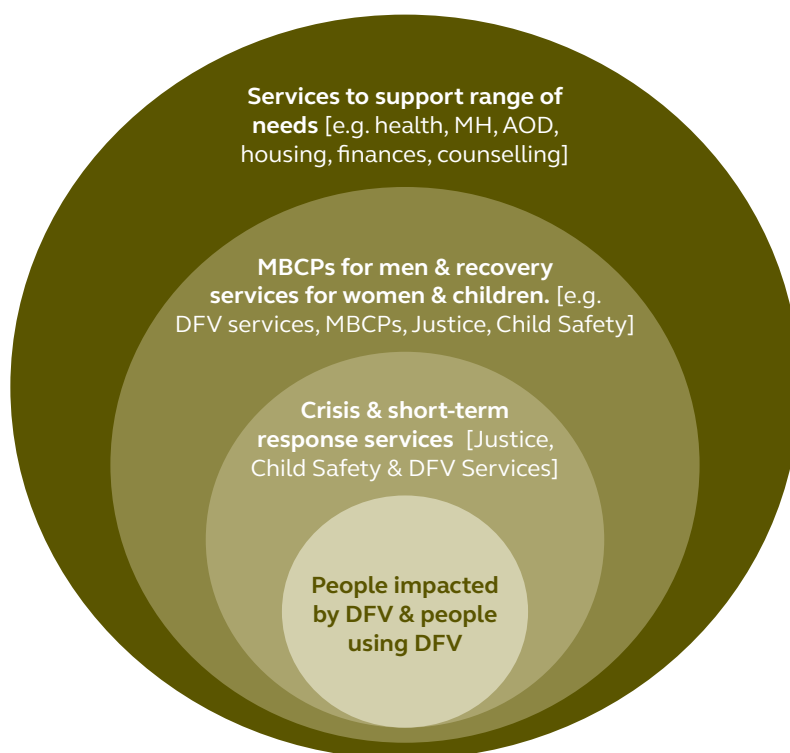
8 https://cspm.csyw.qld.gov.au/practice-kits/domestic-and-family-violence/overview-of-domestic-and-family-violence/safe-and-together-model#The_safe_and_together_principles

9 <https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/circle-of-security-model/what-is-the-circle-of-security/>

8.2 The contribution of *Men Sustaining Change* to the Sunshine Coast DFV service system

Interviews with a range of stakeholders from organisations related to the DFV sector on the Sunshine Coast was an opportunity to obtain a broader perspective about how the *Men Sustaining Change* program contributes towards the service response to DFV. We have used a socio-ecological approach to examine the service system for men, women, and children.¹⁰

Figure 1: Socio-ecological model of services categories available to people impacted by DFV and people using DFV



Many of the stakeholders reported increased demand for their services over recent years. The Domestic, Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Unit (DFV & VPU) have found that with increased community awareness there is increased reporting of DFV to police. As most DFV is still not reported¹¹ increased reporting to police can be interpreted as

positive in the medium term, with an expectation that DFV would eventually decrease with effective violence prevention supports. The current increased numbers of people entering the justice system with DFV related matters puts more pressure on the crisis response sector and subsequently on recovery and rehabilitation services. If the resourcing of these

services is not simultaneously increased this can lead to wait lists and extended periods of time to be able to access programs such as *Men Choosing Change*.

¹⁰ Examining the Sunshine Coast DFV service system in-depth was out of the scope for this evaluation.

¹¹ Source: 2016 Personal Safety Survey (ABS, 2017) accessed from ANROWS (2018):

Of women who have experienced violence by a current partner since the age of 15:

- **82 percent** (225,700) **had never contacted the police.**

Of women who have experienced violence by a former partner since the age of 15:

- **65 percent** (888,100) **had never contacted the police.**

Several stakeholders suggested that there needed to be more resourcing to increase the capacity of MBCPs to shorten the waiting periods on the Coast:

I think the waiting periods are a bit of a turnoff for a lot of people, so if there were more spaces for men. You know if there were more courses available to shorten those waiting periods it would be really good.

Another stakeholder stated that we know that MBCPs are beneficial and we need to have more of them to have a broader impact. They suggested funding allocation for this area needed to be greatly increased.

Related to this are increased demands for other types of programs, for example the UnitingCare Parenting Support Program has noted significantly increased referrals over the last three to four years. This includes increasing numbers of fathers accessing this program.

Need for more longer-term services to enable healing, recovery, violence prevention and breaking intergenerational cycles

There are a number of DFV related services on the Sunshine Coast and several locally developed interagency forums to respond to reported DFV and manage high risk cases¹². These include Domestic Violence Agency Monitoring (DVCAM), which monitors cases where there is imminent risk, and the Multi-Agency Triage and Case Lead Allocations (MATCLA), which also monitors high risk cases that are less time sensitive. The Vulnerable Persons Unit (VPU) is an interagency initiative hosted by Police and includes a Domestic Violence Coordinator and Vulnerable Persons Coordinator who is a mental health professional. The VPU

had dedicated police staff who specialise in DFV attached to the unit.

An observation by one stakeholder was that many of these services worked within the crisis and post-crisis response for up to three months post reported incidents of DFV:

Most of the services I can think of are really at the pointy end to be honest. There is a lot of services that provide things like risk assessment and safety planning, some brokerage or immediate support. A lot of services might also link women into housing because as we know there is a whole other issue in terms of homelessness and housing issues for women experiencing violence. For men as well in terms of being ousted from properties etc. So yes I think there is a real gap in terms of that more longer term support. ... I wouldn't think there are many of those [services] that work beyond about the three month mark.

Other service gaps were noted in terms of addressing diversity and particularly vulnerable groups. For example, the VPU has noticed an increase in elder abuse, including by adult children and older couples, coming to the attention of police.

The sections below reflect on some of the longer-term services available and service gaps for women and children to heal and recover and for men to learn and embed positive behaviour changes to prevent further violence.

Longer term rehabilitation and support services for men

Men Sustaining Change was regarded as a welcome next step for men who had completed *Men Choosing Change*. The feedback from all stakeholders interviewed recognised the importance of men addressing their DFV behaviours and that embedding

change takes time. Further, stakeholders identified that men changing their behaviours would also have a positive effect on the children in their lives and would reduce their exposure to DFV, negative role modelling, and the accompanying trauma and health impacts. Becoming better fathers and stepfathers and modelling positive behaviours and respectful relationships had the potential to prevent cycles of intergenerational violence:

I think it [Men Sustaining Change] is fantastic. I mean I do not know a person I have spoken to that hasn't thought that it is a wonderful idea. We all know that longer term programs, ... see better results. So, I think having the opportunity to extend that and have something like Men Sustaining Change is wonderful. It is a wonderful idea. I think one of the best things we can do is we can continue to support women and children that have experienced violence... but if we don't also work with men that support them to change some of their beliefs and behaviours then this problem is not going to go away.

You know, our kids are witnessing violence and they are witnessing conflict and that has a massive impact, but it is also modelling of how we deal with behaviour.

So, if you had more services like the Men Sustaining Change program and just other wraparounds, I think we would see something very different. Instead of just being reactive, if we were a bit more proactive. . . I think if we can improve some of those wraparound services, and whatever that looks like I don't know, but I think we would have better outcomes for the men, then we would absolutely break the cycle, absolutely.

12 See the Sunshine Coast DFV Coordination website for an overview of different services and interagency forums at <https://sunshinecoastdfvcoordination.com.au/AboutUs/ThisService-388/>

Longer term recovery and support services for women

UnitingCare have a memorandum of understanding with Centacare to refer women whose partners or ex-partners are attending *Men Choosing Change* if they require further supports such as counselling. The DFV Advocate for *Men Sustaining Change* also refers some women to Centacare. However, it appears there is some misalignment with timing in the system as most of the women referred to Centacare from both *Men Choosing Change* and *Men Sustaining Change* do not end up engaging with the service.

A stakeholder thought there were several reasons why women referred from these MBCPs declined to engage with Centacare based on women's feedback:

- The UnitingCare DFV Advocate was providing enough support for them at that time
- They had previously engaged with Centacare or another DFV service and no longer required support
- They had relocated out of the area that Centacare services
- They were currently working with another service or declined support for other reasons

An important consideration is the different timings of women's and men's engagement in supports and what women need post crisis verses longer term depending on whether they are still experiencing DFV. Centacare provides DFV crisis services and engages clients shortly after receiving a police referral, whereas men's engagement in *Men Choosing Change* can take some time due to factors such as Court processes and wait lists to access the program. The stakeholder observed that by the time the

DFV Advocate engaged with the partners and ex-partners of men attending MBC programs, many women had already received support and finalised their involvement with a DFV service:

I think it is that misalignment in terms of having longer term services that we can continue to walk that journey or provide something different ... so that there feels like there are tangible and specific benefits for remaining engaged from the survivor and child end of the spectrum.

Another local service specifically funded to provide longer-term recovery services for women who have experienced gender-based violence is available as an option and they provide trauma counselling and group programs.

Longer term recovery and support services for children

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study published in 2023 found that among Australians aged 16 to 65 years and older, 62.2% had experienced at least one type of child maltreatment. **Exposure to domestic violence was the most common form of maltreatment (39.6%)**, followed by physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse (Haslam, Mathews, Pacella, Scott, Finkelhor, Higgins, Meinck, Erskine, Thomas, Lawrence, Malacova, 2023). The least common type of maltreatment was neglect.

There is a Local Level Alliance on the Sunshine Coast where agencies come together and a number of programs for children and parents are represented. As one stakeholder stated, "We know that to do effective work with children you need to engage the parents. Really, they are the change agents aren't they. So really, we are working with the child and the parent."

UnitingCare on the Sunshine Coast provides Safe Spaces Child and Young Person's Counselling Service for those aged up to 18 years who are currently encountering, have experienced or are at risk of suffering domestic and or family violence, or are exposed to high risk, complex parental conflict. Safe Spaces received referrals from *Men Choosing Change* and *Men Sustaining Change* programs during the pilot period.

The Parenting Support Program provided by UnitingCare also receives referrals from these programs. This parenting program uses the Circle of Security model that a stakeholder thought aligned well with how these group programs were supporting men's behaviour change, particularly the *Men Sustaining Change* model:

Our Circle of Security which I actually think is a beautiful fit for particularly the Men Sustaining Change program. There is a lot of alignment with what they do in both of those programs and the Circle of Security. It is an attachment-based program, but it really links into emotion regulation and connection and all the things that the group really speak to in terms of why people behave the way they behave.

A service gap identified by one stakeholder was the need for more trauma counselling services for children:

I think for children with trauma and needing counselling for issues, no I don't think there is enough on the Coast. There is a response to say we will help the parents, but sometimes the parent may not be the appropriate person to work with the child.

8.3 Guest speaker experiences of presenting to Men Sustaining Change

Six of the stakeholder organisations had provided guest speakers of whom five stakeholders had personally presented at *Men Sustaining Change*. All the stakeholders said they would be happy to go back and present again.

Guest speakers felt well informed about *Men Sustaining Change* by Facilitator prior to presentation

All the guest speakers interviewed felt that the process of inviting and preparing them to speak at group was managed well with good communication and information from the group Facilitators. Some also commented they valued the opportunity to debrief with the Facilitators after the session. Examples of stakeholder feedback:

But I mean [Facilitator] in particular is a really great communicator . . . very proficient in making sure that you have got information but also offers you the opportunity to get more information.

Facilitator was really clear in what to do and I sort of went back. Like we had a really good conversation around it. They wanted something quite informal which suits me perfectly, and I love the idea of sitting in a circle and just having a conversation because you never know what will come out of any question . . . and that is what actually happened, and I love those kinds of conversations. I could have been there all night.

So, the [Facilitator] sent me some information on what it is all about and [they] talked to me about it. I had a bit of an idea. . . For the first time I did it I wasn't really sure what they wanted to hear about so I was very general. . . I think the process was great. Probably now that

I am thinking about it, I could present another presentation maybe specifically on children, maybe parenting matters and domestic violence if the men were interested.

Several stakeholders said they had a close working relationship with UnitingCare and because of this they felt well informed about the program prior to presenting as guest speakers at *Men Sustaining Change*:

Yes. And I had an understanding of what it was already because a lot of Dad's go from me to Men Choosing Change to Men Sustaining Change. I felt like I had a good understanding of what it was.

Feedback on men's engagement with guest speaker session

Child Safety provide the Walking with Dads program for men who have been identified as using DFV. A stakeholder from Child Safety explained that they work with the men individually using a tailored approach based on the Safe and Together framework. When they feel a man is ready, they refer him to *Men Choosing Change*. Their experience of being a guest speaker at *Men Sustaining Change* was that the group asked a lot of questions and were respectful:

What stands out most is that the men were quite respectful. I imagine the Facilitators had thought about the timing of our visit and had prepared them beforehand. Obviously, we go in knowing that some people don't have good experiences with Child Safety so we owned that and were cautious around how we presented ourselves, but I think they were respectful of the fact that we had come in at night time out of work hours to talk to them and give them some information and answer questions. So it was good.

Another stakeholder thought it was important to inform men in the group about parenting programs as they had found that fathers were having more independent care of children and some of the men had not done a lot of hands-on parenting. Therefore, it was important that they learn and are trusted. This stakeholder regarded the opportunity to present to *Men Sustaining Change* as a good way of engaging men in the parenting program:

We find men now who are more often having a lot more independent care of their children, so when the relationships have broken down and they need to have more time where they are the primary carer or at least part of the time, then the skill of parenting is really important. . . . if Dads can engage, even if their motivation is to engage in the Parenting Program in order to get their kids back because they are ticking a box that doesn't matter because he will pick up some information that is helpful. So, for example me going into that group gives them a pathway for that. I know that if I have met someone then I am more likely to engage with them or be happy to have a referral made, rather than a complete stranger. So I think there are some benefits in that.

The guest speaker from Harmony House was surprised that some of the group did not know their service existed, even some of the men who had been through the Family Law Court. This service has been established on the Sunshine Coast for 25 years. Several of the men said they wished they had known about Harmony House sooner. However, some of the men did not like the concept of supervised contact and being monitored by an independent person. This stakeholder thought

that there was an opportunity to shift these men's perspectives to be more child focused if they were "invited to look at the effect of the separation and the emotional harm to the children if they go on about the circumstances of the separation to their children".

The guest speaker from Suncoast Community Legal Service, who has presented twice, said that men in the group were interested in the service and asked appropriate questions:

It was really good. I have to say the men were very interested. They listened to everything I said. They asked appropriate questions. Both times. I got really good feedback after each session from the course convenors who said that the men have found it really helpful in their own journey. Although a lot of them wouldn't need me or need our service at this point in their life, if they did have issues coming up they would know where to go.

The men were interested in what the law said in relation to

children's best interests and the importance of considering a child or young person's developmental stage when making custody arrangements:

I think they were really interested in what the law is basically. What is normal so to speak when you separate and what is in children's best interests, what the law considers to be in children's best interest. They were quite interested in that. Like the different age group of the children, how their needs change with their development. Probably a couple of them hadn't even thought of that, as the children grow up their needs will change and that routines will probably change and that it is usually nothing to do with them but just because of their children's development.

Another stakeholder who provides financial counselling was impressed with the quality of the conversations during the session. Her observations of the group interactions along with her work with participants outside the

group showed her how well the group works:

So just the quality of the conversations that they were talking about and where someone would bring something up, I loved how someone else across the room would just sort of jump in and give their thoughts of what they have learned, their experience, and what seems to be really sound advice to other people. Even though they had all gone through the programs [Men Choosing Change and Men Sustaining Change] and they were coming in and out either weekly or fortnightly, it was amazing. It showed me just how good programs like this are and how much we need more of them.

It is a testament that the program works. Because the guys that I spoke to outside of that group when I was there ... a few weeks later, you can see like a difference. They just stand a little different.... I just love that sort of quiet confidence that people kind of get.

8.4 Referral pathways for Men Sustaining Change participants and their partners/ex-partners and children

The guest speakers' provided feedback about men referring themselves to their services as result of their presentation to the group. These self-referrals are not included in the program data, so it was important to understand if the guest speaker sessions were providing another pathway for connecting men to supports.

A stakeholder who provides the Parenting Support Program saw part of her guest speaker role as engaging men in the potential of doing their program by providing information and also connection, so the men felt safe with her:

So a lot of those men, particularly Men Sustaining Change, are either not having very much contact with their children and wanting to be trusted to have more contact with the children, and there is a lot of pain and grief not having contact with the children as well or not being trusted... so if I go into a group and if I connect well with the Dads and they feel like they are safe with me or they resonate some way with the information that I am providing and they don't feel blamed or shamed, then they are more open to seeking

support which means we might have less family ruptures or at least we might have less children who don't have their Dads in their lives.

As a result of the information session this stakeholder received at least three self-referrals to the parenting program. They found the men who have been to Men Sustaining Change were very reflective and able to take accountability for their behaviours:

So, the two men who had been through Men Sustaining Change were incredibly reflective, they were incredibly able to own and take accountability for their own stuff, and they could really come to be vulnerable about their own childhood experiences and about the mistakes maybe they had made about their own children... They both identified Men Sustaining Change as being something that was really important and helpful to them.

The stakeholder from Suncoast Community Legal said they had received at least one self-referral after each presentation to the

group. They noted that providing the information sessions was an opportunity to engage with the people present but also to spread the word that their service exists.

The stakeholder providing financial counselling also observed that many men were not aware of their service as generally people do not know about financial counselling until they need it. They received a few phone calls and self-referrals from men after they presented their information session:

I have had a few phone calls and referrals from that session

which has been quite good. Like I left my cards behind ... I run a very informal sort of session as well and I am cognisant that no one really wants to take any information away. They will write down what they need or not. ... But lots of people took my card or took a photo of it and then I was getting messages and emails for a little bit and then it kind of died down a bit, but that is okay and if financial issues aren't the crux of the matter then it is okay. At least they know that it is available if they need.

8.5 Identified benefits and strengths of Men Sustaining Change

Strengths of facilitated peer group model

A strength of this service is the peer support model where men are connecting and holding each other to account:

I hear so much about the power that comes from peers within the group being able to hold other men to account. Not just the Facilitators but other men who are further along their change journey and working towards having healthy and non-violent relationships either with their current partner or repairing their relationship with their former partner.

The stakeholder from the Parenting Support Program, based on the Circle of Security model, explained the alignment of the Men Sustaining Change group processes with attachment theory that also underlies their program. This helps to provide an explanation of why men value the group process and

continue to attend. The stakeholder begins with an explanation of attachment theory:

when we feel safe in connection with others, and obviously this starts very early in our earliest months and years, we can manage big emotions. We can self-regulate because we have been co-regulated with. So, if we can do that well for children we will grow really good adults. What I notice is ... men who are perpetrators of domestic violence have never learnt those skills which tells me that they probably never received, well for many of them probably didn't receive, attuned care in their early years. I know working with all the parents that I work with, a common theme is family of origin trauma. That might be quite big trauma, or it might just be sort of a pattern of not getting your needs met.

So, men as adults when we get

into intimate relationships or when we have the challenges of being in a close relationship and our needs aren't being met, we don't know how to manage that emotion. So, where I see it really aligning is... through the process of Men Choosing Change, 16-weeks, the men who then go onto do MSC have had an experience of a really connected relationship. So maybe for the first time in their lives they have a space where they can feel held and validated, and also held accountable which is what we should do with parents, and safety. Like at the core of it is safety. It feels like a safe space. When you feel safe you can take on information that might feel hard. So, the Circle of Security program in particular is all about understanding how our needs were met or maybe they weren't met and then what that means for us.

Provision of longer term supports to embed change

Stakeholders thought a key strength of *Men Sustaining Change* was that it provides men with an opportunity for longer term support to change their behaviour within the context of a formal support network:

I think it is really useful because we know that change is a really long process and no man is going to spend a few months with me and then a few months at Men Choosing Change and everything is better. I think a lot of the men don't have an informal support network and they need a more formal one, and it provides that as well.

I think it is really good, really good. Because especially once they realise that there is another way of life, I think they need the support for longer than just the 16 weeks to really sustain big change. So I think yes the more we can get programmes like this the better. I mean it is better than nothing, but it [Men

Choosing Change] is not really long enough to change all your brain pathways especially once you are an adult.

I think it is necessary. ... I think to have that sort of consistency in wanting to sustain [behaviour changes], I think they need those ongoing supports. ... it is certainly a well worthwhile program. I think we have only got to look at the challenges that seem to happen and the tragic circumstances that we hear of women. If men haven't done a program. You know the murders and the dreadful things that happen as a result. Yeah, if they were given support or choose to sustain it, people may challenge that you need to check a few things out from time to time.

Several of the stakeholders recounted positive outcomes for their clients that had been to *Men Sustaining Change* and how this program had supported them to make positive changes for them and their families.

Importance of DFV Advocate working with women

A stakeholder noted that continuing the DFV Advocate support for women when their partners or ex-partners were involved with *Men Sustaining Change*, was beneficial: "at least then she has got someone to talk to as well, sort of monitoring him." This is a strength both for monitoring men as well as giving women access to longer term support.

All the stakeholders thought that *Men Sustaining Change* was worthwhile and this stakeholder summed up the sentiment that they wished to see this program continue.

Keep up the good work. I love being a part of the Men Sustaining Change program. I think it is really worthwhile and I would hate to see it go. I think it is definitely worth it.

8.6 Suggestions for strengthening Men Sustaining Change

Stakeholders provided several suggestions to strengthen *Men Sustaining Change* from their perspective. Their suggestions are grouped under three broad themes:

- Additional child-focused content in program
- Strengthening interagency information sharing to monitor risk
- Opportunities for strengthening interagency relationships

Additional child-focused content in program

A stakeholder observed that child focused content is a known motivating factor for men to be better fathers:

The way you get traction is through talking about their hopes and dreams for their kids. Many of them obviously had violent or traumatic upbringings themselves and they want to be a better father. That is one of the most powerful ways you can motivate them to want to change their behaviour.

Stakeholders made suggestions for the type of child-focused content they would like to see more of based on the different types of work they did. One stakeholder thought that it was important that MBCPs emphasise the effects of separation on children, so they fully understood the trauma for children. This relates to how parents manage separation and shared custody

where the focus should be on the child's needs first:

It needs to be that sensitivity that the child does come first. He or she needs to be the focus.

Another stakeholder suggested that there was an opportunity for *Men Sustaining Change* to include more parenting information for fathers and offer the Circle of Security program in tangent with the group. The stakeholder noted that, where men had been through *Men Choosing Change*, they had learnt to be aware of their triggers and strategies to remove themselves from the situation before their behaviours escalated. This was really positive, however when the situation is related to challenges with children, it can leave mothers alone to deal with this. The stakeholder suggested a stepped approach whereby *Men Sustaining Change* included more content strategies about how to actively parent.

Another stakeholder explained that the Multi-Agency Triage and Case Lead Allocations (MATCLA) had developed a document that captured the things a victim and their children most wanted to see change in their partner so these topics could be addressed by the service supporting the perpetrator. They hoped this type of approach could ultimately identify common themes that could then be expanded upon to guide group work with men, but at the time of interview this has not yet eventuated:

A classic example would be something like UnitingCare when they are running the Choosing or Sustaining Change programs to say these are the top five things or themes that kids are worried about, that mums are worried about ... Maybe this would be valuable stuff to then touch on inside these groups.

Strengthening interagency information sharing to monitor risk

Several stakeholders suggested they would like more information to be shared by UnitingCare regarding the men attending MBCPs to improve the monitoring of risks. This was a broader issue for the sector to consider, as one stakeholder said, "if the DV sector is better informed then we can assess the risk better and we can manage that risk better."

Opportunities for strengthening interagency connections with Men Sustaining Change

While some of the stakeholders were well connected with *Men Choosing Change*, some identified opportunities to further strengthen their connections with *Men Sustaining Change*. This may look different as men were generally further along in their journey of change. The guest speaker sessions provide a good example of how *Men Sustaining Change* is connecting men with services and the stakeholders suggested ideas that could deepen these collaborative connections.

9 Conclusion and suggestions for further development

9.1 Reflecting on the evaluation findings

9.1.1 Providing longer-term supports for men, women and children achieving positive outcomes

The *Men Sustaining Change* pilot program was developed and funded by UnitingCare in response to the need for longer-term supports for men to embed behavioural changes after they had completed *Men Choosing Change*. This was supported by the evaluation of *Men Choosing Change* which also found that women and children required more opportunities to receive longer-term supports for their recovery from DFV. The *Men Sustaining Change* evaluation findings strongly support the importance of providing longer-term supports and is a valuable addition to the service system.

9.1.2 Outcomes for men attending the program

The findings show the *Men Sustaining Change* pilot is operating well and as intended. Men reported that the program supported them to continue changing their behaviours and develop themselves as a person. Men were able to identify the changes they had made, and many saw themselves as still on this journey. Nearly all the men interviewed (12 of 14) found *Men Sustaining Change* extremely helpful or very helpful.

The positive changes men were making can be regarded as protective factors that lessen the risk of future violence towards women and children, which is the primary goal of this pilot. Such fundamental changes in thinking and behaviours are not easy and the men interviewed articulated this struggle and how the pilot was supporting them to change.

9.1.3 Key elements of Men Sustaining Change design and practice that supported men's behaviour change

The key elements of the pilot design and practice that supported men's behaviour change often worked in a combined way which has important implications for developing the pilot at other locations. These findings resonate with Borek and Abraham (2018) extensive review of the literature on how small groups promote behaviour change. They identified common features of groups that explain how they develop, function and facilitate change. The conceptual model they developed has five interrelated domains: group development; dynamic group processes; social change processes or inter-personal processes between group members; personal change processes such as individual cognitive change and skill development; and group design and operating parameters. How

each of these domain's function and impact the other domains is important to consider when designing and managing groups.

When implementing this initiative at other sites some local innovations and tailoring may be required. However, the evaluation findings suggest that the following key elements should be included:

Men were well informed about Men Sustaining Change and the referral process went smoothly

Key to referrals from *Men Choosing Change* was that men felt well informed about the pilot. Presentations by the *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitators and participants at *Men Choosing Change* groups supported this, as did promotion by the *Men Choosing Change* Facilitators.

Voluntary, flexible attendance with no restrictions on the length of engagement

The free, flexible and voluntary nature of *Men Sustaining Change* made it easier to fit with other commitments in men's lives, while giving them access to continued supports, particularly when they needed it.

Men had accessed the program differently from one or two sessions to a core group accessing thirty or more sessions. This flexibility in attendance recognises that men are at different stages of their journey and have different needs. Some men were

more motivated than others to keep attending. Organisational constraints meant cases cannot be left open indefinitely and those that do not attend four consecutive sessions are contacted to see if they want to continue to attend. There is an “open door” policy in that men can exit and then return to the program at a later date.

Psycho-educational content is responsive to the needs of the group

The major benefit of the pilot design and implementation identified by interviewees was that the weekly psycho-educational content was responsive to the needs of the group and there was flexibility to discuss topics more deeply than was possible in the *Men Choosing Change* structured sessions. This flexibility helps to cement learning and gives men an opportunity to practice and reflect on their knowledge and tools between sessions. Similar to the findings in *Men Choosing Change*, men engage with material they find relevant, interesting and useful. Therefore, having their input into topics and the flexibility to deep dive into areas they are interested in supports their continued engagement.

Men valued the format of the group sessions

The group sessions helped men to align and realign their core values such as accountability and taking responsibility, respect, boundaries, listening to other points of view. Men valued the check-in process as they were able to talk about their issues with the group, heard other perspectives, and learned from other men’s experiences. The psycho-educational content was responsive to their needs and interests (as above). Men appreciated the monthly information sessions from guest speakers which resulted in some men accessing services the guest speakers provide.

Facilitation style creating a safe space to open up

Men were very positive about the facilitation style and the safe space that Facilitators created for discussion and learning. Qualities of the Facilitators that stood out for men were that they were non-judgemental, knowledgeable, supportive, able to guide the group discussion and were flexible rather than prescriptive and very good to talk to one-on-one during phone check-ins.

Individual learning and transformational change is iterative and takes time

For men who want to make substantial psychological and behavioural change this is a complex process that takes time (Carswell and Taylor, 2022; Brown et al., 2016). Men identified their learning process and explained that putting this into practice involved small steps which began when they found content relevant and meaningful and was reinforced by the discussions with Facilitators and the men in the group. This is similar to Kelly & Westmarland’s findings from Project Mirabel where they found men’s change “requires layers of new understandings, reflection and translation into behaviour” (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015: 34).

Journeying with other men – connection and collective learning processes

A key purpose of *Men Sustaining Change* is to create a forum where men can be supportive of each other including reinforcing and normalising positive ways of being a respectful partner/ex-partner. The men interviewed said they valued other men in the group, noting that the supportive environment and discussion gave them another perspective and deepened their sense of empathy which is important for healthy relationships. Men also respectfully contributed suggestions and strategies which

supported each other’s learning and accountability.

The group dynamic over the course of the pilot evolved into collective learning as the group interacted and supported each other, alongside the individual learning of each man. A core group of men continued to attend regularly, and they provided cohesion and continuity within the group. This was valuable with new members coming in and out of the group as they were able to model safe behaviour.

Prosocial networks developing

Connecting was encouraged in the group space with opportunities for discussion during check-ins, psycho-educational session, during the dinner break, and with social outings with the Facilitators. As the men got to know each other, they provided peer support within the group environment. For some men this extended to contact and support outside the group sessions.

The pilot aimed to encourage the men’s pro-social behaviours and networks. Prosocial behaviour is defined as actions that benefit others and a critical element of this is empathy:

The capacity to notice the distress of others, and to be moved by it, can be a critical component of what is called prosocial behavior, actions that benefit others: individuals, groups or society as a whole. (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

9.1.4 Outcomes for women and children

The feedback from women was mixed about the extent of men’s behaviour change. Some women identified significant changes to the extent that they had decided to continue or had returned to the relationship. Other women experienced more moderate changes and said the man was still on their journey of change, while others said there had been minimal to no behaviour changes.

While all women thought it was very beneficial to have a follow-up program after *Men Choosing Change*, they stressed the importance of men wanting to change their behaviours.

Women's ability to comment on how much *Men Sustaining Change* had supported men's behavioural change varied as some women said the man had only been to a few sessions, or a few ex-partners had minimal to no contact so they were not sure. A key way for some ex-partners to tell if there had been any changes were based on experiences of child custody and how men were interacting with their children.

Women's feelings of safety showed that while most of the women felt somewhat safe to very safe, several still felt somewhat unsafe. Likewise, women's perceptions of how safe their children under 18 years felt varied, including variations within the same family.

9.1.5 Supporting women and children's longer-term safety and wellbeing

For victim-survivors, long-term recovery is "a personal,

evolving, and multidimensional experience that is often described as a long and arduous journey" (Carman et al., 2023: 757). The gap in longer-term specialist support services for women was recognised by the Queensland Government who began funding organisations in 2019 to provide Women's Health and Wellbeing Support Services (WHWSS) for longer-term recovery of survivors of gender-based violence. An evaluation of WHWSS across 10 sites in Queensland found extremely high demand from women to access WHWSS, which confirmed the need for this type of longer-term recovery service response (Carswell & McDermott, 2020). Further, women require a range of supports at different times to meet their and their children's needs, for example, safety concerns, practical needs, advocacy and support navigating services, and addressing a complex range of psychological and somatic needs resulting from trauma (Carswell & McDermott, 2020:5).

Women who engaged with the DFV Advocate found this service 'very' to 'extremely' helpful

providing them and their children with practical, emotional and safety supports to enable their longer-term recovery. The DFV Advocate supported women with safety planning and accessing services that assisted with their safety, for example help to report breaches of orders. The Advocate provided information and referrals and assisted women to connect with services for them and their children. The women were very appreciative of the emotional support provided by the Advocate and said she was there to listen and support them when they felt distraught.

The Advocate provided women with a voice to inform the program as they could tell their Advocate about men's current behaviours. The Advocate could then inform the Facilitators which enabled Facilitators to have a fuller understanding of men's progress and issues, monitor risk, and where appropriate, tailor the group sessions.

How *Men Sustaining Change* supports women and children could be strengthened and suggestions are outlined in the next section.

9.2 Suggestions to develop *Men Sustaining Change*

9.2.1 Strengthening DFV Advocate role

Strengthen the DFV Advocate service to provide further support to women and children's longer-term recovery, just as this program is supporting men's longer term change journey. For example, the *Men Sustaining Change* team have discussed providing information sessions by guest speakers for the women so they would have access to this information and service contacts.

Expand DFV Advocate role to include face to face contact: meeting women face to face at UnitingCare offices, or in women's homes or a place they felt comfortable, could strengthen engagement and provide an opportunity to observe how women and children are doing.

9.2.2 Enhancements to *Men Sustaining Change* program delivery

Develop a *Men Sustaining Change* Facilitator manual: Now that the pilot has become

business as usual, a Facilitator manual would support new Facilitators to understand how sessions are sourced, developed and adapted in response to the needs of the group.

Extend group sessions by half an hour to two and half hours: This was suggested by both Facilitators and many of the men. A longer session would accommodate the check-ins, psycho-educational session and allow for a reasonable break for men to talk and eat a light meal to facilitate peer support.

Behaviour change reminders:

The *Men Sustaining Change* team have developed a small card that men can keep in their wallet with 'my values' on one side and 'my goals' on the other. This card was not implemented during the pilot phase and it is suggested it is rolled out and feedback sought from participants about its utility.

9.2.3 Broaden accessibility of program to enable more people to benefit

Expand delivery to other locations:

men, women, key stakeholders and UnitingCare staff all expressed the need for this program to continue and to be expanded to other locations. *Men Sustaining Change* is now being delivered by UnitingCare in the Moreton Bay region in addition to the initial pilot site in Maroochydore.

Consider accepting men who have completed other MBCPs into the group:

Men Sustaining Change has received queries from men who have attended other MBCPs and wanted to continue their journey of change. UnitingCare may be in a position to consider referrals from other MBCPs as long as they could be assured the program adhered to the Queensland Men's Behaviour Change Program Practice Standards.

Access to online material: Men would like access to program resources online as a refresher and to access material when they have missed a session. Some men have indicated interest in doing their own research and providing them with suggested readings and websites would also be helpful.

9.2.4 Key Stakeholders' suggestions to strengthen *Men Sustaining Change* and the local service system

Additional child-focused content in program:

Child focused content is a known motivating factor for men to be better fathers. More content on the effects of separation on children, managing separation and shared custody to support children's needs, and including more parenting information for fathers is important.

Strengthening interagency information sharing to monitor risk:

Several stakeholders suggested they would like more information sharing with UnitingCare regarding men on the UnitingCare MBCPs generally to inform monitoring risks. This is a broader issue for the sector to consider.

Opportunities for strengthening interagency connections with *Men Sustaining Change*:

While some of the stakeholders were

well connected with *Men Choosing Change*, some suggested they would like stronger connections with *Men Sustaining Change*. This may look different as men were generally further along in their journey of change. The guest speaker sessions provide a good example of strong connections with other services and it is important for UnitingCare to keep building on these relationships and looking for new ways to work together.

9.2.5 Expansion of program and new initiatives

A suggestion was to broaden the program with information beyond domestic violence and to other topics for men and their families.

There were several suggestions for other types of services including a service for young people. UnitingCare is currently developing a service for young men. Another suggestion was specialised help for blended families which is being followed up by the *Men Sustaining Change* team.

An early intervention/prevention approach was suggested including promoting pathways into Men's Behaviour Change programs earlier to prevent more serious violence and sharing this type of information more broadly such as teaching in schools.

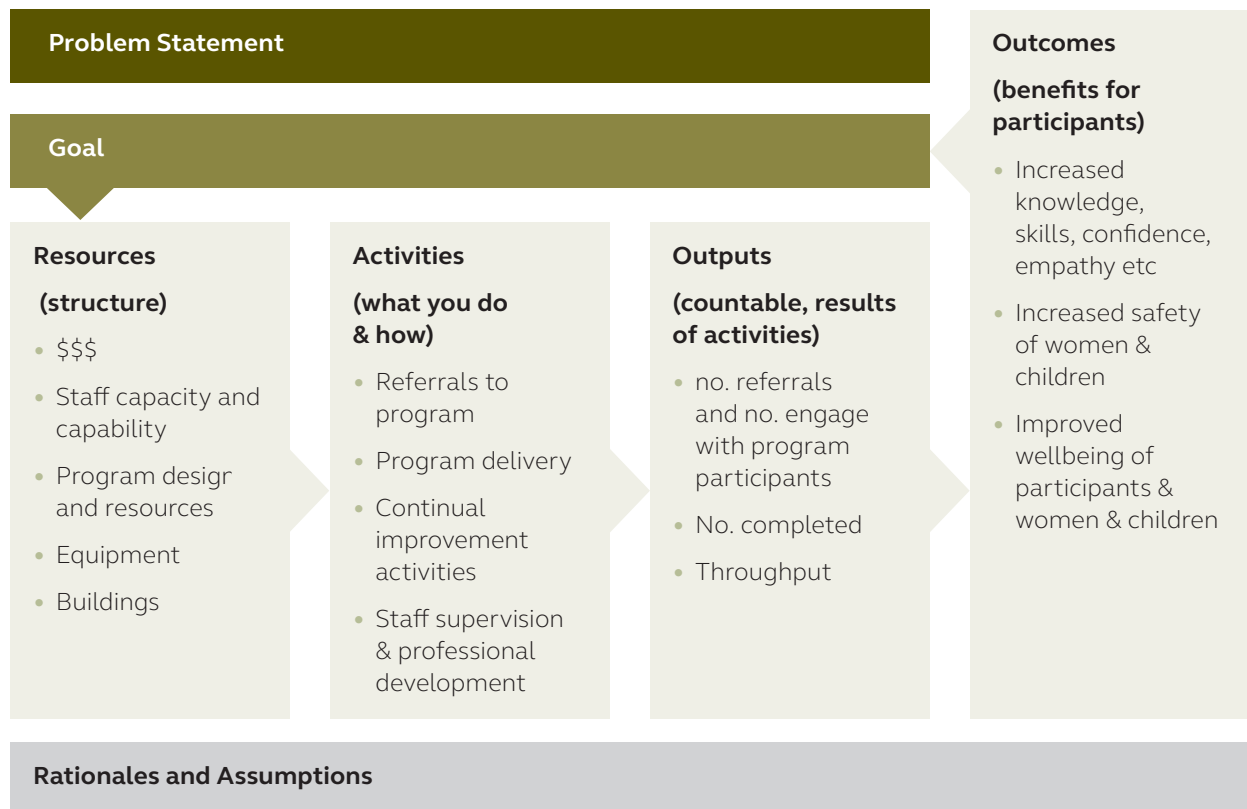
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Appendix 1: Intervention Logic Model

Figure A1 provides a basic model of intervention logic which describes how the different components of a program or service work together to achieve the intended goals and address issues, in this case domestic and family violence.

Figure A1: Basic models of intervention logic and theory of change (rationales and assumptions)



The final revised Intervention Logic is presented in Tables A1 and A2. Table A1 specifies pilot program inputs, activities, outputs, and Table A2 shows the expected outcomes of the pilot in the short, medium and longer-term.

Table A1: Part 1 - **Men Sustaining Change** Pilot intervention logic model showing inputs, activities, and outputs (reported quarterly)

| Pilot inputs/resources | Pilot Activities | Pilot Outputs –quarterly |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 0.6 FTE female Facilitator 0.6 FTE male Facilitator 0.4 FTE Women’s Advocate <p>Induction and training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induction Suicide ASIST Food Hygiene Ongoing DFV training Outcome assessment (Change Star) Facilitator Training Risk Assessment Safe and Together Modules HMA Training Blue Knot Trauma-informed training <p>Equipment & Facility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobile phones, laptops, desks Venue for groups <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice Manual & Facilitator guide Outcome Star Licence Materials for group activities Guest Speakers Food, tea/coffee <p>Marketing materials</p> | <p>Entry to Men Sustaining Change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At <i>Men Choosing Change</i> (MCC) exit interview (referred to as a MCC Transition Interview if man agrees to engage in <i>Men Sustaining Change</i>). Transitioned men can attend stand-alone two-hour sessions which are provided weekly <p>Men Sustaining Change Ongoing Open Peer Group Program seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build sustainable pro-social connections between men. Empower sharing of successes and challenges. Role model skills and strategies within a supportive peer group environment. Provide psychoeducational and practical content as led by male participants needs, guided by Facilitators/guest speakers. Periodic social connection event <p>Individual Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing risk assessment and referrals as individual needs are identified. Individualised client check in. Men will complete an Outcome Change Star individual assessment with practitioner every 8 sessions ongoing and at exit of program. Feedback will be sought from women at this time Every 8 sessions men and women will be provided a feedback survey to complete DFV Advocate will maintain contact with partner/ex-partner as assessed at intake If children are accessing Safe Spaces counselling, feedback will be sought at the same time as above | <p>Men accessing Men Sustaining Change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # men who started # Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander # Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) # Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex plus (LGBTQI+) # transition interviews completed # Outcome Stars completed # client related hours # referrals to other services # of men who attend 8 sessions <p>Partners/ex-partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander # CALD # LGBTQI+ # client related hours # referrals to other services <p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> # Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander # CALD # LGBTQI+ # client related hours # referrals to other services |

Table A2: Part 2 - **Men Sustaining Change** Pilot intervention logic model with the expected outcomes over short, medium and longer-term timeframes

| Short-term Outcomes | Medium-term outcomes | Longer-term Outcomes |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Men accessing Men Sustaining Change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are building on achieved changes from MCC • Have increased awareness of what constitutes DFV • Have increased sense of accountability for their DFV behaviours • Continue reflection on their values and align their attitudes & behaviours • Are demonstrating proficiency in learnt skills and strategies • Continue to sustain & model respectful behaviours & relationships with their partners/ex-partners & children • Are beginning to develop pro-social connections with support of Facilitators within the group • Are accessing support services relevant to their individual needs • Confidence in life skills continues to grow <p>Partners/ex-partners and children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and children are safer, and their wellbeing improving • Women are offered support from the Advocate, and those who wish to engage feel supported and empowered to make own decisions • Women and children who need support are referred by Advocate to appropriate services. • Women and children continue to rebuild trust in their relationships with men. • Children are no longer in need of protection | <p>Men accessing Men Sustaining Change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to sustain & model respectful behaviours & relationships with their partners/ex-partners & children • Are challenging other men about their behaviour & attitudes & are sharing strategies. • Are forming pro-social connections without support of Facilitators within the group • Are consistently accessing support and know how to get help for themselves and their family • Men who have mental health issues are accessing specialist supports and have improved wellbeing <p>Partners/ex-partners and children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and children are safer, and their wellbeing improved. • Women who engage with Advocate feel supported and empowered to make own decisions • Women’s equality in their relationship with men continues to improve • Children’s relationships with their fathers continue to improve • Children are no longer in need of protection | <p>Men accessing Men Sustaining Change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to sustain & model respectful behaviours & relationships with their partners/ex-partners & children • Men role model healthy behaviours and attitudes to other men and boys. • Men are forming pro-social connections in the community. • Men assist other men to access support. <p>Partners/ex-partners and children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and children have shared safe/positive social connections in community. • Women and men are equal (no power and control) in their relationships. • Victim-survivor support for DFV is no longer required. • Children are no longer in need of protection • Children are seen, heard & have a voice • Children feel safe and confident enough to tell Dad when he is stepping over the line • Where there are attachment issues with mother or father, these are repaired |

Appendix 2: Overview of *Men Sustaining Change* pilot monitoring and outcome data sources

Table A3: *Men Sustaining Change* pilot monitoring and outcome data sources

| Men Sustaining Change participant | Partners, ex-partners and children |
|--|---|
| <p>Referral from <i>Men Choosing Change</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case summary including background information • Interventions to date • Presenting issues at time of referral • Client goals and/or expectations of referral • Other agencies involved. | <p>Transition from <i>Men Choosing Change Advocate</i> to <i>Men Sustaining Change Advocate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner/ex-partner may be engaged with <i>Men Choosing Change Advocate</i> and it is their choice whether they transition to the <i>Men Sustaining Change Advocate</i> or remain with the <i>Men Choosing Change Advocate</i>. • If not engaged with <i>Men Choosing Change Advocate</i>, partner/ex-partner is contacted by <i>Men Sustaining Change Advocate</i>. • Consent maybe verbal or by text message. |
| <p>Intake assessment –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome of assessment interview: accepted, declined, or deemed unsuitable for <i>Men Sustaining Change</i>. | <p>Intake assessment discussion guided by Domestic Violence Safety Assessment Tool (DVSAT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Identification process • Background of male participant • Children – risk identification checklist • Sexual Assault – Risk identification checklist • Professional Practice Judgement – fear, concerns about woman and children • Risk level assessment and Action required |
| <p>Participant agreement form provides: participant consent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change Star from exit of <i>Men Choosing Change</i> • Identified current supports (friends, family, community, other) and the services or types of advice they would like to hear from at <i>Men Sustaining Change</i> | <p>Privacy and confidentiality form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent to record and store information • Agreement on regularity of phone contact |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Master tracker records:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demographics • children • contact information • Child Safety involvement • Community Corrections involvement • Intervention Orders and breach notifications program engagement • Program attendance • individual contact via phone check-ins • information about referrals to internal and external services • Change Star • Advocate information regarding partners/ex-partners and children • <i>Men Sustaining Change</i> information regarding planning and delivery e.g. speakers, events, catering etc | <p>Master tracker records:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demographics • children and partner/ex-partner details • contact information • DVO • engagement with Advocate and referrals to services |
| <p>Change Star</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted for each participant at intake and every 8 sessions thereafter | <p>NA</p> |
| <p>Progressive survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation to complete after every 8th session to provide feedback on safety, benefits of <i>Men Sustaining Change</i> and self-reported outcomes, service delivery | <p>Progressive survey –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation to complete after every 8th session attended by the man – feedback on safety of self and children, benefits of <i>Men Sustaining Change</i> for man and changes observed; service delivery in relation to Advocate support and suggestions for improvement |
| <p>Men Sustaining Change Facilitator debrief forms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document reflections after each session, to provide insights into group dynamics and developing peer relationships. • Implications for program delivery is also recorded, such as session topics, guest speakers, engagement of participants, benefits of group and feedback about sessions. | <p>NA</p> |
| <p>Case Reviews, Team Updates and continuous improvement planning monthly meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record of development of pilot implementation, resources, processes etc • Case review information – Facilitators and Advocate share info about shared cases of concern, Local Service Manager provides guidance. Risks and actions planned and documented. | |

Telephone

07 3253 4000

Address

Level 5
192 Ann Street
Brisbane QLD
Australia 4000

Mailing address

GPO Box 45, Brisbane QLD 4001

Email

contact@ucareqld.com.au

unitingcareqld.com.au



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