

DVRCV Fast Track Pilot Program

Evaluation Summary

Building a strong, sustainable and expert specialist family violence workforce is one of the major challenges we currently face in Victoria. It is also integral to the significant Royal Commission into Family Violence reforms. As Victoria's only specialist family violence Registered Training Organisation, DVRCV's purpose is to build the capability of professionals, organisations and systems to prevent and respond to family violence. In 2018, we designed an innovative new pilot program that aimed to test whether it was possible to 'fast track' the development of early career family violence professionals into middle management roles. Funded by Family Safety Victoria (FSV), the pilot was designed and delivered over six months in Victoria. This summary outlines the program framework and the evaluation results of DVRCV's first Fast Track program.

Program context

Fast Track was designed with a focus on building skill and confidence in management and leadership specific to a Victorian family violence context. Workshops were structured around leadership and management skills as outlined in Family Safety Victoria's family violence Capability Frameworks. Evidence-based best practice adult learning principles that use participatory and experiential learning techniques were intrinsic to the program. In practice this meant that the workshops made use of the knowledge and skills of participating professionals to problem solve issues rather than relying on a strictly didactic presentation-style model.

The Fast Track pilot sought to meet a number of objectives, including:

- Designing and delivering a professional development program containing mutually reinforcing program components all informed by the Capability Framework;
- Testing the extent to which the program increased participants' knowledge and skills;
- Identifying the strengths and limitations of the pilot program and making recommendations on changes required.

The multi-method approach to learning was highly effective: [The program was] *“a great experience and a brilliant opportunity to expand your knowledge within the family violence sector. From the other participants to the guest speakers and facilitators, it was an enjoyable and extremely beneficial journey.”*

Fast Track Program participant



Program components



Workshops

Ten face-to-face workshops were delivered weekly over a period of three months addressing the following topics:

1. Introduction to Fast Track, historical overview and current reforms
2. Family violence leadership in Victoria
3. Applying theory and practice frameworks to family violence response management
4. Leading quality services within an integrated multi-agency network
5. Leading engagement with diverse communities
6. Managing family violence risk and prioritising safety
7. Leading and developing high-quality systems to support evidence-based practice
8. Advocating for a parenting role: supporting women and promoting perpetrator accountability and change
9. Leading advocacy and reform
10. Public speaking and future career pathways

Visiting experts attended individual workshop sessions to offer expertise, commentary and advice on contemporary issues and areas of debate. Across the Ten workshops, these visiting experts addressed a range of issues including:

- Policy and advocacy
- Management and organisational development
- Staff supervision, resourcing and support
- Working in multi-disciplinary teams
- Partnership development
- Program design
- Working with specific communities (e.g. CALD, Aboriginal communities, LGBTQI+), children or men
- Working in specific contexts (e.g. educational settings, local government, sporting contexts)
- Responding to backlash and resistance

Tools and resources

Fast Track also offered participants access to family violence and violence against women management and leadership tools and resources. These resources were provided in a participant pack which was distributed at the first session. Specific readings from these packs were used in each workshop session. Additional materials from the program team were made available via electronic networks.

Mentoring

Three mentors were selected based on their expertise in responding to family violence and violence against women, to deliver three one-hour mentoring sessions to each individual participant. Participants were able to submit preferences for mentor allocation to ensure that their chosen mentor was able to offer the most relevant advice to their area of work/interest. The mentoring was designed to afford participants the opportunity to explore issues covered in the course, according to their individual development needs.

Community of Practice (CoP) and Electronic Practice Network (EPN)

Three CoP meetings were interspersed throughout the program, facilitated by a senior family violence specialist practitioner. The meetings were designed to offer an avenue for participants to receive support and share information. They offered a space to reflect on leadership and senior management concerns in a structured way, and enabled participants to build on each other's insights and experiences in order to collaboratively problem solve. The content discussed ranged from managing ongoing change resulting from current family violence system reforms, to working with LGBTIQ+ and Aboriginal communities. An EPN was also offered to participants to provide them with an opportunity to share resources, experiences, tools and strategies in an informal online setting.

Forum

An end of program forum offered a formal conclusion to the course. Participants were given the opportunity to reflect on the development of their knowledge and skills, and presented on an area of contemporary debate covered in the workshops. The forum gave them the opportunity to practice skills in the design and delivery of public presentations, something that is often required at senior practice level. Participants' managers and colleagues were invited, as were sector experts, mentors, DVRCV staff, partner organisations and other interested parties. Finally, participants received graduation certificates that recognised and honoured their achievements.

"I would encourage any worker within my organisation who has a desire to move into a leadership role to apply for this program. I would tell them that the program offers an overview of the service system that you don't get access to in your everyday work life."

"The course is useful to shift thinking space from direct practice to broader sector climate and development. Also very helpful for networking and exposure to leaders in the field to get a better understanding of where the sector is coming from and where it is headed".

[The Program offered] *"a great opportunity to build on skills and knowledge, particularly in relation to leadership and family violence legislation and policy. It also offered a great opportunity to meet others within the family violence sector working towards the same vision."*



Key Evaluation Findings

Fast Track adopted a multi-method approach to evaluation using multiple participant and facilitator surveys. One element of the multi-method evaluation was a responsive survey model, so that participants' feedback could be regularly incorporated ensuring ongoing quality control of the program. Key evaluation findings from the program are outlined below.

Participants were asked to self-assess their confidence level with each of the capabilities in the framework before, during and after the course. The data showed that there was an increase in participant confidence across all capability areas contained within the program.

Within these capabilities, Fast Track was particularly focused on increasing capabilities pertaining to leadership and senior management. Confidence with qualities that underpin sound leadership increased dramatically. Before the course, only 25% were extremely or very familiar with these qualities. By the end of the course, 92% were extremely or very familiar.

Another key aspect of senior specialist family violence work is advocacy, however participant confidence in undertaking public advocacy work, prior to commencement of the program, was relatively low. Initially only 12.5 % were extremely or very confident and 19% were somewhat confident. By the end of the course 16% were extremely or very confident and 62% were somewhat confident.

100%

of participants rated their experience of the program as extremely or very positive. Participants also reported that they would recommend the program to others.

100%

of participants reported that that they found the expert's sessions extremely or very useful and requested that additional time be allocated to this part of the workshop. As such, time for expert activities was increased.

100%

of participants reported that larger group activities were either extremely or very useful in stimulating their learning, when compared to 38% who found smaller group activities were either extremely or very useful in stimulating their learning.

Overall, participants rated the Community of Practice forums lower than the workshops or mentoring sessions in meeting their learning needs.

ONLY
30.77%

of participants reported that their CoP sessions were extremely or very useful in supporting their learning in relation to the content of the program.

85%

of participants reported that their mentoring sessions were extremely or very useful in supporting their learning in relation to the content of the program.

77%

of participants thought that preparing a presentation for the forum was extremely or very useful in increasing their knowledge of issues covered in the course.

The EPN was not valued highly in the evaluation.

ONLY
15.38%

found it extremely to very useful in supporting their learning in relation to the content of the workshops

85%

thought that the forum would be extremely or very useful in increasing their confidence to present at similar events in the future.

