Continuous Improvement of the Family and Sexual Violence System

A national collaborative backbone agency is the critical component

Discussion paper produced by The Backbone Collective

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> The system responding to family and sexual violence is not just a government system, therefore multiple government and non-government agencies, iwi and Māori authorities, academics, service users, frontline personnel and local communities all need to see themselves as having collective ownership of and being able to influence how the system operates and to safely and equitably have their voices heard.

New Zealand needs an integrated and effective system for addressing family and sexual violence that is joined up, aligned and makes a difference.[1]

On 28 September 2018 the Under-Secretary to the Minister of Justice (Domestic and Sexual Violence Issues), Jan Logie announced a new government joint venture to deliver an integrated, whole-of-government approach to family violence and sexual violence. The announcement from The Multi-Agency Team on Family Violence and Sexual Violence[2] said:

> *Integrated practice across government and in communities can reduce family violence and sexual violence, so government must do things differently to achieve that integration.*

This announcement reflects considerable discussion internationally and in New Zealand over many years about the need for a more integrated approach to address social issues such as family and sexual violence. Numerous terms for different types of approaches have been used – amongst them, joined-up, whole-of government, inter-agency, multi-agency, coordination, collaboration, integration and partnership.

The Backbone Collective believes that when planning the form, functions and processes of its new integrated, whole-of-government system for addressing family and sexual violence, it is critical that the Government consider guidance provided from the local and international literature and learn from work already undertaken in other similar countries.

Background – The Backbone Collective

In 2014 we wrote an independent report 'The Way Forward' which we published as The Impact Collective. The report contained a proposed model for an integrated system for responding to intimate partner violence and child abuse and neglect. A central component of that model was the backbone agency; it would sit outside of government and be the glue that ensured central government agencies, and national governance and advisory groups were linked with local communities where services were delivered which we called regional hubs and with key stakeholders (eg academics) – vertical integration, and that the regional hubs were linked together - horizontal integration. We saw continuous improvement of the whole system and gathering the experiences of service users to help inform, design and evaluate the system response as critical functions of the backbone agency.

We knew that we were not in a position to establish or operate the backbone agency as defined in The Way Forward but while we waited for those ideas to propagate and hoped that government would take action, we decided to take our own action - to get victim survivor voices to the table to find out more about how the system is or isn't working. So, in March 2017 we established The Backbone Collective (Backbone) – making reference to the backbone agency name as a sign of our commitment to this model.

We created a conduit to enable victim survivors' experiences to inform policy and practice. Backbone enables women to safely and anonymously tell the Government, others in authority, and the public about how the 'system' responded to them when they experienced violence and abuse, and how they need it to respond for them to be safe and rebuild their lives. Backbone currently has over 1600 women members who are all victims/survivors of violence and abuse. We run online surveys focussing on aspects of the system response and then produce reports detailing what women share with us and release those publicly in the hope that they will result in system change. The challenge to date has been that there is no central point or continuous improvement mechanism that can receive this

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[1] Family Violence & sexual violence work programme web page. Available at https://www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector-policy/key-initiatives/reducing-family-and-sexual-violence/work-programme/

[2] Email newsletter dated 28 September 2018

information and feed it back to relevant parts of the system, so they can learn, innovate and improve the system as a result.

It has always been our hope that in time the backbone agency we proposed in The Way Forward would be established and would be responsible for bringing all the different inputs and feedback loops of continuous improvement together, enabling all key parties to collaborate and collectively decide where and how improvements need to be made.

We do not envisage that The Backbone Collective would become the national collaborative backbone agency we describe in this paper. We are firmly of the view that a collaborative backbone agency at arm's length from central government to undertake a comprehensive continuous improvement agenda (as proposed in this paper) needs to be based on a collaborative model of partnership. We envisage that the voices of victim survivors will become a central part of a new collaborative backbone agency – either as a core internal function of the new agency or contracted in from The Backbone Collective and/or elsewhere.

If for any reason the collaborative backbone agency and the continuous improvement model, is not established, The Backbone Collective will be advocating for a separate Advisory Council and or Commission for victim survivors in line with the Victim Survivors Advisory Council that was set up in Victoria following their Royal Commission.[3]

About this paper

The purpose of this paper is to put forward the case for a national collaborative backbone agency - at arm's length from central government – to be established as part of the infrastructure required to support the new integrated, whole-of-government approach to family violence and sexual violence recently announced by government. We believe that the primary (but not necessarily the sole) purpose of the collaborative backbone agency would be to provide the glue to hold the integrated system together, to enable all key stakeholder groups to have collective ownership, accountability and responsibility for ensuring the system continually learns and improves over time.

The collaborative backbone agency would collect and collate information from a range of sources and key stakeholders and experts would collectively analyse and agree improvements that need to be made and identify opportunities for strengths-based learning across the system. We believe this is critical to the success of the Government's new integrated whole-of-government approach.

> To succeed in creating a new, integrated, whole of government system for addressing family and sexual violence we need to ensure we build a set of continuous improvement functions into the system and establish an independent national backbone agency responsible for this function.

We hope this paper will be used to start a collective conversation among politicians, policy makers, service providers, service users, iwi and local communities - so they can 'come to the table'– to contribute their ideas about this critically important component of a successful system response to family and sexual violence.

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[3] https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/committees-for-change/victim-survivors%E2%80%99-advisory-council.html

The Backbone Collective would welcome any opportunity to work collaboratively with the joint venture team, service providers, academics, service users, community groups and other stakeholders to explore the issues discussed in this paper in greater detail. In particular, we would be open to any discussions around mechanisms to ensure victim survivors 'voices of experience'[4] can become central to planning, implementing and continually improving the new integrated whole-of-government approach for family and sexual violence.

In compiling this paper, we have drawn heavily from (but not necessarily referenced in all instances) The Way Forward,[5] the submission The Impact Collective made to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into More Effective Social Services in December 2014,[6] and the Productivity Commission's final report 'More Effective Social Services' published in August 2015.[7]

Wicked and Complex Social Problems

Family and sexual violence are wicked social problems. The concept of wicked problems dates back to the 1970s when Rittel and Webber[8] coined the phrase to describe a class of problem that defy solution in the context of social planning. In 2007, the Australian Government identified tackling wicked problems as the most pressing policy challenges for the Australian Public Service and produced a guide to encourage its public service managers to understand what wicked problems are and to look for ways to improve the capacity of the Australian Public Service to deal effectively with these complex policy problems.[9] This guide lists the following key features of any strategy aiming to address a wicked problem:

- Working in collaboration.
- Bottom up perspective.
- Flexibility and innovation.
- Long term approach.
- Interagency working.
- Developing a framework of accountability.

Decentralisation – a bottom up perspective

In the past there has been criticism of the ways that government has responded to the problem of family and sexual violence by taking a silo-ed, top down approach and not sharing information across sectors and setting up providers to compete against each other for limited funding opportunities.[10] More recently there has been a growing acceptance that in order to address the wicked/complex social problems plaguing New Zealand, government will need to 'let go of the reins' and take a more collaborative, decentralised and bottom up, rather than top down, perspective. Likewise, there is a growing acceptance that the voices and experiences of service users must be central to the system design and operation to ensure it is responsive to their needs.

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[4] https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/initiatives/action-family-violence/voice-of-experience.pdf
[5] Available at http://theimpactcollective.co.nz/thewayforward_210714.pdf
[6] Available at https://www.productivity.govt.nz/sites/default/files/sub-social-services-130-the-impact-collective-584Kb.pdf
[7] Available at https://www.productivity.govt.nz/sites/default/files/social-services-final-report-main.pdf
[8] Rittel, H., & Webber, M. (1973). Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning Policy Sciences, vol. 4. (pg 155–169).
[9] Australian Government. (2007) Tackling Wicked Problems citing Management Advisory Committee, Connecting Government, p. 6. Available at: https://www.apsc.gov.au/tackling-wicked-problems-public-policy-perspective
[10] Inquiry into the determinants of wellbeing for tamariki Māori Report of the Māori Affairs Committee Fiftieth Parliament (Hon Tau Henare, Chairperson) December 2013 Presented to the House of Representatives

The Australian Public Service guide mentioned above[11] explains why a 'bottom-up perspective' is needed:

> Governments do not usually have the reach or power to direct behaviours that might conflict with local beliefs, values and private interests, even if they are sure of the right policy answer to the problem. It is unlikely that government from the centre can specify how best to provide a complex service at the local level if there is to be scope to boost service satisfaction, improve outcomes and secure local legitimacy.

In the literature, the concept of bottom-up aligns closely with the concept of decentralisation – removing the top down mechanism thereby enabling local approaches to flourish. In a report produced by the UK Institute for Public Policy Research,[12] Muir and Parker advocate three steps to design and manage public services in a way that recognises they are complex systems: decentralise, pool funding and integrate. They say that dealing with complex problems requires much greater integration of public service systems, and the fostering of deep relationships both among citizens and between service users and frontline professionals - that public management of the future is one where central government has to 'let go' and become an enabler rather than the manager. They say this is because complex challenges are not susceptible to standardised, one-size-fits-all blueprints; because services delivered in functional silos from Whitehall [central government] are unable to get a grip on the interconnected causes of complex problems; and because greater professional autonomy is required to allow for more innovative and relational approaches at the frontline.

The Productivity Commission[13] said that top-down initiatives and restructures tend not to work because regions, communities and subsidiary organisations vary not only in the nature of the social problems they face but also in their capabilities and perspectives. They say that many providers are attracted to the concepts of "co-production" and "co-design", which includes wider involvement in design, governance and ongoing service management and delivery. They cite Matahaere-Atariki et al. (2008)[14] regarding co-production in a Māori context:

> Co-production is more than a "bottom up" community development model and does not aim simply to promote community planning and user-focused services. It involves a more active role for iwi and Māori authorities in designing and delivering local services, as well as providing the opportunity to influence the policy process by working with government to invest in shared outcomes for Māori. (p. 34)

The Taskforce on Violence within Families' Māori Reference Group's (MRG) 'E Tu Whānau' strategy for addressing whānau violence[15] reflects similar sentiments and builds on the concepts of Whānau Ora and the Mauri Ora framework. This states that the responsibility and accountability for positive change lies with both iwi and the government and *'requires a range of strategies and interventions and a continuum of short – term and long-term priorities and responses'* (pg 20). Fundamentally at the heart of the framework is a commitment to Māori designing and implementing strategies that respond to Māori needs and ways of being.

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[11] Australian Government. (2007) Tackling Wicked Problems citing Management Advisory Committee, Connecting Government, p. 6. Available at: https://www.apsc.gov.au/tackling-wicked-problems-public-policy-perspective
[12] Muir, R and Parker, I. (2014), *Many to Many: How the relational state will transform public services.* Institute for Public Policy Research, London UK. Available at http://www.ippr.org/publications/many-to-many-how-the-relational-state-will-transform-public-services
[13] https://www.productivity.govt.nz/sites/default/files/social-services-final-report-main.pdf
[14] Matahaere-Atariki, D., McKenzie, D., Goldsmith K., & Whiu, T. (2008). Co-production in a Māori context. Social Policy Journal of New Zealand
[15] E Tu Whānau Programme of Action for Addressing Family Violence 2013 – 2018 The Māori Reference Group for the Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families.

Collective Impact

The Collective Impact[16] approach is also particularly applicable to thinking about ways to respond to wicked problems and hence to the work of the new integrated approach to family and sexual violence. It recognises that organisations must coordinate their efforts and work in collaboration if they are to achieve transformative, large-scale social change to which they all contribute.

The Productivity Commission's report 'More Effective Social Services'[17] refers to the five conditions that, according to Hanleybrown, Kania and Kramer (2012),[18] allow collaborative actors to achieve social improvements:

- **Common agenda:** All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed actions.
- **Shared measurement:** Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other to account.
- **Mutually reinforcing activities:** Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
- **Continuous communication:** Consistent and open communication is needed across many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
- **Backbone support:** Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organisation(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and to coordinate participating organisations and agencies. (p. 1)

Backbone Support

In this section of the paper we draw together Kania and Kramer's criteria of 'backbone support' for collective impact with the 'bottom up perspective' or decentralisation required when responding to wicked problems. Kania and Kramer say that creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organisation and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. They also say that in the best of circumstances, backbone organisations embody the principles of adaptive leadership: the ability to focus people's attention and create a sense of urgency, the skill to apply pressure to stakeholders without overwhelming them, the competence to frame issues in a way that presents opportunities as well as difficulties, and the strength to mediate conflict among stakeholders.

The challenge is to find the infrastructure, processes and practices that might promote better connections and remove any obstacles to collaboration that devolution may have raised. These include relevant skills and culture, an information-sharing infrastructure and governance arrangements that focus accountability on the whole of government outcomes the government is seeking.[19] However, collaboration takes time, and none of the participating organisations usually have any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.[20]

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[16] A term coined by Kania and Kramer. See Kania and Kramer (2011), 'Collective Impact, ' Stanford Social Innovation Review. Available at
http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/rereading_collective_impact_three_lessons?utm_source=Enews&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=SSIR_Now&utm_content=Read_More

[17] https://www.productivity.govt.nz/sites/default/files/social-services-final-report-main.pdf

[18] https://ssir.org/articles/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work

[19] Australian Government. (2007) Tackling Wicked Problems citing Management Advisory Committee, Connecting Government, p. 6. Available at: https://www.apsc.gov.au/tackling-wicked-problems-public-policy-perspective

[20] https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

Muir and Parker (the UK Institute for Public Policy Research)[21] identified the development of collaborative backbone organisations in public services as one of seven key developments required for interconnected systems. Key functions they collectively identify for such organisations include:

- Coordinating participating organisations and agencies.
- Working with those involved in all parts of the system to ensure they understand and agree to uphold both the common agenda and rules for interaction.
- Generating and transferring knowledge around the system to ensure the system is constantly learning.
- Disseminating knowledge and offering opportunities for ongoing professional development.
- Acting as clearing houses for innovative practice and allow the system as a whole to learn.
- Tracking data, enabling adaptation, disseminating knowledge and improving motivation and morale among all participants.
- Enabling a high degree of transparency among all organizations and levels involved in the work.

> An independent backbone agency is critical to the success of an interconnected system such as the new integrated, whole of Government approach to family and sexual violence.

A system that innovates and learns

A number of the key functions that Muir and Parker list above, refer to the importance of the system infrastructure enabling innovation and learning; the generation and dissemination of knowledge. They say that top-down initiatives and restructures tend not to work because, as complexity theory teaches us, the most effective change in a complex system comes about endogenously and incrementally, rather than externally and suddenly. Innovation comes about through learning over time.[22]

Innovation isn't about arbitrarily testing the latest 'bright idea'. Innovation needs to be informed by evidence of what is most likely to work. Muir and Parker referred to this as 'informed innovation' with particular attention being paid to how knowledge regarding what works is generated and shared around the system and responsibility being put on all providers of publicly funded services to share their experiences. The need for the whole system to improve through the sharing of successful practice should override any concerns among private/NGO providers about protecting their commercial competitiveness (commercial confidentiality).[23]

The Productivity Commission said devolved, or decentralised, approaches (as discussed above) can support a diversity of providers, which leads naturally to more innovation.[24] Further, they say, devolving commissioning is likely to generate quite different solutions and stimulate ongoing learning

[21] Muir, R and Parker, I. (2014), Many to Many: How the relational state will transform public services. Institute for Public Policy Research, London UK. Available at http://www.ippr.org/publications/many-to-many-how-the-relational-state-will-transform-public-services

[22] Ibid. Pg 68

[23] Muir, R and Parker, I. (2014), *Many to Many: How the relational state will transform public services.* Institute for Public Policy Research, London UK. Available at http://www.ippr.org/publications/many-to-many-how-the-relational-state-will-transform-public-services

[24] Sturgess, 2012 cited in More Effective Social Services. Available at https://www.productivity.govt.nz/sites/default/files/social-services-final-report-main.pdf

about what works best. Chapter 7 of the Productivity Commission's report[25] is devoted to exploring how social services can learn and innovate. They found that a system that learns needs:

- clear goals around improving the performance of social services
- strong incentives and the flexibility to find and try new ways of doing things and test them against current approaches
- ongoing feedback to the clients and providers of services and commissioning organisation about what is working
- a means to discard or amend the less successful and the failing services, and to select and spread the successes
- a culture in which participants actively seek and welcome evidence to inform decisions
- a means to review the performance of the system as a whole and to initiate system-level changes that will improve performance

The following diagram is from that report.

Figure 7.1   A system that learns
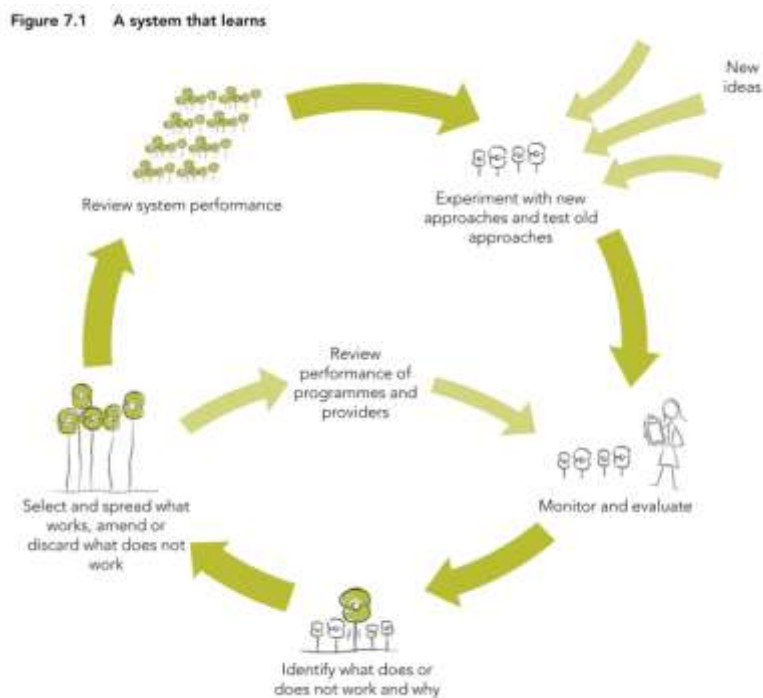
A system that continually improves

Solving wicked/complex problems not only requires a system that can innovate it requires a system that can readily identify and respond to unintended negative consequences, when and where they emerge, try new approaches and select the most promising solutions. In 2011, the Better Public Sector Advisory Group (BPSAG) drew the critical link between innovation and continuous improvement,

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[25] https://www.productivity.govt.nz/sites/default/files/social-services-final-report-main.pdf

'sharply improved state sector performance will require a culture that supports and actively encourages innovation and continuous improvement' *(BPSAG, 2011, p. 39).* [26]

All stages of the continuous improvement cycle (below) must operate effectively, and all be linked with one another. This is what Rittel and Webber[27] call the 'no stopping rule'.
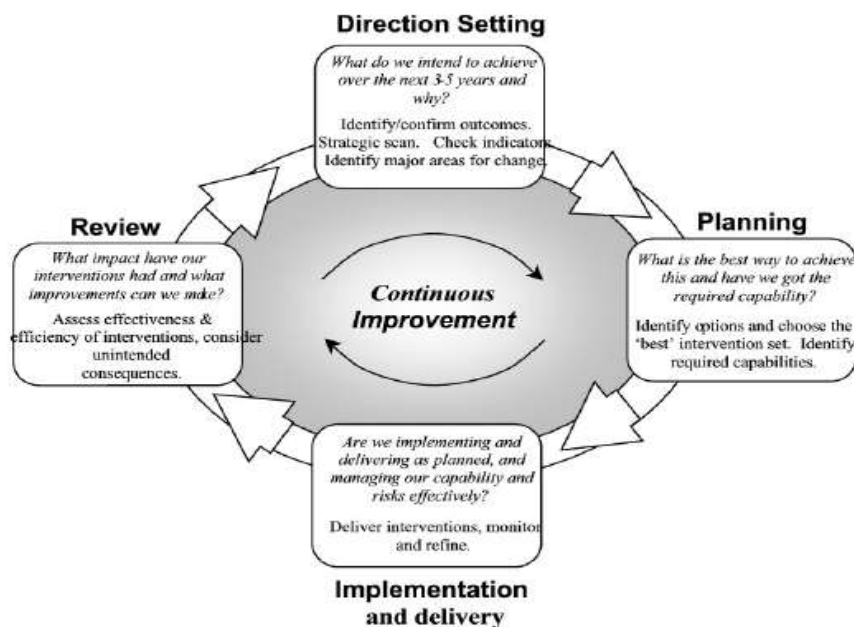
Source: Steering Group for the Managing for Outcomes (2003, 2).[28]

Material sourced for the continuous improvement of the family and sexual violence system would be drawn together from multiple sources to:

- generate and share knowledge around the system to ensure the system was continually learning
- disseminate knowledge and offer opportunities for further shared understanding, training curriculum and programmes and professional development
- identify innovative and promising practice for the system as a whole to learn from
- identify where incremental change was required either in all regions, individual regions, one specific service or profession including:
  - o changes within the system i.e. updating the system specification, local or national documentation
  - o changes that would need to be negotiated with central government agencies, national NGO bodies or national professional bodies.

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[26] Cited in the Productivity Commission's report. Available at https://www.productivity.govt.nz/sites/default/files/social-services-final-report-main.pdf
[27] Rittel, H., & Webber, M. (1973). Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning Policy Sciences, vol. 4. (pg 155–169).
[28] Steering Group for the Managing for Outcomes. (2003) *Managing for Outcomes: Guidance for Departments.* [Online]. Available from http://www.ssc.govt.nz/display/document.asp?navid=253&docid=3530&pageno=1#P12_245 .

Without this, the system specification, the national strategy and standardised resources, the shared understanding, workforce development and training and local practice would quickly fall out-of-date and the system would no longer be operating at an optimal level.

> A continuous improvement function is critical because without it the system specification, the national strategy and standardised resources, the shared understanding, workforce development and training and local practice would quickly fall out-of-date and the system would no longer be operating at an optimal level.

Sources of information – the continuous improvement inputs

There are a range of information sources that we believe need to feed in to the continuous improvement process. These include (but are not limited to):
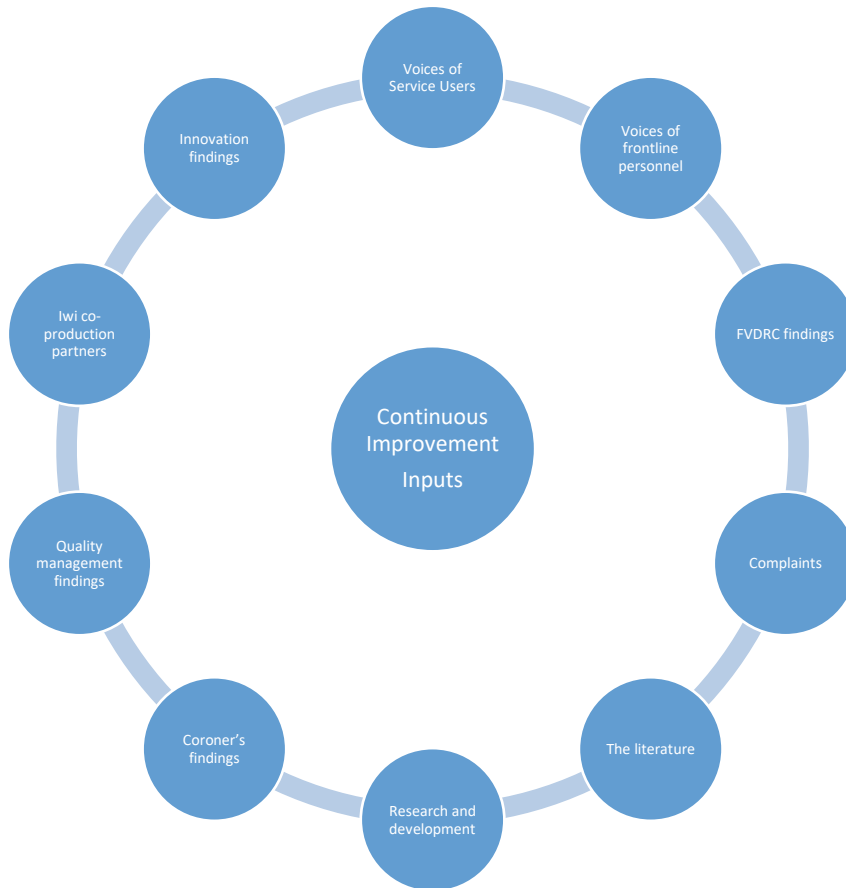
Quality Management

The new integrated, whole-of-government model for family and sexual violence will require multiple agencies, professions, communities and individuals all working collaboratively together towards a common agenda, towards achieving collective impact. To ensure all parts of the system are accountable, consistent and aligned, data will need to be collected and results measured consistently to ensure efforts remained aligned and participants held each other accountable. A comprehensive range of what can be broadly called quality management activities are the traditional avenues for accountability, consistency and alignment – monitoring, performance and outcome reviews,

evaluation, quality assurance, accreditation, audit and one-off enquiries. Not only do these activities ensure all parts of the system are operating to best practice levels, they also provide information to enable the system to continually learn and improve.

The voices of service users

International best practice recommends that service user input is gathered for all planning, policy and service delivery initiatives to enhance the way that services respond to their needs. The Better Public Services Advisory group[29] also identified 'weak customer focus' as one of the barriers to meeting the challenges ahead for the New Zealand state services:

> 'State services that understand customer needs well are more likely to do the things that matter most to their clients, in ways that make sense to users.'

The Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families (the Taskforce) published a guide to involving service users to improve agencies' and the government's response to all forms of family violence.[30] The guide recommends a service user voice be at the table of any collaboration. The following expected benefits for organisations and service users are shown in Figure 20 from the guide.

Benefits of involving service users

Benefits to Organisations	Benefits to Service Users
• Creating a service that better meets service users' needs by being more inclusive, accessible and/or fulfilling the needs of service users more precisely • Improving the quality of the service provided and making it safer for users • Achieving the effective use of resources • Developing outcome measures that are meaningful and relevant to service users themselves • Improved accountability • Improved communication between providers and service users	• Being empowered and having their voice heard • Building confidence, self-esteem, skills and self-respect • Feeling included, valued and respected

Any major developments in the sector need to be undertaken in a collaborative and collective way that involves and actively responds to all service user voices - women, men, children – those who experience violence and abuse and the perpetrators of violence and abuse. To ensure equitable outcomes for all, it is especially important that the voices of those with particular needs and experiences are heard - Māori, Pasefika, ethnic and migrant communities, GLBTIQ, disabled, older people, rural women, upper socioeconomic women, male victims and others. By involving service users in all levels of policy, planning, implementation, and service delivery, the developments are more likely to be equitable and accessible for all service users.

The voices of frontline personnel

A system that innovates, learns and continually improves would see frontline service personnel as a valuable source of information and would provide safe and strengths-based ways for them to discuss gaps, inconsistencies, resource requirements and areas where they see improvements could be made. A continuous improvement approach which enables more 'on the ground' feedback, would mean those at the frontline (workers and managers) feel less isolated, more empowered and valued, and

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[29] http://www.ssc.govt.nz/sites/all/files/bps-report-nov2011_0.pdf

[30] Taskforce for Action in Family Violence. *Incorporating the Voice of Experience.* Family Violence Service User Involvement Guide. July 2012. Available at https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/initiatives/action-family-violence/voice-of-experience.pdf

more connected to those working in other parts of the system.

The literature

Evidence is continually emerging from academic research and practice examples in New Zealand and internationally. The New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse (NZFVC) has been operating for 12 years to provide access to high quality research and information of family and whānau violence. There is now an opportunity to expand the NZFVC's brief to also include sexual violence and then to establish processes for determining what learnings this emerging research and information can provide to the New Zealand system.

Research and development

Particular attention needs to be paid to how knowledge regarding what works is generated and shared around the system, in order to facilitate ongoing learning and informed innovation. Much greater emphasis must be put on research and development. While this is common in medicine and in other public services such as teaching and policing, there is currently far too little formal research and development in the family and sexual violence sector. We cannot expect the system to improve if professionals are not exposed to valid and relevant research.[31]

Iwi co-production partners

Māori are over-represented in reported cases of family and sexual violence and in many, if not all, of the related social issues that evidence shows arise as a consequence of the intergenerational transfer of the trauma created by family and sexual violence *and* colonisation. A critical feed of information to inform continuous improvement of the whole system must come from tangata whenua (whanau, hapū and iwi). Tangata whenua need to lead the collection and collation of information about Māori and be an integral part of the team undertaking the continuous improvement triangulation and decision-making processes.

Death reviews

All family and sexual violence deaths are preventable. They are typically not the result of a one-off isolated episode but have a long history of abuse, and most cases would be known to one or more services within the Integrated System. The FVDRC regional death reviews and nationally aggregated findings and recommendations will be important sources of information about where the system is failing and where improvements need to be made.

Coroner's findings

Similarly, findings from coroner's inquiries should be seen as a key source of information about the part family and sexual violence have made in any other deaths – in particular suicides.

Complaints

In order to hear about areas where the system is failing it will be important to establish mechanisms regionally and nationally for services users, family/whānau, friends and frontline workers that can hold the system accountable and be part of affecting change if the system is failing in any way. Wherever possible complaints would be considered at a regional level but where that was not possible or appropriate they would be investigated and responded to nationally. System failures identified via complaints investigated regionally would be reported into the continuous improvement process, so checks can be made to ensure similar problems are not occurring in other regions.

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[31] Muir, R and Parker, I. (2014), *Many to Many: How the relational state will transform public services.* Institute for Public Policy Research, London UK. Available at http://www.ippr.org/publications/many-to-many-how-the-relational-state-will-transform-public-services

Innovation findings

As innovations are evaluated it is essential that findings about their impact (good and bad) are fed into the wider continuous improvement process. Requiring this to happen will help to manage the introduction of 'new bright ideas' in a way that adds a layer of oversight by multiple service users and service providers and point out the potential unintended consequences or risks which can inform development before widespread roll out occurs. This will also ensure that new innovations that are shown to be effective can then easily be shared with regional hubs and Government to inform evidence-based service development and funding, avoid reinventing the wheel and avoid replicating innovations that have shown to be counterproductive to safety.

The feedback loops – the continuous improvement outputs

The information and evidence from these multiple sources would be considered using a 'triangulation' approach whereby information/evidence from a number of sources can be continually brought together and analysed, discussed and processed by specialist staff and the collaborative governance team at the backbone agency and conclusions reached on what improvements need to be made in the system.

The findings of the continuous improvement processes will then be fed back to any or all relevant parties to enable adjustments to be made to legislation, documentation or practice. For example:

- Horizontal learning, rapid strengths-based improvements and collaboration within and between agencies or regional hubs.
- Information to inform workforce development and training – so the workforce can also be continually learning and improving.
- Feedback to individual national or local specialist agencies about where they could make improvements.
- Adjustments to legislation, national service specifications or guidelines or service contracts.
- Input into the continuous improvement processes of government agencies that are directly or indirectly impacted by family and sexual violence.

A backbone agency to facilitate continuous improvement

In the sections above we have shown that the new integrated, whole-of-government system for family and sexual violence will need to be structured in a way that maximises opportunities for collective impact, learning, innovation and continuous improvement. The greatest opportunity for ensuring this happens is to establish a backbone agency where all stakeholders see themselves as collectively responsible for gathering, reviewing and analysing information from multiple sources to build evidence and feed this back to various parts of the system thereby:

- building on the strengths of existing systems and services and provide a framework for strengthening systematic changes over time

- identifying and altering the practices, processes and/or policies that need change early on

- ensuring there are pathways and processes to make changes as the learning occurs.

A backbone agency with collaborative governance and collaborative leadership

The system responding to family and sexual violence is not just a government system, therefore multiple government and non-government agencies, iwi and Māori authorities, academics, service users, frontline personnel and local communities all need to see themselves as having collective ownership of and being able to influence how the system operates and to safely and equitably have their voices heard. We refer again to the Australian Government's guide for its public sector about tackling wicked problems[32] which says, 'The challenge is to find the infrastructure, processes and practices that might promote better connections and remove any obstacles to collaboration that devolution may have raised'.

We have shown that the literature is clear that innovation, learning and continuous improvement of the system cannot be achieved in the traditional top-down, centralised approach. Different commentators explain things differently and none are specific about 'must have' funding or governance arrangements - but all seem to agree (specifically or by inference) that the functions undertaken by a backbone organisation must be at arm's length from central government.

Independence from both the Government and service providers will be critical as the backbone agency will have an important role to play in managing and negotiating sometimes competing demands from both while holding the voice of services users at its heart. Muir and Parker,[33] who we have also referred to throughout this paper, talk of 'collaborative backbone organisations'. They say that collaboration should be considered compatible with managed competition: together they can raise performance. In this model, government is an enabler rather than a manager, steering an interconnected system in which a diverse range of actors and institutions take the lead.

If the backbone agency was governed collaboratively by representatives from the key stakeholder groups for family and sexual violence – a collaborative backbone agency – all stakeholders are more likely to embrace a sense of collective accountability and responsibility.

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[32] Australian Government. (2007) Tackling Wicked Problems citing Management Advisory Committee, Connecting Government, p. 6. Available at: https://www.apsc.gov.au/tackling-wicked-problems-public-policy-perspective

[33] Muir, R and Parker, I. (2014), *Many to Many: How the relational state will transform public services.* Institute for Public Policy Research, London UK. Available at http://www.ippr.org/publications/many-to-many-how-the-relational-state-will-transform-public-services

A collaborative backbone agency for the family and sexual violence system

The collaborative backbone agency will thrive and be most effective and efficient if it has a collaborative leadership structure. This can only happen if it is configured in a way that ensures it cannot be controlled or captured by any one agency or Government Ministry.

> The national backbone agency and continuous improvement functions must be at arm's length from central government.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth conclude that, 'Effective collaborative leadership requires the ability to recognise, and capitalise on, the unique features of the collaboration process. This is not the type of leadership most sectors or professions are producing or demanding. But when this type of leadership is enacted in a collaboration, it can make a difference to the success and outcomes of the effort'.[34]

Muir and Parker[35] follow a similar theme and explain why collaborative leadership is the pre-curser to continuous improvement:

> At the level of public service systems, there is a need for greater connectedness…. the establishment of collaborative infrastructures so that actors and institutions can learn and improve. …. for knowledge to be generated and transferred around the system, we also need collaborative backbone organisations that are tasked with disseminating knowledge and offering opportunities for ongoing professional development.

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[34] https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/237/filename/Advancing_Collaboration_Practice_-_Fact_Sheet_9_-_Collaborative_leadership.pdf
[35] Muir, R and Parker, I. (2014), *Many to Many: How the relational state will transform public services.* Institute for Public Policy Research, London UK. Available at http://www.ippr.org/publications/many-to-many-how-the-relational-state-will-transform-public-services

Other similar agencies

Many of the functions outlined in the earlier sections of this paper mean the national backbone agency will in many respects provide independent oversight of the whole system. Examples of existing independent oversight agencies in New Zealand include:

- The Health Quality and Safety Commission - government funded but arm's length from the Ministry of Health and DHBs.
- The Health and Disability Commission, the Children's Commission and the Mental Health Commission – all established under legislation to provide independent oversight.

There are two relevant examples of agencies focused on collecting the voices of service users:

- Voyce – a relatively new government funded agency in New Zealand tasked with providing an independent voice *from* children and young people to the care system.[36]
- Victim Survivors' Advisory Council for family violence survivors in Victoria – established to provide family violence victim survivors with a formal influencing role in how the family violence reforms will be developed and implemented.[37]

Family Safety Victoria is a unit within the Victorian Government sector,[38] responsible for leading policy development and delivering key reforms. According to the Victorian Government directory[39] this includes:

- Establishing and operationalising 17 Support and Safety Hubs across Victoria
- Establishing a Central Information Point, which will allow police, courts and government services to track perpetrators and keep victims safe
- Establishing and housing the new Centre for Workforce Excellence to build workforce capacity and capability in partnership with the sector.

Family Safety Victoria therefore appears to be similar to the New Zealand Government's new joint venture but quite different from the collaborative backbone agency proposed in this paper.

Conclusion

We have shown that a collaborative backbone agency that is arm's length from government is critical if we are to ensure the family and sexual violence system is able to innovate, learn and continually improve from the outset. The evidence provided in this paper strongly suggests that the collaborative backbone agency for the family and sexual violence system in New Zealand will need to be:

- Funded by Government
- Operated independently from both government and non government front line service providers (i.e. not run by the joint venture team or by any individual front line service provider agency).
- Configured and governed in a way that enables key stakeholders, tangata whenua, academics, service users and the community to have a sense of collective ownership and that encourages all parties to collaborate, support and guide the system.

We have also explained the importance of the collaborative backbone agency having a collaborative

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[36] https://www.voyce.org.nz/
[37] https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/committees-for-change/victim-survivors%E2%80%99-advisory-council.html
[38] https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/family-safety-victoria.html
[39] https://www.vic.gov.au/contactsandservices/directory/?ea0_lfz149_120.&organizationalUnit&d25f2e6a-c708-431d-8c86-1535088166aa

leadership structure in order to support a new decentralised bottom-up approach and to enable a more intelligent and responsive system.

The collaborative leadership and continuous improvement functions that we have detailed in this paper are not currently in place in New Zealand. This new model will require a radical shift in the way New Zealand responds to family and sexual violence. However, it is in the radical new way of working that greatest possibility for success and safety lies.

We strongly believe that the collaborative backbone agency, collaborative leadership, and the innovation, learning and continuous improvement processes *must* be established from the outset. It will more difficult and costlier to add these critical elements into the system at a later date. The value of knowing up front more about what works and what doesn't *and* being able to do something with that knowledge simply cannot be overstated.

> An independent backbone agency to facilitate collaborative leadership innovation, learning and continuous improvement *must* be built into the new system at the outset.

About the authors

Ruth Herbert, Co-Founder, The Backbone Collective

Ruth is well known for her work in trying to improve New Zealand's system response to violence against women and children. She has given many presentations and media interviews and researched and written extensively about intimate partner violence, child abuse and neglect and sexual violence.

Ruth has worked in a wide variety of paid and unpaid roles – all focused on improving the domestic and sexual violence system response. This has ranged from being the Director of Family Violence at the Ministry of Social Development and the Executive Director of the Glenn Inquiry to the victim/survivor representative on the independent Ministerial Review Panel assessing ACC's sensitive claims clinical pathway. In 2014 Ruth and Deborah proposed a new model that would build on and strengthen the existing system in New Zealand and established the Backbone Collective to advocate for such change. Ruth has a Master of Public Policy (dist.) and was awarded the Victoria University Holmes Prize in Public Policy in 2008.

Deborah Mackenzie, Co-Founder, The Backbone Collective

Deborah has worked for many years trying to improve New Zealand's system response to violence against women and children. She has worked in advocate roles and policy positions both in NGOs and within Government (woman's advocate, interagency network coordinator, policy analyst, project manager, and researcher).

Deborah has a special interest in the justice sector response to women survivors including writing in depth reports on specialist domestic violence courts and female offenders. During the last five years she has worked as an independent contractor and managed an NGO. In 2014 Deborah co-wrote The Way Forward with Ruth Herbert which proposed a new model for an integrated response system in New Zealand to respond to violence and abuse. Deborah has significant experience as a trainer, presenter and media commentator. She has a Master of Arts in Education (first class hons).