

First steps to streamlining domestic violence processes

The project team consulted police throughout the state. Pictured at Palm Island are Madison Landsberg of Nous Group, Project Manager Declan McNamara, Acting Senior Sergeant Rowena Hardiker, Maree Wilson of Nous Group, Townsville DFVC Sergeant Elise Feltham and Acting Sergeant Kellie Percy of Palm Island Station.

Last month's tragic incident at Camp Hill, which resulted in the death of Hannah Clarke and her three children after their car was set alight, has brought domestic and family violence (DFV) into the forefront of mainstream conversation. For police however, the issue has never been in the background.

Acting Senior Sergeant Rowena Hardiker knows the pain of responding to DFV incidents. As a former general duties officer in Normanton, Cloncurry and Mount Isa, and then a Domestic and Family Violence Coordinator in Mount Isa, she has experienced her share of the frustration many police feel when navigating such a complex issue.

"Domestic violence is an incredibly complex social and community issue, but our administrative processes shouldn't be," Acting Senior Sergeant Hardiker said.

"The message we've consistently received from first response officers across the state is they are spending too much time bogged down in the various administrative processes that surround the response to reports of domestic violence."

Now based at the Domestic and Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Unit (DFV&VPU) in Brisbane, Acting Senior Sergeant Hardiker has been leading a project to support police in their everyday work by reducing complexity and streamlining actions in the policing response to DFV.

The team's first step was to consult widely with officers across the state. Starting in 2019, the team travelled to Palm Island, Townsville, Gold Coast, Brisbane, Logan and Toowoomba to speak to officers on

the ground and identify the pain points within the current process.

"We found that officers were frustrated with the uncertainty around the administrative processes they were required to follow, the additional approval processes, and the time being taken away from investigations to complete paperwork and process documents, among other things," Acting Senior Sergeant Hardiker said.

As a result of the consultation, the project team, in conjunction with external consultancy group Nous, has developed the DFV Process Improvement Action Plan which has been endorsed by the Executive Leadership Team. Acting Senior Sergeant Hardiker said the action plan detailed a number of short and medium term improvements, some of which had already been implemented.

"While we look forward to some exciting new medium term developments, we are extremely pleased to be able to announce a number of quick wins that are in place as of this month," she said.

The three main areas that will provide immediate benefits to police concern finalising 'No DV' jobs, reducing the burden of document service, and simplifying briefs of evidence.

When police respond to a report of a DV incident (312) and find that DV has not occurred, they are now able to finalise the job via a 'No DV' and change the job code using the same authorising officer. This also extends to the use of a No DV where there is an order in place, but no DV has occurred, and avoids initiating an unfounded contravene occurrence.

The review found that officers are over-serving orders that do not require service of documents. To provide clarity, a document service guide has been developed to highlight circumstances where police are not required to serve DV Orders, particularly Temporary Protection Orders (TPO) made in the same conditions as a Police Protection Notice (PPN) or release conditions.

System changes ensure that a TPO is always requested if a matter is adjourned, to provide continued protection for the aggrieved and any named persons in all DFV applications and PPNs.

The project team has also supported the release of a Full Brief of Evidence comment sheet and index for use as a purpose built document for DFV civil proceedings, rather than using the existing criminal documents.

Manager of the DFV&VPU, Inspector Ben Martain, said the DFV&VPU was looking forward to making further announcements regarding DFV process efficiency gains in the near future.

"We are currently examining a number of evidence-based proposals with partner agencies that aim to improve both our and other agencies' processes," Inspector Martain said.

"By reducing the time needed for administrative tasks, police will be better placed to prevent DFV occurring, increase support for victims, and more effectively disrupt and investigate DFV offenders."

For further information on the DFV process improvements, visit the DFV&VPU intranet page.