The page features several decorative orange elements. In the top right, there is a large orange circle with two white concentric circles inside. Below it is a smaller orange circle with a white gradient and a white outline. In the bottom right corner, there is a large orange circle with two white concentric circles inside, partially cut off by the edge of the page. A thin orange line runs diagonally from the top left towards the center, and a thin grey line runs diagonally from the top right towards the center.

# **Bsafe Pilot Project 2007-2010 Evaluation report**

A partnership project between  
Women's Health Goulburn North East  
and the Victoria Police

National Winner of the 2010 Australian Crime  
and Violence Prevention Award for Excellence

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The Bsafe DVD, produced by Marilyn Ross and Anna Erbrederis, can be accessed online at [www.whealth.com.au](http://www.whealth.com.au)

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Special thanks to:

A special thank you to the women who agreed to be interviewed for this report and the women who told their stories for the Bsafe DVD. Your stories will now be heard.

Mr. John Harbord, you have been a major 'champion' of Bsafe. From the start you could see the potential for such a project and your support never wavered. You installed the units with such respect and care for the women and advocated for Bsafe on radio and with your local community. Thank you so much.

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Rachael

## Forward

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### *Bsafe – a symbol of women and children's resistance to violence*

My professional journey has led me to many places around Australia and the United Kingdom where the issues of family violence and homelessness, whilst very similar, are also distinct to each region and place. The same can be said about the journey for each woman and child who experience homelessness as a result of family violence. While each has a unique story to tell, the experience of grief, loss and trauma are ever present. What remains the same for victims of violence is the importance of 'home' and with that, a sense of belonging and community. For women and children this sense of home and community is critical in their journey away from and resistance to, abuse and to their creation of a life free of violence.

The initial idea behind Bsafe was that it would enable women and children to remain safely in their own homes. However, within months, the resounding response from women was that it allowed them to go out into the community and lead a 'normal' life. We found that prior to accessing Bsafe women and their children were too scared to leave their homes. Women weren't able to get their mail, children were not able to participate in sport, and for some, shopping was impossible, particularly in smaller communities. Women were legitimately scared for their lives and lived this fear every second of every day.

Some said they believed they would be murdered. For the many women I spoke to, Bsafe was pivotal to changing the dynamics in their lives - the dynamics of fear and hyper-vigilance. Bsafe came to symbolise women's resistance to violence, gave them the choice to stay in their own homes and communities, and enabled them to resume a life of normality. Bsafe became essential as they attempted to resist the violence, threats and abuse that remained constant and unrelenting. One woman said 'Bsafe enabled me to breathe again.'

For family violence and sexual assault workers, the beauty of Bsafe is that they could present another option to women they worked with. Bsafe offered a product that alerted police while validating women's own concerns for their safety and the safety of their children. Bsafe became a significant component of the workers' risk management and safety planning with women. The referral process became so entrenched that at the conclusion of the pilot, when we had to cease taking referrals, workers continued to try to refer eligible women who desperately needed a Bsafe unit.

One of the most significant challenges that emerged in the second year of the pilot was the obvious lack of capacity of the family violence system to continue to support women

post-crisis. Most women accessed Bsafe for a period of more than 12 months and up to three years. They often remained unsupported in the longer-term as their crisis support dissipated. This continues to remain a challenge.

Despite this, the success of the pilot became evident when we collated information from workers and police and data from the women. We discovered a significant reduction in physical assaults and a decrease in breaches of Intervention Orders. It became obvious that Bsafe was successful in a myriad of ways, from improving physical and psychological health and wellbeing, to Bsafe's impact on homelessness. Bsafe also suited a variety of different client cohorts, such as Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, women with limited English and rural women. It is critical that Bsafe, in some form is made available to rural women in particular, but ideally to all Victorian women and children fleeing family violence. As one woman commented, 'How much does my life cost'?

All of the Bsafe recipients stated they wanted Bsafe to be made available to other women. Thirteen women remain reliant on the units for their safety and peace of mind. They were assessed as too high risk to return the units at the conclusion of the pilot. As a result, the Integrated Family Violence Services (Hume Region) Managers' Alliance committed to fund the units for these women for an extra six months.

Lastly, the strength of the women involved in the pilot cannot be underestimated. They chose to remain in their own homes, or relocate to a home of their own, with the added security of Bsafe, in spite of great risk to their lives.

Women's Health Goulburn North East received an Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Award for Bsafe in these women's honor.

Bsafe Project Coordinator  
Rachael MacKay  
Women's Health Goulburn North East

# 1. Introduction

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## What is Bsafe?

Bsafe is a personal alarm system and risk management option primarily for people escaping family violence and sexualised assault perpetrated by intimate partners. Bsafe utilizes VitalCall / Chubb Security who supply two types of products. Bsafe consists of a water-proof pendant that operates via the home telephone line. The pendant can be activated within the area of the victim's home and garden. The system also includes a 'mobile unit' which is similar to a mobile phone. The mobile unit can be used where there is mobile coverage and allows Bsafe clients increased autonomy and security when out in the community. When either device is activated an alarm is sent to the 24 hour VitalCall<sup>1</sup> response centre which immediately alerts 000 for a police response while continuing to monitor and record the call and what is happening in the home. Such recordings can later be used as evidence for court proceedings. The option of a prepaid mobile phone is available to clients without a phone to assist referral agencies in maintaining contact with them.

## Background to the Bsafe pilot project

The Emergency Safety Kit, now known as Bsafe, was a Victoria Police initiative developed within the Benalla Family Violence Prevention Network.<sup>2</sup> During a Rotary study exchange trip to Sweden in 2003, Victoria Police Sergeant Peter Milligan observed a model where safety kits were being utilised by family violence victims still at risk of further violence. Believing that the concept could effectively operate within the Victoria Police, in 2006 the Benalla Family Violence Prevention Network trialed the emergency safety kit in Benalla Rural City. Four women escaping intimate partner violence were involved in the trial with 23 accompanying children.

The trial showed that the women and their children were able to remain in their own homes. The women reported that having the kit provided them with an extra sense of security, they felt reassured that their concerns for their safety were being taken seriously and that the response by police would be timely. Women also reported that their perceptions of safety significantly increased once they had access to the kit.

Following the success of the trial, in 2007 Women's Health Goulburn North East, in partnership with the Victoria Police, successfully obtained three year funding from the

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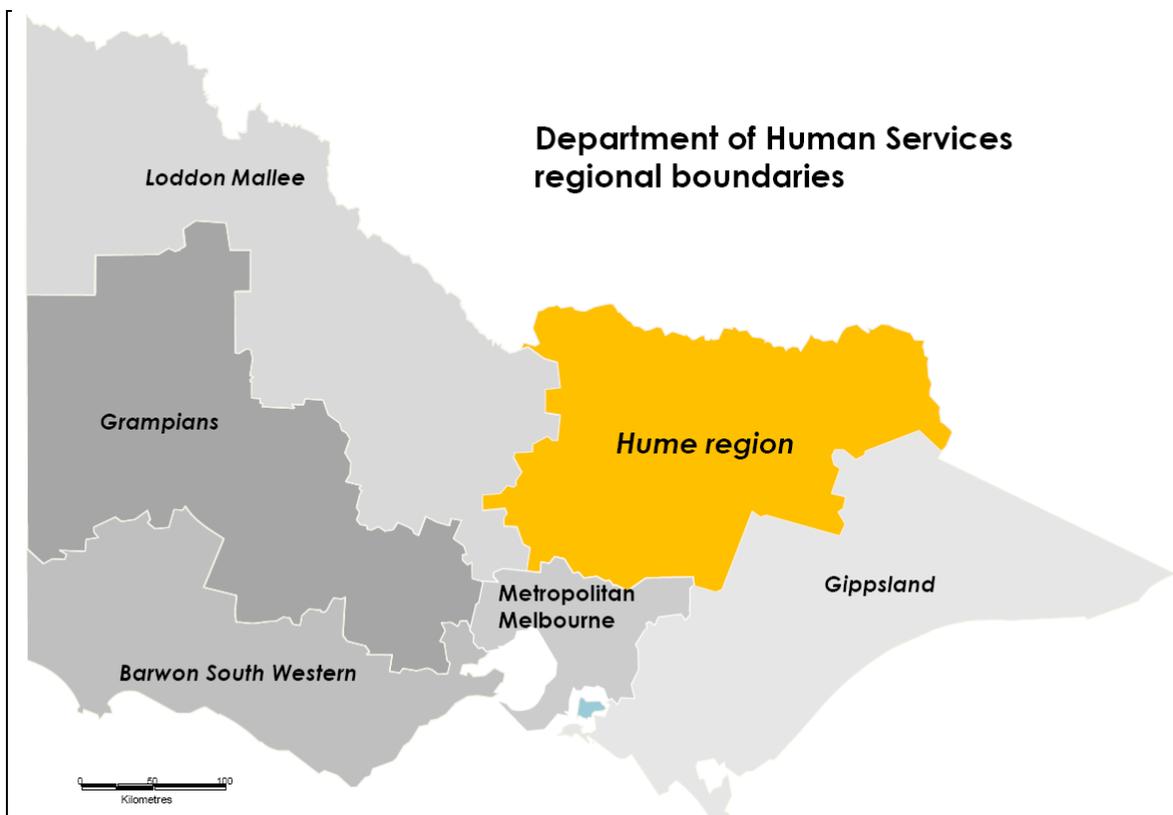
<sup>1</sup>VitalCall is a personal emergency response service that provides services within Australia 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year.

<sup>2</sup> Established in 1989, the Benalla Family Violence Prevention Network draws membership from a diversity of government and non-government organisations who work in partnership with the aim of preventing family violence in Benalla, [www.familyviolenceservices.com.au](http://www.familyviolenceservices.com.au)

National Community Crime Prevention Programme for Bsafe to be piloted in the Hume region. As the regional women's health service with clearly established relationships with the integrated family violence service system, Women's Health Goulburn North East was ideally placed to coordinate the project in partnership with the Victoria Police.

### The Hume region in geographical context

The Hume region is one of eight Department of Human Services regions in Victoria. Located in Victoria's north east, the Hume region comprises nearly one-fifth of the state and covers an area of 40,427 square kilometres. The region is geographically varied and includes Alpine areas, some relatively remote farming communities and the major regional centres of Wodonga, Wangaratta, Seymour, Benalla and Shepparton. The City of Greater Shepparton is home to one of Victoria's largest Indigenous populations outside of metropolitan Melbourne. The City of Greater Shepparton is also home to an increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, many of whom have come via refugee and humanitarian programs.



**Figure one: The Hume region: the geographical area where Bsafe was piloted.**

### Bsafe eligibility criteria

Bsafe's eligibility criteria require victims escaping family violence and sexualised assault to:

1. Reside in the Hume region, as this is where the project was piloted;
2. Have an Intervention Order (IVO) that excludes the perpetrator from the victim's premises; and
3. Be at risk of the IVO being breached.

The third eligibility criterion is determined through the use of the Family Violence Comprehensive Risk Assessment tool that participants complete with a family violence or sexual assault service worker. This tool is designed to assess the level of risk posed by the perpetrator by the victim's own assessment of their level of risk, evidence-based risk indicators and the practitioners' professional judgment.<sup>3</sup>

## Project objectives

The overarching goal of Bsafe is to provide an effective, integrated, multi-agency response that improves the safety and autonomy of victims of family violence and sexualised assault whilst increasing detection and accountability for those perpetrating such violence.

The Bsafe project has two key objectives:

1. To reduce homicides, assaults, sexualised assault and recidivism relating to family violence by funding the Bsafe kit and service to provide an additional level of support and service to victims of family violence so they can safely stay in their own homes and communities.
2. To strengthen the relationship between the police, family violence, and health and community sectors and the community.

By meeting these objectives Bsafe aims to:

- Improve safety and security for victims of family violence and sexualised assault
- Reduce fear of crime
- Improve response and risk assessment
- Reduce the incidence of family violence within the community
- Facilitate early intervention and arrest repeat offenders
- Support victims within the judicial system
- Increase levels of security relating to safety within the home and the community.

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<sup>3</sup> Family Violence Coordination Unit (2007) *Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management: Supporting an integrated family violence service system*, Department for Victorian Communities: Melbourne, p. 65.

## Evaluation methodology

This three year final report draws on multiple methods of evaluation. The project has collated information about women and their children and the perpetrators' use of violence against them through the Comprehensive Risk Assessment Tool (CRAF). This standardised tool, which was implemented in 2007, is designed to assist specialist family violence practitioners to assess the victim's safety needs and the likelihood and severity of future violence. This tool enabled the project to gather demographic information about women, their children and perpetrators. Bsafe analysis has provided quantitative data on the evidence-based risk and vulnerability rating of 67 of the 72 women who participated. Data was not collected on the first five women to access Bsafe as their involvement in the project was prior to the CRAF becoming a standardised tool for practitioners in the family violence and sexualised assault sectors.

Bsafe engaged the use of questionnaires, completed voluntarily by participating women, after three and six months with a kit and when they exited the project. The questionnaires were designed to monitor and track breaches to the Intervention Order, kit activations and police response and women's perceptions of safety. The questionnaires also investigated the implications Bsafe had on women's housing situation, social support networks and access to relevant support services, particularly specialist family violence and sexual assault services. This evaluation method proved useful in allowing clients to independently feed back information about their needs and expectations of Bsafe. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected through the use of the questionnaires.

In an attempt to understand the extent and range of violent acts women and their children were subjected to and the ways in which Bsafe has been used to reduce perpetrator violence and recidivism and increase victim's feelings of safety, a small group of participants were interviewed. Data was collected through one-to-one, semi-structured telephone interviews with five women by the Bsafe project coordinator. This method of interviewing allowed for further informal discussion and offered participants a greater opportunity to express their experiences with Bsafe. Interviews were between half an hour and an hour in length. When the project concluded in 2011, the Bsafe coordinator contacted women to discuss either the return of the units or the option for continuing with Bsafe for a further six months (with funding from the Integrated Family Violence Managers' Alliance Hume Region). During this process women were asked if they would like to be interviewed for this evaluation report. Three narratives of the first five women who agreed to be interviewed are featured as case studies.

This report is further informed by two reflective workshops conducted with Bsafe's key stakeholders. The notes taken during the first reflective workshop held in 2008 document the emerging issues that were raised on the day, as are transcripts taken from the second reflective workshop held in 2010. This workshop was digitally recorded and information gathered from stakeholders has been included in this report. The data collected in these

reflective workshops with key partners was primarily used as a form of process evaluation. Key enablers and barriers to the project's success were identified in both workshops and barriers were subsequently rectified to strengthen the pilot's ability to meet its objectives and be responsive to the needs to women and their children escaping violence.

Questionnaires were distributed to partner agencies - including the Victoria Police, family violence and sexual assault services and community health services that provide family violence outreach support – to provide feedback after the three year pilot project concluded. Information obtained through a semi-structured interview carried out with the Bsafe project coordinator provided valuable insights and reflections. The perspectives of women, workers and police that feature in the Bsafe training DVD, produced for the Victoria Police's Blue Tube<sup>4</sup>, are included throughout this evaluation report. The Bsafe training DVD can be accessed online at [www.whealth.com.au](http://www.whealth.com.au).

## Project definitions of violence and sexualised assault

Bsafe is a risk management option for people who have been victims of, and who continue to be at risk of, family violence and sexualised assault. The Bsafe Pilot Project characterises family violence as the use of violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour by one individual against a family member or an intimate partner.<sup>5</sup> Bsafe recognises that family violence is a gendered crime, as overwhelmingly it is men who perpetrate acts of violence against women and their children.<sup>6</sup> In accordance with the *Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008* the Bsafe Pilot Project defines family violence as:

*(a) Behaviour by a person towards a family member if that behaviour-*

- (i) is physically or sexually abusive; or*
- (ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or*
- (iii) is economically abusive; or*
- (iv) is threatening; or*
- (v) is coercive; or*
- (vi) in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or*

*(b) Behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a).<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> *Blue Tube*, similar to *You Tube*, is a multi-media communication device used on the Victoria Police Website to educate and inform police members and the community.

<sup>5</sup> DV Vic (2006) *Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children: Enhancing the safety of women and children in Victoria*, Domestic Violence Victoria: Melbourne.

<sup>6</sup> The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2009) *A Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021*, The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children: Canberra.

<sup>7</sup> *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*.

The term 'sexualised' assault is used throughout this report as the preferred use of language. The term 'sexual' assault implies that this form of assault is a sexual act and therefore a mutual act. We maintain that sexualised assault is an act of violence. Bsafe is informed by the notion that rape and other forms of sexualised assault are deliberate, unilateral acts of violence.<sup>8</sup> We continue to use the term sexual assault in relation to workers and services (ie sexual assault worker) as this is their preferred title.

Bsafe defines sexualised assault as any unwanted sexualised behaviour that causes humiliation, pain, fear or intimidation. It is sexualised behaviour that someone has not consented to, where another person uses physical or emotional force against them. Sexualised assault can include anything from sexualised harassment, through to life threatening rape.<sup>9</sup> This was a common experience for the women who accessed Bsafe with 43 percent reporting that they had experienced a sexualised assaulted and/or been raped by their former partner prior to obtaining a kit. Indeed, where Bsafe clients had experienced sexualised assault and rape, in all instances this violence was perpetrated by current or former partners.

In accordance with these definitions, Bsafe recognises that non-physical forms of violence are as serious and threatening as physical forms of violence. Hence, to be eligible to participate in the Bsafe project, victims were not required to have experienced or to be at further risk of physical violence. With that said, according to information recorded through the use of CRAF, only an estimated three of the 72 women using Bsafe had not experienced some form of physical violence from their former partner.

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<sup>8</sup> L. Coates and A. Wade (2004) 'Language and Violence: Analysis of Four Discursive Operations, Journal of Family Violence, vol. 22, p. 512.

<sup>9</sup> CASA Forum: Victorian Centre Against Sexual Assault, Accessed online at: <http://www.casa.org.au>.

### **Veronica's story**

[Before Bsafe] there was quite a lot of physical violence, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, there was pretty much the whole lot. I was getting hit, punched, yep, like physically beaten up ... There was two separate partners. They just both happened to be domestic violence perpetrators. The first one was ten years and I was married. Then the next relationship I was in for 5 years ... I found out that there was actually drug abuse in his history, and then I found out after [it ended] that he was actually on drugs as well at the time of our relationship.

[The violence] started off not daily, but once every now and then, and then it became once a week. It just all depended on how much he was using or what the situation was. With the first relationship the only way I was able to get out - because he was really controlling and ... he had me tied up several times - was just by chance I was able to run out the house and someone called the police for me ... When I had to be taken to the school to pick up my two kids I was severely unrecognisable.

The first one, he was in jail for the five years during the second relationship. So when he got out, and the other one was very angry, I had to run from him and hide. So I was actually running from two different people and it was quite scary. So I've had to move completely out of the area ... I've heard that someone may know what area I've been in and that was quite alarming and so I've moved several times.

I've probably moved about six or seven times in the past couple of years. And so the last incident we had I was in my new house and either I was to look for another place to live or seek help from [Domestic violence service]. They were able to put me onto this Bsafe, so I was able to stay at home and feel a little bit comfortable instead of having to run again.

My two older children, they're having a few issues dealing with it ... the youngest one, he hasn't seen too much but has still seen he fear in the older children and that we've had to be moving all the time. He's quite unsafe ...

but since we've had this Bsafe he's felt a little bit more comfortable. [My ex-partner] he's threatened to kill me and my son. He's been straight up ... It's his son and he said that he was going to kill him. So that's the main reason we got [Bsafe] to keep him safe because he made direct threats to both of us.

Bsafe takes the edge off. I'm able to sleep. Before I had it I wasn't able to sleep. I was quite anxious. I didn't feel comfortable being at home by myself. It just brings my anxiety levels down. It just gives us that sense of safety in our own home. Not having to sort of watch and listen to every single noise. To know that if something happens we've got an option ... [Before] I had no options at all.

[It's helped me] get back to normality, just to be like everybody else and not having to move all the time. I was able to actually settle in this house, more so than the other houses that we've been in. And I've actually been able to unpack all my boxes, because usually we don't unpack our boxes because we just think its going to be a matter of time before we move again. So this is the first place I've ever been in the last 10 years where I've actually unpacked every single box of mine.

[With Bsafe] I've been able to settle down and my son's able to make friends and socialise. So that's been a really positive thing, because the last few places that we've moved to, the kids haven't really been able to connect with any good sound friends or solid relationships. Now we've actually been able to slowly meet the community and feel a little bit safer.

[Without Bsafe] I'd have to make arrangements to move ... There's no way I could stay in a place without something. It's not an option because I'm not going through sleepless nights I've just started to get my son to be more comfortable in his room, although he still sleeps with me most nights but he still doesn't feel comfortable ... I was able to start working with him saying 'Look we are okay, we just need to press a button and the police will be here' ... So its been a really positive thing.

## 2. Policy and practice context and a cost analysis of Bsafe

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Over the past decade, there has been increasing attention paid to the social and economic costs associated with men's use of violence against women and their children. The association between family violence and homelessness among women and children is now clearly understood, as are the serious physical and mental health consequences violence has on both women and children's health and wellbeing. In 2004, VicHealth found that intimate partner violence was the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years and was responsible for more of the burden of disease than risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking or obesity.<sup>10</sup> A commitment to appropriate action to redress violence against women and children has occurred at both a national and state level.<sup>11</sup>

### Safe at Home

As a risk management option that supports women and children to remain in their homes, Bsafe sits within and supports the 'Safe at Home' model currently operating in Victoria. 'Safe at Home'<sup>12</sup> refers to a jurisdictional response to family violence that aims to have the perpetrator removed from the home while women and their children remain in the home in circumstances where it is safe, appropriate and desirable.<sup>13</sup> This model aims to safeguard the 'autonomy and social support networks of victims; reduces the financial, social and health impacts; and ensures that perpetrators experience consequences for their violent actions.'<sup>14</sup>

Over the past decade, Victoria has implemented a number of key reforms aimed at advancing 'Safe at Home' models through an integrated, multiagency approach to family violence. In 2002, the Victorian Government's *Women's Safety Strategy 2002 – 2007* was launched and outlined the policy framework to guide government in the area of violence against women. In 2004, the Victoria Police introduced its *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence*. The Code of Practice aims to enhance accountability for perpetrators of family violence while supporting 'aggrieved family members to stay safely in their own homes.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> VicHealth (2004) *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, Victorian Health Foundation: Carlton.

<sup>11</sup> Policy commitment at a national level includes The National Council Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Children. In Victoria a raft of changes have occurred including VicHealth's prevention of violence against women initiatives, Victorian family violence service reforms and through a policy commitment outlined in *A Right to Respect*.

<sup>12</sup> Or sanctuary schemes or staying safely at home as they are sometimes referred to.

<sup>13</sup> The National Council, *A Time for Action*, op.cit., p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Victoria Police (2004) *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence*, The Family Violence Unit: Melbourne, p. 1, 1.2.

In 2005, *Changing Lives: A New Approach to Family Violence in Victoria* stated the government's commitment to reducing family violence. This report outlined that the new approach to family violence - which included the introduction of an integrated service system with community services including specialist family violence services, police and justice services working together to provide a better service to victims of family violence – would ensure women and children had greater support to assist them in staying in their own homes and communities.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, reforms brought forth by the *Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008* were designed to support women and children affected by family violence to stay in their homes, if they wished. The Act has given the Victoria Police greater powers to take action and respond to family violence incidents through the implementation of Family Violence Safety Notices. The *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* has made it easier for those experiencing abuse to adjust tenancy agreements and have the violent person removed from the home.

The current Victorian policy and practice environment supports women and children remaining safely in their homes by removing the perpetrator. This has been crucial to Bsafe's success as it could not operate outside an integrated approach to family violence where community services, specialist family violence and sexual assault services and police are working together to support the safety needs of women and children escaping violence. Yet the bulk of literature on 'Safe at Home' approaches indicate that such models 'must only be an option for women assessed at low risk'<sup>17</sup> of further violence.

Indeed, while Bsafe sits within the Victorian, and more specifically, the Hume region's integrated family violence service system, unlike other 'Safe at Home' strategies (for example, Tasmania's Domestic Violence Strategy *Safe at Home*, and NSW *Staying Home Leaving Violence*) Bsafe has a 'product' in the sense of a tangible risk management option. This product in the form of the Bsafe kit provides women with immediate assistance through the ability to talk with a VitalCall operator. It also ensures that emergency calls made from these women are prioritised by local police who are required to be aware of the women's circumstances and that the women and their children are at high risk of life threatening violence. As a result, Bsafe has been able to provide a service for high-risk women and children escaping family violence and/or sexualised assault who want to remain in their home. Until Bsafe, these women's needs as a client group have, for the most part, remained unmet.

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<sup>16</sup> Department for Victorian Communities (2005) *Changing Lives: A new approach to family violence in Victoria*, Department for Victorian Communities: Melbourne, p. 8

<sup>17</sup>K. Crinall & J. Hurley (2009) *Rethinking Domestic Violence and Homelessness, Parity*, vol. 22, issue 10, pp. 1-2.

## Family violence and homelessness

Research shows that family violence is the greatest cause of homelessness among women in Australia.<sup>18</sup> Escaping violence is also the most common reason provided by people who seek assistance from specialist homelessness services.<sup>19</sup> Women with children escaping men's violence who are able to find crisis accommodation 'often struggle to find long-term housing due to a lack of supply of suitable housing stock, discrimination, low income as a result of women's poorer labour market opportunities, the need to care for small children and the substantial cost of private rental accommodation.'<sup>20</sup> For women and children living in rural and remote areas, crisis accommodation and long-term housing options, including public housing and safe, affordable private rentals, are limited. Therefore, for women and children, leaving the violence further exacerbates their risk of homelessness. Indeed, the pressure to find suitable and safe accommodation remains an ever present challenge in the Hume region and in other regional parts of Victoria.<sup>21</sup>

The Federal Government's report *The Road Home* was launched in 2008 in an attempt to provide a national approach to reducing homelessness. This report acknowledges that homelessness experienced by women and children escaping family violence is different from other forms of homelessness as victims of violence frequently 'cycle in and out of homelessness.' Subsequently, the report calls for new strategies to 'keep victims of violence, mainly women, safer in their homes.'<sup>22</sup> Bsafe has proven to be one such option, as the added level of support and security allowed 68 percent of women to remain in their homes, therefore reducing their risk of homelessness. When women are supported to remain in their homes and communities they are better able to maintain social support networks, employment and educational opportunities and stability of care for their children all of which support them on their road to recovery.<sup>23</sup>

## Housing pathways and the cost of men's violence against women and their children

Each year, violence against women, including family violence, costs Victoria \$3.4 billion. By 2021 the figure is expected to rise to around \$3.9 billion. This section of the report explores the cost associated with the typical housing pathway of a woman and her

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<sup>18</sup> WESNET (2008) *A Safe Way Home!* WESNET's response to 'Which Way Home?' p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> K. Crinall & J. Hurley, *op.cit.*, p. 5

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> A. Alexander (2010) 'The Family Violence Challenges for CALD women and women living in remote areas,' *Parity*, Vol. 23, Issue 10, December.

<sup>22</sup> Department of Families, Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2008) *The Road Home: A National Approach to Homelessness*, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> The National Council, *A Time for Action*, *op.cit.*

children escaping family violence who are not able to return home. A financial analysis of the cost of re-establishing a woman and her children escaping family violence, including costs associated with crisis accommodation, transitional housing and accessing long-term housing in the form of private rental,<sup>24</sup> has been compared with a financial analysis of the costs of Bsafe. This includes the cost of a woman and her children having spent time in crisis accommodation and then returning home to have Bsafe installed.<sup>25</sup> The financial analysis was carried out by Rural Housing Network Ltd based on their cost calculation for 2011. This analysis therefore examines only the costs associated with housing and support.

The cost analysis detailed in Table 3 and Table 4 is based on a woman with three children accessing specialist housing support in the Hume region. The cost of a woman with children who accesses crisis accommodation, refuge, transitional housing and then exits into private rental in the Hume region was estimated at **\$13,195.90**. For a woman and her children escaping violence who do not return home, there are also costs associated with replacing belongings and household goods (e.g. beds, lounge, fridge, children's toys, television, microwave etc) and/or storage costs. Replacing such items can cost thousands of dollars and would likely bring this total to approximately \$15,000. This figure also doesn't take into account the financial burden women often incur in relation to loss of income and productivity through to the inability to work or to honour back debts or repayments.

By contrast, the costs associated with a woman and her children who accessed refuge or crisis accommodation and then returned to their home with the added support of Bsafe, has been estimated at **\$3,755.12**. It is important to note that some Bsafe clients have spent time in refuge and transitional housing before accessing Bsafe.

The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children has investigated the cost of violence against women and their children. They insist that there are several cost categories when examining the associated costs. These include:

- Pain and suffering and premature mortality costs associated with the victims/survivors experiences of violence (without appropriate action will cost **\$7,530 million** in 2021-22)

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<sup>24</sup> For a further breakdown of costs see Appendix one

<sup>25</sup> For a further breakdown of costs see Appendix two

- Health costs include public and private health system costs associated with treating the effects of violence (without appropriate action will cost **\$863 million** in 2021-22)
- Production-related costs, including the cost of being absent from work and employer administration costs – lost productivity, lost unpaid work, retraining costs etc (without appropriate action will cost **\$1,181 million** in 2021-22)
- Consumer-related costs, including replacing damaged property, defaulting on bad debts and the cost of moving (without appropriate action will cost **\$3,542 million** in 2021-22)
- Second generation costs are the costs of children witnessing and living with violence, including child protection services and increased juvenile and adult crime (without appropriate action will cost **\$280 million** in 2021-22)
- Administration and other costs, including police, incarceration, court system costs, counselling and violence prevention programs (without appropriate action will cost **\$1,077 million** in 2021-22)
- Transfer costs, which are the inefficiencies associated with the payment of government benefits (without appropriate action will cost **\$1,104 million** in 2021-22)<sup>26</sup>

Examining the impact that Bsafe could have in relation to cost savings in these categories is clearly beyond the capacity of this project. Yet, it could be assumed that the cost saving Bsafe has demonstrated in relation to housing pathways are applicable in other cost categories identified by the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

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<sup>26</sup> The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2009) *The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children*, The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children: Canberra, p. 9.

**Table 3: Costs associated with a woman and her children escaping violence leaving their home and accessing specialist housing support**

Expenditure Description	Crisis accommodation 3 days	Refuge 6 weeks	Transitional housing 20 weeks	Transition to long term housing	Total costs
Accommodation costs	315.00				315.00
Pre tenancy Cleaning			300.00		300.00
Transport	75.00	150.00			225.00
Set up food and essentials	171.00	162.00			333.00
Replacement clothing		300.00			300.00
Household set up		0.00	250.00		250.00
Bedding & linen			480.00		480.00
Depreciation on appliances			480.00		480.00
Children school re-location costs		1,200.00			1,200.00
Support worker time	490.00	1,050.00	1,820.00		3,360.00
IAP support worker time			323.75		323.75
Housing support time & administration time			648.00	180.00	828.00
<b>Bsafe</b> Pendant installation					
<b>Bsafe</b> monitoring cost					
<b>Bsafe</b> Mobile Companion installation					
<b>Bsafe</b> monitoring cost					
Connect and disconnect of utilities			150.00	75.00	225.00
Power & gas checks – COMAC		80.00			80.00
Laundry		70.00			70.00
Cleaning post tenancy		150.00	300.00		450.00
Maintenance/ Furniture		346.15			346.15
Removal costs				900.00	900.00
Bond loan				720.00	720.00
Rent in advance – HEF				720.00	720.00
Transitional housing rent foregone accommodation		630.00			630.00
Rent recovery - refuge / transitional		-240.00	-2,100.00		-2,340.00
<b>Total cost for 1 client</b>	<b>1,051.00</b>	<b>3,898.15</b>	<b>2,651.75</b>	<b>2,595.00</b>	<b>10,195.90</b>

**Table 4: Costs associated with a woman and her children escaping violence being supported to remain in their home with Bsafe**

Expenditure Description	Crisis accommodation 3 days	Bsafe Program	Total costs
Accommodation costs	315.00		315.00
Pre tenancy Cleaning			0.00
Transport	75.00	75.00	150.00
Set up food and essentials	171.00		171.00
Replacement clothing			0.00
Household set up			0.00
Bedding & linen			0.00
Depreciation on appliances			0.00
Children school re-location costs			0.00
Support worker time	490.00	1,820.00	2,310.00
IAP support worker time			0.00
Housing support time & administration time			0.00
<b>Bsafe</b> Pendant installation		130.00	130.00
<b>Bsafe</b> monitoring cost		176.60	176.60
<b>Bsafe</b> Mobile Companion installation		200.00	200.00
<b>Bsafe</b> monitoring cost		302.52	302.52
Connect and disconnect of utilities			0.00
Power & gas checks – COMAC			0.00
Laundry			0.00
Cleaning post tenancy			0.00
Maintenance/ Furniture			0.00
Removal costs			0.00
Bond loan			0.00
Rent in advance – HEF			0.00
Transitional housing rent foregone accommodation			0.00
Rent recovery - refuge / transitional			0.00
<b>Total cost for 1 client</b>	<b>1,051.00</b>	<b>2,704.12</b>	<b>3,755.12</b>

### 3. Demographics

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Bsafe targets people in the context of intimate partner relationships and their children who are escaping family violence and/or sexualised assault. Over the three year pilot, a total of 72 women and 143 accompanying children have lived in a home with a Bsafe kit. All those that participated in the project were women and children escaping violence perpetrated by men they knew, which is indicative of the fact that family violence and sexualised assault are gendered crimes and forms of violence against women and their children.<sup>27</sup>

#### Women's relationship to the perpetrator

Many of the women accessing Bsafe had been subjected to men's use of violence against them for years, with a small number of women being abused by their partners prior to separation, for decades. Of the women that accessed a Bsafe kit, 66 percent (47) were escaping violence perpetrated by their former husband or defacto husband. 22 women (30 percent) required the risk management option as a consequence of their former boyfriend's severe violence. Of these clients, four women and their children were at high risk of further violence from two ex-partners. The remaining three women had a Bsafe kit due to a violent family member. Of these women, one required a kit because of the serious risk posed by her schizophrenic son. Another woman was attempting to break the cycle of a lifetime of violence perpetrated by her schizophrenic brother, while one woman and her daughters were stalked by the woman's mother. To date, this is the only instance involving a female perpetrator. As this case was one of the project's first, no risk assessment information was gathered on this client, therefore, it is not possible to assess whether the risk posed by this female offender was of a similar nature to the risk posed by men who perpetrated violence against women and their children.

#### Women and their children's age

Women accessing Bsafe ranged in age from their late teens to early seventies, with an average age of 35 years. There was a high representation of young women, as 18 percent of participants were under the age of 25, all of whom had at least one child. The 143 children living with their mothers or step-mothers in a home with a Bsafe kit ranged in age from infants to late teens. Twenty-five percent of children were between 0 - 5 years of age, 45 percent were aged between 6 - 11 years and the remaining 30 percent were over the age of 11. For some of these children exposure to violence had been a daily reality. The severity of the violence experienced by these women and their children is

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<sup>27</sup> The National Council, *A Time for Action*, op.cit.

alarming considering that childhood exposure to violence in the home 'presents an obvious and grave risk to the safety and wellbeing of children of all ages.'<sup>28</sup>

## Race and ethnicity

In keeping with the demographic profile of the Hume region, the overwhelming majority of Bsafe clients, their children and perpetrators were Anglo-Australian. There was a high representation of Indigenous Australians engaged in the project. Three percent of women identified as Indigenous, seven percent of children were Indigenous and seven percent of perpetrators were Indigenous Australians. This representation is not unforeseen given that the Shepparton and Mooroopna areas are home to one of Victoria's largest Indigenous populations outside metropolitan Melbourne, together with the fact that Indigenous women and their children report high rates of family violence.<sup>29</sup> As detailed in Table 1, only a few women and their children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have participated in the project.

**Table 1:** The ethnicity and nationality of women, children and perpetrators

	Women's ethnicity/nationality	Children's ethnicity/nationality	Perpetrator's ethnicity/nationality
Anglo-Australia	67	100	40
Aboriginal	2	10	5
Indonesian	1	1	-
British	1	1	1
Chinese	1	-	1
Serbian	-	-	1
Not recorded	-	31	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>72</b>

Bsafe has considerable potential to support women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly those with no or limited English proficiency. Women activating Bsafe who are at risk of violence are not required to state their address or the nature of the emergency in order to obtain a prompt police response. Women are therefore not required to speak English in order to effectively use the risk management option. Furthermore, many migrant and refugee women who do not have permanent residency experience difficulties accessing crisis accommodation as most family violence services are not funded to support these women.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, risk

<sup>28</sup> Department of Human Services (2003) *Towards Collaboration: A resource guide for Child Protection and family violence*, State of Victoria Department of Human Services: Victoria.

<sup>29</sup> The National Council, *A Time for Action*, op.cit.

<sup>30</sup> M. Athaide (2010) 'A Call for Justice Towards Immigrant women: Amending Australia's Domestic/Family Violence Provisions', *Parity*, Vol. 23, Issue 10.

management options that can assist culturally and linguistically diverse women and their children escaping violence to remain in the home are urgently needed.

## Disability

More than 7 percent of Bsafe participants were women living with a disability, all of whom were escaping violence from men who had previously been their intimate partner. Women were living with a range of disabilities. One woman had a hearing impairment, four women were visually impaired, three women had an intellectual disability and two women had a physical disability. Establishing whether these women were living with a disability prior to experiencing intimate partner violence or if their disability was in fact caused by their partner's violence is beyond the scope of the common risk assessment tool and hence this pilot project. The high representation of women with a disability is not unexpected given that research has found that women with a disability are more than three times more likely than women without a disability to experience some form of intimate partner violence.<sup>31</sup> Research has also shown that women with a disability experience violence for more prolonged periods.<sup>32</sup> This is in part due to the fact that they have access to limited social and economic resources while experiencing numerous barriers to accessing services, which in turn limits their pathways to experiencing safety.

Bsafe has considerable potential to support women with a disability and their children to remain safely in their homes and communities. Bsafe utilizes the VitalCall system, which is a personal emergency response service that provides services within Australia 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. VitalCall is a system that was primarily designed to assist elderly residents to live independently at home and as such caters for people who have sensory and physical impairments. Moreover, the current capacity of services to meet the needs of women living with a disability is compromised because of insufficient funding. Many women's refuges and housing services lack the ability to meet basic physical standards for disability access.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, many women with serious or long-term disabilities have had modifications to their homes, thus making the process of fleeing violence all the more complex and fraught. For these reasons, providing risk management options that can support women with a disability to achieve safety at home is imperative.

## Income and financial independence

Financial insecurity was an ongoing reality for the majority of women and their children involved in the Bsafe project. Sixty-three percent of women reported Centrelink payments being their only source of income. Four percent of women reported having no source of income at the time they obtained a Bsafe kit, while the income status of the

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<sup>31</sup> The National Council, *A Time for Action*, op.cit.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 75

remaining 21 percent of participants is unknown. Only 12 percent of women were earning a wage, however, whether this was through full-time, part-time or casual employment remains unclear.

The high rate of financial insecurity among women accessing Bsafe is compatible with research that shows a correlation between intimate partner violence and poor economic outcomes, as violence impacts upon victim's ability to maintain job stability and progression.<sup>34</sup> A study exploring the financial wellbeing of women who had been subjected to economic abuse found that while 47 percent of women were in paid employment prior to meeting their abusive partner, only 16 percent had employment after leaving the abuser.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the same research found that 18 percent of women reported receiving government benefits prior to being in a violent relationship. This number sharply increased to 84 percent of women who were on benefits after leaving their violent partner.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, longitudinal research has demonstrated that being a victim of violence can have unemployment implications that continue for many years post violence.<sup>37</sup> The importance of Bsafe supporting women and their children to remain safely in their homes is significant given that it eliminates financial costs associated with leaving their home, such as the costs of relocation and re-establishment in a new house.

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<sup>34</sup> S. Lloyd and N. Taluc (1999), 'The effects of male violence on female employment,' *Violence Against Women*, vol. 5.

<sup>35</sup> N. Sharp (2008) *What's yours is mine': The different forms of economic abuse and its impact on women and children experiencing domestic violence*, Refuge: United Kingdom.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> S. Lloyd and N. Taluc, op.cit.

### **Erin's story**

Abuse comes in many, many different ways. My relationship was based on control ... lots of yelling, anger, aggressive sort of behaviour. It did turn physical, which I never thought it would. It caused a great deal of stress, emotional turmoil, and fear I suppose. It's impacted on my children's wellbeing, emotionally, their behaviours as well. I'm very fearful for their development, again that stress weighs on your mind. Towards the end of my second pregnancy with my ex-partner I was told that anything I'm experiencing, my baby while in my stomach, was experiencing. You want your children to have the best start to life and the day he was born, he didn't have the best start to life, so he's been copping it from when he was in my stomach, and then to witness that behaviour after he was born, listen to the screaming, feel the tension come up, every time I got tense, he got tense and he got sick.

The turning point for me was when my then 3 year-old son laughed when his Daddy told me loudly that he was going to smash my nose through my face. And then my 3 year-old son laughed at that, and then he got in trouble for laughing and got told to come and say sorry to Mummy, as if he was the naughty one. To me that was like, it was a light-bulb, it was like, hang on a second, it's okay to threaten me, but it's not okay for him to laugh over such a stupid thing that shouldn't have taken place in the first place.

I stayed in my house ... My family violence worker told ... me about this kit that was available and I had hope that I could get resources [needed to stay in my home] but I was fearful. I had nowhere to go, I had no family in town, I only had his family in town, so to flee like that was a bit hard for me to comprehend because I have work and I'm a very committed person to everybody around me. So I did stay in my own home.

I've had numerous breaches [prior to Bsafe] ... He came to my house and that's where the violence escalated – where he was attacking me out in the street, where he threatened to kill me and he physically attacked me on that day and the children witnessed it all. From then he has appeared at my workplace, from the workplace he then did a threatening phone call at home. I've been very mindful of the fact that my children still have a father, he still has rights to being their father, and it's really hard, like you're going through a criminal system, a family system, an emotional system, and still dealing with the fall-out of a broken relationship. Mentally, physically, emotionally, you are beaten. He's still being charged but ... the process is taking so long to follow through.

You have the Criminal and the Family Law controlling it. So, you're going from one dominating, overpowering situation to another that you can't control. You can control your aspect of it, but it's out of your hands. It's a drawn out process which makes it so much harder. As I said to you previously, you don't get a chance to recover from being a victim. You're kept the victim.

I got the Bsafe Unit; it was brilliant for peace of mind. I mentioned the threatening phone call ... we'd only just had the unit installed and when the phone call came through, my eldest son had initially taken the call ... I've taken the phone off him, and we were talking, and it ended up being a very heated argument. When I've hung up the phone, my ex-partner had threatened to come up and you know, smash my head in again. And my eldest son had heard my side of the conversation, and my youngest son, he actually was standing by my legs quite distraught because he could feel how I was feeling.

So when I've hung up the phone, my eldest son has gone 'What's going on? I feel really scared Mum' and so we did everything we had to , locked the gates, locked the cars, locked the house and everything like that, and I turned around and said to him, 'You know what, out of anywhere that we can be other than a police station right at this moment, we're in the safest spot.' And he just looked at me, and I said, 'We have the BSafe Unit, that is an extra security measure for us, that means that we just have to press this button, and the police will be here because we'll have that assistance, and it's all recorded'. He looked at me and I looked at him and it wasn't like 'Ok that's taken away everything that's happening', but it was like, 'We are okay here, we are safe here'. Don't open the doors and if he comes, and if starts doing whatever, press the button. It was a great feeling knowing that.

I can now leave my house. I'm not locked in my house which is what I did right up until probably getting the unit. I wouldn't go out anywhere, I wouldn't take my kids anywhere, whereas now I'll comfortably to walk down the street and go, 'You know what, I'm not as scared as what I was, you can't hurt me and you know what – I've got help'. Bsafe says to him, I have more devices available to me than I ever have before and I will use them, and that's wonderful – that's a wonderful power for somebody who's been victimised and treated like crap most of their relationship. The unit has given me, as I've said quite strongly, a sense of freedom, a sense of ownership of my life. I can say the unit for me has been a life-changing experience, and to think that some women aren't eligible for it because of funding, that actually makes me angry. You know, like who puts a value on somebody's life like that. And again, it's all about politics, and all about government funding and that's wrong, because this is a person's life.

## 4. Victims' experiences of violence and the risk posed by perpetrators

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This chapter of the report details information that women have disclosed to specialist family violence services relating to the perpetrator's history of violence. The chapter includes evidence-based risk and vulnerability factors relating to the likelihood that the perpetrators will commit further acts of violence. This information was gathered through the Aide memoire section of the Comprehensive Risk Assessment tool (CRAF) and as such is quantitative data. The *Family Violence Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework* (known as CRAF) was developed in 2007 to support the integrated family violence service system reforms. The framework provides a standardised approach for risk assessment and safety planning and aims to enable all professionals to identify and consistently respond to family violence. It is important to note there is no risk assessment information on the first five women that accessed Bsafe, as their involvement in the pilot was just prior to CRAF becoming a standardised tool for workers in the family violence sector in the Hume region and throughout Victoria.

### Post-separation violence

For women who have been subjected to intimate partner violence the period shortly after leaving the relationship places them at a higher risk of homicide, stalking and serious sexualised and physical assaults.<sup>38</sup> The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women survey found that women experienced much higher rates of violence from an ex-partner (36 percent) than they did from a current partner (only 10 percent).<sup>39</sup> Women who experienced violence from an ex-partner were also more likely to sustain injuries and feel their lives were in danger.<sup>40</sup>

The risk of post-separation violence was a reality for all 69 women who were escaping violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, thus making their attempts to achieve a life free of violence precarious. Eighty-one percent of women reported that their ex-partner had breached a previous or current Intervention Order. Alarming, 89 percent of women who had ended their relationship reported an escalation in the severity and/or frequency of men's violence, despite the fact that only 65 percent of women had recently separated from their partner. Hence, for many women, ending their relationship had done nothing to cease the chronic and on-going nature of men's violence and the danger posed to them and their children.

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<sup>38</sup> C. Humphreys & R. Thiara (2003) 'Neither Justice Nor Protection: Women's experiences of post-separation violence,' *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 156-214.

<sup>39</sup> J. Mouzos and T. Makkai (2004) *Women's experiences of male violence: Findings from the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey*, Research and Public Policy Series, No. 56, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

## Evidence-based risk and vulnerability factors relating to women

Forty-two percent of women that participated in the Bsafe project reported having mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, panic attacks and post traumatic stress disorder. Nineteen percent of women reported having suicidal thoughts and/or having tried to commit suicide. Whether women's mental health issues were pre-existing or a response to men's violence is unclear. However, it can be assumed that many of these women's poor mental health was caused by men's violence, given that exposure to intimate partner violence is associated with increased risk of mental illness including depression, anxiety, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide attempts.<sup>41</sup>

One in ten women (13 percent) indicated that they were misusing or abusing drugs and/or alcohol. Women may use alcohol and other drugs to medicate the physical and emotional pain of violence.<sup>42</sup> Australian research carried out with 150 women found that some women reported that the only way they could cope with the violence was to find comfort in alcohol or drugs.<sup>43</sup>

Two-thirds of women (68 percent) stated that they were experiencing isolation. It is not possible to establish whether women were socially isolated from friends, family and their communities, or by geographical isolation due to rurality, or both, as women were not asked to specify this during their Comprehensive Risk Assessment. Given that more than 60 percent of women were living in the major regional centres of Wodonga, Wangaratta, Benalla, Shepparton and Seymour, it could be assumed that most were experiencing considerable social isolation. Men who perpetrate violence against women often use tactics to control and isolate their victims from family and friends through 'techniques such as ongoing rudeness to family and friends to alienate them; instigating and controlling the move to a location where the victim has no established social circle or employment opportunities; and forbidding or physically preventing the victim from going out and meeting people.'<sup>44</sup> Such abusive behaviour is commonly referred to as social abuse.<sup>45</sup>

Almost one quarter of women identified as being pregnant or had recently given birth when they accessed Bsafe. Pregnancy is considered a time of increased risk given that

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<sup>41</sup> VicHealth, *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*

<sup>42</sup> Stuart, G. L., Ramsey, S. E., Moore, T. M., Kahler, C. W., Farrell, L. E., Recupero, P. R. & Brown, R. A. 2002, 'Marital violence victimisation and perpetration among women substance abusers: A descriptive study', *Violence Against Women*, August, vol. 8, no. 8, pp. 934-952.

<sup>43</sup> Keys Young (1998) *Against the Odds: How Women Survive Domestic Violence – The needs of women experiencing domestic violence who do not use domestic violence and related crisis services*, Office of the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra.

<sup>44</sup> The National Council, *A Time for Action*, op.cit, p. 186

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

most women who are subjected to intimate partner violence first experience violence during pregnancy.<sup>46</sup> Intimate partner violence during pregnancy has significant implications on maternal and infant health, including increased risk of premature labor, low infant birth weight, prenatal substance use, miscarriage and postnatal depression.<sup>47</sup> For women already experiencing abuse, pregnancy is a period when violence often intensifies.<sup>48</sup> This was the case for some Bsafe clients whose partner's violence escalated during their pregnancy. A small group of women indicated that men's severe use of physical violence had led to the death of their unborn child by causing them to miscarry.

## Risk factors relating to perpetrators

Over two-thirds of perpetrators were reported as having access to weapons with more than one-quarter of men using a weapon in their most recent violent attack against the victim. Perpetrators' access to weapons, particularly firearms, has been shown to increase the risk of serious assault and homicide.<sup>49</sup> Women identified men as having access to, and in some instances using, a range of weapons, including household, axes, knives, fire arms and explosives.

A history of violence is deemed an evidence-based risk factor that increases the likelihood of perpetrators committing further acts of violence, as violent men 'generally engage in more frequent and more severe family violence than perpetrators who do not have a violent past.'<sup>50</sup> Eighty-one percent of men were identified as having a history of violence other than family violence. Women reported that men had been incarcerated for crimes including common assault, assault with intent to cause injury, assault causing injury, aggravated assault, unlawful assault and armed burglary. The threat posed by their ex-partner's recent release or imminent release from prison prompted some women to access Bsafe.

Seventy-nine percent of perpetrators were reported as having some form of mental health issue, ranging from depression and anxiety to acute mental health disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Eighty-eight percent of women reported that the perpetrator had a drug and/or alcohol misuse or abuse problem, including alcoholism and addictions to drugs such as marijuana, amphetamines, crystal methamphetamines and anabolic steroids. Research has found that abusive men with alcohol or drug problems inflict violence against their partners more frequently and are more likely to inflict serious injuries, than abusers without a history of substance abuse.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> A. Taft (2002) *Violence against women in pregnancy and after childbirth: Current knowledge and issues in healthcare responses*, Domestic Violence Clearinghouse.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Family Violence Coordination Unit, op.cit, p. 73.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 61

<sup>51</sup> J. Mouzos and T. Makkai op.cit.

More than two-thirds of men had threatened or attempted to commit suicide. This is of considerable concern as suicidal threats or attempts by men using family violence is a risk factor for murder-suicide.<sup>52</sup> In addition, all 72 women identified that perpetrators were exhibiting coercive, controlling, obsessive and jealous behaviour towards the victim and/or her children; behaviours that have also been identified as evidence-based risk factors for victims being killed or almost killed.<sup>53</sup>

## Men's use of violence against women and their children

The overwhelming majority of Bsafe clients had been subjected to severe and chronic violence. Eighty-one percent of women reported that the man whose violence they were attempting to escape had threatened and/or attempted to kill them. A small group of women reported that it was simply a matter of time before they were murdered by their ex-partner. The severity of men's violence is further evidenced by the fact that more than three-quarters of perpetrators had attempted to strangle their victim. Strangulation is a common method used by male perpetrators to kill female intimate partners.<sup>54</sup> For most women, the constant and continual nature of family violence was evident, with 84 percent of clients reporting that they were being stalked by the perpetrator post-separation.

Violence of a sexualised nature was a reality for many women, with 43 percent of women identifying that they had experienced a sexualised assault and/or rape by the perpetrator. This figure is higher than that identified by evidence-based research that shows that around one in three women who have experienced physical intimate partner violence have also been raped by their abusive partners.<sup>55</sup> Of these women, two also disclosed that their ex-partners had also sexually assaulted their daughters aged three, six and eight years old.

More than half (57 percent) of women reported that the perpetrator had harmed or threatened to harm or kill their children. This figure is in keeping with research that shows that a co-existence of intimate partner violence and child abuse occurs in between 30 and 60 percent of cases. The extent of men's violence against children is difficult to assess given the CRAF tool's limited focus on ascertaining the history or future risk of violence perpetrated against children. In the CRAF case notes that provided details of children's experiences of violence, high rates of physical violence were evident, as were the incidents of children being forced to witness violence against their mothers and siblings.

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<sup>52</sup> Family Violence Coordination Unit, op.cit, p. 74.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>55</sup> J. Campbell et al, *Intimate partner violence and abuse among active duty military women*, Violence against Women, vol. 9, no. 9, 2003. pp. 1072-1092.

Men threatening or attempting to abduct children from their mothers was a recurrent theme in many Comprehensive Risk Assessments. A small percentage of women were terrified that their ex-partners would abduct their children. For example, two men had attempted to abduct their former partner's children, while one man succeeded in abducting his ex-girlfriend's son from childcare and then *'threatened to kill him by crashing his car into a tree.'* In addition, a further two men had threatened murder-suicide against their ex-partners and their children.

### Men's violence in other contexts

Threats of, or violence carried out against family members, was identified as one of the many ways perpetrators attempted to control women. Two-thirds of men had harmed or threatened to harm or kill family members other than the women's children. For example, two women identified that their ex-partners had seriously physically assaulted their mothers, who were subsequently included on their Intervention Orders.

Cruelty to animals, particularly family pets, was also a coercive controlling strategy used by many of the men who used violence. More than one-third (40 percent) of perpetrators had harmed or threatened to harm or kill pets or other animals. Many men carried out acts of cruelty and abuse towards pets, most often the family dog. More extreme and sadistic scenarios include one man dismembering a cow then leaving it in his ex-partner's car; while another perpetrator killed a litter of kittens and then told his former girlfriend that *'he enjoyed watching them die.'*

## 5. Women's accounts of violence and the impact of Bsafe

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Throughout the three year pilot, victims of violence involved in Bsafe were asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire after having their kit for three months, six months and upon exiting the project. The evaluation questionnaires were designed to track breaches to the Intervention Order (IVO), kit activations and the police response to determine whether Bsafe had lead to a decrease in recidivism. Questions also related to victim's safety, housing circumstances and social support networks. This chapter will therefore explore women and their children's experiences of:

- Bsafe kits
- IVO breaches, kit activations and the police response
- Women's perceptions of why perpetrator violence decreased or ceased
- The impact of Bsafe on women and children's housing options
- The impact of Bsafe on women and children's perceptions of safety
- Bsafe as a risk management tool for children affected by violence
- Bsafe and women's connection with social support networks, and
- Bsafe and women's access to relevant support services.

### Evaluation questionnaires

Of the 72 women who accessed Bsafe during the three year pilot, half (36) participated in the formal evaluation process. Of these women, 13 completed more than one evaluation form. Of the participants who completed no formal evaluation, three women weren't able to be contacted by family violence practitioners or police and hence their kits were eventually cancelled.<sup>56</sup>

Women experiencing family violence are often involved with prolonged Family Law Court , child custody arrangements and criminal court matters. Their lives are complex, involving high risk situations and an all encompassing hyper-vigilance for their and their children's safety. Understandably, completing a questionnaire that arrives in the mail was simply not a priority for some women involved in the project.

In the project's first 12 months the Bsafe project coordinator went on maternity leave. Due to the specialised nature of the role, the coordinator position was reduced from a three day a week position to a one day a week caretaker role. No evaluation questionnaires were sent out over this six month period.

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<sup>56</sup> Please note that none of these three women ever activated their kits. Family violence outreach workers and the police have attempted to contact these women to determine their safety, but as these women were no longer living at the registered addresses they could not be contacted.

In later conversations with participants, the Bsafe coordinator found that, for some women, violence related trauma was seemingly exacerbated through continually having to retell their and their children's story of violence – to workers, the police, at court or via a Bsafe questionnaire. Once safety was achieved, some women were less willing to recount their and their children's experiences of violence as it impacted on their recovery and ability to resume a normal life.

## Bsafe kits

Once a referral for a Bsafe kit is made, the VitalCall installer contacts the client to make a time and date to install the kit. Women have the choice of the mobile unit and/or the pendant. To access the pendant women must have a home telephone that has in and out calling access. The installer demonstrates how each unit and the system operates, assists the woman to test the product and set up a password. The Bsafe unit is assigned and specifically programmed for each client by VitalCall. If a client was to relocate, VitalCall would need to be notified so that the unit could be reprogrammed to the new address.

Both the mobile unit and the pendant provide an emergency response when pressed. Once the button on either unit is pressed the VitalCall Response Centre will respond immediately and the woman is able to talk to the operator. When the kit is activated the client's details are instantly displayed on the operator's call centre screen including the woman's name, address, the number of children that reside at the property and that the nature of the call is family violence related. The client will be asked to state their password. If the password is not provided, the police will be contacted and notified of the need to respond immediately. Clients using the mobile unit not at their residential address, must notify the VitalCall operator of their location for the police to respond.<sup>57</sup> All kit activations are recorded. Transcripts of calls made to VitalCall and the police can be made available for legal testimony.

If the client does not want the offender to be aware of the alarm the system can be set up so that the operator will not speak when the alarm is pressed and the police will be notified of the need to respond immediately. Women are required to calibrate their Bsafe kits once a month to ensure that they are working properly and are required to report any malfunctions to their worker without delay.

Of the women engaged in the pilot over the past three years, 28 accessed both the mobile unit and the pendant. Five women accessed only the pendant, while 38 women used only the mobile unit. The option of the prepaid mobile phone was used by only one client. The high rates of women accessing only the mobile unit may be due to the fact

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<sup>57</sup> VitalCall is currently exploring the possibility of the mobile companion having GPS tracking device installed in it so that when activated women would not have to provide details of their location for a police response.

that the majority of clients were experiencing financial hardship and therefore were unlikely to have a home phone connected. Of the 36 women who completed a formal evaluation, 31 reported that the Bsafe kit was easy to use. Three women were unsure whether the kit was easy to use, while two women stated that the kit was not easy to use.

## **Intervention Order breaches, kit activations and police response with Bsafe**

The Bsafe Project's rationale is that the kit and the enhanced police response will function as a deterrent for perpetrators as it increases the likelihood of detection and prosecution. In order to monitor and evaluate Bsafe's capacity to reduce recidivist offending, women are asked to detail:

- Perpetrator breaches to the IVO prior to, and during their involvement with Bsafe
- Whether they activated their kit when IVO breaches occurred, and
- Information relating to the police response upon activation

The project found that for some perpetrators Bsafe operated as a deterrent, while the prompt police response assisted police to apprehend and charge offenders who continued to breach the IVO. For these reasons women who activated their kits when breaches occurred were more likely to report that perpetrator violence decreased or ceased. Bsafe therefore reduced perpetrator violence, as there was a notable decrease in the severity of violence associated with men's IVO breaches. For many women, prior to Bsafe, IVO breaches involved serious physical assaults. Once Bsafe was installed, these breaches, for the most part, became psychological in nature with perpetrators resorting to threats, intimidation and stalking, which over time usually ceased. The findings presented in this chapter support the idea that Bsafe is a highly effective risk management option that contributes to perpetrators receiving a swift and certain response from the criminal justice system. Bsafe is an innovative and vital component of an integrated service system that works to improve safety outcomes for victims of violence.

## **Perpetrator breaches to the Intervention Order prior to Bsafe**

Of the 36 women who provided questionnaire feedback, only three women indicated that the perpetrator had not breached the IVO prior to them accessing Bsafe. Many of these women reported that men's violence had escalated in severity and/or frequency post-separation.<sup>58</sup> Prior to the installation of Bsafe, men's IVO breaches consisted of behaviour such as severe physical violence, threats to kill, stalking, property damage including breaking and entering, and obsessive and abusive text messaging and calling. One woman reported that her violent and extremely unpredictable ex-husband

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<sup>58</sup> 89 percent of women who had ended their relationship reported an escalation in the severity and/or frequency of men's violence.

breached the IVO by brutally raping her. In many instances, men's IVO breaches involved violence against children and/or children being forced to witness violence perpetrated against their mothers. The following are women's accounts of IVO breaches that men enacted prior to them accessing Bsafe.

*He would usually force his way into the house, take my mobile then refuse to leave. He'd hold me in the house and assault me and force me to do things. (Claire)*

*My ex-husband put bullet holes in my old house (I locked the bedroom door) and also threatened to bury me in the bush in front of the police. When he was imprisoned for assaulting me (breaking my nose in two places) he wrote to me from prison sounding very happy that he has a job in jail but it still didn't stop him thinking about how he was going to 'get me back' for putting him in jail. (Irene)*

*My door was kicked down on two occasions. (Una)*

*He came to my place when I had just finished the shopping. He assaulted me, strangled me. It was hard to get the police that time because he took my phone and bag and pulled the phone off the wall. (Charlie)*

*Ex-husband attacked my daughter and I, and tried to strangle me when he was drunk. (Sally)*

*Greg came to my home. We had an argument. Greg grabbed my hair and pulled me into the lounge room. He pinned me down and punched me around the head and face. (Kacey)*

*Damaged property, abusive calls and texts. (Deb)*

*My ex slashed five of my tyres on three separate occasions at my home. He was lurking in my backyard, getting drunk and turning up in my garden threatening me. (Cassie)*

*Ex-husband stated he wanted to harm myself or him. He attended my work place with half a bomb saying he would blow several people up. (Anne)*

*Ex-partner visited the kids, he wanted money and he turned nasty [and was] choking me. I said I was calling the police, he dared me. I got the phone and went outside. He sat and watched, then chased me. The phone was disconnected as I fell to the ground and received a kick to the face. (Angie)*

*He assaulted me, hit me, grabbed me around the throat, pushed me against the kitchen wall. He has broken into the house, broken in under the house and threatened to kill me. (Sue)*

*I confronted him about drugs, he started yelling abuse, kicked the door. I could sense that his aggressive behaviour was going to escalate. I threatened to call the police. He said 'Yeah that's right call the police you dog.'* (Kerry)

*[I want] to have contact with my son [the perpetrator], but don't want to continue living everyday in fear... [I] live in fear that Josh will explode. The violence is chronic and continues even after police intervention and an Intervention Order. The violence continues to escalate.* (Kylie)

*Threats of violence towards me and to me through my children. Drink driving and dangerous driving with my children in the car.* (Tess)

*My husband is an alcoholic and I felt threatened by his drunken rampage.* (Phoebe)

*He broke into my house by smashing the back glass door.* (Kirsten)

*He'd constantly text me and also tried to run me off the road.* (Melissa)

These narratives clearly articulate the severity of men's IVO breaches prior to Bsafe and the serious risk posed to these women and their children. One-third of these breaches involved physical or sexualised violence and/or threats to kill or seriously harm the women and their children. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of perpetrators demonstrated a clear disregard for the law by repeatedly breaching the no-contact order, with one woman reporting that her ex-partner had breached the IVO in excess of ten times.

**Table 2: Perpetrator breaches to the IVO prior to and during the Bsafe Project**

\*Insufficient information provided

\*Insufficient information provided

	IVO breach prior to Bsafe	IVO breaches 3 months	IVO breaches 6 months	IVO breaches until exiting	Status of men's violence	Colour scale for men's violence against women and children
Angie	2	1	-	-	Decreased	Phsycial violence
Deb	3+	3+	-	-	Unchanged	Sexualised assault
Grace	2-3	0	-	-	Ceased	Threats and/or to kill
Kirsten	3	4	-	-	Increased	Stalking
Liz	1+	1	-	-	Unchanged	Treats/property damage
Lara	1	1	0	-	Ceased	Calling/texting
Sue	5	5	-	-	Unchanged	Technically not a breach
Gayle	3+	1+	-	-	Decreased	Violence not specified
Una	10+	0	-	-	Ceased	No response provided (-)
Melissa	3+	3+	-	-	Unchanged	No IVO breaches (0)
Kacey	3+	0	-	-	Ceased	
Sally	1	0	-	-	Ceased	
Ester	0	-	0	-	Unchanged	
Jacky	2+	-	1	-	Decreased	
Lynda	1+	-	0	-	Ceased	
Lucy	2+	-	1	-	Decreased	
Irene	3+	0	0	-	Ceased	
Rose	1+	-	0	-	Ceased	
Pamela	5+	-	0	-	Decreased	
Kerry	1+	-	-	0	Ceased	
Kathryn	1+	-	-	0	Ceased	
Elizabeth	3+	-	-	N/A*	N/A*	
Sarah	1+	-	-	0	Ceased	
Claire	7	1	0	-	Ceased	
Charlie	2	3	0	-	Ceased	
Millie	3-5	0	0	-	Ceased	
Nicola	0	1	4	-	Increased	
Cassie	6	3-4	0	-	Ceased	
Tina	0	0	0	0	Unchanged	
Anne	1+	0	0	0	Ceased	
Tess	3+	-	-	0	Ceased	
Phoebe	1+	1	-	0	Ceased	
Kylie	3+	-	2+	-	Decrease	
Tracy	1	-	0	0	Ceased	
Mary	2	1	0	0	Ceased	
Tara	1+	-	0	0	Ceased	

Women who reported a decrease in perpetrator recidivist offending with Bsafe

In the three month, six month and exit evaluation questionnaires women were asked about IVO breaches during their involvement with the project. Table 2 details the nature and frequency of perpetrator IVO breaches prior to Bsafe and during women's involvement in the project.

Of the 36 women who provided a response, 77 percent (27) reported a decrease in the number of IVO breaches with Bsafe. Of these women, 74 percent (20) stated in their most recent questionnaire that the perpetrators use of violence had ceased completely. In many instances men's violence continued in the first 3 months of women accessing Bsafe, though there was a clear shift in the nature of perpetrator violence; serious physical violence ceased as psychological abuse and threatening behaviour continued.

Of the 27 women reporting a decrease in perpetrator recidivist offending, 16 reported that IVO breaches stopped entirely once Bsafe was installed. Given that these women experienced no breaches once they accessed Bsafe and weren't required to activate their kit, their narratives are not featured below.

For two women, accessing Bsafe meant their ex-partner's prior IVO breaches that were characterised by serious physical assaults, had stopped, although they continued to stalk and intimidate them. One of these women experienced a decline in the severity of her former partner's violence, though in the first three months of accessing Bsafe, she reported an increase in the number of IVO breaches before his violence ceased completely.

*I saw him at Centrelink and he stared and I pressed the button [on the mobile companion]. He is always already gone. He sneaks around. He dropped a present for my child around. Tried to get in the window, police couldn't find him. (Charlie)*

*Christmas Eve he came to the window, out of view of others, wanting to come in. Pendant was activated, had communications problems, ex-partner heard machine and left, I then requested that the police be called.... [When the police arrived] I was told I needed proof, should have recorded or taken photo on my mobile. He was then contacted and cautioned not to do it again. (Angie)*

When these IVO breaches occurred, both women stated that they activated their kit and received what they considered to be a timely police response. While neither man was charged, both men were cautioned by police. These women reported that this functioned as a deterrent. One woman reported that IVO breaches subsequently ceased, while for the other, IVO breaches decreased and there were no further physical assaults.

Another woman whose ex-partner breached the IVO also reported that activating Bsafe and receiving a prompt police response had functioned as a deterrent causing his recidivist offending to cease.

*There has been a decrease in the number of breaches ... [I activated Bsafe once] the police arrived within good time and were very kind to me as I was panicked ... The charges were dropped because they were unable to find him and I haven't had any trouble in a while. (Mary)*

One woman also noted a decrease in the number of IVO breaches once she accessed Bsafe, though her ex-husband's property damage and psychological intimidation continued during the initial three month period. There were several breaches that occurred where this woman decided not to alert the police via Bsafe because she 'wasn't sure if it was him' and consequently 'didn't want to abuse it, didn't want to be the girl who cried wolf'. One night, after feeling extremely threatened by her ex-partner, she activated Bsafe:

*He has been seen outside my house then set fire across the road, jumped my fence and was in my yard. He was phoning me from his mobile after being seen near my house at about 2 a.m.... [The police] searched for him after questioning me. (Cassie)*

While Cassie reported a minor response delay due to technical difficulties with her kit, when the police arrived at her property they caught the perpetrator who was remanded and later charged with breaching the IVO.<sup>59</sup>

Another woman also reported that after accessing Bsafe there was a decrease in the number of IVO breaches perpetrated by her schizophrenic son. Although the breaches decreased, the severity of the perpetrator's physical violence towards his mother did not ease. On one evening the perpetrator breached the IVO causing the victim to activate Bsafe. The police responded promptly. The following night the perpetrator breached the IVO again during an attempted assault.

*Son came around trying to break in, smashed windows. (Kylie)*

The victim again activated Bsafe, however did not receive a timely police response. Two minutes later VitalCall reissued the activation and contacted the local police again. In the process of smashing windows, the perpetrator seriously injured his arm. An ambulance was subsequently called and he was airlifted to hospital. The police arrived at the victim's house later that night when she no longer required assistance. This case,

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<sup>59</sup> Family Violence Advisor, Blue Tube DVD.

which was investigated by a Victoria Police Family Violence Advisor, highlights the serious risk posed to women when the police don't respond appropriately.<sup>60</sup>

One woman, who experienced a significant drop in the incidence of her ex-partner's violence, was one of only two women involved in the project who reported being physically assaulted in her home.

*I was out the back feeding the dog at 9:30 p.m. when he burst through the back gate wielding an iron bar. He tried to drag me inside. I told him I had to shut the gate so the dog didn't get out then ran to my auntie's house two blocks up ... I managed to run out the gate before he got me inside but if he had he would have been able to hold me [there] sometimes for several days like before. (Claire)*

Despite the severity of her ex-partner's violence, this woman stated that she chose not to activate her kit and report the IVO breach to the police because she had managed to escape. Six months after accessing Bsafe, her ex-partner ceased breaching the IVO and was eventually incarcerated.

Five women, who experienced a decrease in the number of perpetrator IVO breaches, reported that they were subjected to non-physical violence while having accessed Bsafe. Despite the perpetrator's continued threats and psychological intimidation, these women chose not to activate Bsafe on various occasions. Two women provided no comment as to why they decided not to activate Bsafe when IVO breaches occurred, despite one woman indicating that her ex-partner had threatened to kill her in the most recent IVO breach. Another woman, whose experience was unique, chose not to activate Bsafe when the IVO was breached as she didn't feel threatened.

*It was a technical breach. I saw him at the supermarket and had a good conversation, asked about kids. He wasn't pressuring me and I didn't feel threatened. (Phoebe)*

One woman's 12 year old son who used the mobile companion because of the serious risk posed to him by his father didn't activate Bsafe when the IVO was breached due to the time delay between the offence and when he had access to the mobile companion. This incident was not reported as this woman didn't believe the police would investigate due to the lack of evidence.

*Hard to explain the breaches. They happened at child's school and he didn't have the mobile companion ... I have found the police don't like to get involved if they can't make it stick in court. (Lucy)*

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<sup>60</sup> After this incident Kylie received a formal apology from the police and was assured that any further activations would be dealt with in an effective and timely manner.

Similarly, a concern around a lack of evidence prevented another woman from activating her Bsafe kit.

*My ex-husband was near the primary school where my daughter attends when I was collecting her ... No [I didn't activate Bsafe] when my ex-husband was near the school. I was worried that by the time the police get there he would have driven off and then I've wasted police time. (Jacky)*

## Women who reported perpetrator IVO breaches remained unchanged or increased after accessing Bsafe

Of the 36 women who provided formal evaluation responses, eight reported that the number of times the perpetrator breached the IVO prior to, and after accessing Bsafe remained unchanged. Two women reported, an increase in breaches. For these two women, this was due to the fact that their former partners had not breached the IVO prior to, or whilst they had Bsafe. Another woman, who had an intellectual disability and a nine month old child, also reported no decline in the number of IVO breaches perpetrated by her extremely violent ex-partner. After only having had Bsafe for a short while, this woman's ex-partner broke into her home and physically assaulted her. She activated her kit during this assault and the offender was arrested by police at her premises. While Bsafe had not functioned as a deterrent for this man, it did ensure the police arrived almost immediately and were thus able to ensure that the perpetrator was held accountable for his criminal conduct.

One woman's ex-partner consistently breached the IVO both prior to and while she had Bsafe. He attempted to run her off the road and then threatened to kill her.

*He followed me in the car. He followed me around the supermarket and told me 'I have a hole dug for you with a tunnel lined.' I live in constant fear. (Melissa)*

Melissa activated Bsafe and the police responded promptly, though 'he had already disappeared.' She reported that while the breaches hadn't decreased 'at least the response was quicker therefore he has suffered the consequences of his actions.' This woman's ex-husband was eventually jailed, for offences unrelated to his serious history of intimate partner violence.

These women's accounts highlight Bsafe's capacity to enhance perpetrator accountability through the provision of a more effective and streamlined police response, which increases the likelihood that men who use violence will be apprehended and charged.

Similarly, one woman's ex-partner's IVO breaches remained constant. However, this woman experienced a clear shift in the nature of the perpetrator's violence and a decrease in its severity as physical violence ceased while the psychological violence continued.

*He's always ringing me and trying to call me; he threatened to kill my friend because she helped me out. (Sue)*

She also hadn't activated her Bsafe kit when breaches occurred and provided no explanation as to why this was the case.

As noted above, only two women reported an increase in perpetrator IVO breaches during their involvement with Bsafe. For one of these women, her ex-partner's escalating psychological violence was linked to his recent release from prison.

*He came to my house after he had been released from jail. Returned to my house the following day and has been to my house and in the unit block area at least two other times. [I activated my Bsafe and the police arrived] but he had already left in a taxi. The police searched for him. (Kirsten)*

The other woman to report an increase in the number of IVO breaches while in the Bsafe program, had not experienced any breaches prior to her involvement in the project. She reported that her ex-partner had breached the IVO four times in the first six months of having accessed her kit, yet she chose not to alert the police as she didn't believe his behaviour was either 'abusive' or 'threatening.'

*Phone call and text message; not abusive. Noise in backyard – investigated – neighbour's dog. [More] text messages, one drive by. [Didn't activate Bsafe] as he didn't stop when he drove past so wasn't threatened. (Nicola)*

Women involved in the project clearly vary in their approach to how they use Bsafe. Some women stated that they had informed the perpetrator of Bsafe and its purpose. Others stated that they wanted the perpetrator to be caught and charged so they waited for a serious breach to occur before activating their kit. The latter of the two approaches seems to be less effective in decreasing breaches and ensuring women's safety as men who use violence require a clear message each time they breach the IVO that the criminal justice system will hold them to account.<sup>61</sup> More research is needed to determine whether perpetrators' knowledge that his ex-partner has a Bsafe device is a deterrent to his violence behaviour.

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<sup>61</sup> The National Council, *A Time for Action*, op.cit

## Women's perceptions of why perpetrator violence decreased or ceased

Of the 26 women who reported that perpetrator IVO breaches decreased and/or ceased during their involvement with Bsafe, 16 women provided explanations as to why they believed men's violence had declined. Three women stated that Bsafe had functioned as a deterrent and was the reason their extremely violent ex-partners had stopped their abusive behaviour.

*Once aware of the kit, not knowing what it is but that I have something, he keeps away. (Mary)*

*Just before he was released (from prison) we had the kit installed. I have only had to use it the once ... He heard the system being activated and he left within two minutes. So it's a deterrent to him. (Angie)*

*We have had no contact and a mutual friend told him that I have a Bsafe alarm, which I believed stopped the threats in behaviour. (Kathryn)*

Two women reported that the prompt police response that Bsafe provided had resulted in the police charging the offenders with breaching the IVO, thus significantly improving their safety outcomes.

*He was remanded immediately after the last breach around five months ago and is still in jail until January ... As I said he's in jail but before that and for when he gets out, the alarm means I can get help by just pushing a button, as once he's inside the house trying to use the phone to call for help would just get me beaten. (Claire)*

*He was charged 12 times for breaching the Intervention Order. (Elizabeth)*

Six women reported that criminal justice proceedings to hold men accountable for their violent behaviour was the reason their ex-partner's violence decreased and/or ceased. In these cases, perpetrator accountability brought about through criminal convictions, prison sentences or sanctions through the Family Law Court were inextricably linked to the safety of these six women and their children.

*Jail 3-4 months. (Kacey)*

*Jail/rehab periods contributed to the decrease. (Cassie)*

*Charged with assault, on good behaviour bond for 12 months. (Sarah)*

*My ex-husband is currently in prison on firearm charges. (Irene)*

*He has gone to court and been convicted so is serving a good behaviour bond. This and during his court appearance kept issues down because he knew it would be bad for him in court. (Tara)*

*[Bsafe and] Family Law matters may have influenced [the decrease in IVO breaches]. (Charlie)*

In keeping with many women's stories, the imminent risk posed by one woman's schizophrenic brother meant that crisis accommodation was essential. Her move into safe accommodation was the reason she provided for the IVO breaches ceasing.

*I was moved into transitional housing for my safety due to my brother going off his medication and attempting to come to where I was living ... His level of anger ... increased as he went off his medication. (Millie)*

For some women a combination of factors - including Bsafe, relocating to another community, securing an Intervention Order with more conditions, effective perpetrator programs in conjunction with drug and alcohol counselling - lead to men's violence reducing or ceasing.

*Moved and getting new Orders and Bsafe has helped decrease incidents. (Una)*

*Offender moved away ... He has moved from across the road to Wangaratta. Now he hasn't got a car as he wrote it off [drink driving on] Boxing Day at 3 a.m. (Tess)*

*At the time of most recent move, it fell into place. I felt safer after good interaction with ex-husband. Moved towns. Felt stronger in self. I hear good things about ex-husband (in counselling etc) from mutual friends. Less abusive drunken outbursts. (Phoebe)*

As these women's narratives attest, Bsafe has the capacity to function as both a deterrent for men who use violence and as tool to enhance perpetrator accountability through the provision of a more effective and streamlined police response. Yet, evidently this risk management tool is only one part of the solution in ensuring that perpetrators stop their violence. There must be a prompt and decisive response to perpetrators of violence from the criminal justice system, accompanied by effective perpetrator programs and appropriate treatment and support for offenders experiencing substance abuse and mental illness. These strategies together with flexible and effective service systems that work together effectively to support victims of violence are necessary for improved safety outcomes for women and children affected by men's violence.

## The impact of Bsafe on women and children's housing options

For women and children escaping family violence the risk of homelessness is immense. One of Bsafe's key objectives is to provide an additional level of support and service to victims of family violence so that they can safely stay in their own homes and communities, therefore reducing the risk of homelessness and poverty.

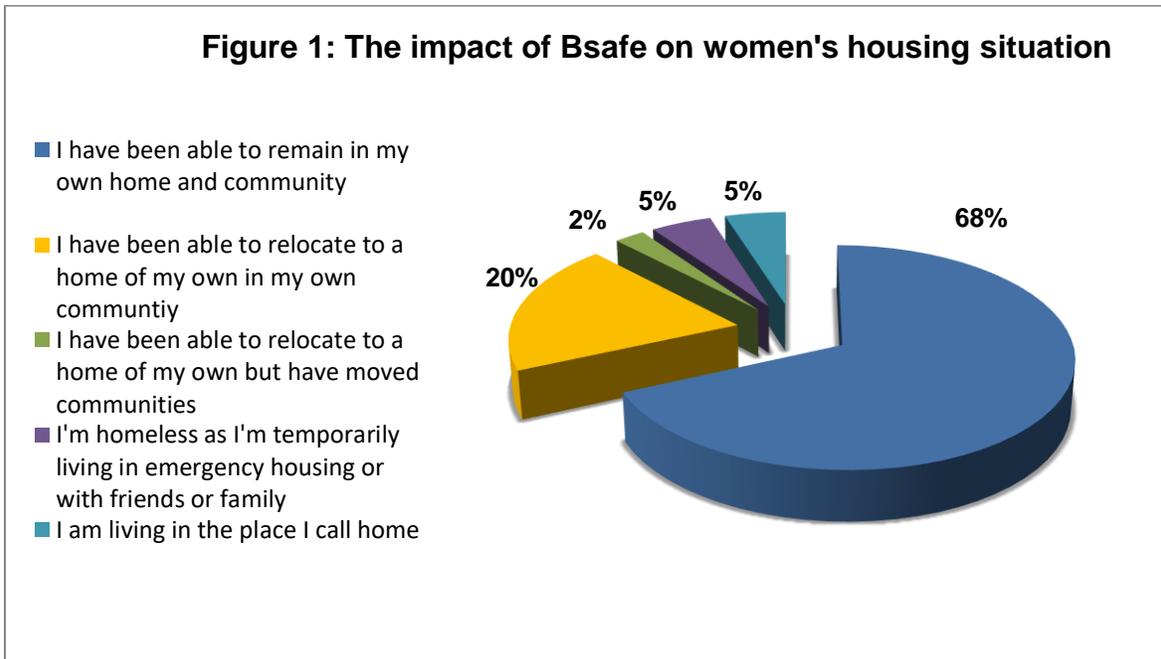


Figure 1 shows the impact of Bsafe on women and their children's housing arrangements. Sixty-eight percent of women reported that Bsafe and the added level of security it provided had allowed them and their children to remain in their own home and community. An additional 20 percent of women stated that with Bsafe they were able to relocate to a home of their own in their own community. For some, relocating to another house was the preferred option as some women didn't want to return to the property where they and their children have experienced violence in the past.

Bsafe's capacity to support women to reestablish a life of safety in their local communities cannot be underestimated. The high rates of women and children who were able to remain in the family home are significant when compared with federal housing outcomes for women with children escaping family violence. While evidently the sample size of the Bsafe project is small, 62 percent of women involved in the project were able to remain in, or return to their own home despite their high risk status. Nationally, women and children escaping violence who access specialist housing services are more likely to exit

into public housing than any other type of accommodation, with only nine percent of women returning to their own home.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to quantitative data relating to women's housing status, 14 participants provided accounts of the impact Bsafe had on their journey to secure safe and appropriate housing. Three women reported that the serious risk posed by the perpetrator meant that they had no alternative but to relocate.

*He knew where I lived and I was constantly afraid he would come and kill me. I slept with my cupboards against the door and often felt vulnerable and helpless. I moved into transitional housing. I am in a safe place now and fortunately I was helped by the family violence service, the police and Rural Housing. (Millie)*

*Relocated into a Department of Housing property from Tallangatta to Wodonga. (Sue)*

*I had to move right away from him to another town. (Sarah)*

Three women relocated to a refuge or with their family due to the imminent risk posed by their ex-partners. After having Bsafe installed, two women and their children were able to return home, while the third woman with children relocated into a home of her own within their community.

*I was in a safe house but now in my own place. I felt vulnerable at first but once getting the kit I felt a lot better knowing it was there. (Una)*

*I was in my own home but moved into emergency housing [then returned home with Bsafe]. (Lucy)*

*I had to leave my home and after staying with family for three months I have relocated to my own home. (Claire)*

Undoubtedly, the risk posed by many violent men is so severe that women's refuges and other forms of crisis accommodation are essential in securing women and children's safety. It is important to note that because Bsafe has a portable unit, women can take it with them when they enter a woman's refuge, safe housing including transitional housing, or they relocate to friends or family. Bsafe provides women and children with an added level of security and safety wherever they may be housed, either temporarily or permanently.

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<sup>62</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2009) *Which Way Home: A New Approach to Homelessness*, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra, p. 35.

For many women prior to their involvement with Bsafe, fleeing their homes and communities had not secured their safety as perpetrators often maintained unrelenting acts of post-separation violence and intimidation. Some women, like Veronica, had relocated several times in an attempt to escape men's violence.

*I've probably moved about six or seven times in the past couple of years. And so the last incident we had I was in my new house and either I was to look for another place to live or seek help from [Domestic violence service]. They were able to put me onto this Bsafe, so I was able to stay at home and feel a little bit comfortable instead of having to run again. (Veronica)*

The costs incurred by Veronica and other women forced to flee their home and reestablish in another community, on numerous occasions, is in excess of thousands of dollars. This excludes the added costs of crisis services, accommodation services, legal services, income support and health and medical services that women and the community are forced to pay due to men's violence in the home.

Two women commented that, despite being counselled by professionals, including police, to relocate due to the serious risk posed by their violent ex-partners, Bsafe had enabled them to stay in their own home.

*Advised to move. Having Bsafe kit made it possible to stay. (Cassie)*

*I have been able to remain in my own home and community. The police would like me to move but I wanted to stay. (Tara)*

A recurring theme throughout many women's narratives was the importance of Bsafe as a tool that supported their right to self-determination in relation to where they chose to live and raise their children.

*I stood my ground and am respected in the community. To be able to stay in my home with some better safety measures has been positive. (Tess)*

*We can sleep easier in our own home and we haven't had to move. (Mary)*

*[Bsafe has given us the] confidence to stay in our own home. (Kerry)*

*[Bsafe has] supported me in moving towns to get a fresh start. (Phoebe)*

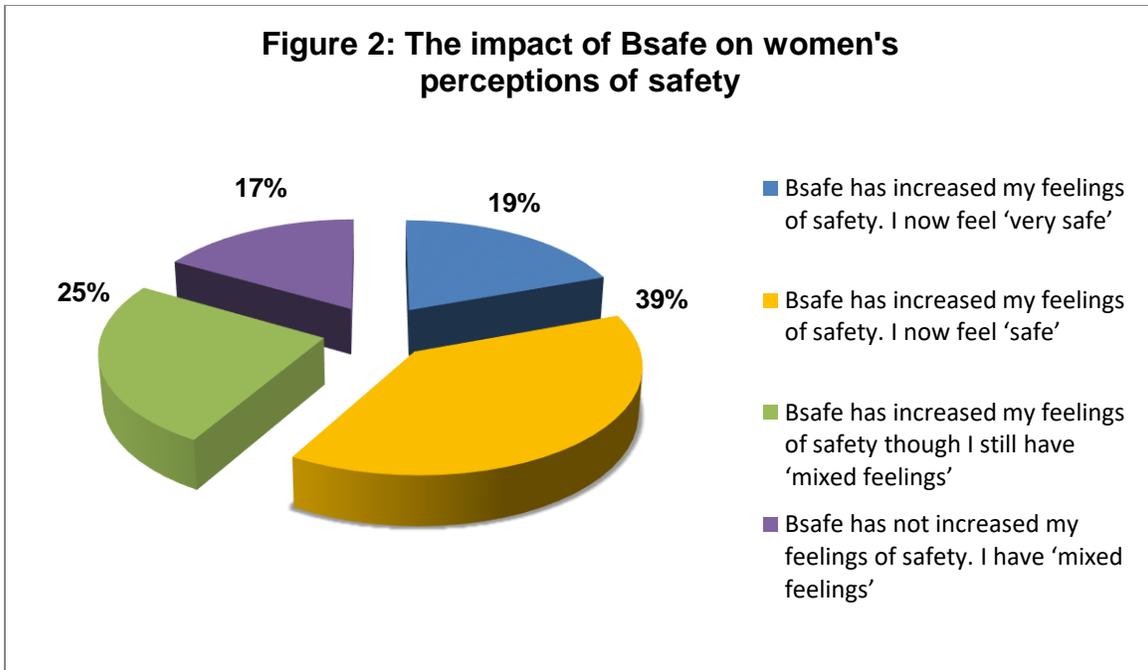
*I was living out of town with my parents when I was feeling unsafe, but since I've had the Bsafe kit I went back to my own home. (Grace)*

Despite this risk, for many women remaining in their communities - where they are supported by specialist family violence agencies, the police, other relevant services as well as families and friends - is crucial to their safety and the process of recovery. Indeed, Bsafe provides an additional level of support and service that enables women and their children to remain in their homes and communities where they are better able to maintain social support networks, employment and educational opportunities and stability of care and education for their children. The disruption and emotional distress of being forced to relocate is avoided.

*Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness* draws attention to how women with children escaping violence continue to be forced to abandon their homes and local communities, leaving behind important relationships and networks. This creates difficulties in participating in employment, education and maintaining connections with family and the community. Women and children who find accommodation in a crisis service often struggle to find longer-term housing due to a lack of supply of suitable housing stock, discrimination and the cost of private rental accommodation. Strategies such as Bsafe that have demonstrated success in supporting women and children to remain in their home are urgently needed if we are to begin to 'turn off the tap' of homelessness caused by men's violence against women and their children.

### **The impact of Bsafe on women and children's perceptions of safety**

A key aim of the Bsafe project is to enhance safety and security for victims of family violence and sexualised assault. Women were asked to provide feedback about their perceptions of safety prior to, and during their involvement with Bsafe and rate these feelings on a scale of 'very safe', 'safe', 'mixed feelings', 'unsafe' or 'very unsafe.' Figure 2 depicts women's self-rated safety levels at the time they last completed an evaluation questionnaire.



As detailed in previous chapters of this report, prior to Bsafe the overwhelming majority of women participating in this pilot project had been subjected to severe and chronic violence. Eighty-one percent of participants reported that the man whose violence they were attempting to escape had threatened and/or attempted to kill them. The vast majority of women stated that prior to accessing Bsafe they were feeling 'unsafe' or 'very unsafe' due to the serious risk posed by the perpetrator.

The overwhelming majority of women reported that their feelings of safety had increased considerably following the installation of Bsafe. Fifty-eight percent of women reported that their perceptions of safety had increased to the point that they were feeling 'safe' or 'very safe'. A further finding has been the strong correlation between safety, kit activations and police response. Not surprisingly, women who activated their kit - either accidentally or due to a perpetrator IVO breach – and received a prompt police response were far more likely to report feeling 'safe' or 'very safe', when compared to women who had not activated their kit or who had received a poor police response.

Of the 21 women who reported feeling 'safe' or 'very safe' as a consequence of Bsafe, 19 provided further information about how the device had impacted upon their perceptions of safety.

*It makes me feel more safer then before. (Liz)*

*Often when he was going off I'd pray silently for help. I never stop worrying but it's nice to know that help will come. (Angie)*

*[Bsafe provides a] sense of safety. Its not bullet proof. (Tara)*

*Before I had a Bsafe kit I was feeling scared that my partner will do something. But after I received the kit, it was easy to use, and I felt safe. (Esther)*

*I feel so much safer at home. (Lara)*

*Feeling safer in the house. It made [my children] feel a bit safer. (Kacey)*

Three women spoke of how Bsafe had increased their feelings of safety by feeling reassured that they were not alone and by providing them with the capability to act to ensure their own and their children's safety.

*Having the kit won't stop him when he decides to come but knowing that I'm not alone and that help is a button away is very reassuring. (Mary)*

*Felt stronger to act, to take action. Felt like 'I'm fine.' Felt stronger in myself. (Phoebe)*

*I feel safer as I carry the Bsafe mobile with me everywhere. It is comforting to know I only have to flick a switch to let people know my daughter and I are in danger. (Sally)*

A recurring theme acknowledged by six women, was how Bsafe had provided them with the safety to regain some normality in their lives. For example, women spoke of how, prior to Bsafe, the hyper-vigilance required to keep them and their children safe from their violent ex-partners, had meant that something as simple as a good night's sleep was unobtainable.

*I still fear for my safety and of my new fiancée, as I don't know when he (ex-partner) is to be released. This is an ongoing fear I face everyday. At least with the Bsafe kit I know I can get help immediately. I do sleep better at night now. (Irene)*

*I don't feel like I need to pack us all up every time I feel threatened. I can sleep at night. (Bsafe has) given me confidence... Police know the circumstances, know why and then I don't have to explain. Having to explain was initially difficult...To know that I didn't have to hide away... Significant impact on everyday tasks. Sanity. (Cassie)*

*I could go out and chop wood if needed when it was dark, I wouldn't have done that before. I could arrive home at dark and unload my children. I wouldn't have done this before. Before I got the Bsafe kit I was basically a prisoner in my home ...*

*It changed my life, we could continue as normal, which was extremely important ... for us. (Lucy)*

*I used to feel unsafe walking around town not just from my ex but I was also worried about his friends and family but I'm starting to feel a lot safer. (Grace)*

*(Prior to Bsafe) I only had my mobile and often not much credit. Slept... fully clothed. Both of us (baby) slept together because we didn't feel safe, baby feels my reaction and doesn't feel safe... (Now I'm) more confident, safer, able to get police quickly. Sleeping quite well now and not wearing my clothes. (Charlie)*

*Better sleep, less worry. [My children] - they feel safer and happier. (Kathryn)*

A further three women spoke of how the sense of increased safety that Bsafe offered had allowed them to regain some personal strength and freedom in their lives post-violence.

*As time passes you relax more though the possibility of his return is always in the back of your mind, even the kids bring it up now and again. The 'what if'. The Bsafe kit gave us back our strength and our lives. (Mary)*

*More freedom from my home. I now feel safe to walk my dog and ride my bike. I feel safer to go outside my home for work. I sleep better when it's beside my bed. (Anne)*

*I feel so much safer having Bsafe. Knowing how easy and efficient it is, having someone to contact immediately who contacts the police. This device has given me much more of a sense of freedom ... Completely life changing. (Nicola)*

For one woman who had been living with the threat of her brother's violence for most of her life, the impact of Bsafe was profound. Not only did she feel as though her experience had been legitimised, but the kit reminded her of her risk status and assisted her to achieve safety.

*It immediately raised my confidence in myself and knowing that I had support and a plan if anything went wrong. Just knowing that my circumstances are legitimised and that people care about my safety makes me have hope and feel safer. The kit reminds me about how important my safety is and prevents me falling back into bad habits that placed me in dangerous situations in the past. Being in a safe place can free up those areas of your life taken up by fear. Bsafe [has allowed] me to feel safe and free my mind of fear. To think clearly made all the difference. I can manage my panic attacks. (Millie)*

Nine women stated that while their feelings of safety had increased with Bsafe, they were still experiencing 'mixed feelings'. Many of these women had recently exited from the Bsafe project, therefore increasing their feelings of apprehension. For many women whose ex-partners' had breached the IVO, their feelings of uncertainty were a response to these men's extremely violent and unpredictable behaviour. Perpetrators' recent or imminent release from prison caused women considerable anxiety about their safety.

*[Bsafe] gives me a sense of security – an extra safety measure. I felt safer at first because I knew he was in jail. I don't feel very safe since he was released because he has breached the IVO so many times. (Kirsten)*

*I had the security to feel safer at home. Knowing the defendant is at large and not being able to reinstate the IVO worries me. (Tina)*

*I'm a bit scared about when he gets out [of jail]... He's too unpredictable, but the Bsafe alarm makes a big difference because I know at least I can get help. (Claire)*

*I feel safe right now only because he is in jail. I feel very unsafe all the time when he's not in jail. Though my children are happier, feeling safer [with Bsafe]. (Melissa)*

*I know what he is capable of and he won't stop (Sue)*

*Don't know what to think. Have a strange feeling. I feel like he's out there and one day he'll pounce or maybe not. Don't really know what to expect anymore. (Tracy)*

Of the 36 women who provided formal feedback, six women reported that Bsafe had either not increased their feelings of safety (4), or that they were 'unsure' if they felt safer with the risk management option. Of these women, only two provided further explanation as to why Bsafe hadn't enhanced their perceptions of safety. For one woman who was subjected to violence from her schizophrenic son, the police not responding after she activated her kit during an incident of crisis meant that she had 'mixed feelings' about Bsafe's capacity to secure her safety. While for another woman her apprehension was due to her geographical isolation and the fact that Bsafe 'didn't prevent breaches and the police can't be there ASAP.' She stated that Bsafe might be a more appropriate option for women living in larger towns.

Feeling safe in one's home is a basic human right that for many women and children continues to be violated by men's violence. Bsafe's ability to assist women and children to feel safe at home is a significant outcome given that most, if not all, of these women

had been living in a state of 'intimate partner terrorism'<sup>63</sup> and thus had been overwhelmed with feelings of fear and anxiety. The success of Bsafe to function as a tool to support the complex safety needs of women and children escaping violence, has been one of this project's greatest strengths.

## Bsafe as a risk management tool for children affected by violence

The impact of violence in the home on children's health and wellbeing is profound. In total, 143 children were living in houses that had a Bsafe kit. The overwhelming majority of these children had been subjected to violence and/or witnessed men perpetrating what were often severe acts of physical violence against their mothers. Through research and development, Bsafe will become a highly effective tool to support the complex and critical safety needs of children escaping family violence and sexualised assault.

Bsafe as a risk management tool for children became increasingly evident throughout the piloting of the project. The Bsafe system allows children to access a prompt police response without having to state their address or the type of emergency, as is required by the 000 call.

Through conversations the Bsafe coordinator had with women and from evaluation feedback, it was apparent that most children were aware that Bsafe was a safety mechanism. Many children were taught by their mothers how to activate Bsafe if, and when, the perpetrator posed a threat.

*My three girls are scared of their father ... [They are] too little to use it but the eldest has been informed of how to use [Bsafe]. (Sue)*

*They understand how it works and were glad we had it. (Tara)*

*They were told to press it [Bsafe] if anyone comes in the house without permission. (Pamela)*

*My 4 year old daughter is aware it's for emergencies and what to do. (Lara)*

*[My children] never asked any questions [about Bsafe] they just know it was for my protection. (Sarah)*

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<sup>63</sup> M. Johnson (1996) Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 57, (2), pp. 283-294.

*My daughters understand why we have the kit. Knowing I can push a button without speaking and the police will arrive is a relief as I don't have to alarm my daughters of exactly what is going on plus its definitely a faster response than dialing 000. (Jacky)*

*The children are aware if they push the button the police will come. (Gayle)*

*[My children] felt safe once explained and weren't tempted to push the button. When explained what it was for they slept better at night. (Lucy)*

*My son feels heaps safer with the kit knowing that(with) one push of the button we'd have the help of the police. (Lynda)*

*My daughter feels more secure and knows how to activate the Bsafe mobile, which gives her piece of mind. (Sally)*

*My kids have activated the kit on two occasions ... It was easy to explain to them how to use the kit. It made them feel safe. (Tess)*

One woman spoke of how she used Bsafe to reassure children that they were now safe in their own home, which assisted in alleviating their anxiety.

*[Bsafe] is reassuring for the kids. When we do get phone calls or he drives past, the kids turn into defensive mode I guess and I'm able to settle them by reminding them of the system. They sleep easier knowing it's there and so do I ... They have pressed the [Bsafe] button once. I'm surprised they understand it's for emergencies only. If needed I am confident they would activate it. (Angie)*

A recurring theme underlining women's responses was the helplessness many children experience in the face of men's ongoing violence. Bsafe provided children with a tool to assist them in getting help to ensure their own and their mother's safety.

*To give them the knowledge that they can get help for themselves and they don't have to be in the situation where they can be hurt or I can be hurt. [So they are] very aware, stable in themselves. They could push the button and help would come. [It's given them] confidence to leave the house. (Cassie)*

*I was surprised how quickly they adjusted to having it. They understand what it is for and how to use it. They feel safer rather than inadequate as they can help mum ... It was reassuring to them ... that if we needed help it was there. (Mary)*

Cases involving children's use of Bsafe include a seven year old boy who activated the kit by pressing the wall unit button and shouting 'get help for my mum' after he saw the

perpetrator at the front door. In another case, a woman's ex-husband had threatened to kill her and abduct their 12 year old son. In response to these threats, this child carried the mobile companion to school and at football training while his mother was safeguarded by the Bsafe pendant at home.

Most, if not all, of the children living in houses with a Bsafe kit have had their right to safety violated by men's violence. The risk of post-separation violence meant that many children continued to live in fear.

## **Bsafe and women's connection with social support networks**

Women were asked about how the perpetrator's violence had impacted upon their social support networks and whether Bsafe had assisted further connections with friends, family or their community more generally. Perpetrator violence and the systematic isolation from family and friends had a significant impact on many women and children's social support networks and connection with loved ones.

*[Perpetrator's violence] did disrupt my life extremely but I managed to remain in contact with a few family and friends, but lost others in the process. It was very difficult. (Millie)*

*Restricted to some degree to avoid contact with perpetrator, like down the street, out at night with girlfriends. (Kerry)*

*I don't have friends because he didn't allow it. My children couldn't have friends over. (Sue)*

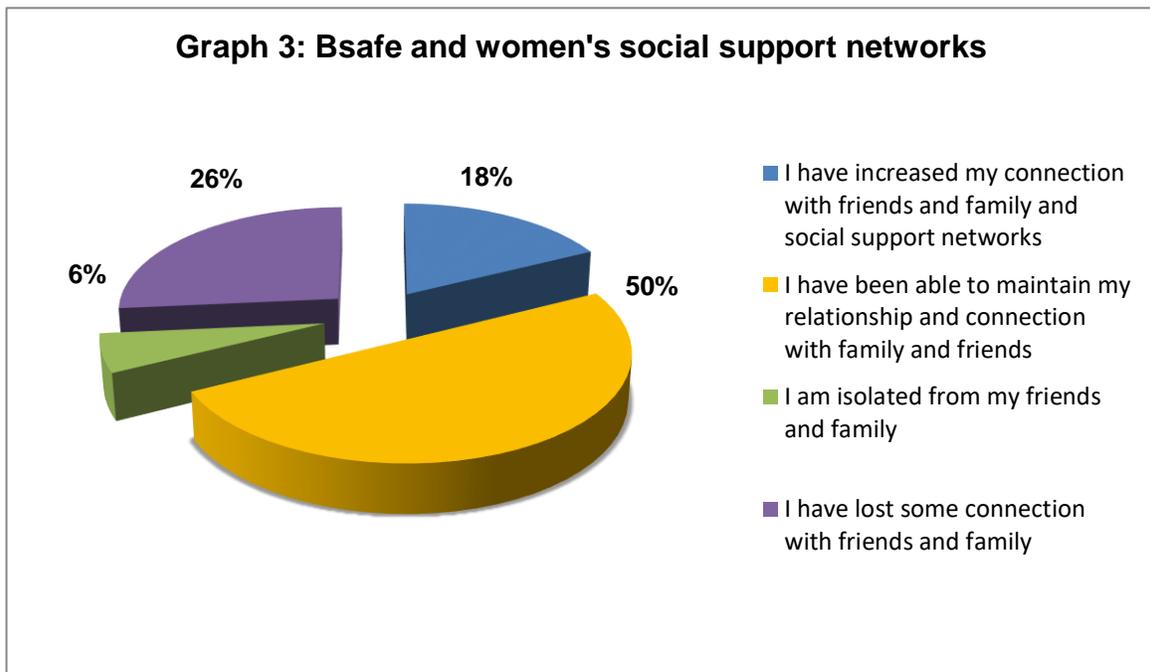
*[I still have] feelings of not burdening my friends and family. (Cassie)*

Graph 3 shows the impact of Bsafe on women's social support networks. Of the 34 participants who provided information on this subject, 50 percent (17) of women reported that Bsafe had assisted them to maintain their social support networks and connection with friends and family. For 18 percent of women the added level of security Bsafe provided had enabled them to increase their connection with friends, family and/or their community.

*I am feeling connected to my friends and family, which was never allowed before as he controlled everything I did. (Melissa)*

*I don't feel so secluded and cut off ... my daughter and I are both out more. (Sally)*

*We have a better life now. We don't live in fear, we have family, friends and are involved with sports and community. I'm feeling connected to my friends and I'm hoping to return to TAFE in 2011. Without [Bsafe] moving on would have been harder and taken longer. (Mary)*



Nine women reported that they had lost some connection with friends and family, that they had not been able to regain. Two women reported feeling isolated from family and friends, that was directly attributed to being forced to move from their homes due to the serious risk posed by the perpetrator.

*I am still feeling isolated from friends and family because of choosing not to live in the same town due to safety. It's hard to meet new people in a town I've never been to before. Socially it's a struggle when meeting people. You don't really want to say your background [fleeing domestic violence]. (Una)*

*All my friends and family live in the eastern suburbs but I feel unsafe to return. (Irene)*

Family violence undoubtedly impacts on women's ability to connect with their friends, families and communities. However, it would seem that by reducing men's violence and increasing women and children's sense of safety, Bsafe has supported many victims of violence to maintain or increase their connections with their social support networks.

### **Bsafe and women's access to relevant support services**

Through Bsafe women are provided with a risk management option that offers an additional level of service through an integrated service response. Ensuring that Bsafe clients are supported by the police as well as specialist family violence or sexual assault services who can assist with the process of ongoing risk assessment and safety planning has been central to the project's success.

Of the 36 women that participated in the formal evaluation process, 32 provided a response relating to service access and support. Twenty women reported that they were supported by family violence or sexual assault services, with three of these women stating that they were supported only 'some of the time'.

*The support we receive is wonderful. The Bsafe kit completed the picture and reminds us that we are never alone. (Mary)*

*The police and services have been exceptional in their response and attitude towards me. I have to admit that I am at times overwhelmed by the level of support I am receiving but understand it's important. (Millie)*

*Reconnecting with [domestic violence service] after a period of not accessing services. Have felt fully supported, they are fantastic. (Kerry)*

*Supported by [domestic violence service]. Been able to know about services but also feel independent. (Tracy)*

*I receive regular phone contact from my family violence worker. (Sally)*

*Not linked in with worker. Know that I can contact (worker). Only query is around court and custody [of children]. (Rose)*

*I am supported by a family violence worker if I need it. (Jacky)*

The remaining 12 women stated that they were in no way connected to a family violence, sexual assault or other support service. There was a strong correlation between the length of time women had their kits and loss of contact with specialist services, with contact often ceasing at around 3 months in keeping with the current crisis-focused system.

*I have a great worker but don't talk to her much now the immediate danger isn't there. (Claire)*

*Not linked, FamilyCare ditched me... [Though the] police are excellent, they supported current Victims of Crime claim and issues around ongoing IVO. (Tara)*

Through a routine phone call to monitor women's safety, the Bsafe coordinator established that many of Bsafe's 72 clients were not in contact with a specialist support service. It became evident through discussion that Bsafe's clients had long-term safety needs and that issues such as Family Law Court, custody of children and men's release from prison, meant that the risk posed to them and their children frequently fluctuated as they cycled in and out of crisis. Women's help seeking and risk management processes' are complex and active'<sup>64</sup>, and many needed support to make decisions with new information about risks and further discussions around housing and safety options. The gap between the capacity of services and the long-term needs of Bsafe clients will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

### **Lilly's story**

I was in what you would call a volatile relationship in so far as it was just mental abuse at first, and that was just words being said. It started to get a little bit more physical, until my (then) ex-partner returned to the house and imprisoned me and basically abused me, and also raped me. He threatened to kill me on that evening in December. A counsellor at CASA mentioned about BSafe. I actually did return home prior to Bsafe being installed.

To me, an intervention order is only really a piece of paper is how I see it, you know, to keep him away. So the fear just intensified and I wasn't sleeping. I would go through what I'd probably call an obsession in so far as making sure everything was locked, you know I'd double, triple, quadruple check that everything was locked, windows were shut. I mean I just became more of a recluse in my own home. I am a strong person and I am fearing for my life because I knew that evening he was going to kill me and I think that kind of placated it. To be afraid in your home, to be afraid and not be able to sleep, it's just an awful feeling. Fear literally takes over from you.

In terms of moving house, I decided no, because why should I? I was the innocent party here, my daughter is at kinder – she's at an age where I don't want her to start all over again with new friends. I know she's very young – she can do that – but we have a great network of friends here, a lovely support group of people.

With the Bsafe, as I say, for me it was, it became my rock. My protection zone for now, I knew it was probably not going to be something that would in the long haul, but certainly it would start to allow me to gain back control and empower myself again. But most importantly, whilst I have a safety plan and an escape plan put in place, my daughter and I, and she's now just four and a half, and this is a very easy device for her to work with. We went through and we trained her into how to do this but you know if the BSafe device wasn't there, I do worry that if something happened to me, she couldn't maybe get help because, it's just

paramount importance – not only my safety, but ultimately and most importantly is hers. I sat down with her and I explained to her that if at any time, Mummy couldn't be woken up or there was a problem with Mummy or you couldn't find Mummy for some reason or you were afraid, then basically you press the button, which is lit up. And I explained that if you press it, and there'd be a nice person at the end of the line who's there to help us.

Having Bsafe is just something that, she presses a button and every time I've made a call through VitalCall to have a test on it, they have been so remarkable, and so lovely as they answer the phone, that I always knew that if we were in a situation of danger that she would be quite happy to say 'Mummy, something's wrong with Mummy'. So yes, for me, it's an ultimate for basically retaining some sanity of not being in fear, and like I say, being in fear of your life. It's a horrible thing, it's takes over.

It's all about security, and feeling safe. Bsafe it helped me to sleep, 100 percent it did. I didn't really want anybody to know about Bsafe and for the reason that – I looked at it one way that I could make it known that I've got this which would be a deterrent - but at the same time for me it was a case that I don't want him to know that either its on my body or around me somewhere is this device that I could just press.

Last week I had a trial turning Bsafe off. I actually ended up having to go to a counsellor. I hadn't realized the true impact of the BSafe device until I actually disconnected, in so far as I just trialled moving it away. I realised that all of a sudden I felt exposed, I felt that I had no safety barrier, because the trial is coming up, I just felt very much at risk. The removal of Bsafe brings back loss of sleep and not coping very well. I started to not sleep. I'd fall asleep, and I'd literally hear everything. The wind's blowing something in the trees, and it then becomes a disruptive sleep, and then I can't get back to sleep.

I have this safety [with Bsafe]. It's just something that I can't explain. I started to actually feel safe because help was literally one button away, and I didn't have to then go through and explain who I was or where I was calling, you know, through the normal palaver. I think that's the huge difference between BSafe and just your normal telephone line with phoning 000. That's the difference between, in my opinion, saving a life or being in fear of your life.

## 6. Key project findings

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Bsafe's development and direction has been shaped by key issues and findings. Informed by action research methodology,<sup>65</sup> there were several opportunities presented for incremental evaluation. This has occurred through various mechanisms, including the Bsafe steering committee and feedback from women and key stakeholders. The issues and concerns raised in the two structured reflective workshops further supported this process.

This chapter presents some major issues that emerged throughout the piloting of Bsafe and the changes that were implemented to address these issues. While this is not an extensive list, this chapter aims to flag key issues and areas of concern that require consideration, particularly for the implementation of Bsafe in other regions. The initial three findings detailed in this chapter are carried over from the Bsafe interim evaluation report.

### Redefining Bsafe's target group and eligibility criteria

Bsafe is designed to provide an additional level of support and service to victims of family violence and sexualised assault who, where safe, appropriate and desirable, want to remain in their own homes. As a consequence of this broad definition, people experiencing family violence in a range of family and family-like relationships were eligible to access Bsafe. During the project's first year, it became evident that the parameters of the target group and eligibility criteria needed clarification.

A case in 2008 highlighted that there was confusion around the need for clients to have an Intervention Order with an exclusion clause that prohibits the perpetrator from the victim's premises. A case involving a mother who was experiencing violence perpetrated by her schizophrenic adult son brought attention to a multitude of issues. These included the complexities surrounding a parent-child relationship where violence is present, and a mother's desire to maintain a relationship with her son, despite severe and continuing violence. Her son's inability to access appropriate and ongoing support for his mental illness caused him to spiral in and out homelessness, prompting his mother to allow him to periodically live with her at home. This woman subsequently modified her Intervention Order so that her son was able to come and go from her home (eliminating the exclusion clause), which in turn made her ineligible for Bsafe. As a consequence of this case, the steering committee worked to clarify the parameters of the pilot project.

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<sup>65</sup> Action research methodology, as stated by Rory O'Brien (1998), is a process of "learning by doing" - a group of people identify a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and if not satisfied, try again.

*We really needed to clarify the importance of the IVO exclusion clause so that workers and police were aware of the scope of the project. (Bsafe coordinator)*

The steering committee agreed that Bsafe's creditability and its capability to ensure clients are prioritised by police was reliant on the project's eligibility criteria that required all women to have an Intervention Order with an exclusion clause. This meant that when women activated their kits due to a perpetrator breaching the Intervention Order the police were alerted that a crime was likely to have been committed, justifying the prioritisation of the call out.

*With a strong criterion we pick up the very serious cases. Everyone wants to know about the cases with the highest degree of risk. I know that all family violence has risk, but it gives Bsafe so much credibility to say that 'these are the cases more likely to end up as murders.' (Police officer)*

The majority of women escaping violence perpetrated by intimate partner's who access Bsafe, have shown a clear desire to emotionally, physically and often geographically disconnect from the perpetrator. The steering committee determined that Bsafe was unable to provide support for people wanting to maintain ongoing contact and a relationship with the perpetrator. Based on this rationale, the steering committee decided that people escaping intimate partner violence would be the project's target group.

While many service providers, and police in particular have argued that redefining the target group and adhering to strict eligibility criteria has been integral to Bsafe's success, concerns have been raised by service providers in the Hume region.

*An issue that serves as a major barrier is the need for an Intervention Order in place before the client can become part of the project. There are good reasons for this requirement, but at the same time it can put women in more danger trying to secure an Intervention Order against a perpetrator intent on seriously harming or killing them. (Service Manager)*

Similarly, during the 2010 Bsafe reflective workshop, some practitioners voiced concerns about the project's target group being redefined given the serious nature of violence perpetrated by one family member against another.

*I just worry about the exclusion, for instance, of mother and sons. I just think that this is such a serious form of family violence. I think it needs to be marked for more thought, more development. (Service Manager)*

While Bsafe hasn't allowed for flexibility around Intervention Orders, the inclusion of people outside the target group has occurred. For instance, following the decision to

redefine the project's target group to people escaping intimate partner violence, a woman who was subjected to violence from her brother accessed a kit. The rationale for including this woman was the severity of her brother's violence (e.g. she had been granted a life-long Intervention Order) and her understanding of the importance of adhering to the exclusion clause. The project's flexibility has been viewed as an important part of its continued development.

*We certainly acknowledge that other forms of family violence could be targeted in the future. There is still room for flexibility. If family violence services are coming across scenarios that don't fit the criteria we want to know about them so we can learn from them and keep evolving the project to meet the needs of clients. It's not static. (Bsafe coordinator)*

## The long-term needs of Bsafe clients and the introduction of Terms and Conditions

In the initial stages of the project, it was anticipated that women and children escaping violence would access Bsafe for a period of between three and six months. This estimate was informed by evidence-based research that shows that women experiencing intimate partner violence are at the highest risk of being seriously injured or murdered during the initial stages of, or immediately after, separation particularly in the first two months.<sup>66</sup>

*We did have an expectation that women would have kits for a fairly short time. We were quite surprised that women were having them for up to a year and longer and are really reluctant to hand them back due to prolonged court hearings relating to Family Law Court and criminal proceedings due to the violence. (Bsafe coordinator)*

Rarely did clients have their kits for less than six months, with most women accessing Bsafe for years. A small group of women had their kits for the entire duration of the three year pilot. The unanticipated period of kit access meant that a significant gap between the capacity of family violence services and women's support needs occurred. It became clear that while the family violence sector is primarily crisis-focused, women involved in Bsafe remained at high risk of experiencing serious, ongoing post-separation violence and therefore had long-term support needs. Specialist family violence services were referring women to the program, but they were not maintaining contact with women. This was due to resource constraints, pressures to close cases and achieve funding targets or because women were seen to be 'post-crisis' and therefore no longer requiring support.

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<sup>66</sup> Family Violence Coordination Unit, op.cit, p. 74.

In *Researching the Gaps*, Dr. Lucy Healey argues that there is a major policy and practice gap within the integrated family violence service system. Dr. Healey insists that the current system fails to recognise that some women and their children are at high risk of experiencing ongoing consequences of family violence and therefore require longer-term support, which at present is unsustainable in the current crisis-focused system.<sup>67</sup> Dr. Healey maintains that for the risks to these women and children to be properly managed, a suite of services are recommended, including the implementation of Bsafe to manage high risk clients at home.

The gap Dr. Healey identifies between the capacity of services and the long-term needs of clients was effectively managed for some time by the Bsafe coordinator, a social worker with over a decade of family violence expertise. She maintained ongoing contact with women via routine phone calls to monitor the women's safety and whether Bsafe was working effectively to meet their needs. However, as the project grew, this became unsustainable.

*One of the biggest issues that was particularly highlighted during the caretaker position<sup>68</sup> has been the lack of follow-up by family violence services with Bsafe clients. What we found was that women had changed addresses, their circumstances had changed, or their Intervention Order had lapsed. Often we couldn't track women so a number of kits have had to be written off. There was a complete lack of follow up by services to the point where we had to contact the police to do welfare checks to see if women were safe and if the kit was still required. (Bsafe coordinator)*

In response to this, the Bsafe Steering committee introduced a 'Terms and Conditions' document which specifies that agencies are required to maintain contact with women for the duration of their involvement with the project. The minimum requirement is a monthly telephone call. Women are required to agree to have contact with their referral agency and notify them of any changes to their circumstances.

The introduction of the 'Terms and Conditions' enhanced communication and allowed another avenue for women to provide feedback about their experiences with Bsafe. The regular contact provided workers with an opportunity to conduct ongoing risk assessments and talk to women about their safety needs, including when they felt able to exit the project. The 2008 reflective workshop identified the need to develop an exit strategy for women no longer requiring the kits. The cost of monitoring kits could be reduced and kit recovery streamlined. Access to a practitioner who can support them in

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<sup>67</sup> L. Healey (2009) *Researching the Gaps: The needs of women who have experienced long-term domestic violence*, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services: Melbourne, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> The project had a caretaker worker while the Bsafe coordinator was on maternity leave.

identifying when their sense of safety had reached the point where they can return their kit assists women with a sense of closure. Negotiating this is a complex process, particularly given that the risk of violence recidivism is not static and changes over time.<sup>69</sup>

*The Bsafe kits provide women with safety and they are often reluctant to give up the kits even when there have been no breaches for some time. It is difficult to gauge the line between asking for the kit back and respecting women's own sense of safety. (Service provider)*

## The importance of the Bsafe coordinator role

A key learning that arose through the piloting of Bsafe was the need for the project to have a coordinator working at least three days a week. Mid-project the Bsafe Coordinator was absent on maternity leave. During this six month period, a one day a week caretaker role was trialled.

*Operating on one day a week didn't allow for time to facilitate service system dialogue around how we manage women's risk in the long-term and there was also no space for reflection and evaluation. (Bsafe caretaker worker)*

As the project progressed and became more complex it became clear how pivotal the role of the coordinator was to the success of the project. This was emphasised during the 2010 reflective workshop.

*We need a regional coordinator for the project to be a success. There needs to be a continuation of the steering committee. The worker needs to be full time. (Family Violence Outreach worker)*

The need for the coordinator to have time to oversee the referral process, ensure timely kit installation, monitor activations and police response was acknowledged as a key element of the project. This role is also essential in providing ongoing communication to relevant key stakeholders about changes to process and practice and educating new workers and police about Bsafe. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation is pivotal to the role of the Bsafe coordinator to monitor the newly emerging evidence base.

*A major strength has been [Bsafe coordinator's] determination and great work to progress the project. That might not be seen by so many people outside the steering committee, but it has been the key ingredient required for the project. (Police officer one)*

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<sup>69</sup> L. McFerran (2007) 'Taking back the castle: How Australia is making the home safer for women and children,' *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse*, Issues paper 14, p. 19.

## Training workers in the use of Bsafe

Training police, family violence and sexual assault workers in the use of Bsafe was delivered by the Bsafe coordinator. Training covered the eligibility criteria, the referral process and the installation of Bsafe.

*A critical component is the implementation of training for police family violence liaison officers, specialist family violence and Centre Against Sexual Assault workers. Training includes the eligibility criteria and the referral procedure as well as the installation process. The training involves how the system works with VitalCall and police response, as well as how to monitor clients' need and usage and ensuring the process for returning the units is explained to women at the referral point. This can so easily be incorporated into CRAF training. (Bsafe coordinator)*

The Interim Report showed that training for workers needed to include information about the effective use of Bsafe. The Interim Report found that women who activated their kits when IVO breaches occurred were more likely to see a decrease in the severity and frequency of perpetrator violence. Activating the units ensured the system operated as a deterrent, as well as increased the likelihood that perpetrators, who continued to breach the IVO, would be apprehended and prosecuted. This crucial information needed to be communicated to women in order to improve safety outcomes for them and their children.

It became apparent that training for workers had to be more comprehensive. Workers needed to ensure that their clients accessing Bsafe were aware of their rights and responsibilities including the need to notify the Bsafe coordinator of any changes in their status (e.g. expired IVO, change of address), technical difficulties or kit malfunctions or an inadequate police response, to ensure that such matters could be dealt with promptly. Workers also needed to maintain contact with clients longer-term and support women through the process of identifying when they were safe enough to return their kits and exit the project.

## 7. Police and service providers' perceptions of Bsafe

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The Bsafe project's second objective is to provide an integrated approach to family violence by strengthening the relationship between the police, family violence, sexual assault, health and community services and victims of violence. Ensuring that agencies within the integrated family violence service system work together at a local level and prioritise the rights, needs and safety of women and children has been a driving factor in the success of this project.

In early 2011, managers, family violence workers and Victoria Police officers were asked to complete questionnaires reflecting on their experiences with Bsafe during the three year pilot. This chapter also includes qualitative data gathered during two reflective workshops with Bsafe's key stakeholders.

### Police and service provider's perceptions of Bsafe's key strengths

Police and service providers spoke of a range of strengths associated with the Bsafe project, many of which mirrored those put forward by women. Bsafe's ability to provide victims of violence with a sense of safety while assisting them to manage the fear and anxiety associated with men's ongoing and chronic violence was identified as a key success of the project. Service providers insisted that Bsafe had increased women's personal power and autonomy as it enabled them to regain some control in their lives.

*I think Bsafe is an essential tool to assist women and children to feel empowered in the face of violence. A great strength is that it increases confidence and reduces fear. (Family violence worker)*

*The strengths of the project are that it is something effective that FV workers can offer clients at risk. It is easy to use - the mobile is small and can be hidden. Not only does it provide a physical way of protecting clients it provides psychological security to women and children who have not been feeling safe. (Family violence worker)*

*Ability to seek immediate help without the perpetrators knowledge [and it's an] ... effective tool that makes women feel safer immediately. (Family violence worker)*

*The greatest benefit to the worker is another tool we have in our tool kit for safety of women. For the woman it is about 'peace of mind' and autonomy in her movement and her ability to live her life with some sense of further security. (Family violence worker)*

*It helps women manage their anxiety and fear, for some women they feel that the perpetrator could turn up at any moment and kill them. In one case it has meant the difference between life and death because the police were able to respond immediately. (Family violence worker)*

*By far the most effective tool for family violence clients ever. It not only gave the women the power to stay safe, it also made my job easier as they were not so hyper-vigilant, were able to come to appointments and the fear response lessened. It acted as a safety net and reduced anxiety which meant that I could work on the effects the violence had on them. (Family violence worker)*

Bsafe's capacity to support women and children to remain in their homes, stay connected to their social networks and reintegrate into their community was an important outcome of the project. Practitioners and police also commented on how Bsafe's portability as integral in facilitating women's ability to go about their day-to-day lives with a greater sense of safety.

*My client appreciated having Bsafe to enhance her sense of confidence both inside and outside of the home. It allowed her to reengage in community activities. (Family violence worker)*

*[Bsafe gives] clients the freedom to leave their home or feel protected whilst in their home. (Police officer)*

*I worked ... with family violence clients and have found the benefits of Bsafe to be the most helpful interventions to my clients. It gave them and their children a sense of security, it assisted in women feeling supported enough to take out IVOs against perpetrators, and emotionally had a far greater impact of creating a survivor from a victim. It gave women the power to remain in their homes without hiding, and the most beneficial of it was the lanyard that could be taken remotely, meaning women and children were not isolated to the house to remain safe. (Family violence worker)*

*It helps women to feel safe wherever they are, to regain some sense of normality by being able to connect in the community and not have to hide away. (Family violence worker two)*

*Every person I have referred to Bsafe has nothing but praise for the service. All commented on how ... they could stay in their own homes, in their own communities and feel safe. They did not have to take kids out of school and find a whole new network of support and friends. There are some clients who before Bsafe would never leave their homes from fear. Now with the portable Bsafe device they can go anywhere ... I know of one client who commented that*

*something as simple as this phone installation could have such a dramatic change on her life. (Police officer)*

Increasing accountability through ensuring that there were consequences for men's use of violence against women and children, was identified as a further strength of the Bsafe project. As too was Bsafe's role providing women and children with a prompt police response therefore functioning as a tool to support the complex and highly important safety needs of women and children at high risk of further violence.

*The Bsafe project shows abused women that they have been believed and ... gives abused women added strength, as the abuser is not only dealing with her, whom he has often been able to overcome and push around, he is dealing with the strength of the police and through them the law. (Service Manager)*

*A number of Bsafe kits were introduced in Wodonga. One in particular resulted in the prompt arrest, which also resulted in further arrest as he kept offending and is now in custody .... [Bsafe provides] reassurance that the perpetrator, will be caught and dealt with ... [It also] puts, perpetrator on notice, once it is revealed that this strategy is available to police and women involved ... [It allows a] quicker response to an incident by police ... It's an excellent working tool for police to deal with persistent and potentially dangerous offenders. (Police officer)*

*The program has proven to be a very effective tool in providing an enhanced security to victims of family violence. It also has proven to be a vital link between the persons involved and the attending police as it allows the police response to be swifter and more targeted due to the recorded details of all persons involved giving the responding police the ability to have known details before attending which results in a better arrest rate of offenders. (Police officer)*

*Bsafe is the key to providing women and children with a sense of safety that they've not had since the onset of perpetration of family violence. For women who have voiced this concern 'An IVO is just a piece of paper, no one believes me' or 'I've reported it to the Police but it is hard because he is never there when they get there and in the end they think it is me' the Bsafe is the difference as it enables a prompt response that the perpetrator cannot monitor or interfere with and therefore improves safety. (Service Manager)*

One of the key principles of practice associated with the new approach to family violence in Victoria is a move towards an integrated service system that ensures victims of violence are not required to continue to repeat their 'story' in order to receive an

adequate service response from support agencies and the police.<sup>70</sup> One manager reported that Bsafe had worked to support this aim as the project's referral protocols required police to be aware of women's experiences of violence and the risk posed by the perpetrator.

*I had one client on the Bsafe program. Both her and her teenage daughter appeared to benefit greatly from the program. The client was being harassed daily at her workplace by her abuser and stalked at home. Both said that they felt more confident about getting appropriate help from the police because they did not have to tell their story over and over to gain the assistance they needed. (Service Manager)*

Sleep deprivation and reliving traumatic events through nightmares and flashbacks is a common response among women and children who have been subjected to violence.<sup>71</sup> Two service providers reported that the added level of security provided by Bsafe had allowed women and children to relax enough to sleep with reduced anxiety.

*Most women comment that with Bsafe both themselves and the children are able to sleep for the first time in a long time. (Family violence worker)*

*I have had clients say that they are able to relax a little as they know help is available at the push of a button. One client told me that she was able to sleep knowing the Bsafe mobile was under her pillow. (Family violence worker)*

## Key challenges

Despite winning a National Award, proving its cost effectiveness and receiving positive testimonials from women, police and workers, the future of Bsafe remains uncertain. While the project concluded at the beginning of 2011, further funding was sourced through the Integrated Family Violence Managers' Alliance (Hume Region) to continue to fund Bsafe for women involved in the project. These women perceived their risk to be too great to return their kits. The lack of certainty around Bsafe's future was a key concern for women and those working within the family violence sector, particularly given that Bsafe demonstrated a capacity to reduce perpetrator violence, assist women and children at high risk to remain in their homes and communities and significantly increasing feelings of safety.

*It's like real estate – location, location..... Ours is funding, funding, funding. This is followed by support for taking the project to a state level. (Police Officer)*

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<sup>70</sup> Office of Women's Policy (2005) *Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria: Report of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence*, Department for Victorian Communities, Melbourne.

<sup>71</sup> L. Healey, op.cit, p. 36

*Showing the benefits of the system to the persons responsible for the funding so that the project may continue. (Police officer)*

*The other issue is the lack of ongoing funding, which creates uncertainty [for victims of violence]. (Service provider)*

*Funding to be able to offer it to all women who feel in need. (Service provider)*

*They are constant worries about sustainability. Otherwise the project could only improve. (Service Manager)*

If 'Safe at Home' models are to become a legitimate option for women, particularly those at high risk of further violence, the introduction of risk management options such as Bsafe are vital.

Rural settings can play a strong role in the safety of women and their children. In this case the portable mobile companion only works in areas where there is Telstra mobile reception. Some women living in remote areas including farming properties, had difficulties accessing this service. This remains an issue with Telstra's infrastructure and is currently beyond the scope of the project.

*Mobile reception for clients in remote areas. (Family violence worker)*

*Geographic problems in the past when women had to go out of the region e.g. family law in Melbourne. (Family violence worker)*

## **Bsafe stakeholders and the integrated family violence service system**

Throughout the Bsafe project ongoing consideration from police and service providers went into assessing the strengths and limitations associated with:

- The effectiveness of Bsafe's referral process
- The police response, and
- The extent to which Bsafe facilitates integration between key stakeholders.

These issues will be considered in this part of the chapter briefly and are discussed in more detail within the Interim Report.

### **Effectiveness of the referral process**

One of the ways Bsafe has strengthened an integrated approach to family violence is through its procedures and protocols around the referral process. Once eligibility is

determined, the family violence or sexual assault service faxes through the Comprehensive Risk Assessment and the IVO to the Victoria Police's Family Violence Liaison Officer (FVLO) and the Bsafe coordinator. The FVLO then completes a VitalCall referral form which is then faxed to VitalCall and the Bsafe coordinator, who collates all necessary documentation. If a local FVLO is on leave, workers are required to contact the Victoria Police's Family Violence Advisor who will process the referral. VitalCall then contacts the woman to arrange installation. This process became more streamlined throughout the project. However, maintaining consistency with appropriately skilled workers within the sector has at times led to delays.

*The staff who handle the referrals may be on leave, such as the police, which can lead to delays. (Service Manager)*

*From my position the challenge was that if I received an application to approve a Bsafe kit and was out of the office it sometimes sat there until I returned to the office. (Police officer two)*

*I think its working well. It's just that time factor we worry about if there is a delay. (VitalCall installer)*

*Improvements to continuity, reducing delays from Police and VitalCall is important. (Service Manager)*

This process could be simplified by allowing workers to fax referrals directly to VitalCall. However, the current practice ensures that police are aware of Bsafe clients in their local division and the high risk nature of their circumstances.

*It is important that the police are actively involved in the referral process. They're a crucial part of the integrated system and need to be alert to not only Bsafe clients but also offenders in their local area. (Bsafe coordinator)*

Bsafe is not designed to operate as a crisis response based on two key rationales. Firstly, clients must have an IVO in place. Safety planning and other security measures are essential and it is crucial that women are provided with the time needed to make an informed decision about whether staying in the home is a safe and desirable option. Secondly, installation is not immediate as kits must be specifically programmed for individual clients<sup>72</sup> and VitalCall installers are contracted which can also lead to time delays. The immediate risk posed by some perpetrators, particularly following child

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<sup>72</sup> Kits are specifically programmed for individual clients which means that when a kit is activated a client's individual details such as address, the specifics of the IVO and how many children reside at the property come up immediately on the VitalCall system.

custody court hearings or release from prison, is so serious that crisis accommodation, refuge support or temporarily staying with friends or family is necessary.

*Bsafe should be seen as one of a range of tools that can be drawn on. Because of the timeframe between assessment, referral and installation it can't be seen as a crisis option... it's complimentary to a number of other interventions, it's not the only intervention. (Bsafe Coordinator)*

While Bsafe is not a crisis response, all key stakeholders acknowledge the importance of kits being installed in a timely manner. As one manager put it:

*While we know Bsafe's not a crisis tool, once women know they want a kit, we know that the wait can be difficult. (Service Manager)*

*The referral process is very effective though there have been calls for the referral process to be hastened if possible from the date of referral to the placement of Bsafe. It is understandable that when women are eligible for this service urgency accompanies this referral. (Service Manager)*

## Effectiveness of the police response

The dynamic partnership between Women's Health Goulburn North East and the Victoria Police accounts for the success of this project. As a result, Victoria Police officers have played a pivotal role in the development of Bsafe and are key drivers in its success. A Police Family Violence Advisor, a Sergeant and a Senior Constable from the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Unit were members of the Bsafe steering committee, while numerous other police members have been involved on a day to day basis. Police input into the direction of the project has facilitated ongoing communication to strengthen the police response to family violence.

Clear eligibility protocols have been paramount to effective police response. Bsafe clients had to have an IVO, which meant that when perpetrators breached the IVO and were arrested, they could be immediately charged with a criminal offence. For the police these strict protocols contributed to the legitimacy of the project.

*We have worked very closely with the police and one thing they said was that they needed some clout, so that the women that are on the kits have to have an Intervention Order where it excludes the perpetrator from the home. (Bsafe Coordinator)*

*I am really strong about it sticking to the strong criteria, to the protocols. I think that it's going to be part of Bsafe's success. (Family Violence Advisor)*

Bsafe is increasingly identified as a valuable tool that assists the police in supporting victims of violence and ensuring offenders are held accountable for their criminal behaviour.

*In terms of our ability to catch offenders it's fantastic. We had a situation... where a man was breaching an Intervention Order.... doing things such as lighting fires... but he was always gone when the police attended. We gave the victim a Bsafe kit and she used it. The police attended and we were able to catch the offender there at the property. As a result that offender was remanded and I understand that he was given a sentence. (Family Violence Advisor)*

*It gives the police that little added advantage in gaining evidence to take that person before the court. (Family Violence Liaison Officer)*

As the women's narratives testify, the overwhelming majority of Bsafe clients have reported an appropriate and timely police response.

*Overall the police response to women has been really good given the complexities of a project such as this one. (Bsafe coordinator)*

*The police response in the Hume region has been excellent. (Service Manager)*

## The effectiveness of integration between key stakeholders

During the reflective workshop held in March 2010 and as part of the questionnaire, service providers and police were asked to consider the impact Bsafe had on the effectiveness of integrated and multi-agency approaches to family violence. Of those that provided a response, all reported that the project had contributed to strengthening the network between key stakeholders such as the police, the family violence and sexual assault services, VitalCall and the women involved in the project.

*[Bsafe is] about ensuring that women have a journey of safety... It's about working together, so that each service understands what is required to offer her that next level of safety. (Outreach worker)*

*As well as being of huge economic benefit to the community, Bsafe is a great example of integration at work. From the time a woman requests a kit, the streamlined process involves the woman, the police, the Bsafe Coordinator, the family violence worker and the security agency. This process leads to greater safety for women and their children to assist them to live free from fear. (Regional Integration Coordinator)*

*It increases the links between women/children and police which are the most important links to be legitimised. When police believe and respond promptly they uphold the law and legitimacy; all other aspects of the system fall into place behind that fundamental first call response. Research has shown that specialist services such as family violence and sexual assault services tend to 'get it right' so knowing that police also are getting it right through tools/supports such as Bsafe is strengthening integration ... in the Hume region. (Service Manager)*

*It provided also a very unique way of conversing and interacting with police and in a sense created a strength and a conversation that was not present previously. (Family violence worker)*

*As a counsellor it was great to be able to offer her a practical tool. Liaising with police and other family violence services enabled me to broaden [clients] networks of support. (Family violence worker)*

*I think one of the most important aspects of the Bsafe project is the partnership approach it provides between Victoria Police, the community welfare sector, organisations like Women's Health, Department of Human Services and family violence services. We are all working together to keep women and children safe. (Bsafe coordinator)*

For Bsafe to operate effectively, sector services have had to be integrated and work collaboratively at a local level to ensure that the safety needs of women and children are being met and upheld. A project such as this cannot operate outside an integrated approach to family violence.

## Directions for the future of Bsafe

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As highlighted throughout this report, the Bsafe project has successfully provided a risk management option for high risk women and their children escaping family violence and sexualised assault. This project has achieved considerable success, evident in part by winning an Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Award for Excellence. This concluding chapter presents some issues for further consideration and development.

### Incorporating Bsafe into safety audits

The findings from this pilot and other 'Safe at Home' models indicate the need for Bsafe to be seen in the context of a 'safety audit' of the home. For example, the Staying Home Leaving Violence program in Eastern Sydney carries out a detailed risk assessment with clients including questions that specifically relate to women who are staying in their home after leaving a violent partner. Women are asked about the perpetrator's attitudes to the home and their likely reaction to being excluded.<sup>73</sup> For women who left their abusive partners some time ago, but continue to experience post-separation violence, questions include: 'whether the abuser has ever lived in her home and therefore whether he has a sense of 'ownership' or know its security weak points, and whether he has tried to gain access to her home in the past.'<sup>74</sup>

Incorporating these questions as part of Bsafe's risk assessment informs safety planning with women and is essential given the high numbers of women that chose to remain in their homes.

*By including Bsafe as part of a woman's safety audit we are better able to assess risk and her individual circumstances. For example a tree from her property may need to be cut down so that she has a view of the street from the safety of her home ... By installing Bsafe as part of this audit it becomes one of a raft of tools that works to support high risk clients at home. (Bsafe coordinator)*

Tailoring risk assessments for Bsafe clients, particularly women remaining in their homes, is important in ascertaining the degree and imminence of risk, as well as identifying other needs including further security upgrades such as an inexpensive lock change. Incorporating Bsafe into a safety audit of the home that informs the development of safety plans with women and their children is essential for Bsafe clients who are at high risk of life threatening abuse. One practitioner stated that Bsafe is already being utilised in the context of safety audit and planning.

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<sup>73</sup> C. Thompson, op.cit.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

*During my work when there was the availability of the Bsafe kit I found the extra peace of mind with offering a Bsafe to clients at high risk a very beneficial way of engaging with women. It provided a 'gap area' when planning around safety. (Family violence worker)*

By formalising the process by which Bsafe is included in women's safety audit it works to ensure that clients are better informed about the potential for recidivism and the risks they face, which assists them in making informed decisions about housing and safety options, including Bsafe.

### **Bsafe: A risk management option for rural women**

Women in regional and rural communities face particular challenges in relation to men's violence in the home and in securing pathways to safety. Limited emergency accommodation and access to specialist support and housing, lengthy police response times and increased perpetrators' access to firearms are but a few of the added complexities for women and escaping violence in rural and remote areas.<sup>75</sup> With fewer specialist family violence and sexual assault services in rural and remote areas of Victoria, practical difficulties of distance and transport mean that for many women outside the regional centres opportunities to access services or a plan out of violence become more precarious.<sup>76</sup> For women and children living on farms and remote properties an immediate police response is unachievable due to geographical isolation. Bsafe's ability to provide support to women through VitalCall until police arrive has significantly increased these women and children's feelings of safety in time of crisis.

*In my 13 years of working within the homelessness/family violence sector, Bsafe is the most practical, effective and useful tool that I have come across for women escaping family violence ... Many of our women would have opted to enter refuge or move away from their communities and supports without the aid of a Bsafe kit ... It is especially useful for women in rural and remote areas who are at a heightened risk due to their geographical isolation from breaches of the IVO and ongoing intimidation and fear. The fact that they can use their Bsafe kit to get in contact with someone on the end of the phone who will continue to stay with them, after calling the police is very reassuring for these women. (Service Manager)*

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children maintains that different responses are needed in rural and remote areas and that response need to be tailored to meet the varied and specific circumstances of women and their children living in rural and remote communities. Bsafe is one such option that has been successful

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<sup>75</sup> A. Alexander, op.cit.

<sup>76</sup> D. Parkinson

piloted in rural and remote Victoria with high risk women and children; a diverse client group whose needs for the most part have previously been unmet.

## Research and rigorous evaluation

This report draws attention to the complexities of evaluation. There remains a need for rigorous and innovative methods of evaluation to continue to capture the complex ways that Bsafe has impacted on women and children's journey to a life of freedom from violence. Funds need to be directed to building capacity towards longitudinal evaluation. The impact of Bsafe on a diverse client base, including Indigenous women, women with a disability and culturally and linguistically women, also requires ongoing analysis. As Ludo McFerran maintains:

*Evaluation is a process that should be budgeted into all new and continuing models, both within individual services and systems. The process should be ongoing so that it informs and improves practice. The process ... should be independent and employ both quantitative and qualitative data ... But the final test must be the assessment of women and children themselves.<sup>77</sup>*

## Conclusion

*Bsafe has given a new freedom, a liberation. (Service Manager)*

*I think it is a wonderful initiative that contributed to saving my life and I highly recommend it being rolled out for all women in high risk categories. (Millie)*

*Bsafe is allowing women to stay in their homes, stay in their communities, they aren't being blamed. It's putting the onus of responsibility back on to perpetrators. (Service Manager)*

Bsafe as an innovative risk management option for women and children at high risk of further violence has been highly successful in meeting its objectives. Not only does Bsafe operate as an effective deterrent for extremely violent men, the prompt police response increases the likelihood that offenders who continue to breach Intervention Orders will be apprehended, charged and prosecuted.

The impact Bsafe had on women and children's feelings of safety was profound. For women who had been previously been living in a state of 'intimate partner terrorism'<sup>78</sup>, Bsafe was reported to have enabled them to feel 'safe' or 'very safe' in their homes and

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<sup>77</sup> L. McFerran, op.cit, p. 21.

<sup>78</sup> M. Johnson (1996) Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 57, (2), pp. 283-294.

communities. The ability to sleep, regain some normality and a sense of personal strength and freedom were identified as important outcomes for women who participated in the project. Children's understanding of Bsafe and how to activate the unit in times of crisis, further identify Bsafe as a highly effective tool to support the needs of children escaping family violence and sexualised assault.

Perhaps one of Bsafe greatest successes has been its potential to reduce the high rates of women and children experiencing homelessness as a consequence of fleeing family violence and sexualised assault. Sixty-eight percent of women reported that the added level of security provided by Bsafe had allowed them and their children to remain in their own home and community. Bsafe safeguards the autonomy and social support networks of victims, reduces the financial, social and health impacts, and holds perpetrators to account by ensuring that they experience consequences for their violent and criminal behaviour.<sup>79</sup> This project has also advanced an integrated approach to family violence, whereby specialist family violence and sexual assault services, women's health services and the Victoria police work in unison in their effort to support women and children's endeavours to live a life free from violence.

Indeed, if 'Safe at Home' models are to become a viable option for women and children who are at high risk of severe and ongoing violence, services such as Bsafe must be made widely available. Violence against women and children is a social justice issue, just as safety in one's home is a basic human right that must be protected and upheld for all women and their children.

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<sup>79</sup> L. McFerran, *op.cit*, p. 21.

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Appendix one

<b>B-Safe Process</b>								Total Cost per case
1								
<b>Crisis Accommodation</b>	Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$	Return to Family Home	Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$	\$\$
3 nights Accommodation	3	105.00	315.00	Transport	1	75.00	75.00	
Transport	1	75.00	75.00	Support Worker Time / Hrs	52	35.00	1,820.00	
Food & Essentials	3	57.00	171.00					
Support Worker Time / Hrs	14	35.00	490.00	<b>B Safe Program</b>				
				SL1 Pendant - Installation	1	130.00	130.00	
				Monitoring Cost per Quarter	2	88.30	176.60	
				Mobile SmartlinQ - Installation	1	200.00	200.00	
				Monitoring Cost per Quarter	2	151.26	302.52	
<b>TOTALS</b>			1,051.00	<b>TOTALS</b>			2,704.12	3,755.12

## Appendix two

Established Process			Assuming 6 weeks Assume 1 Adult & 2 Children				
1			2				
Crisis Accommodation			"Refuge" Accommodation by RHNL				
3							
Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$	Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$		
3 nights Accommodation	3	105.00	315.00	THM Rent Foregone Accommodation	6	105.00	630.00
Transport	1	75.00	75.00	Transport	3	50.00	150.00
Food & Essentials	3	57.00	171.00	Set Up Food & Essentials	6	27.00	162.00
Support Worker Time / Hrs	14	35.00	490.00	Replacement Clothing	3	100.00	300.00
				Children School Re-location Costs	1	1,200.00	1,200.00
				Support Worker Time / Hrs	30	35.00	1,050.00
				TAW Support Time & Admin Time		35.00	0.00
				Power & Gas Checks - COMAC	1	80.00	80.00
				Laundry	1	70.00	70.00
				Cleaning	1	150.00	150.00
				Maintenance/Furniture	0.058	6,000.00	346.15
				Refuge Rent Recovery	6	-40.00	-240.00
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>1,051.00</b>				<b>3,898.15</b>

Appendix two continued

3			4				Total Cost	
Transitional Housing			Long Term Housing (Private Rental)				per case	
	Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$		Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$	\$\$
Accommodation - 20 weeks	20		0.00	Tenancy Admin - Sign Up	2	36.00	72.00	
Pre Tenancy Cleaning	1	300.00	300.00	Removal Costs	1	900.00	900.00	
Household Set Up Costs	1	250.00	250.00	Bond Loan	4	180.00	720.00	
Bedding & Linen	1	480.00	480.00	Rent in Advance	4	180.00	720.00	
	2400	40%	480.00	Re-connect Utilities	1	75.00	75.00	
Support Worker Time / Hrs	52	35.00	1,820.00	Household Set Up Post Tenancy			3000.00	
IAP Worker Time / Hrs	8.75	37.00	323.75	Property Mgr Time / Hrs	3	36.00	108.00	
TAW Worker Time / Hrs	18	36.00	648.00					
Connect / Disconnect of Utilities	2	75.00	150.00					
Post Tenancy Cleaning	1	300.00	300.00					
			0.00					
THM Rent Recovery	20	-105.00	2,100.00					
			2,651.75				5,595.00	13,195.90

