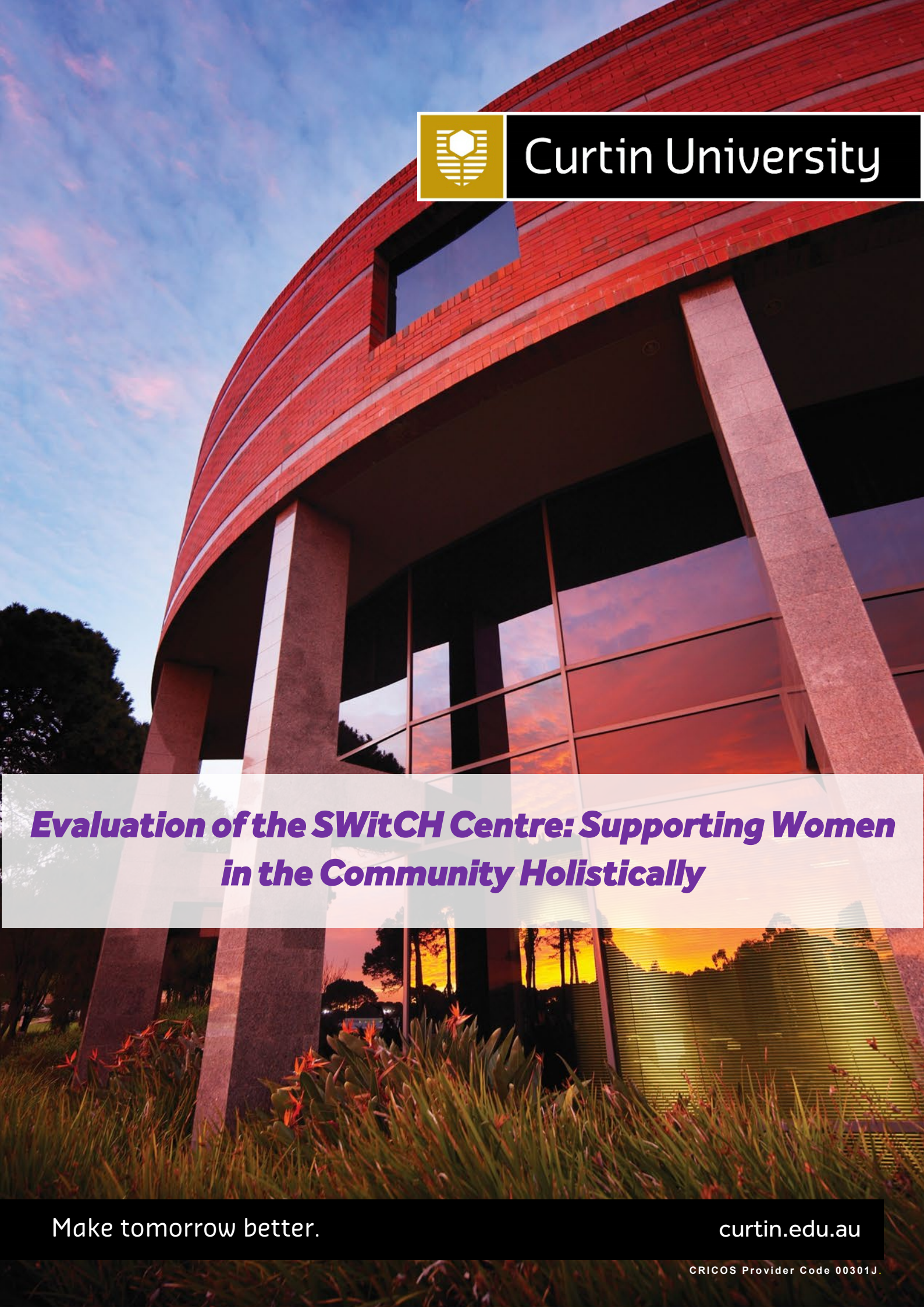

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Evaluation of the SWitCH Centre: Supporting Women in the Community Holistically

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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

The research team and Curtin University acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we live and work, the Wadjuk people of the Nyungar Nation. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Nations and Traditional Owners of Country and respect their connection to the land, sea and community.

We pay respects to Elders past, present, and emerging and recognise their strength, resilience and capacity, and we acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

We also acknowledge the profound impact that domestic and family violence has on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Acknowledgment of Victim-Survivors

The research team acknowledges the long shadow cast over women, children and young people who experience family violence and recognises the essential need for support that endures beyond the crisis point. We respect the strength and knowledge of victim-survivors to direct their healing journeys and understand the importance of responses that are informed by victim-survivor's experiences and advocacy. We pay our deepest respects to those who have been tragically taken by family violence and acknowledge their families, friends and communities who must endure the immeasurable grief of the loss of their loved one to an issue that is widespread and preventable. The research team is committed to conducting research that is informed by the voices of women and children with lived experience.

We believe you.

Report prepared by Ms Bec Taylor, Ms Darcee Schulze and Professor Donna Chung.

Curtin University 2025

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Executive Summary

The SWitCH Centre – "Supporting Women in the Community Holistically"

Domestic and family violence (DFV) post-crisis services in Australia are overburdened with inadequate funding streams and the current housing crisis. With demand relentlessly outstripping the availability of services, the capacity of agencies to deliver support that is responsive to women's and children's individual experiences of DFV may become compromised (Sullivan et al., 2023). As a result of the continuing scarcity, DFV services implement standard practice models that are provider-led and time-limited and do not provide long-term, flexible support for victim-survivors healing and recovery.

DFV impacts can be lifelong for women and children, occurring across multiple life domains, including housing, employment, financial insecurity, ongoing post-separation violence and abuse, poorer physical and mental health and disability from violence (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, 2025; Franzway et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2022). Children and young people can have poorer educational experiences impacting later life, social isolation and severed friendships due to escaping violence, and the bond with their mother can be undermined as part of the abuse (Campo, 2015; Lloyd, 2018; Safe and Equal n.d.). Therefore, it is essential that DFV programs integrate healing and recovery into practice models. Furthermore, DFV programs are most effective when victim-survivors receive a holistic response, committed service and advocacy without prejudice or judgment (Ponic et al., 2023).

Whilst Orana House operates within this environment of high demand and scarcity like most DFV services, they are committed to improving long-term outcomes for victim-survivors by taking a survivor-led approach to implementing victim-survivor safety, recovery and healing. Survivor-led (also referred to as survivor-centred) practice in the DFV sector prioritises the autonomy, choices, and unique experiences of survivors. It emphasises a collaborative partnership between service providers and victim-survivors, ensuring that support is tailored to individual needs, circumstances, and coping strategies (Cattaneo et al., 2021). The approach is underpinned by the belief that empowering victim-survivors through respect, sensitivity, and personalised support leads to better outcomes, such as increased safety, well-being, and self-sufficiency. By focusing on survivor-defined goals and preferences, this practice provides victim-survivors with a sense of control and agency, essential to the healing and recovery process (Goodman et al., 2016).

Recognising the lasting impact of DFV, Orana House leadership identified a critical gap in the support options available in the Eastern Corridor and the Perth metro area, more broadly, for women and

children to navigate the challenges of rebuilding their lives post-separation. Orana House understood that the complex personal and material effects of DFV often persist well beyond the immediate crisis, creating barriers to long-term stability. To address this, Orana House prioritised extended support, advocacy, and connections to diverse services, ensuring that victim-survivors have access to the resources needed for sustained recovery, healing, and re-establishment. It was through this development of Orana House that the SWitCH Centre evolved. Orana Houses' provision of outreach and aftercare support commenced in 2017 before securing a tenancy with the City of Bayswater in 2020 which is the SWitCH Centre's current location. During this time the service has evolved and taken shape based on women's needs and preferences. The impact of the SWitCH Centre has been strengthened by their close collaboration with the Orana House refuge and the parallel program, Housing Families, also developed and operated by Orana House. Housing Families is being evaluated alongside the SWitCH Centre. Housing Families works closely with several property managers from real estate companies to acquire housing for women and their children after separation from an abusive partner. This report presents the findings of the SWitCH Centre whilst recognising how it works together with the Housing Families program.

In considering the evaluation findings, the in-depth data from women who received support from the SWitCH Centre is compelling. The findings from this data demonstrate the enduring impact of DFV on the lives of women and children and highlights their diverse support needs throughout all stages of their healing and recovery journey. The women's experiences confirm the importance of medium to long-term DFV models as women's needs change and evolve depending on their own circumstances. Medium to long-term aspects which women described included the well-being and needs of their children, the level and types of informal support women may have, and the types and extent of post-separation violence and abuse that they are being subjected to such as financial abuse, systems abuse through prolonged court processes and ongoing stalking and surveillance.

The in-depth data from Orana House key staff who are involved with the SWitCH Centre demonstrates Orana House's commitment to improving long-term outcomes for victim-survivors by addressing the current gap in DFV services. An open-door, survivor-led approach provides wrap-around, holistic and long-term support in collaboration with Orana's Refuge and Housing Families program. The SWitCH Centres' approach to the provision of DFV outreach and aftercare support aligns closely with the One Stop Hub model (Hub), which brings together DFV services in a single location alongside other community resources, making it easier for victim-survivors to access the support they need. Hubs provide an integrated service delivery model that facilitates collaboration between agencies to provide streamlined and accessible pathways to assistance (Hodgson, et al., 2022). However, Orana House goes beyond this model by offering a continuum of support that is not

restricted by time limits. Through the SWitCH Centre, Orana's open-door, survivor-led approach ensures that victim-survivors receive holistic, wrap-around support for as long as needed. This commitment to long-term engagement—combined with the integration of Orana's Refuge and Housing Families program—ensures that women and children have ongoing access to advocacy, resources, and stability, bridging the gaps often left by traditional service models. Importantly, the service delivery is underpinned by a solid organisational culture that is strongly supported from the top down to deliver a unique service that has been received with the highest praise from the women and children who engage with the SWitCH Centre.

The model of practice developed by Orana House has potential for scaling up. However, in considering the expansion of this medium to longer-term response, to maintain the integrity of the model and for the optimal impact, it should be located within specialised DFV organisations so there is enough highly experienced staff with the capacity to implement survivor-centred practices. As this evaluation shows, women's needs and challenges change over the path to recovery and re-establishment and are highly diverse, which an organisation must be able to accommodate. Additionally, the growth of an organisation requires the capacity to obtain ongoing and reliable funding to sustain future growth. Despite the considerable value to victims/survivors of the SWitCH Centre's current service delivery, without secure adequate funding, this model might be unsustainable into the future.

About this evaluation

In February 2024, Orana House approached Curtin University to conduct an independent evaluation of its SWitCH Centre and Housing Families program. This report presents the evaluation results of the SWitCH Centre. Data collection concluded in October 2024 and involved semi-structured interviews with Orana House key staff members involved with the SWitCH Centre, semi-structured interviews or focus groups with key stakeholders and semi-structured interviews with women who had received outreach support from the SWitCH Centre. Eight staff members participated along with 20 women and 19 key stakeholders representing Orana House's management committee, referring agencies, and volunteers and supporters of Orana House and the SWitCH Centre. Administrative data was also analysed to document the range of programs and number of women and children participating.

Key Findings

- Service delivery is strengthened by respectful and in-touch leadership that supports internal growth and leadership opportunities for staff.
- Flexible, no time limit, non-judgemental support positively influences women's safety, well-being and future outcomes.
- The SWitCH Centre is highly accessible as there are no strict eligibility criteria or financial barriers to access; for women post-separation, this cannot be underestimated or taken for granted.
- The value of groups and workshops in facilitating social connections that validate women's and children's experiences, empower personal growth and support healing, recovery and re-establishment are fundamental to why the SWitCH Centre can be effective in supporting women's outcomes for housing and future financial security.
- Court support and advocacy is a significant need which can require lengthy involvement for workers.
- Support provided to children acknowledges children as victim-survivors and seeks to enhance mother/child relationships that can be fractured by the experience of DFV while resulting in positive outcomes for the child/young person.
- All programs/services within Orana House collaborate with the shared purpose of maximising the safety and well-being of women and children, providing a space of trust and safety.
- Funding insecurity impacts service delivery impacting on women's and children's outcomes

Conclusion

The SWitCH Centre addresses the common criticism levelled at DFV policy and service systems that they offer very little to women and their children post-crisis. Whilst DFV casts a long shadow the service system does not follow in support. The SWitCH Centre is an exception with a longer-term survivor-led response, which takes account of women's and children's changing needs when they are working to re-establish their lives free of violence and recover from the effects. The work of the SWitCH Centre confirms that women's needs vary from everyday connection with others through to practical aspects and training and development. It is the dual aspects of Orana Houses' commitment to ensuring women's recovery and reestablishment and the staff implementing survivor-led practice that ensures women, and their children can engage with varied and flexible types of support depending on their needs and preferences.

Like the 'hub' style of DFV support that has recently been developed in the Perth metro and some regional areas of Western Australia, Orana House is unique in its provision of this coordinated and integrated response to DFV. Their uniqueness and a key reason the SWitCH model is effective is that it is embedded within a continuum of specialist women's DFV services, from refuge to longer-term support where women engage with Orana House when needed. Whilst the SWitCH Centre is open to all women in the area, those who have used Orana's refuge services have developed trust with the service as a safe space and feel confident to continue engaging. In relation to surviving DFV, this trust in a service is essential because evidence continues to show victim-survivors commonly report fearing judgement, not being believed and/or feeling shamed, which are founded on their past experiences of responses from services or the community. Women are then often reluctant to seek support as needed when their safety is at risk, so Orana Houses' approach to working with women, where they promote dignity and establish trust, underpins the effectiveness of the SWitCH Centre.

Orana House staff working at the SWitCH Centre have typically worked at the refuge previously. With organisational and client familiarity the SWitCH Centre staff bring valuable experience in supporting women to move forward. They recognise the specific concerns that women may have about their safety and confidence after being subjected to coercive control. Additionally, women also worry about money, housing, and their children's needs, and the staff are well-equipped to provide support in these areas.

Research evidence consistently shows that social isolation is both a tactic of users of DFV and an ongoing issue for women in the post-separation period. Combined with loss of confidence, and fear of judgment, social isolation continues and impacts women's mental wellbeing. There has, however, been far less focus on how women develop social connectedness following DFV and its socially isolating impacts. The data from the evaluation describes how SWitCH has been empowering for women, and they have developed social connectedness through involvement in the SWitCH Centre. Of note was the frequent mention by the women of the Warrior Women Social Group. Women referred to this as "the social group". A weekly social group run at the SWitCH Centre and led by the women attending. The provision of a supportive environment where women could rebuild their confidence and share their experiences without judgment was deeply valued by the many women who attended. This is an important finding of SWitCH's impact on a range of women, including women who migrated to Australia for their marriage and had no social or other networks of their own. The Centre's practice approach enabled such inclusion. The findings reveal that once women felt supported at the Centre, they would go on to develop other key aspects of recovery and re-establishment which could include study, job preparation and search or aspects related to their children. It is doubtful that women's paths to recovery and re-establishment would have been as

successful if they had had to navigate multiple systems that are largely not DFV-informed or culturally responsive. The practice approach also recognised women will come and go in their engagement and were welcoming of this which recognised that needs and circumstances change.

The evaluation demonstrates women's appreciation of the SWitCH Centre and the value it has had on their lives. The extension of a program that offers a continuity of support to the changing needs and challenges that victim-survivors confront is highly valuable and can both prevent women and children from being subjected to further post-separation violence and abuse and make a difference to their recovery and re-establishment of their lives free from violence. The SWitCH Centre offers a financially efficient model of medium to long-term support, which should receive ongoing funding given its outcomes and be scaled up into other locations within specialist DFV services for women and their children.

Recommendations

Future development of the SWitCH model

It is recommended that:

1. Secure ongoing funding is provided to operate the SWitCH Centre to a higher level of capacity so that the full-time equivalent staffing is more closely aligned to the demand for the services and there is capacity for the needed extension.
2. The future planning for the SWitCH centre to further consolidate partnerships with other services to enable a wide range of recovery and reestablishment responses for women and children's diverse and changing needs continue to be pursued subject to available funding.
3. Orana leadership explore options for developing and implementing training that supports the DFV workforce development in survivor-led longer-term practice as it is one of the first organisations to undertake these programs
4. Orana Leadership consider the potential for the SWitCH model and practice framework to be scaled up in the future in ways that maintain the integrity of the model and its longer-term focus on survivor recovery and re-establishment.
5. Prior to any scaling up of the SWitCH model into other locations it requires consistent and reliable funding to consolidate its exemplary and innovative practices.

6. To further demonstrate the extent of the SWitCH Centre's economic and social benefits that a Social Return on Investment is conducted to demonstrate the individual, social and economic benefits which builds on the evidence developed from this evaluation.

Organisational Aspects

The following recommendations are based on the condition that there are the necessary financial and other resources available for implementation.

It is recommended that:

7. The continuum of responses offered with SWitCH are continued as they are responding to a wide and changing range of needs for women and their children, subject to the resources available

8. The staffing of SWitCH with DFV specialist workers using survivor centred practice is continued as the evaluation findings indicate this is critical to ongoing engagement and reducing women's social isolation and increasing their sense of connection which promotes their recovery and reestablishment

9. Staffing of the SWitCH Centre is increased to algin more closely with demand given the growth and interest in involvement. This is particularly important because the workload is considerable for current staff who are highly committed to their work

10. To support the growth of the SWitCH Centre, external supervision for staff is available to develop this specific model of practice and emerging specialist area of DFV practice.

11. With any expansion of the SWitCH Centre, it should include resourcing for administrative tasks associated with managing and reviewing the Centre activities.

Background

The SWitCH Centre was established by Orana House to address a significant gap in the provision of outreach support to women and children experiencing DFV. With an extensive history dating back to 1978, Orana House has undergone significant changes to its business structure and leadership becoming an incorporated organisation with its own constitution and management committee in 1989. Orana House Inc. was established in March 1990 to provide refuge accommodation to women and children fleeing domestic and family violence (DFV).

In 2017, with fresh leadership, Orana House expanded its scope of services to include an outreach program to address the long-term needs of women and children affected by DFV. With increasing numbers of referrals to the service from Orana House Refuge and external agencies, and with growing safety and privacy concerns for the provision of outreach support in the community, there was an urgent need to deliver outreach support from a secure premise. In response, as part of its three-year strategic plan (2020-2023), Orana House prioritised setting up a separate location for the outreach team. In 2020 Orana House were successful in securing a tenancy in the City of Bayswater. The SWitCH Centre officially opened at the start of 2021 as a safe space where women could access outreach and aftercare services. Providing integrated wraparound services for women and children experiencing DFV, the SWitCH Centre recognises that for many women, support is needed for many months and even years after the crisis is over. Additionally, recovery and healing from DFV is not a "one model fits all", and it will look different for every woman. The SWitCH Centre provides flexible support in a safe, welcoming place for women and their children to access at any point in their journey.

The SWitCH Centre operates within Orana's vision of creating a community free from DFV with a mission to support women and children to be safe from such violence. Upholding values of safety by prioritising non-violent principles and ensuring environments where clients and staff are protected from harm, the SWitCH Centre emphasises respect through mutual understanding, recognising the dignity and worth of every person and supporting diversity in all its forms. Women and children are empowered to have a voice and gain control over their lives and environments.

"The SWitCH centre is a unique service in both premise and in practice, filling a much-needed gap in the community".[1] The Centre offers a space where women and their children can access a range of services, including education and group programs, individual case management, housing options, legal support, advocacy, and counselling services. The impact of the SWitCH Centre has been further strengthened by its close collaboration with Orana House refuge and the Housing Families program,

also developed and operated by Orana House. Collaboration with other services, community groups, businesses, governments, and not-for-profit organisations is fundamental to the SWitCH centre's operations to achieve effective support, services, and community outcomes. The SWitCH Centre prioritises collaborations with organisations and services with aligning values and interest in client outcomes, seeking to streamline service delivery rather than duplicating supports.

The SWitCH Centre identified that its highly regarded range of group programs was encountering funding and staffing challenges impacting the consistency of their delivery and the opportunity to expand the program delivery. In June 2024, with a plan to increase the type and frequency of the free services and programs offered by the SWitCH Centre, Orana House applied for and was successful in being chosen to receive a $100 000 Impact100 grant. The grant will provide funding for two years that will enable the SWitCH Centre to hire a Program Coordinator to develop and deliver high-quality group programs as well as co-designing, co-presenting and providing referrals to other related services. This will include specialist counselling, legal clinics, culturally responsive groups and workshops for friends/family of those experiencing DFV. It is anticipated that this will translate to immediate and direct benefits for more than 100 families.

In November 2024, the SWitCH Centre welcomed its first dedicated Government funding allocation. As part of the State Government's 16 Days in WA campaign; the Cook Government announced $250,000 in grant funding to contribute to the SWitCH Centre’s ongoing operations. While the funding from the State Government is welcomed and provides temporary relief from the time and labour-intensive task of locating and completing funding tenders, financial modelling has identified that operating the SWitCH Centre to meet increasing demand requires $600,000 per annum. The expansion of the SWitCH Centre’s current service delivery is evidenced by the significant increase in referrals that continue to be received by the SWitCH centre through word of mouth and reputation, despite a purposeful lack of promotion of their services.

The SWitCH Centre has provided services to 269 women and children since its commencement. Given the demand for this unique program, there are times when all referrals cannot result in services being offered given the staffing complement. However, significant work is still conducted to attend to the referral promptly and to understand the needs of the woman being referred. This needs assessment frequently involves over-the-phone or in-person meetings with the woman, and/or the referrer and subsequent information gathering to determine the most appropriate intervention. Over a three-year period (2021 to 2024), just over 90 referrals received were not able to be supported by the SWitCH Centre. Many were referred to more appropriate services or provided with information. Currently, the small staffing complement (2.2 FTE inclusive of child

advocates) is all part-time due to funding constraints; based on the available data, their roles could easily incorporate full-time hours. During the evaluation, we observed the staff working intensively with limited resources, a sign of their dedication, however, also an indication of under-resourcing for such an initiative.

The SWitCH Centre aims to provide a comprehensive women's centre that consolidates all essential domestic and family violence (DFV) and related services in one location. The SWitCH Centre seeks to create a supportive, holistic environment that addresses the diverse needs of women and children experiencing DFV.

Currently, the Centre offers a range services according to the women's and children's diverse and unique needs through direct service provision or via external partnerships that support women and their children at all stages of their journey. These include group programs and creche facilities, a range of counselling options, housing support, advocacy and material relief. (Refer to Appendix A for a complete list of the current services and support offered by the SWitCH Centre),

To further enhance its impact, the SWitCH Centre envisions expanding its range of current support services and partnerships. For example, the SWitCH Centre hopes to facilitate a greater range of targeted mental health support, such as alcohol and other drug (AOD) counselling, and to co-locate with professionals such as a Child Health Nurse and trauma informed General Practitioners. Additionally strategic partnerships would include organisations providing specialised support for youth, women and children living with disability, and First Nations and CALD women. These services could either have a regular time at the SWitCH Centre or strong memorandums of understanding (MOU) to ensure the facilitation of referrals for SWitCH service users. To effectively support women and children, the envisioned staff complement at the SWitCH Centre would include a broader range of staff, specialised professionals and volunteers.

As the SWitCH Centre expands, careful consideration must be given to balancing its growth with key operational factors. These include ensuring the safety and accessibility of the location for both clients and staff, maintaining strong relationships with existing funders, and securing sustainable funding for long-term operations. A challenge at the current site has been the limited space, which restricts the ability to co-locate other essential professionals to support women and children. This challenge was the motivation for the relocation of the Housing Families Program (HFP) away from the SWitCH Centre. Without appropriate space the environment became too noisy, distracting, and lacked privacy for sensitive meetings.

Co-locating the SWitCH Centre and HFP would streamline communication between the staff, allow for easier referrals to SWitCH programs, reduce travel for clients accessing both services and enhance safety due to a higher number of staff present on-site. Providing dedicated spaces for external service providers within the SWitCH Centre would further benefit women by ensuring all essential services are accessible in one location. This integrated model would reduce the barriers women face when seeking multiple forms of support, enhance collaboration between professionals, and create a seamless service experience that prioritises safety, privacy, and efficiency. Orana House is considering how the existing space could be increased to address future growth and optimise service delivery to support women and children accessing the SWitCH Centre.

Overview of the Evaluation

In February 2024 Orana House approached Curtin University to conduct an independent evaluation of its SWitCH Centre and Housing Families Program. Orana House hoped to demonstrate the need for dedicated and sustainable funding by highlighting how each service complements each other and enables Orana to demonstrate their provision of a holistic model that addresses the four domains outlined in the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 – 2032:

1) Prevention
2) Early Intervention
3) Response
4) Recovery and Healing

Evaluation Aim and Objectives

The aim of the research was to evaluate the SWitCH Centre and the Housing Families program.

The evaluation commenced in April 2024, and the following objectives were developed in collaboration with Orana House: [1]

- Review the range of activities involved with the Housing Families Program and provided at the SWitCH Centre.
- Examine the impact of the SWitCH Centre and Housing Families Program on the safety and longer-term well-being of women and their children accessing Orana House.

[1] This report addresses the aims and objectives relevant to the SWitCH Centre

- Identify how the Housing Families Program and SWitCH Centre contribute to other local family and domestic violence services and to the overall purpose and objectives of Orana House.
- Provide recommendations about how to sustain and improve the Housing Families Program and SWitCH Centre.

Research Design

This evaluation utilised a mixed methods approach to gather quantitative and qualitative data across three participant groups:

1. **Orana House key staff members** who are involved with the SWitCH Centre. Key staff members included Management, External Communications and SWitCH Centre case managers.
2. **Key Stakeholders** in the eastern metropolitan corridor who are involved in the SWitCH Centre. Key stakeholders represented Orana House's management committee, referral agencies, and volunteers and supporters of Orana House and the SWitCH centre.
3. **Women** who have received outreach support from the SWitCH Centre.

Key Stakeholders were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews or focus groups and Orana House key staff members and women who received support from the SWitCH Centre were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Interviews and focus groups were conducted over the phone or online using Microsoft Teams. Additionally, Orana House provided administrative statistical data to assist researchers in the data analysis process. Deidentified demographic and service delivery data from SHIP: Specialist Homelessness Information Platform was also provided for the women who had received outreach support from 2018 to 2024.

Participants

Nineteen key stakeholders representing the Orana House management committee (n=5), referral agencies (n=6) and Orana House and SWitCH volunteers and supporters (n=8) participated in a semi-structured interview (individual or group) between July and October 2024. Most interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams or over the phone. However, some participants were able to meet in person (n=2), and others provided written responses to the interview questions (n=2).

Eight Orana House key staff members participated in semi-structured interviews between June and August 2024. The interviews were conducted in person (n=7) and online using Microsoft Teams (n=1). One staff member also provided a written response in addition to their in-person interview due to time limitations on the day of their scheduled interview. Three key staff members were employed in Orana House management roles, one staff member was involved with marketing and communications and four were workers at the SWitCH Centre.

Twenty women who were receiving support from the SWitCH Centre participated in semi-structured interviews between June and October 2024. The interviews were conducted in person (n=13), over the phone (n=4) or online using Microsoft Teams (n=3). Demographic data was not collected from the women who were interviewed; therefore, they are not able to be linked to the SHIP data.

Almost all participants were residents of Western Australia. However, one woman who received outreach support from the SWitCH Centre was a resident of the United Kingdom.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from Curtin University's Human Research Ethics Committee on 23 May 2024 (Approval Number HRE2024-0252) prior to collecting data. The research team conducted the research in accordance with the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were generated from administrative program data. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and focus groups were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Researchers utilised NVivo software to collate, organise and analyse transcriptions through a process of coding, theme development and refinement. Codes were categorised according to participant groups and subcategorised to capture participant responses to the interview questions. For example, "safety" and "long-term outcomes" were codes used to analyse the impact of the SWitCH Centre on women's and children's well-being across the women, Orana House key staff and stakeholder narratives. The codes were then compared and collated under each theme, with quotations extracted to support themes. All participants were deidentified to ensure anonymity.

Findings

Demographic and Service Delivery Overview of the SWitCH Centre

From 2021 to 2024, the SWitCH Centre has provided outreach support to 269 women and children. [2] This figure includes 91 women. Seventy-four of these women had children who were also supported as clients in their own rights. Figure 1 below presents the percentage of women with children who were supported by the SWitCH Centre in comparison to women without children. The women who were mothers had between 1 and 5 children with most women having one child. Two and three children were equally as common (see Figure 2). The women's children were born between the years 2000 and 2024.

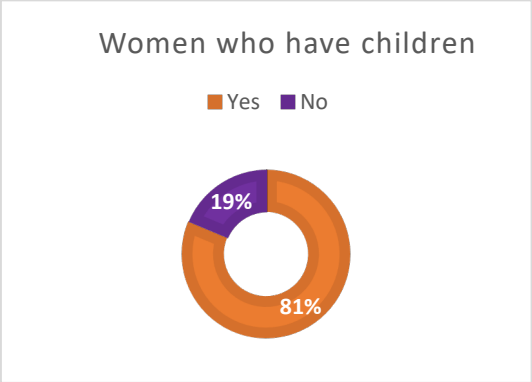
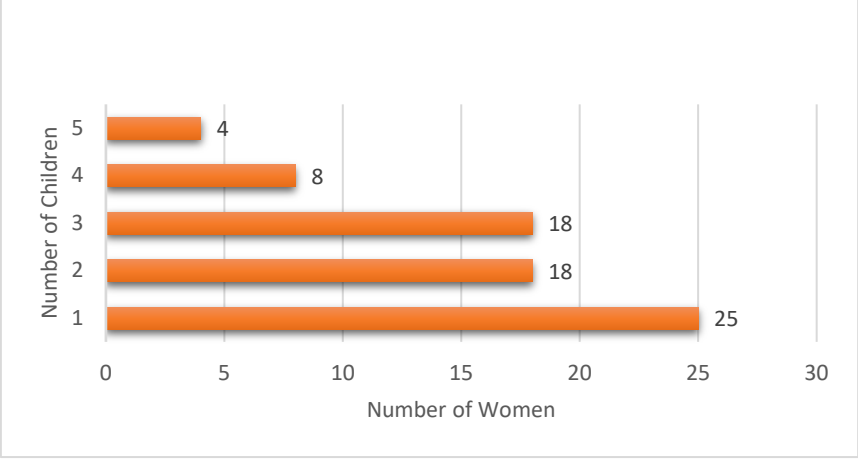


Figure 1: Percentage of women receiving support who have children



[2] Figures current from October 2024

Figure 2: Number of children per woman

Twenty-two women were recorded as receiving outreach support prior to the SWitCH Centre's commencement of operations from their current location. Twenty-three women had engaged in multiple periods of support, which included 16 of the women who received outreach support prior to the opening of the SWitCH Centre. Fourteen women had reengaged with the SWitCH Centre twice, seven women had reengaged three times and two women had reengaged four times. Table one below details the total months of support received by the women and identifies the number of support periods that resulted in each total.[3] The duration of support received by the women ranged from one month to 61 months (5 years and one month).

TOTAL MONTHS OF OUTREACH SUPPORT RECEIVED BY THE WOMEN (INCLUDES PRE-SWITCH CENTRE)

	Number of Support Periods (SP)			
MONTHS	**SP1**	**SP2**	**SP3**	**SP4**
1-5	35	2		
6-10	16	1		
11-15	7	3	2	
16-20	7	1	3	
21-25		3		
26-30		1		
31-35	1		1	
36-40	1	2		
40+	1	1	1	1
60+				1

Table 1: SWitCH Total Individual Support Duration (months) for Women 2021-2024[4]

Between 2021 and 2024, there were 6692.16 hours of individual support provided to women using the SWitCH Centre (See Figure 3); it is important to note that most people only had one support period and that it tapers off significantly in hours and duration as support periods increase. This indicates that whilst women are comfortable to return to SWitCH for future needs these are not overly time consuming in terms of hours. Therefore, the option to return to SWitCH as needed does not lead to

[3] A **support period** is the duration of time, beginning from the first provision of support to the conclusion of assistance

[4] Includes duration of outreach support provided to the women prior to the opening of the SWitCH Centre

large numbers of repeat clients for long support periods. The total individual support hours pertaining to children was 6775 hours, which is unsurprising given most women have at least one child and the high level of direct support for children and young people (not only with their mothers). These findings show the considerable number of service hours for the relatively small number of staff employed with SWitCH.

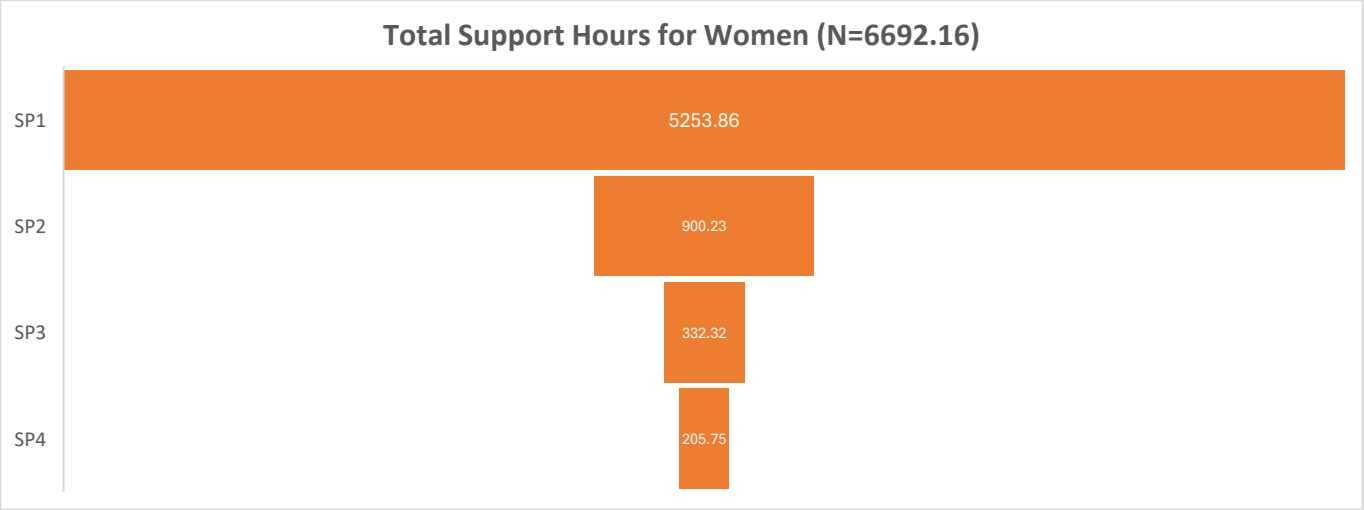


Figure 3: SWitCH Total Individual Support Hours for Women 2021-2024

Seventeen women were reported to be receiving ongoing support at the time of the evaluation. Thirteen of these women were engaging in their first period of support, two were engaging in their second support period and two were in their third support period. Three of the women who were supported between 2021 and 2024 were experiencing elder abuse perpetrated against them by their adult children, and another woman was experiencing abuse from her adult daughter's abusive partner. The women who received support were between 23 and 80 years of age. The largest age group was women aged between 35 and 44 years representing 45%, followed by 25-34 years and 45-54 years each at 21% (see Figure 4).

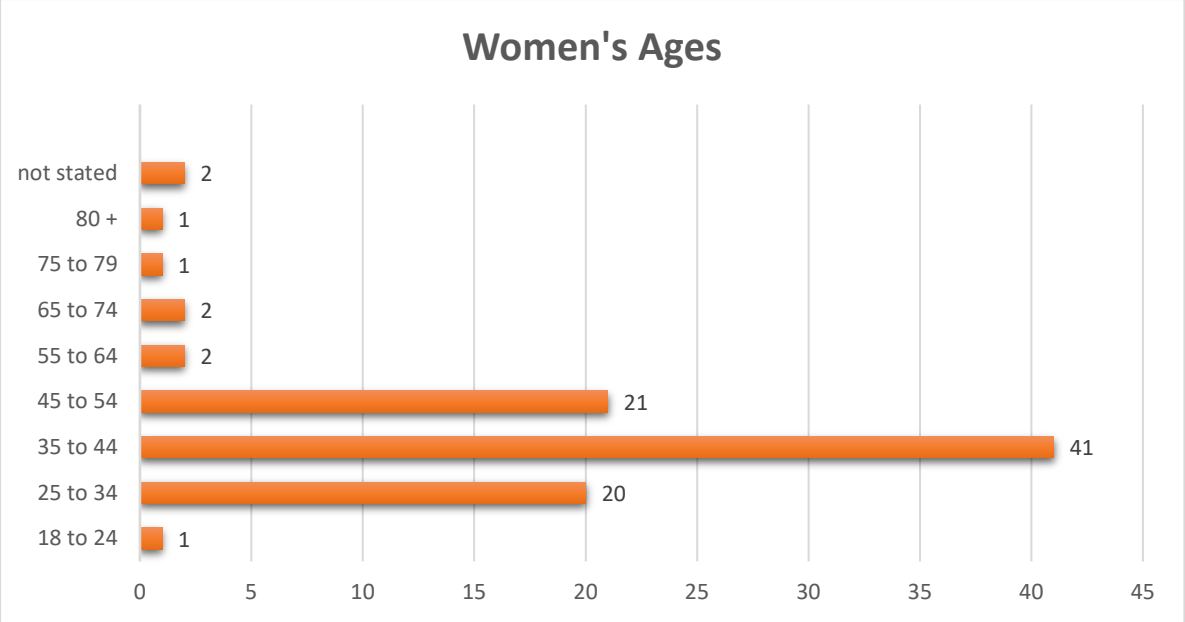


Figure 4: Age groups of women receiving support from the SWitCH Centre

Figures 5 and 6 below show that of the women supported in the 2021 to 2024 period, 13% identified as First Nations women and 31% from a CALD background. One-third of women were recorded as having a first language other than English (See Figure 7). Australia was not the country of birth for 41 women who were supported by the SWitCH Centre (See Figure 8). The women who were not born in Australia had resided in Australia between 2 and 59 years, with the largest group being residents for 10-19 years.

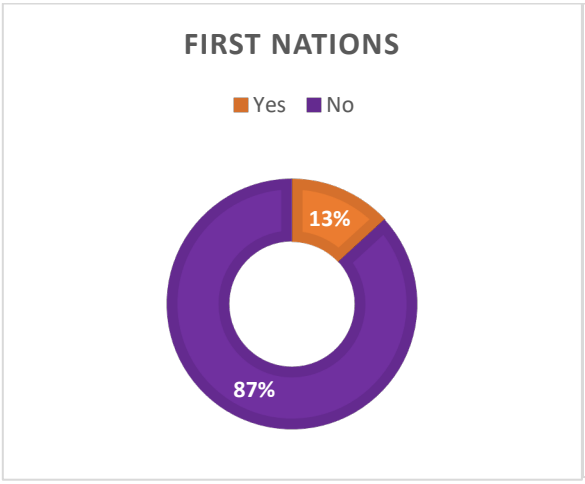


Figure 5: Percentage of First Nation women supported

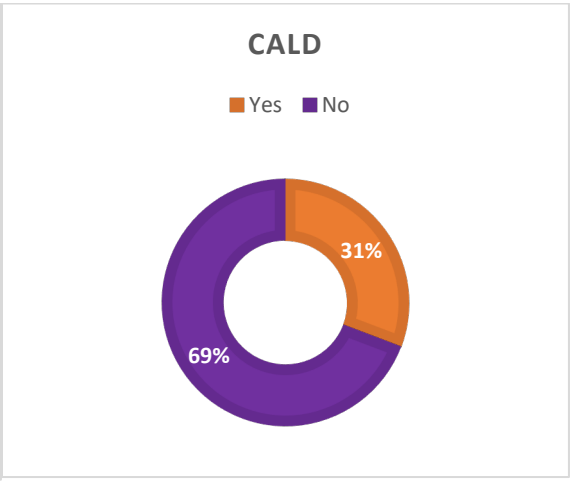


Figure 6: Percentage of CALD women supported

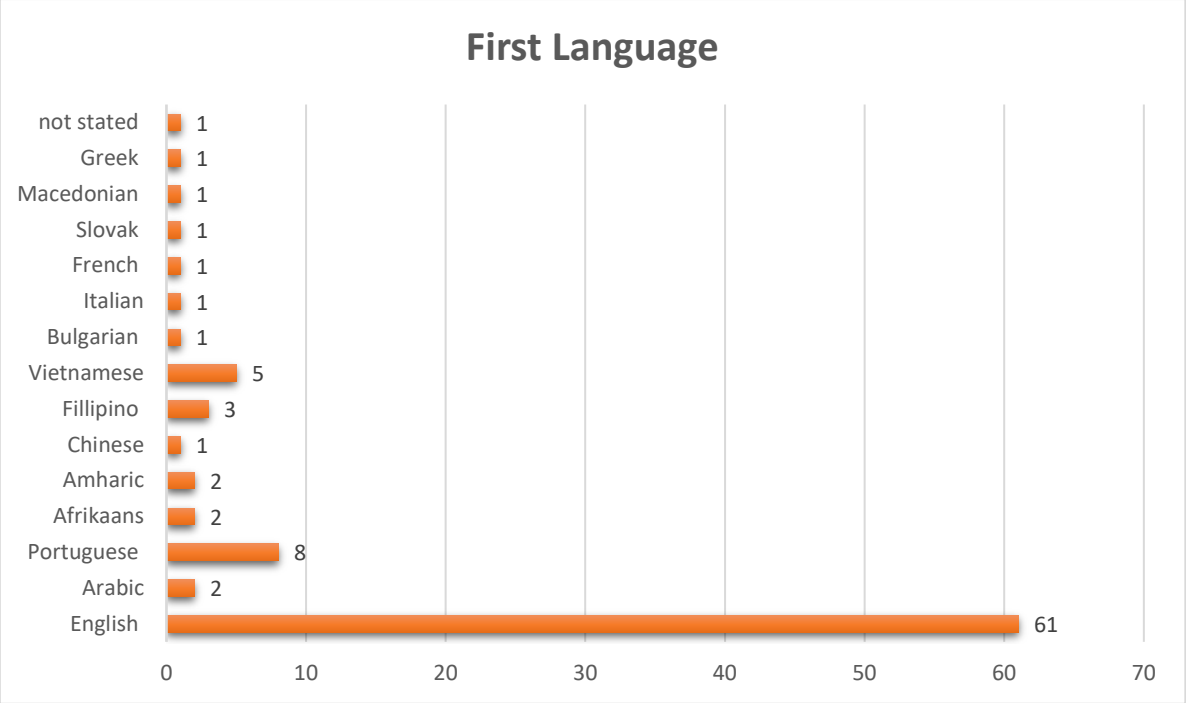


Figure 7: First Language spoken

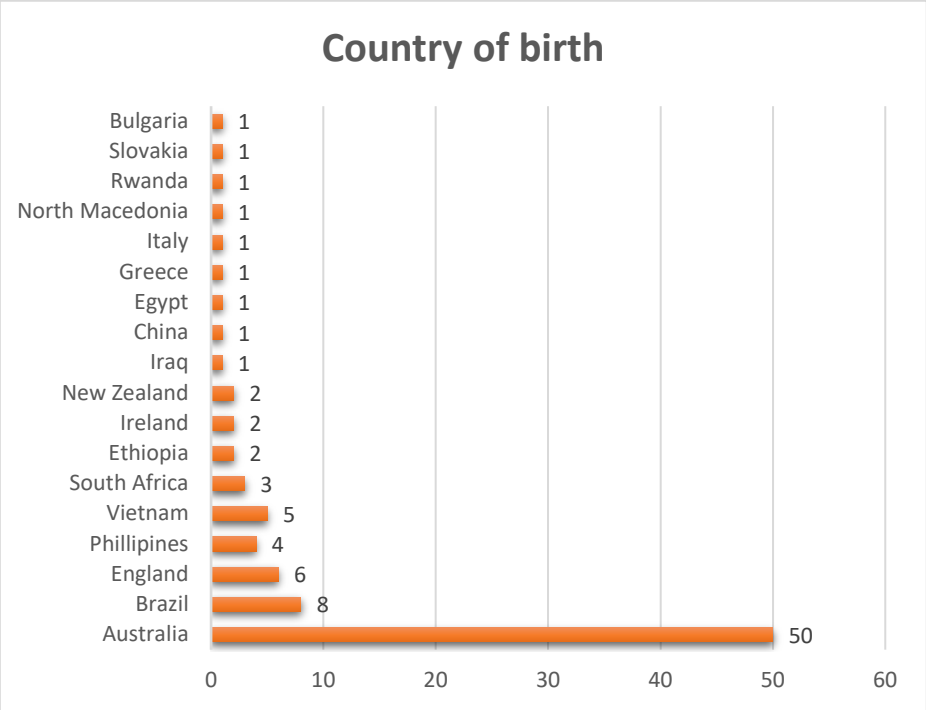


Figure 8: Country of birth of women supported

Amongst the SWitCH users, 37 women had used Orana refuge, 30 transitional housing and 11 were referred to the HFP. Seventeen of the 74 women (23%) who had children and received support from the SWitCH Centre were reported to be involved with the Department of Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS). The SWitCH Centre provided advocacy (N=7), support (N=4), multi-agency case management (N=2) and contacting other agencies (N=2). There were 36 periods of Court Support which were primarily for Family Violence Restraining Orders and Family Law matters with some criminal cases. Other common support types included housing, legal advocacy and referral, referrals to counselling, financial and material support.

The children and young people that were supported by the SWitCH Centre received a range of support that included school liaison and advocacy, financial and practical support to facilitate community engagement in clubs and sports, and the provision of school uniforms and stationery items. Children and young people engaged in individual sessions with the Children and Young Person Advocate (CYPA) and others participated in joint sessions with their mothers. The children and young people also participated in mentoring groups where they received guidance and support to assist them in developing skills, building relationships, and setting and achieving goals. The children and young people were also frequently supported to enhance their social and community participation through invitations to attend holiday programs and events. Some of these events were intended for the attendance of the children and young people only while others facilitated opportunities for children and young people to attend with their mothers.

As with their mothers, the specific needs of children and young people who have experienced DFV are diverse and unique. However, the overarching needs of these children and young people include feeling physically safe and emotionally supported and having opportunities to express themselves and be heard (Noble-Carr, et al., 2020). The SWitCH Centre's programs and supports are designed to address these needs using trauma-informed approaches that promote children's and young people's recovery and well-being. Additionally, by working in collaboration with their mothers, the support aims to strengthen parent-child relationships, rebuild trust, communication, and emotional connection helping to break cycles of intergenerational violence.

Activities and Programs at the SWitCH Centre

The following programs were coordinated through the SWitCH Centre in 2024, however there was a significant reduction to the program timetable due to staff shortages and funding availability. [5]

[5] Orana House Annual Report 2024

My Understanding of Me: FDV Education. *Run twice – 7 women participated*

Empowered for Employment: *Run once – 12 participants.*

Sing and Grow: *Run once – 8 sessions attended by 4 mums and 8 children.*

Magic Coat: *Run twice – 8 children participated.*

Parenting Effectively: *Run once – 8 women participated.*

Women's FDV Counselling: *Provided throughout the year at the refuge and SWitCH Centre for outreach clients.*

Strengths-Based Children's Counselling: *Provided throughout the year at the refuge and at external locations for outreach clients.*

Protective Behaviours: *Individual sessions with children as needs identified.*

Warrior Women Social Group: *Meets weekly at SWitCH Centre throughout the year.*

Mother's Day High Tea: *Held at SWitCH.*

Young men's mentoring program: *Weekly sessions at SWitCH and fortnightly in partnership with Bayswater Men's Shed.*

Young women's mentoring program: *Weekly sessions at SWitCH supported by a Department of Communities Women's Grant.*

Participation and Engagement

The women who were interviewed frequently reported that their engagement with the SWitCH Centre spanned over several years. Several women described their initial engagement with outreach support occurring before the opening of the SWitCH Centre. The women reported that during their engagement with the SWitCH Centre, they participated in a range of workshops and programs that built their confidence and strength by supporting social connections and providing leadership opportunities that empowered them to reach their goals. The intention of the SWitCH Centre is to hold hope for the women and provide them with opportunities to find themselves by validating their strength and resilience. As described by a staff member, "The programs they work towards trying to give women that sense of strength and recognising their resilience and their resourcefulness and that there's hope for the future." The success of this approach was evidenced in the comments of a woman who had accessed several programs and workshops through the SWitCH Centre, stating,

> you know, just not being able to believe in ourselves before that we could finish studying and now all of us have a job. Both of us have finished some studies, and then we're moving

> forward and, yes, so I believe it's all to do with the help of the Orana staff the workshops. (Participant P)

The importance of having opportunities to make these connections was evident in the disclosures from many of the women who were interviewed, who described family and informal networks as either absent, unsupportive or their abusive partner's networks. This was particularly evident for the women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds who were interviewed. With limited support networks, these women often described additional barriers to locating and accessing support including language barriers, visa status and cultural expectations.

Many women described taking part in workshops to support their parenting and to promote bonding and attachment with their children. One of the women interviewed described how her parenting capacity was frequently called into question by her abusive ex-partner, leading to a negative self-perception of her parenting ability

> I didn't know how to parent properly 'cause I was being told how to parent … by the husband who was there, who wasn't really there. … telling me what to do, what not to do. And if I did something wrong, it was… so wrong, if you know what I mean... Like you're really a bad mum (Participant P)

The women received validation of their parenting capacity through their attendance, reframing their self-perception and building confidence in their abilities as mothers. Engaging in these workshops allowed them to develop positive parenting strategies, strengthen their relationships with their children, and recognise that their previous doubts were a result of coercive control rather than actual shortcomings. This process of reframing helped them regain a sense of autonomy in their parenting, fostering both their own healing and their children's wellbeing

The relationships built with staff positively impacted both the children and their mothers. The women felt able to seek support and guidance from staff, program facilitators and their peers. The programs and connections helped the women to develop an identity outside of people viewing them as a *single mum or unemployed* etc. For many women, these programs provided a sense of purpose and opportunities for personal growth that might otherwise be difficult to access. The ability to participate in structured activities allowed time for the women to focus on their own well-being, building their confidence and self-worth. Additionally, programs that offered childcare gave mothers a much-needed break, enabling them to engage in self-care, build relationships, and regain a sense of independence. As one woman described,

> I just used to do everything because I was not working as well so we could have something to go to. A little bit of purpose and some time for you… and if it was something where they looked after the kids, that was another thing to just have a break from young children at the time you wouldn't otherwise get. (Participant D)

The findings highlight the additional challenges faced by single mothers who experience DFV, often contending with multiple stigmas and limited opportunities to participate in activities. By providing a safe, supportive space for personal and social development, the SWitCH Centre plays an essential role in breaking isolation, reducing stress, and empowering women to rebuild their lives.

There were a range of programs for children and young people such as mentor programs, school holiday programs, and events like Mother's Day and Christmas celebrations. The SWitCH Centre continued to extend invitations and offer vouchers and tickets for movies, the zoo and other events to facilitate active social participation and ensure people were not missing out due to financial constraints.

The range of children and young people's programs and workshops offered by the SWitCH Centre was intended to cater to the children's ongoing and dynamic support needs that evolved with their developmental changes. It was noted that this can require differently skilled staff to work with children and young people of different age groups. Staff had a deep understanding of child development and the impact of DFV for children on social and emotional well-being and attachment. In combining interventions to deliver programs that attend to the multifaceted challenges of children who experience DFV, the SWitCH Centre consistently recognised children as victim-survivors in their own right.

The SWitCH Centre also prioritised removing barriers to ensure young people could fully participate in programs, addressing practical challenges such as transportation. Going "above and beyond," the SWitCH Centre aimed to provide consistency and stability, creating a space where young people did not have to explain or justify the chaos, unpredictability, or stress in their lives. This judgment-free environment fostered trust and security, allowing time and space for rapport to develop.

Building these relationships created a foundation for open communication and personal growth. Group settings allowed participants to engage at their own pace, observing and listening until they felt confident enough to share. For many, this sense of connection with peers who had similar experiences was invaluable. The SWitCH Centre provided a safe space where young people could discuss concerns, they might not feel comfortable sharing at home or school, reinforcing its commitment to their emotional well-being and empowerment.

There was an understanding that not all women and children were in the same place in relation to moving on from the crisis and needs varied. For example, some children were shy, so they were reluctant to be involved in group activities. Therefore, the flexibility to work individually with children and young people *where they were at* was important. Additionally, there could be challenges in providing group support, such as mentoring to children and young people if there were significant age differences as this presented a variety of developmental stages that could not all be appropriately attended to within a group setting. This is not a unique issue when running groups in community-based services with children and young people. One option may be to conduct individual mentoring. Alternatively, if it is viable to work with other refuges to run joint mentoring for children and young people. The importance for mentors to have supervision was identified given the work they were doing. The value of having a mentor also included extending connections outside SWitCH with integration into community.

It was notable that the SWitCH Centre staff were aware of the complexity of support needed and that young people's willingness to be involved was an important factor in developing responses, and that providing multi-disciplinary support that is flexible and adaptable was necessary but hard to consistently offer with changing numbers and limited resources.

The women described programs focused on personal development, such as breathing technique classes, yoga, and meditation. Additionally, the women had opportunities to engage in creative activities like candle making, soap making, and vision board workshops. Some women described questioning the benefit of their participation in these types of workshops.

> they had a breathing technique class. And again, me prejudging before it even, I thought this is going to be boring, but I need to pass some time. And I loved it. I learned so much in that about how to control my anxieties, why it's happening. Just so much valuable information in their classes. (Participant S)

Programs that support the mental health and well-being of women with experiences of family violence play an integral role in healing and empowerment. A strength of the survivor-led way of working was that it supports women taking more active roles, such as running some of these classes (candle making, etc) as appropriate. Women described their confidence was rebuilding with the opportunity to volunteer as well as developing friendships, which also was foundational to healing and recovery. Moving from volunteer work to paid employment was also valuable as women may have had little attachment to the workforce, combined with the impacts of coercive control, which meant that they could gain confidence in their skills and interact in a work or work-like setting. Some

of the women interviewed had referred friends to the SWitCH Centre who were unable to access other supports because of the welcoming approach and supportive space.

The Warrior Women Social group was highlighted as an opportunity for women to run the group, build social connections and be amongst people with similar experiences. One of the challenges with running such groups is that involvement ebbs and flows depending on people's availability and circumstances so it can be challenging to maintain continued membership. Several women noted that work and other commitments limited their attendance and suggested offering the group multiple times a week, including an after-hours option.

The value of the workshops and programs coordinated by the SWitCH Centre provided more than an opportunity for individual learning and self-empowerment. The women and children could share knowledge, validate each other's experiences and develop supportive relationships. One stakeholder explained.

> it's not just what they might be learning from the facilitator, but what they take from and give to each other…. So, things that some people might take for granted. That's a real function that SWitCH is helping facilitate. It's almost an incidental result of some of the programmes, but it's really important. (Stakeholder)

Impact of the SWitCH Centre on safety and wellbeing

The staff who were interviewed all described the organisational commitment to prioritising women and children's safety, explaining, "Safety is our number one priority." The service delivery was described as "open-door" and without time limits. The staff stressed the importance of women feeling welcome to return for support at any time no matter the reason. It was highlighted by staff and several of the women how a non-judgmental approach to service delivery and engagement was fostered. Combined with the flexibility of support provided an environment where women could engage as needed. For example, if the refuge is not able to accommodate a woman a referral will be made to the SWitCH Centre and they will work with the client and if refuge is needed, they will support the client into safety. The SWitCH Centre works with women who are considering their options with safety planning and through processes of separation. This woman offers a rich description of the practice and why it worked for her.

> The SWitCH Centre practised in a strengths-based, person-centred, trauma-informed way that recognised me, the individual, as the expert of my own experience and did so without judgement and with unrelenting and unconditional positive regard. My case worker

> embodied a level of professional tact, discernment, and knowing that fostered safety and promoted my resilience, and NEVER increased my risk…like ascertaining the safest times and the safest way to contact me, only ever contacting me if I had contacted her first, and being able to visit me on my work break, helped keep me visible, engaged, safe, and empowered. (Participant C)

In the interviews, many women referred to the SWitCH Centre as a home where they were surrounded by family and spoke of developing lifelong friendships with others who truly understood their experience. The women were provided with practical, social and emotional support and warm referrals to other trusted services that were guided by the women 's voices and tailored to their diverse and dynamic experience of DFV.

An external program facilitator described this as follows,

> as the women come into the Switch Centre, I can just see the difference right from that week one there they're already relaxed and they're already, you know cheerful, and you know they might be a little bit nervous about what we're gonna cover in content but there isn't all of that other stuff to overcome (Stakeholder)

The trust and relationships built with Orana House staff across the organisation empowers women to "step out of what they would normally do – extend beyond their comfort zone" (Stakeholder). It can be overwhelming for women coming from the intensive support of Orana House refuge to programs and a reduction of support. The SWitCH Centre allows a gradual reduction of support intensity at the women's pace. Women are also not faced with having to return to refuge to take part in programs but are able to come to a familiar but still associated space that offers a variety of support options. This creates a "real one-stop shop concept that we know works for people because they've got enough to deal with in life without trying to find the energy to go somewhere new or the confidence to try something new" (Stakeholder). This approach ensures that women feel supported and confident as they transition to greater independence. It was also described by staff, stakeholders and the women that the SWitCH Centre frequently provided transport assistance to ensure the women, and their children were not prevented from engagement in both internally and externally provided programs and workshops. The SWitCH Centre demonstrates equitable service delivery that addresses the individual needs of every woman and child accessing their centre.

Another commonly mentioned and highly regarded support that was mentioned by the women was the assistance they received from the SWitCH Centre when attending court. This was described by many of the women as having a profound effect on their well-being and sense of safety when in the

presence of the abusive person in a courtroom where there was an obvious lack of DFV education within the justice system. One woman described how her family lawyer would interact with her abusive ex-partner at the court, “laughing and joking with him” (Participant N). The women commonly described the regular collusion of magistrates and lawyers with their abusers that justified their abuse, invalidated their experience and failed to hold the person who used violence accountable.

The subtle ways that the abusive men were able to continue to intimidate and threaten the women within the court setting were not missed by the SWitCH Centre staff, as one woman explained, “She'll sit with me at court, and she'll know he always sits within eye contact, so she'll be like this just moving in there” (Participant N demonstrated the way her case manager positioned her body to block the perpetrator’s view of her client). This simple action validates the impact of an abusive person’s behaviour on a woman’s emotional safety and well-being. Modelling acts of resistance can help women feel protected and supported during court proceedings.

It was also reported that there had been occasions where Orana House refuge clients were supported in court by the SWitCH Centre staff, and it was noted that if the anticipated staff member was unable to attend court, they reliably found another worker to step in. Some staff sought advice from more senior colleagues, recognising that court processes were not standard or expected knowledge for DFV workers. The specialist knowledge and competence of the SWitCH staff in this area ensured that women received the necessary support and advocacy during these challenging times. The SWitCH Centre’s provision of this support meant that women received consistent support with familiar and trusted workers as a first option, rather than being referred to an unfamiliar service.

Long term Outcomes and Recovery

The women who were interviewed described their journeys from feeling broken, hopeless, isolated and afraid to obtaining housing and employment, getting their driver's licence, seeing their children thrive and rebuilding the lives that had been taken from them. One woman described being supported by the SWitCH Centre to get her driver’s licence and was also referred to the Housing Families Program, resulting in obtaining housing for herself and her children. From a CALD background, she described being extremely isolated by her perpetrator, so she valued the gentle encouragement she received from the SWitCH Centre staff to engage with other women and expand her social network. She explained this motivated and inspired her to want to achieve and stated,

“now I feel like I can fly” (Participant J). The provision of a safe and stable home and a safe place to support relationship building facilitates reestablishment and promotes healing and recovery.

The women frequently attributed their achievements to the support that they received from the staff at the SWitCH Centre. The women commonly pondered where they may be without the support that they had received from the SWitCH Centre to navigate systems that were unknown, confusing and frequently re-traumatising.

> I really don't think I could have done this without them. And that's a pretty big statement, but I know I am where I am today because of the support that I've got from the staff and the centre. I think it's just so invaluable what they provide. (Participant R)

One woman who had experienced DFV support delivered through other services, stated, “SWitCH has set the benchmark for DFV services” (Participant L). She further considered if she would be alive to tell her story if it had not been for the support provided by the SWitCH Centre. She described the consistently non-judgmental support that respected her choices, even when they included returning to her abusive partner, as building her strength to finally leave.

Contributions to Local Domestic and Family Violence Services

The SWitCH Centre is committed to working in partnership with other family and domestic violence refuges, community groups, businesses, governments and other not-for-profit organisations to identify and respond to needs in communities. Their intention is to complement rather than duplicate the efforts of other service providers which promotes positive outcomes for all stakeholders and the women who receive support. As described by a stakeholder from an agency receiving referrals from the SWitCH Centre, the Centre provides liaison between the women and the organisation receiving the referral which helps women to reduce the number of stakeholders involved and maintains the women’s existing relationship with the staff at the SWitCH Centre, whom they have frequently built trusting relationships with. Open and transparent communication between the SWitCH Centre and other DFV organisations and related services facilitates efficient and coordinated supports that are less likely to result in the duplication of services. While recognising the necessity for referrals to occur, the SWitCH Centre aims to minimise service involvement for the women and children whenever possible, recognising that multiple stakeholder engagement can be overwhelming and counterproductive for women and children with experiences of DFV.

A challenge in the current funding environment when partnering with other services providing programs, particularly those similarly on short-term funding, is that if the programs cease, there is a gap that cannot be immediately filled by SWitCH or another partner. As highlighted by one stakeholder from a referring agency, "The reality is that there's no such thing as sustainability without money…and the cycle of not-for-profit is just constantly looking for the next funding source." Demonstrating that whilst this situation is not unique to the SWitCH Centre or DFV services it raises an important consideration when there is a strong emphasis on multi-agency and collaborative ways of working.

Hub style co-location of services can be an effective approach to addressing the complexity of DFV and streamlining the provision of support for women and children. However, the architecture must support such an enterprise and there can be a lack of suitable spaces and rooms in the current building that makes it difficult to share the space with other professionals that are needed to support women and children. Especially if the hub offers multiple functions considerations for noise, privacy can be a problem. One way space was managed was that the Housing Families Program (HFP) moved to the corporate offices, which may mean, at times, women having to access two sites. The HFP evaluation has also been conducted at the same time, so this will be discussed in that report.

Integration with Orana House Objectives

The overarching organisational belief is that statistics cannot adequately represent an organisation's achievements and value to its clients. This is measured by the individual achievements of the women and the children who access the centre. The SWitCH Centre believes strongly in celebrating each and every achievement of women and their children, no matter the size or scale. It was reported by the SWitCH Centre staff that women frequently popped into the centre, often with their children, to share their successes. The women described being met with genuine excitement and pride when sharing their stories.

A strong indicator of the trust and credibility of staff was that women's engagement with the SWitCH Centre often spanned several years, with many women receiving outreach support dating back to 2017, prior to the opening of the SWitCH Centre.

> The Switch Centre ensures a space where survivors feel safe and supported and can reach out for guidance and support should they need it. The guidance is not forced (Orana House key staff member).

Several women had chosen to disengage from support at times throughout their journey and described always being respected by staff in their choices and reassured that they could return at any time for any reason. This is also an indicator of the difference between a crisis-oriented service and the medium to longer-term focus of the SWitCH Centre. It should, therefore, not be misinterpreted as people being dependent on the Centre; rather, it reflects their changing circumstances and needs. For example, being part of a support group at one point and then re-engaging sometime later for education and employment support. As SWitCH was a trusted service it offered a gateway for warm referrals to other agencies which women either may not have known were available and/or they feel the SWitCH Centre would refer them to a service where they would similarly receive a supportive response. The SWitCH Centre staff are dedicated to women being empowered by their decisions, knowing they are the experts in how they want their lives to be with the confidence that the staff will be beside them for guidance if they require it. The SWitCH Centre has women from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds and First Nations women accessing services, however, there was also external feedback that building capacity to ensure culturally safe and responsive approaches was important.

> it's an important first step that they've acknowledged that there needs to be an improvement for that. But even on the documents, like the strategic plan, there was a brief comment about being culturally aware, but then again, you can say something, but you need to actually back that up with what you're actually going to do, act action and a plan to address (Stakeholder).

Orana Houses' leadership plays a crucial role in upholding the organisation's values, supporting its staff, and ensuring the best outcomes for women and children using its services. By fostering a positive and sustainable work environment that prioritises team cohesion, a strong commitment to holistic, client-centred support is demonstrated across the organisation. The SWitCH Centre staff are provided with the trust and freedom to work flexibly with the women and their children. Thus, enabling them to offer meaningful options and assistance, reducing unnecessary stress from administrative constraints and ensuring that services remain responsive and adaptable to client needs. A staff member with significant experience working in the DFV sector stated,

> I know how they operate, I know how they work, I know the passion behind it and how well it all works with clients holistically. It sits comfortably, very comfortably with me. The job is not difficult when you have the freedom to work really well with clients and when you can achieve things with the clients and give them the options, whether they take them or not is up to them. But when you can do that and when it's a service that offers everything and

> anything you can for their clients within what they can do, it's not hard. The hard is when you're very restricted and limited and you spend more time trying to get permission to do things. To really work well, you have to be working with a good team. The stress should not be coming from the powers that be in this environment. Even though it's grown, and it's developed, it hasn't changed. It's about working from the top down and having somebody who is very approachable, who is always there for her staff and for her clients. And I think for me, one of the greatest things is someone who's always willing to look outside that box for that client and to see if we can find something that's going to fit for them or something that's going to help them. Or if we can't, we find somewhere that can (Orana House key staff member).

Approachable and committed leadership is essential in navigating the challenges of organisational growth. By fostering unity and guiding development, leadership ensures a consistent focus on finding the best solutions for clients, reinforcing the organisation's dedication to improving the lives of women and children. The SWitCH Centre and Orana House staff who were interviewed felt valued, appreciated, and supported, while also being held accountable and transparent in their work. Despite Orana Houses' growth, its core values remain consistent, creating a workplace culture that continues to prioritise both staff well-being and high-quality service delivery.

Collaborations between Orana House and several corporate and community partners were highlighted during the interviews with Orana House key staff and stakeholders, reflecting a shared commitment to addressing DFV and fostering safer communities. Through these partnerships, Orana House staff, including workers from the SWitCH Centre, provide expert guidance to support the implementation of comprehensive DFV strategies within workplaces. This includes education workshops designed to equip employees, supervisors, and managers with the knowledge and skills to support colleagues at risk of DFV. These collaborations extend the impact of Orana House beyond direct service delivery, contributing to community education and workplace advocacy and the financial contributions from these partnerships help to fund essential services at the SWitCH Centre.

Engaging with corporate and community partners promotes broader societal awareness and action and strengthens an organisation's ability to create meaningful, long-term change for women and children affected by DFV.

Conclusion

The evaluation of SWitCH has demonstrated that Orana offers women and their children medium to long-term responses around their recovery, healing and re-establishment, reflecting how their needs change over time. The SWitCH Centre addresses the common criticism levelled at DFV policy and service systems that they offer very little to women and their children post-crisis. Whilst DFV casts a long shadow the service system does not follow in support. The SWitCH Centre is an exception with a longer-term survivor-led response, which takes account of women's and children's changing needs when they are working to re-establish their lives free of violence and recover from the effects. The work of SWitCH confirms that women's needs vary from everyday connection with others through to practical aspects and training and development. It is the dual aspects of Orana Houses' commitment to ensuring women's recovery and reestablishment and the staff implementing survivor-led practice that ensures women, and their children can engage with varied and flexible types of support depending on their needs and preferences.

A key reason the SWitCH model is effective is that it is embedded within a continuum of specialist women's DFV services, from refuge to longer-term support where women engage with Orana House when needed. Whilst the SWitCH Centre is open to all women in the area, those who have used Orana's refuge services have developed trust with the service as a safe space and feel confident to continue engaging. In relation to surviving DFV, this trust in a service is essential because evidence continues to show victim-survivors commonly report fearing judgement, not being believed and/or feeling shamed, which are founded on their past experiences of responses from services or the community. Women are then often reluctant to seek support as needed when their safety is at risk, so Orana Houses' approach to working with women, where they promote dignity and establish trust, underpins the effectiveness of the SWitCH Centre.

Orana House staff working at SWitCH have typically worked at the refuge previously, so they are experienced in supporting women to move forward as they recognise the specific concerns that women may have about their safety and confidence after being subjected to coercive control and very often worry about money and housing and their children's needs.

Research evidence consistently shows that social isolation is both a tactic of users of DFV and an ongoing issue for women in the post separation period. Combined with loss of confidence and fear of judgment social isolation continues and impacts women's mental wellbeing. There has however, been far less focus on how women develop social connectedness following DFV and its socially isolating impacts. The data from the evaluation describes how SWitCH has been empowering for

women, and they have developed social connectedness through involvement in the Centre. This is an important finding of the SWitCH Centre's impact on a range of women, including women who migrated to Australia for their marriage and had no social or other networks of their own. The Centre's practice approach enabled such inclusion. The findings reveal that once women felt supported at the Centre, they would go on to develop other key aspects of recovery and re-establishment which could include study, job preparation and search or aspects related to their children. It is doubtful that women's paths to recovery and re-establishment would have been as successful if they had had to navigate multiple systems which are largely not DFV informed or culturally responsive. The practice approach also recognised women will come and go in their engagement and were welcoming of this which recognised that needs and circumstances change.

The evaluation demonstrates women's appreciation of the SWitCH Centre and the value it has had on their lives. The extension of a program that offers a continuity of support to the changing needs and challenges that victim-survivors confront is highly valuable and can both prevent women and children from being subjected to further post-separation violence and abuse and make a difference to their recovery and re-establishment of their lives free from violence. The SWitCH Centre offers a financially efficient model of medium to long-term support, which should receive ongoing funding given its outcomes and be scaled up into other locations within specialist DFV services for women and their children.

Recommendations

Future development of the SWitCH model

It is recommended that:

1. Secure ongoing funding is provided to operate the SWitCH Centre to a higher level of capacity so that the full-time equivalent staffing is more closely aligned to the demand for the services and there is capacity for the needed extension.
2. The future planning for the SWitCH centre to further consolidate partnerships with other services to enable a wide range of recovery and reestablishment responses for women and children's diverse and changing needs continue to be pursued subject to available funding.
3. Orana leadership explore options for developing and implementing training that supports the DFV workforce development in survivor-led longer-term practice as it is one of the first organisations to undertake these programs

4. Orana Leadership consider the potential for the SWitCH model and practice framework to be scaled up in the future in ways that maintain the integrity of the model and its longer-term focus on survivor recovery and re-establishment.

5. Prior to any scaling up of the SWitCH model into other locations it requires consistent and reliable funding to consolidate its exemplary and innovative practices.

6. To further demonstrate the extent of the SWitCH Centre's economic and social benefits, a Social Return on Investment is conducted to disaggregate the individual, social and economic benefits, which builds on the evidence developed from this evaluation.

Organisational Aspects

The following recommendations are based on the condition that there are the necessary financial and other resources available for implementation.

It is recommended that:

7. The continuum of responses offered by the SWitCH Centre are continued as they are responding to a wide and changing range of needs for women and their children, subject to the resources available

8. The staffing of the SWitCH Centre with DFV specialist workers using survivor centred practice is continued as the evaluation findings indicate this is critical to ongoing engagement, reducing women's social isolation and increasing their sense of connection which promotes their recovery and re-establishment

9. Staffing of the SWitCH Centre is increased to align more closely with demand given the growth and interest in involvement. This is particularly important because the workload is considerable for current staff who are highly committed to their work

10. To support the growth of the SWitCH Centre, external supervision for staff is available to develop this specific model of practice and emerging specialist areas of DFV practice.

11. With any expansion of the SWitCH Centre, it should include resourcing for administrative tasks associated with managing and reviewing the Centre activities.

Appendices

Appendix A. Outreach and aftercare services provided by the SWitCH Centre 2021 – 2024

Education and group programs for women, children and young people

Women

- Social Group – Warrior Women
- Resilience and empowerment groups
- Parenting groups tailored for DFV
- Health and wellbeing sessions
- Employment programs

Children and young people

- Protective behaviours and consent programs
- Older children's programs and mentoring
- Creche

Validation, support and understanding through individual case management and safety planning

- Emergency relief
- Material support

Options for housing and future independent living

- Transitional Housing
- Referral to the Housing Families Program
- Support to apply for the Department of Communities Public Housing wait list
- Tenancy advice, support and referrals

Legal, court and referral support to relevant services

- Assistance to attend court
- CPFS appointment support and advocacy

Various options for specific counselling services for women and children

- DFV-specific counselling
- Children's counselling
- Attachment counselling
- Child development support

Educating wider community groups, services and the general public about FDV

- Advocacy and liaison with schools
- Community education programs

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