

SAFE+EQUAL

Standing strong
against family
violence

TOGETHER FOR BETTER:

Practice reflections
and recommendations on
embedding lived experience



SAFE + EQUAL

© Safe and Equal, Melbourne

First published in February 2026

This work was funded and published by Safe and Equal, the peak body for Victorian organisations that specialise in family and gender-based violence across the continuum, including primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery.

Safe and Equal

safeandequal.org.au

Written and developed for Safe and Equal by

Morgan Cataldo

morganandco.au

Named survivor advocate contributors*: Dr Amar Freya, Elvis, Nina Storey, Tess Moodie

*other survivor advocates who have contributed to this report have chosen not to be named

Evaluation advisory and project support

Jo van Twest Farmer

jofarmer.com

Graphic design

Katie Cameron

cameronmac.com.au

Cover art

Natasha Anderson

Safe and Equal acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters, community and culture.

A note from the artist

This cover art represents the themes of the report.

I chose native flowers that can be found in south east Australia with meanings that I felt represented the kind of people we are and the work we do, both as advocates and those working alongside us.

The knitting is about what we're creating as lived experience advocates and supporters. The knitting is left unfinished to represent that the work we do is living and evolving and the different windows are a reflection on the themes of the report.

Natasha Anderson



Acknowledging Country and First Nations peoples

Safe and Equal acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present and recognise that sovereignty was never ceded.

We honour the strength, resilience and leadership of First Nations peoples within this sector and beyond and acknowledge the disproportionate rates at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continue to experience family violence. We stand in solidarity with First Nations peoples in their ongoing fight for justice, self-determination, and healing and remain committed to walking alongside communities in this work.

We also recognise the ongoing advocacy and resistance within First Nations communities — practices that have sustained wellbeing

and safety across generations, often outside of, or in resistance to, systems shaped by colonisation and its entrenched values.

These systems have long excluded and harmed First Nations peoples. We pay particular respect to the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivor advocates and support the systemic and structural change they have long called for and continue to lead.

This includes the insights and directions set out in *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices), which calls on governments and systems to listen to First Nations women and girls and to centre their knowledges, experiences and solutions in all responses to family violence.¹

¹ Wiyi Yani U Thangani — meaning *women's voices* in Bunuba language — is a multiyear systemic change project set out to capture and respond to the strengths, aspirations and challenges of First Nations women and girls. The vision is for First Nations gender justice and equality in Australia. wiyiyaniuthangani.humanrights.gov.au



Recognising the survivor movement and sector contributions

We dedicate this work to all people who have experienced family violence, especially women, children, young people, and those no longer with us.

We honour the legacy of those who came before and acknowledge the many individuals who have shaped the history of this sector: victim survivors, survivor advocates, frontline staff and those who have served in governance and leadership roles. Their insight, courage and advocacy continue to guide and inspire this work.

Safe and Equal is proud to carry forward this legacy as the peak body for Victorian organisations that specialise in family and gender-based violence, working toward a future where everyone is safe, respected and thriving, living free from violence.



Contributors

This summary report reflects the contributions of survivor advocates, staff, and board members. It captures the views of some — though not all — of those who have worked within or contributed to the lived experience program at Safe and Equal since its inception.

We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who shared their reflections and insights. Your perspectives have shaped this work in meaningful ways, and the impact will continue to ripple through Safe and Equal and across the sector.

Survivor advocate co-authors

These recommendations are built on our reflections – some of us as survivor advocates, coordinators and leaders of lived experience programs of work, and as advocates and activists working toward social and systems change.

Between us, we draw on a diversity of methods, frameworks and theories. The recommendations shared here are offered as a contribution to the growing field of survivor advocacy, grounded in the foundations that hold us.

We do not speak with one voice, but as a collective of diverse and divergent perspectives and abilities shaped by a multitude of experiences: of abuse, of violence, of survivor advocacy in its many forms, and of both lived and professional expertise, each informing the other.

Supporting staff and board members

We recognise the steadfast support and commitment of staff and board members who have helped shape and sustain this work, often behind the scenes, and deeply appreciate their foundational role in embedding survivor advocacy within Safe and Equal.

We also acknowledge the many others who were connected to this program at different stages. While they did not take part in the consultation process, we thank them for their contributions and recognise the role they played in shaping this work.

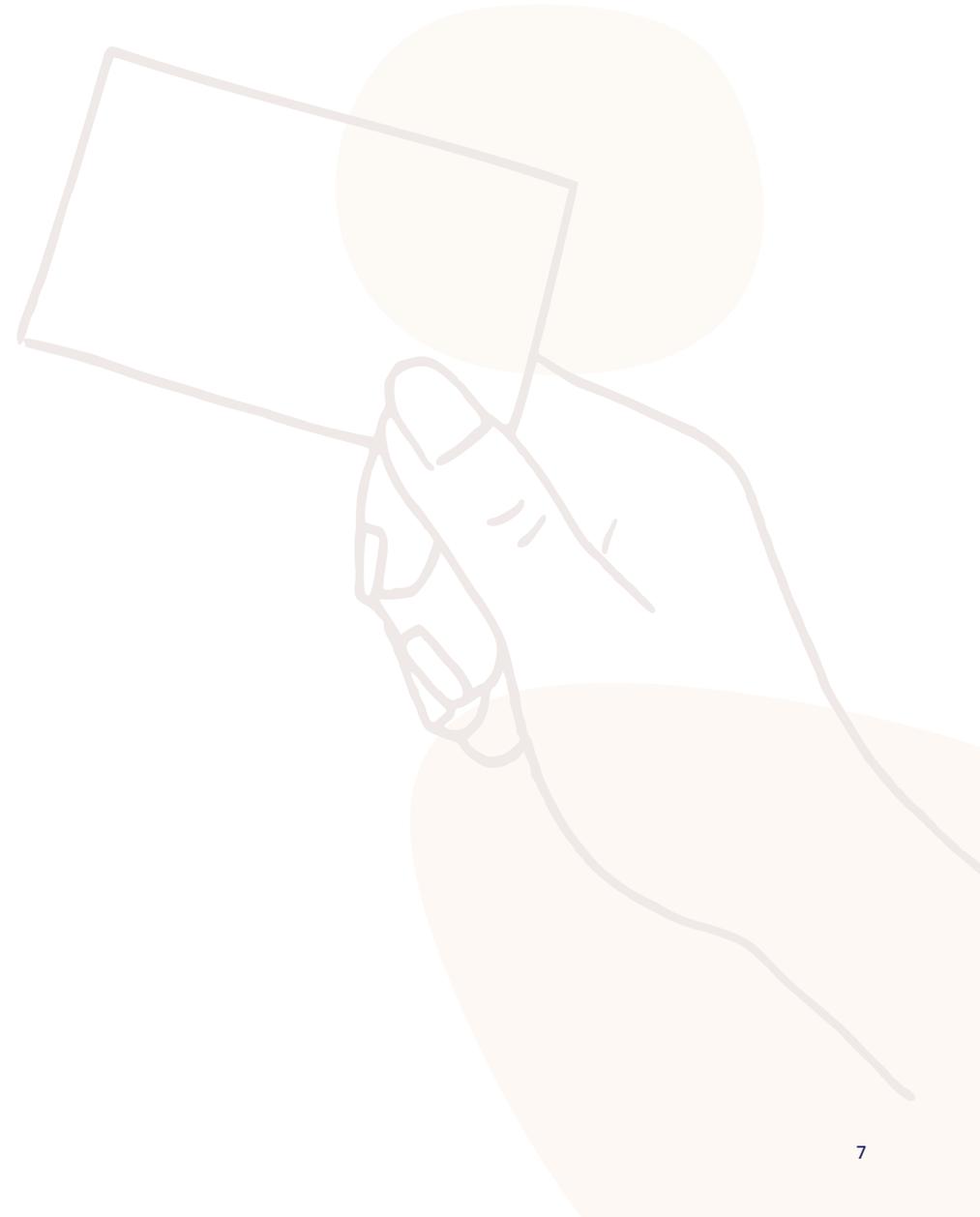
A note about this paper

In the spirit of contributing to the growing field of survivor advocacy in Victoria and beyond, Safe and Equal has chosen to share these recommendations publicly. We do so with purpose and transparency, offering our hindsight as an opportunity for collective learning. It is our hope that this contribution strengthens the broader sector's capacity to partner more intentionally and ethically with survivors.

This paper of recommendations and actions accompanies the full report, *Together for better: Practice reflections and recommendations on embedding lived experience*. While we are publishing only the recommendations, they remain grounded in the reflections that informed them. We offer these as a practical resource to support ongoing learning in the sector and beyond.

We acknowledge the University of Melbourne's Safer Families Centre and the WEAVERS lived experience group for their foundational work on the *Experts by Experience Framework*, developed in partnership with Domestic Violence Victoria and supported by philanthropic funding. Safe and Equal has continued the work through implementation independently, without government investment.

Our intention is not to present definitive answers, but to offer a set of recommendations that supports learning, dialogue and ongoing practice development. This is a living document — one we hope will be adapted, questioned and reshaped in the hands of those who use it.



Contents

A NOTE FROM THE ARTIST	03
ACKNOWLEDGING COUNTRY AND FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES	04
RECOGNISING THE SURVIVOR MOVEMENT AND SECTOR CONTRIBUTIONS	05
CONTRIBUTORS	06
A NOTE ABOUT THIS PAPER	07
SURVIVOR ADVOCATES STATEMENT	10–11
BOARD STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT	12
SUMMARY	13
SURVIVOR ADVOCATES' PERSPECTIVES ON SURVIVOR ADVOCACY	14
SAFE AND EQUAL'S EXPERIENCE OF EMBEDDING SURVIVOR ADVOCACY	15
WHO THESE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE FOR AND HOW TO USE THEM	16
RECOMMENDATIONS	17
RECOMMENDATION 1: Recognise survivor advocacy as a distinct discipline, with its own skills and practice foundations	18–19
RECOMMENDATION 2: Build organisational insight into power and systemic trauma	20–21



RECOMMENDATION 3: Integrate survivor advocacy across organisational culture and structures	22–23
RECOMMENDATION 4: Strengthen inclusive, culturally responsive approaches to survivor advocacy	24–26
RECOMMENDATION 5: Embed trauma and violence-informed practice across all levels of work	27–29
RECOMMENDATION 6: Support survivor advocates to grow, specialise and lead	30–32
RECOMMENDATION 7: Ground survivor-led work in expansive, evolving principles	33–34
RECOMMENDATION 8: Recognise and reflect survivor advocates' impact	35
RECOMMENDATION 9: Align organisational readiness with values, not just process	36
RECOMMENDATION 10: Plan and advocate for fair remuneration and longer-term investment	37–38
RECOMMENDATION 11: Create the conditions for supportive working environments for survivor advocates	39–41
RECOMMENDATION 12: Build specialist capability to work with children and young people as victim survivors in their own right	42–43
ACTIONS	44–49
THE PATH AHEAD: WHERE TO FROM HERE?	50

Survivor advocates statement

The Family Violence Experts by Experience (EBE) framework came at a key time of evolving victim-survivor lived experience practice in Australia. Victim-survivors had advocated tirelessly for a voice for so long in many ways.

Historically, our feminist fore-bearers in Australia (who were also the grassroots movement for creating support mechanisms and rights for victim-survivors) were marching, rallying and speaking out about ending domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) for many decades. Alongside that, and not to be forgotten, were the pioneers of lived experience advocacy and activism in communities with experience of systemic disadvantage, marginalisation and oppression. The EBE framework was created and co-designed with the intention to capture what best practice in victim-survivor lived experience advocacy needed to look like to create safety and ethical practice in the Australian DFSV sector. It also provided a guide for anyone else who saw a vision for creating a vessel for change by embedding lived experience.

The EBE framework was publicly launched during a time of upheaval and uncertainty as the country was feeling the ripples of COVID-19 and its impacts on isolation, community connection and previously built solidarity in the sector. It was obvious at the launch that this was the start of something important.

In 2021, Safe and Equal's inaugural *Expert Advisory Panel (EAP)* was established along with a broader informal group of disclosed and undisclosed victim survivors, including but not limited to, Safe and Equal staff with their own lived experiences. All of us EAP, advocate pool, and staff members alike shared a common goal – to transform our lived experience into expertise to bring change. Safe and Equal's vision was to embed our lived expertise across the organisation and create resources and guidance for the broader sector.

Throughout the years in the work, as peers have both joined and left Safe and Equal to continue their advocacy and work in this space, we have operated under the guidance of the EBE framework. We have often relied on the EBE framework as our reference point, to evaluate whether we are keeping abreast of the ways in which our work can be valued, respected and supported in a meaningful, safe and authentic way. The reflections we have shared encompass our experience predominantly in survivor advocacy in our roles at Safe and Equal, but also our broader advocacy work in the DFSV sector nationally.

This report captures our reflections on the work so far, creates a thought piece for further development of the work, and creates a vision for the future work in victim-survivor advocacy in Australia.

In amongst a changing landscape (and a battle to stop violence that sometimes seems overwhelming) one thing remains certain, and that is that victim-survivor advocacy in Australia continues to build momentum, grow solidarity, and is strengthening the movement for change to end violence in our communities. Aligned with the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children (2022-2032)* and the soon to be released *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices)*, along with other key policies and frameworks, our overarching hope is that victim-survivor expertise will continue to inform policy, practice and legislation and ultimately bolster us to the forefront in every way possible to be leaders of the change for generations to come.

We have shared our hopes for the future of victim-survivor advocacy below. We are hoping that this report enriches your work and knowledge, boosts your ongoing commitment to embedding lived experience in the future, and helps you to identify how the positioning and shifting of power can place us at the forefront.

‘Nothing about us without us’.

**Safe and Equal Victim-Survivor
Lived Experience Advocates, 2025**



Board statement of commitment

We are proud to stand alongside survivor advocates and all victim survivors, whose courage, expertise, and lived experiences continue to drive meaningful change, both within the family violence sector and across the wider community.

We recognise that embedding lived experience is not a one-off commitment, but an ongoing process of listening, learning, and evolving. This report reflects the dedication and leadership of survivor advocates who have generously shared their expertise to strengthen our collective approach.

We acknowledge the importance of these recommendations in continuing to strengthen and sustain this work into the future. We remain firmly committed to working in genuine partnership with survivor advocates, to ensure that lived expertise remains central to our efforts to guide, inform, and drive lasting change to end family and gender-based violence.



Summary

For over five years, Safe and Equal has worked to embed survivor advocacy into its practice, guided by the *Family Violence Experts by Experience (EBE) framework*.

This aligns with the organisation's strategic intent to lead and contribute to the translation of research, practice wisdom and lived experience into safe and effective policy and system design. It also reflects a continued commitment to growing the knowledge base on lived experience advocacy and practice.

Drawing on the experiences and insights of the organisation's survivor advocates, staff and board members, the review set out to:

- **Translate the framework:** capture key insights into how the EBE framework has been applied within this context.
- **Share the story so far:** reflect the perspectives of Safe and Equal's advocate team and support staff, creating space to explore their experiences.
- **Support future readiness:** offer recommendations to support more meaningful co-creation of ways of working with survivor advocates and guide assessments of organisational readiness for this work.

This standalone paper of recommendations evolved from the reflections in the full report, to help guide Safe and Equal — and the broader sector — to continue embedding survivor advocacy into the ways they work.

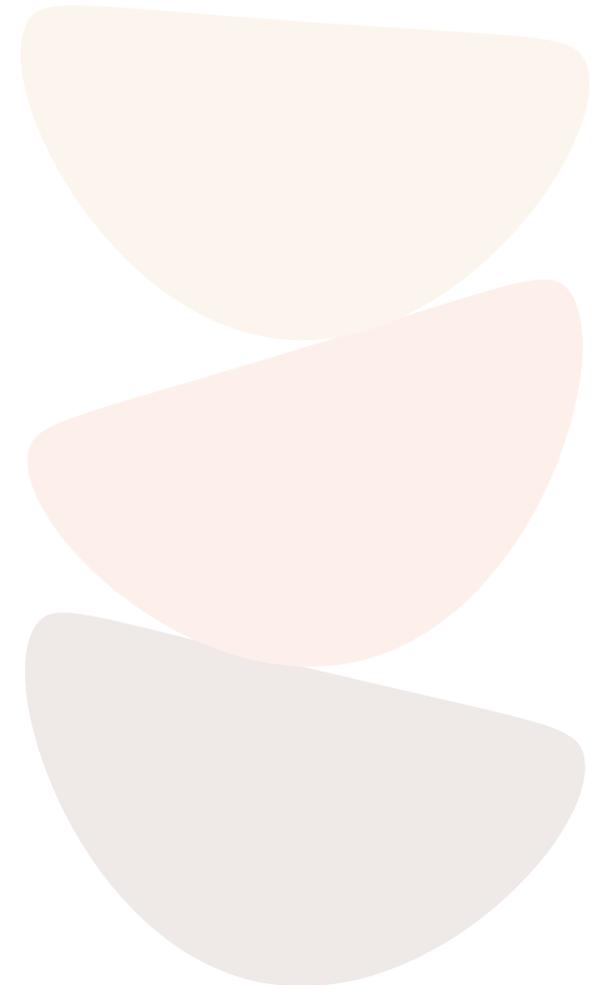
Survivor advocates' perspectives on survivor advocacy

Survivor advocates consistently described advocacy as an enriching and affirming experience — offering, or deepening, a sense of purpose, strength and connection grounded in community. Yet these same elements can also hold tension. The relational nature of advocacy, while powerful, can be its most challenging aspect when not adequately supported.

A shared theme was the importance of coming together, particularly in person, to build strong peer networks grounded in community and a shared commitment to systemic change. But when safe and supported environments are absent, the same relational closeness can give rise to conflict and lateral violence. Some advocates also reflected on how their vulnerability had, at times, been used against them — especially when organisational commitments to valuing lived experience

weren't matched by the actions needed to embed it safely into practice or reform.

These reflections underscore that survivor advocacy, when held with commitment and purpose, can be profoundly beneficial — both personally and systemically. But organisations must not take this involvement lightly. The inclusion of lived experience and expertise should never be tokenistic or surface-level. Embedding it well requires power-sharing, accountability and a willingness for existing systems and practices to be challenged. Supportive environments don't happen by accident; they are cultivated through principled practice and sustained investment.



Safe and Equal's experience of embedding survivor advocacy

Survivor advocates, Safe and Equal staff and board members all shared reflections on the organisation's experience of embedding survivor advocacy. While their perspectives varied, there were strong points of alignment.

As with broader experiences of advocacy, participants emphasised that working from a base of lived experience is deeply relational. It requires sustained attention to building trust and navigating inherent power imbalances, and 'us and them' dynamics that can emerge when approaches that challenge traditional power hierarchies are introduced into systems that haven't historically made space for them.

There was a shared call for culturally safe, trauma-informed and relationally grounded approaches that honour the depth and diversity of victim survivor experience. Across the board, participants stressed that survivor advocacy must not be seen as an 'add-on', but embraced as core to how an organisation thinks, acts and relates.

This calls for a willingness to sit with discomfort, to name and redistribute power and to uphold survivor advocates' autonomy.

Effective working relationships are underpinned by values but sustained through practice. Both staff and advocates reflected on the practical enablers and challenges encountered along the way. These include the importance of clear roles and expectations, fair remuneration and working conditions, realistic flexibility, skilled and supportive staff, trauma-informed and restorative responses to conflict and structures for ongoing support and debriefing.

These reflections also speak to an ongoing process of organisational change. Safe and Equal's approach to survivor advocacy continues to evolve, shaped by listening, learning and a deepening understanding of what it takes to embed this work into systems, structures and everyday practice.

This work has no fixed endpoint, only an ongoing commitment to doing it in ways that are principled, responsive and enduring.

Who these recommendations are for and how to use them

If questioning and reshaping systems and structures is central to your work, this paper is for you.

It's for anyone engaging — or preparing to engage — with lived experience work or survivor advocacy in more intentional, ethical and sustainable ways. Grounded in the experiences and learnings of the family violence sector, these recommendations emerged from our own curiosity and commitment to improving how we work. While it draws from sector-specific contexts, its relevance extends far beyond.

It speaks to people with lived experience, including peer workers and those contributing lived expertise in identified roles. It speaks to CEOs and decision-makers, whose leadership is vital in creating the conditions for this work to thrive. It speaks to researchers, policymakers, academics, funders and anyone committed to disrupting traditional, colonial and patriarchal systems.

How different audiences might use this paper >>

Audience	How this paper may support your work
Survivor advocates and other lived experience workers	To affirm the importance of your expertise and leadership in shaping the systems and services that support victim survivors.
Sector workers working alongside those with lived experience	To prompt reflection, challenge assumptions and support you to embed lived experience into everyday practice.
Researchers and academics	To deepen thinking about how lived expertise can strengthen research and impact.
CEOs and organisational leaders	To challenge traditional ways of working and support strategic shifts toward inclusion, co-creation and embedding lived experience at all levels.
Policy makers	To strengthen your understanding of what principled engagement with lived experience looks like as a foundation for systems reform.
Funders and philanthropists	To highlight the value and true cost of work informed by lived experience and guide ethical, informed and long-term funding priorities.

Recommendations

These recommendations reflect the insights of survivor advocates and the key areas for development identified through the review process. Together, they speak to the layered, relational work needed to create purposeful and sustained opportunities for survivor advocacy across the family violence sector.

01

Recognise survivor advocacy as a distinct discipline with its own skills and practice foundations

02

Build organisational insight into power and systemic trauma

03

Integrate survivor advocacy across organisational culture and structures

04

Strengthen inclusive, culturally responsive approaches to survivor advocacy

05

Embed trauma and violence-informed practice across all levels of work

06

Support survivor advocates to grow, specialise and lead

07

Ground survivor-led work in expansive, evolving principles

08

Recognise and reflect survivor advocates' impact

09

Align organisational readiness with values, not just process

10

Plan and advocate for fair remuneration and longer-term investment

11

Create the conditions for supportive working environments for survivor advocates

12

Build specialist capability to work with children and young people as victim survivors in their own right

RECOMMENDATION : 01

RECOGNISE SURVIVOR ADVOCACY AS A DISTINCT DISCIPLINE, WITH ITS OWN SKILLS AND PRACTICE FOUNDATIONS

Survivor advocates emphasised that a lack of understanding about the nature of lived experience work continues to cause harm.

Organisations — including Safe and Equal — were observed to misunderstand the complexity of survivor advocacy, often reducing it to storytelling, tokenistic consultation or personal testimony. This erasure of structure, skill and discipline undermines advocates' safety and limits the impact of their contributions. Advocates called for a more embedded and accountable understanding of lived experience practice and leadership — one that is genuinely co-created with, and guided by, those who shape and sustain it.



1.1 Make organisational readiness a precondition, not an assumption

Organisations must stop treating survivor engagement as a symbolic gesture and start treating it as a practice requiring preparation, skill and ethical responsibility.

This includes assessing organisational readiness before initiating advocacy work, with survivor advocates involved in determining what “readiness” actually means. Many described being invited into processes that were not safe, not well-designed and not open to challenge — leading to defensiveness, harm and re-traumatisation.

1.2 Recognise survivor advocacy as a distinct discipline with its own expertise requirements

FSV survivor advocacy is a specialised form of lived experience work, grounded in systemic insight, relational leadership and often deep movement-building experience. Yet advocates described being routinely positioned as storytellers, rather than recognised as skilled contributors.

1.3 Strengthen skills and provide support for new or non-lived experience roles

Advocates emphasised the need to strengthen the skills and supports available to people without lived expertise who are employed to facilitate or support advocacy programs. They noted that newcomers to these roles often lack the confidence and capability to engage well with a diverse range of survivor advocates. When this happens, survivor advocates can feel pressured to fill the gaps — adding to their load, straining peer dynamics and ultimately undermining the work. Building capability in support roles is not just a workforce development issue; it essential to safeguarding survivor wellbeing and creating the conditions for ethical, trauma-informed practice.

1.4 Design support systems that reflect advocates’ roles, not a ‘client service’ framework

A consistent theme raised by survivor advocates was the gap in appropriate support structures once individuals transition from being service users to advocacy leaders, peers or collaborators.

Too often, organisations default to therapeutic or client-based models, which fail to meet the needs of advocates working in professional, relational and movement-based capacities

Support for survivor advocates must be trauma-informed, practice-based and peer-aligned — distinct from clinical or counselling frameworks. It must reflect the realities of survivor advocacy as a form of leadership, not as an extension of recovery.

1.5 Recognise the tension between “grassroots” and institutional approaches

Part of building readiness to engage survivor advocates involves recognising that what are considered more “grassroots” versus institutional approaches are shaped by different values, principles, histories and power dynamics. When institutional frameworks dominate, they can obscure or dismiss grassroots methods that have long sustained survivor-led advocacy, sidelining community-based practices and assuming authority without earning trust. There is a need to engage with these tensions directly, rather than smoothing them over or assuming institutional legitimacy by default.

RECOMMENDATION : 02

BUILD ORGANISATIONAL INSIGHT INTO POWER AND SYSTEMIC TRAUMA

Alongside a deeper understanding of survivor advocacy as a specialised discipline, advocates highlighted the need to recognise how power and systemic trauma operate across organisations and sector practices.

While trauma-informed approaches often centre individual experiences, there is far less attention on how systems themselves enact and reproduce harm. In the context of FSV work, it is critical to understand how institutional uses of power — particularly “power over” dynamics — can mirror the very patterns victim survivors are working to resist and disrupt.



2.1 Avoid replicating harm

Many advocates observed that staff and organisations are often unaware of the ways power and harm can be unconsciously replicated in survivor engagement work.

Concepts like *parallel process* and *invisible power* were often unfamiliar — or not sufficiently applied — even within services committed to trauma-informed practice.

Advocates emphasised that these dynamics show up in specific and often intensified ways within the survivor advocacy space, and underscored the need to build strong foundations and practice capabilities to recognise, address and mitigate them. Without this capacity, the risk of re-traumatisation remains high.

KEY CONCEPT

What is parallel process?

A clinical and systems-based term used to describe when the dynamics a person has experienced in trauma are unintentionally repeated within the system or organisation supporting them. For example, power and control dynamics in a family violence context may be mirrored in interactions between survivor advocates and institutional leadership.

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (July 2024), *Best practice supervision guidelines: Family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing*

vic.gov.au/best-practice-supervision-guidelines

KEY CONCEPT

What is invisible power?

The norms, assumptions, and beliefs that shape what is considered 'normal', 'right', or 'appropriate'. Invisible power often underpins systemic inequity and maintains status quos by legitimising dominant worldviews.

Just Associates, *Power*

justassociates.org/big-ideas/power1

2.2 Avoid transactional and extractive approaches to survivor engagement

Advocates spoke at length about the harm caused when their contributions are reduced to data points, stories or organisational leverage. When survivor advocacy is treated as symbolic, transactional or instrumental — rather than relational and rights-based — the result is often exhaustion, mistrust and harm. Survivors are not “unicorns” or spokespeople; they are experts, collaborators and leaders. Respecting this means moving beyond tokenism and into sustained, equitable practice.

RECOMMENDATION : 03

INTEGRATE SURVIVOR ADVOCACY ACROSS ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND STRUCTURES

Embedding survivor advocacy into organisational practice requires more than inviting input — it means recognising it as core to the organisation's work. This involves moving beyond consultation toward co-creation, supporting lived experience leadership across governance and operations and creating pathways for survivor advocates to shape strategy, culture and decision-making. It also means enabling advocates to contribute across a range of roles — not just direct advocacy — and ensuring they are recognised as integral to the organisation, not treated as an add-on.



3.1 Build and nurture relational practice

Advocates consistently emphasised that relationships are the foundation that holds everything together and makes the work impactful. They distinguished between relational work, which fosters deeper connections and trust, and transactional approaches, which tend to be surface-level and short-term. Without intentional relationship-building, trust erodes and the impact of the work diminishes.

KEY CONCEPT

What is relational practice?

“Relational practice is the provision of services through the development and maintenance of a warm and responsive relationship. ‘Relational Practice is a way of working where establishing and maintaining a helpful interpersonal relationship is the priority.’ (Haigh & Benefield, 2020). Making relationships important helps to create the conditions for change.”

Dr Paul Prichard (2024), *What is relational practice and why is it important?*

ccch.org.au/resource-hub/blogs/what-is-relational-practice-and-why-is-it-important

3.2 Understand — and apply — levels of participation correctly

Advocates highlighted the widespread misuse of terms like co-design and co-production and stressed the importance of using these terms with integrity. Organisations must be able to clearly identify where their work sits on the participation spectrum and avoid overstating the depth of collaboration. Misrepresenting the nature of engagement can undermine and erode trust, particularly with communities where transparency and honesty are essential for building strong, sustained relationships.

KEY CONCEPT

What is the ladder of participation?

Sherry Arnstein’s original *Ladder of Citizen Participation* outlines different levels of engagement — from manipulation and tokenism at the lower rungs, to partnership and citizen control at the top. It remains a foundational tool for understanding how power is distributed in participatory work.

More contemporary adaptations build on Arnstein’s model to include approaches such as co-design and co-production. Examples include **Think Local Act Personal’s** *Ladder of Co-production* and **Indigo Daya’s** adaptation through a *consumer/survivor lens*.

3.3 Integrate survivor advocacy into organisational roles and structures

Advocates spoke to the harm caused when lived experience is siloed or treated as an add-on. Survivor advocates are often included through “groups,” yet remain excluded from organisational decision-making, workforce systems, and career progression. This structural separation not only limits their influence, it also contributes to a distinct form of imposter syndrome, intensified by both organisational and systemic misunderstandings of their role, expertise and value.

RECOMMENDATION : 04

STRENGTHEN INCLUSIVE, CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE APPROACHES TO SURVIVOR ADVOCACY

Building capability to engage a diversity of survivor advocates requires sustained, deliberate effort. It means recognising the fluidity of identity, moving beyond tokenism and investing in the structures, skills and mindsets that enable genuine inclusion. It also calls for deeper sector-wide capacity to more deeply engage with diversity, including its discomforts, tensions and challenges. This includes confronting internal biases — within both organisations and advocacy groups — and dismantling structural barriers to participation.



4.1 Embrace the diversity within diversity

The family violence sector still has work to do to move beyond surface-level inclusion and address the systemic factors that shape access, representation and participation.

Advocates urged organisations to invest in intersectional practice grounded in nuance, context and ongoing learning.

While engaging some communities may require what are seen as more flexible or “creative” approaches, these practice challenges must not become excuses for inaction. Without building the capability to reach those most often excluded, the sector cannot fully understand how FSV manifests across different cultural, social and systemic contexts.

KEY CONCEPT

Intersectionality

A framework for understanding how overlapping forms of oppression or inequality shape people’s experiences of power, privilege, discrimination and marginalisation. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the term highlights how Black women’s experiences were often made invisible when racism and sexism were treated as separate systems.

In the context of family violence and advocacy, an intersectional lens recognises that survivors may face multiple, compounding barriers — and heightened risks — due to intersecting structural inequalities. For example, the *Victorian Family Violence Diversity and Intersectionality Framework* illustrates how gender inequality, in combination with factors such as race, disability, or cultural background, can increase vulnerability to violence and reduce access to support.

What do we mean by intersectionality in this context?

Intersectionality challenges the separation of identity categories by examining how they are formed, interact and operate within systems of power. This approach goes beyond naming individual identities — it focuses on the structural change needed to address discrimination and inequality.

At Safe and Equal, we see visibility and representation not just as reflections of past change, but as drivers of future change. When marginalised communities are not in the room, they cannot speak for themselves — and the cycle of exclusion continues.

Adapted from: Safe and Equal (2023), *Intersectionality in Primary Prevention*

safeandequal.org.au/resources/intersectionality-primary-prevention

4.2 Design for diversity and balance in representation

Representation shapes not only who is visible, but whose experiences are heard and legitimised. A balance of representation ensures the burden of advocacy does not fall to one person.

Advocates cautioned against narrow ideas of who qualifies as an “acceptable” survivor advocate. True diversity spans gender identities, cultural contexts, abilities and forms of violence and includes perspectives that challenge dominant narratives.

Diverse representation must also include a diversity of systems experience in different time periods. It was highlighted through the interviews, that Safe and Equal has not recruited for sufficient representation of advocates who, as an example, have post Royal Commission or even contemporaneous experience of the response system, including courts.

When a sufficiently diverse representation is not designed for, it risks privileging only certain experiences. Moreover, when representation is not balanced in a group of advocates, it places burden on a single advocate to carry the load of a particular experience.

RESEARCH CORNER

The concept of “the ideal victim”

Refers to a stereotype or societal expectation of what a victim of domestic violence or abuse is supposed to look like. This idealisation has real-world implications for victim survivor advocacy, shaping which voices and experiences are prioritised and deemed credible or acceptable within the mainstream.

“Despite the prioritisation of victim-survivors’ voices, there are still many less “ideal”, more representative voices that are not being heard. These issues must be addressed.”

Lisa Wheildon & Asher Flynn (2021), *The Batty effect: How one woman changed the conversation on domestic violence*, Monash Lens

4.3 Cultivate diversity awareness among survivor advocates

Building diversity-informed practice is not solely the responsibility of organisations – advocates reflected on how peer spaces can also reproduce bias, gatekeeping and harmful hierarchies. Diversity within advocacy must be recognised, respected and actively supported. Without this, underlying tensions can take root, weakening solidarity and diminishing the collective strength of survivor-led work.

4.4 Recognise the value and relevance of living experience

Advocates encouraged the sector to consider the nuanced realities of those living through ongoing experiences of FSV, highlighting the distinction between historical (lived) and current (living) experience – and how these shape opportunities for advocacy and inclusion.

They reflected on how visibility, legitimacy, and influence are often extended unevenly, shaped by perceptions of who is considered ‘ready’ or ‘palatable’ enough. For those navigating systemic instability, active violence, or ongoing abuse, this can lead to being sidelined or excluded. Advocates called for greater recognition that, for some, engaging in advocacy during such periods can strengthen – not diminish – their contributions, bringing real-time relevance and insight to the work.

RECOMMENDATION : 05

EMBED TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED PRACTICE ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF WORK

Advocates emphasised the need for organisations to deepen their understanding of trauma and violence-informed practice, particularly in the context of survivor advocacy. When practice is inadequate, it can compound harm, delay recovery and retraumatise those involved. As highlighted earlier, it is critical to distinguish between mitigating risk and avoiding it altogether. Trauma and violence-informed cultures recognise that while harm cannot always be prevented, it must be acknowledged, responded to and actively minimised.



KEY CONCEPT

What is trauma and violence-informed practice?

Trauma and violence-informed practice builds on trauma-informed approaches by accounting for the intersecting impacts of systemic and interpersonal violence, as well as structural inequities. It takes an intersectional view that recognises both current and historical experiences of violence — reframing trauma responses not as individual deficits, but as understandable and adaptive responses to harm.

Adapted from: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (November 2022), *Framework for trauma-informed practice*

dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/framework-trauma-informed-practice

5.1 Contextualise trauma-informed practice for FSV advocacy

Advocates reflected on the critical importance of not just understanding trauma-informed practice in a general sense, but recognising how it manifests within the context of FSV survivor advocacy.

This includes attending to the distinct ways trauma affects survivors — particularly in relation to power, agency, and the need for

advocacy approaches that respond to the complexity and nuance of their experiences. Without this contextual understanding, there is a risk of reproducing the very dynamics of harm they seek to challenge.

5.2 Understand and address the impacts of trauma on professional growth

Trauma recovery can both shape and complicate the professional pathways of survivor advocates. These impacts must be addressed without being pathologised.

Rather than being sidelined or denied opportunities, survivor advocates must be supported with practical scaffolding that recognises trauma as an enduring part of their working lives. This includes proactively addressing risks of isolation and burnout, and ensuring support is accessible without relying solely on external systems. This scaffolding is especially critical during early stages of advocacy, where the impacts of trauma may re-emerge in new ways.

5.3 Weigh up risk versus autonomy

Advocates spoke extensively about the need for organisations to strike a balance between adequately assessing risk and overcorrecting to the point where survivor advocates feel silenced, stifled or suppressed. This balance is not fixed; it shifts in response to factors such as community context, the capability and capacity of both survivor advocates and support staff and differing interpretations of risk between organisations and advocates themselves.

Although survivor advocates are well aware of the risks involved in their work, they often observe organisations overcorrecting — becoming overly risk-averse or hypervigilant in ways that feel performative or paternalistic. This can create the impression that organisational responses are more about protecting themselves than truly supporting the safety and agency of victim survivors.

KEY CONCEPT

What is transformative justice?

A community-led way of responding to harm that focuses on healing, accountability, and changing the systems that cause harm in the first place. Unlike restorative justice — which often works within existing structures to repair relationships — transformative justice looks at the bigger picture, asking how systems like racism, ableism, or colonialism create the conditions for harm.

Rather than relying on the legal system, transformative justice builds collective responses that centre the needs of those harmed, support growth and accountability for those who've caused harm, and work to dismantle the systems that sustain harm.

Advocates also highlighted the importance of clearly defining safety and distinguishing between being unsafe and feeling uncomfortable. This distinction is crucial not only for those working within organisations, but also within peer relationships among survivor advocates.

5.4 Prioritise progress over perfection

Advocates emphasised that survivor engagement is not static — it requires ongoing reflection, learning and iteration.

They called on organisations to move away from perfectionism and control, and instead prioritise respect, transparency and openness. While 'do no harm' remains foundational, progress depends on trauma-responsive, dignifying practices that make room for uncertainty and shared growth. Advocates spoke of the need to reduce fear of "getting it wrong", and to replace performance with presence.

RECOMMENDATION : 06

SUPPORT SURVIVOR ADVOCATES TO GROW, SPECIALISE AND LEAD

Survivor advocates spoke to the importance of opportunities to build **broad skills, deepen specialisation and align with areas of personal and systemic relevance**. This dual approach strengthened confidence, supported long-term engagement and opened new pathways for leadership. They stressed that professional growth must be structurally supported, relationally grounded and embedded in collective goals for change, not left to individual effort alone.



6.1 Enhance career development pathways and leadership capacity

Sustainable career and leadership pathways for survivor advocates must be structurally and systemically supported, not left to individual effort. This includes recognising and nurturing lived experience leadership, building inclusive structures for progression and moving beyond tokenistic engagement. Diverse, non-linear pathways enable advocates to grow, lead and shape the systems they've long worked to change.

6.2 Build capability in the relevant areas

Effective survivor advocacy draws on a wide range of essential characteristics and capabilities – from systems literacy to humility and self-awareness. Building capability in the relevant areas means going beyond technical skills to include reflective practice, peer learning, and the ability to recognise personal limits.

These characteristics and capabilities emerged directly from survivor advocates' reflections during interviews. In response to the question, "What do survivor advocates need in order to undertake work that influences policy, service

design and practice?", advocates spoke to the personal, relational and systemic capacities required for purposeful, sustained advocacy. Their insights make clear that advocacy is not only about skills, but about ways of being – grounded in ethics, self-awareness and collective responsibility.

While reflecting on characteristics and capabilities, it is also important to recognise survivor advocates as whole people, bringing far more than their lived experience alone. Advocates expertise also draws from professional, cultural and community knowledge, including skills developed through education, work and leadership in other industries. To support growth and leadership meaningfully, organisations must recognise the full range of expertise and contribution advocates offer.

Category	Characteristics and capabilities
Advocacy skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing advocacy through practice • Capacity and openness to learn from many different sources • Ability to advocate across a range of topics • Knowing your audience • Knowing how to campaign • Understanding how change happens — and how to help make it happen • Networking and building relationships • Balancing strategic thinking and emotional insight
Vehicle for voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's not just about your story, but <i>our</i> stories • Advocating not only from personal experience, but as a conduit for collective stories • Knowing when to move out of the way for others
Empathy and humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community based and solution focused • Accepting what you don't know and where your expertise ends • Knowing we're only <i>one</i> voice, not <i>all</i> voices
Ethics and adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding true to your moral compass • Being willing to be challenged • Being prepared to change your point of view
Recognising limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being aware of when trauma shows up and gets in the way • Responsibility for self: ability to identify and communicate safety and support needs • Self-care (before, during and after engagements) • Being conscious of internalised judgements • Being wary of hierarchies that begin to emerge
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To community, culture and greater cause • To adaptable and flexible structures that foster safety

RECOMMENDATION : 07

GROUND SURVIVOR-LED WORK IN EXPANSIVE, EVOLVING PRINCIPLES

Survivor advocates reflected on the limitations of the existing EBE framework principles and offered a more expansive, future-focused foundation for survivor-led work. These emerging principles centre survivors as agents of change — not subjects of engagement — and set out the values and conditions needed to support lived experience leadership, ethical participation and systemic transformation. They emphasise authenticity, belonging and power-sharing, and call for an approach that evolves through ongoing dialogue with those most affected.



Authenticity	Emphasises genuine representation and engagement, valuing people’s true voices and experiences. Calls for organisations to reject tokenism by honouring their commitments — translating principles into practice and embodying them in everyday actions.
Belonging and representation	Moves beyond surface-level inclusion to ensure marginalised communities are visibly reflected in movement building, leadership and decision-making. Affirms that representation shapes not just who feels welcome, but what feels possible.
Community	Strengthens connection within survivor advocacy teams, across organisations and throughout the sector. Encourages collaboration and collective action, fostering shared responsibility at all levels.
Decolonising	Honours First Nations’ leadership, knowledge systems and ways of working as foundational to advocacy. Centres diverse cultural perspectives and recognises the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Works toward justice through deep respect and structural change.
Growth	Understands that growth and evolution are ongoing processes, for advocates and organisations alike. Encourages continuous learning, reflection and adaptation, fostering cultures where change is expected, supported and shared.
Healing	Shifts the focus from survival toward collective and individual restoration. Emphasises reclaiming agency, rebuilding connection, and supporting one another, while creating environments that nurture wellbeing and honour strength and determination.
Recognising strengths	Sees survivors as agents of change, bringing strength, expertise and leadership to the work that affects them. Shifts the lens from sympathy to solidarity, advocating for survivors to be heard, trusted and amplified.
Power	Surfaces the risk of replicating harmful dynamics, where systems and organisations mirror patterns of ‘power over.’ Calls for relationships grounded in equity — where power is shared, not imposed, and power awareness is embedded in everyday practice.
Respect	Values lived experience, individual identity and the unique contributions each advocate brings. Calls for a culture of mutual respect — where dignity, trust and recognition can take root and grow.
Understanding	Prioritises comprehension over judgment, actively seeking to engage with diverse experiences and perspectives. Encourages open-mindedness, deep listening and dialogue instead of assumption.

RECOMMENDATION : 08

RECOGNISE AND REFLECT SURVIVOR ADVOCATES' IMPACT

Survivor advocates spoke to the difficulty of seeing how their contributions directly lead to change — particularly when that change is relational, systemic or slow to emerge. While their work often shifts narratives, informs strategy and sparks long-term reform, they are rarely shown how their input has influenced outcomes. Closing this loop is vital — not only for accountability, but to honour contributions, support shared learning and sustain continued engagement.



RECOMMENDATION : 09

ALIGN ORGANISATIONAL READINESS WITH VALUES, NOT JUST PROCESS

Survivor advocates emphasised that true organisational readiness begins with purpose, not just logistics. Before recruitment, planning, or structural design, organisations must first reflect on what it truly means to engage with lived experience — and how that commitment aligns with their values, purpose and long-term direction. Only from this foundation can readiness be intentional, sustained and properly resourced.



RECOMMENDATION : 10

PLAN AND ADVOCATE FOR FAIR REMUNERATION AND LONGER-TERM INVESTMENT

Fair and sustainable remuneration is foundational to equitable survivor advocacy. While payment isn't the only way to recognise contributions, it is essential for enabling participation — particularly for those balancing caregiving, employment and other demands. Without financial support, the ability to contribute remains unevenly distributed. If organisations are serious about hearing from those on the margins, they must actively address the financial and structural conditions that shape who can take part, and how.

10.1 Ensure clarity and support in remuneration practices

When organisations fail to clearly communicate whether or how survivor advocates will be paid, it places the burden back on individuals to raise the issue themselves – a position that is both uncomfortable and undignified.

Remuneration should never be assumed or left unsaid. Lack of transparency also deepens inequities, disproportionately benefiting those with prior knowledge of business or contracting practices and further marginalising others.

10.2 Prioritise longer-term funding and more secure employment pathways for survivor advocates

Advocates highlighted the ongoing impacts of limited and insecure funding for survivor advocacy. While acknowledging the broader scarcity of resources, they noted that a lack of sustained investment leads to short-term projects, expired contracts and limited continuity or support. This not only disrupts employment and advocacy pathways, but also undermines systemic

change. Advocates expressed frustration with restrictive funding models that set activities and outcomes without their input – reinforcing power imbalances and limiting the potential of survivor-led work.

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

Guidance on payment, reimbursement and recognition

This resource provides guidance on how to fairly pay, reimburse and recognise people with lived experience for their time and expertise. While developed specifically for engagement with the Department, it may also be useful for community service organisations and others working alongside people with lived experience.

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (October 2024), *Guidance on payment, reimbursement and recognition*

dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/guidance-payment-reimbursement-and-recognition

RECOMMENDATION : 11

CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR SUPPORTIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS FOR SURVIVOR ADVOCATES

Survivor advocates spoke to the cumulative weight and layered impact of their work — often described as a “lived experience tax” — where emotional, social and financial costs are real, yet often invisible.

This makes it essential for organisations to avoid adding unnecessary pressure and instead create conditions that reduce harm, recognise recovery as part of the work, and actively support advocates to sustain their involvement.

11.1 Address employment inequities in survivor advocacy

Advocates reflected on how the casual and often precarious nature of survivor advocacy roles can create significant barriers — even when flexibility is intended as a benefit.

Without consistent employment protections or entitlements, many are left feeling vulnerable, undervalued and “othered” in comparison to colleagues in non-lived experience roles.

11.2 Support flexible practice through responsive and fluid approaches

Flexibility is vital to keeping survivor advocacy sustainable and responsive.

Creating the conditions for choice and adaptability helps ensure the work remains both viable and grounded. Advocates noted that needs can shift day to day — particularly when navigating trauma, systemic barriers or limited access to support. Given the already challenging nature of the work, it is critical for organisations to provide time and space for processing and restoration, especially during times of significant emotional, psychological or structural strain.

11.3 Embed trauma recovery into the practice of survivor advocacy

While trauma-responsive scaffolding is essential to supporting survivor advocates in their professional development (as outlined in 5.2), advocates also emphasised the importance of embedding trauma recovery into survivor advocacy itself — not treating it as something to manage separately or alone.

This is especially vital for those in coordination or leadership roles, where the emotional load and complexity of the work can be even greater. Recovery is not linear, and support must be tailored, ongoing, and embedded across all stages of advocacy. In the context of FSV and intersecting social issues, impacts vary widely — which is why consistent, relational support is essential.

11.4 Make accessibility systemic

Accessibility remains a significant — and often overlooked — barrier to survivor advocacy. From transport and travel to preparation time and accessible formats, practical constraints shape who can participate and who is excluded.

Access needs should not be viewed as individual accommodations, but as part of a broader collective commitment to equity and inclusion. Creating space for feedback and continuously refining processes in response is essential to ensuring that all advocates can engage and contribute in ways that reflect both their needs and strengths.

11.5 Provide access to tailored professional development

While survivor advocacy is a distinct specialisation — often grounded in both lived and learned experience within FSV and intersecting issues and sectors — ongoing skills development remains essential. Organisations must prioritise tailored professional development to support advocates’ safety, confidence and growth, while also helping to identify any practice or capability gaps. As outlined earlier, this also strengthens lived experience leadership and supports clearer pathways for career progression.

11.6 Build trust through transparent and relational feedback

Advocates highlighted the importance of clear feedback channels — both formal and informal — within organisations. Informal mechanisms help prevent issues from escalating by enabling early repair and learning. Trusting relationships with support staff make it safer for advocates to raise concerns, and when feedback is responded to relationally, it has greater potential to strengthen trust, prevent harm and contribute to a more supportive working environment.

11.7 Ensure conflict responses and protocols balance risk management with relational accountability

In the context of FSV advocacy, conflict must be met with sensitivity, skill, and a commitment to restorative and reparative practice. Without thoughtful processes, organisational responses risk mirroring past trauma, eroding trust, and compromising safety. Responding with awareness, accountability, and care ensures conflict is not managed at the expense of relationships.

Advocates emphasised the importance of conflict protocols that centre the safety and experiences of survivor advocates — not just the risk perceptions of organisations. When organisations respond reactively or focus solely on reputational risk, it can retraumatise advocates and erode trust. Organisational defensiveness can easily eclipse care for advocates, particularly in the absence of clear, relational approaches to conflict. Effective responses require time, understanding, and a commitment to addressing the underlying causes of harm. Without this, advocates may disengage entirely.

KEY CONCEPT

What are restorative and reparative practices?

Restorative practices focus on healing and rebuilding relationships through accountability and mutual understanding. They aim to address harm, repair emotional and relational damage and restore trust. Rather than relying on punishment, restorative approaches emphasise personal growth, healing and reintegration.

Reparative practices involve taking concrete steps to repair or make amends for harm. While they can form part of a broader restorative process, they focus more directly on addressing the material or practical impacts of harm, while also allowing space for emotional and relational healing.

Both approaches centre accountability and the restoration of dignity. They aim to foster understanding, seek to prevent future harm and recognise the importance of repairing relationships — not just resolving conflict.

RECOMMENDATION : 12

BUILD SPECIALIST CAPABILITY TO WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS VICTIM SURVIVORS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT

After years of tireless advocacy by young people and their allies, the sector is only now beginning to recognise children and young people as victim survivors — and survivor advocates — in their own right.

Youth advocates emphasised that while children and young people often spark momentum for social and systems change, they are still too often excluded from genuine co-creation. Adults may take over, overlook their expertise, or involve them only superficially — leading to outcomes that fail to reflect their lived experiences or visions for change.

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

Supporting children and young people experiencing family violence

Co-produced with Berry Street's Y-Change Lived Experience Consultants, this guide supports practitioners to better support children and young people with experiences of family violence.

Safe and Equal & Berry Street, Y-Change (2022), *Learning from lived experience – a guide for professionals supporting children and young people experiencing family violence*

safeandequal.org.au/resources/support-for-children-and-young-people

Actions

These actions are not prescriptions for perfection, but practical starting points for principled progress.

Each recommendation calls for both cultural shifts and concrete action, recognising that change must happen at multiple levels, and that responsibility cannot rest with individual organisations alone. System-wide commitment is essential to ensuring that survivor advocacy is held safely, supported effectively and intentionally embedded.

RECOMMENDATION 01:

Recognise survivor advocacy as a distinct discipline, with its own skills and practice foundations

No.	Recommendation	Action
1.1	Make organisational readiness a precondition, not an assumption	Re-evaluate current tools and practices to ensure they embed safety planning, co-design of engagement processes with survivor advocates and staff preparation to receive lived experience perspectives with respect, openness and a commitment to shared power.
1.2	Recognise survivor advocacy as a distinct discipline with its own expertise requirements	Acknowledge survivor advocacy as a distinct discipline and ensure those leading it have specialist experience or training — including investment in organisational literacy about the purpose, boundaries and practice of survivor advocacy.
1.3	Strengthen skills and provide support for new or non-lived experience roles	Provide tailored training, reflective supervision and ongoing support for staff employed in advocacy programs. Acknowledge the relational capability these roles require, and ensure responsibility for trauma-informed engagement does not fall solely on survivor advocates. Foster cultures of learning and accountability that prioritise shared understanding over defensiveness.
1.4	Design support systems that reflect advocates' roles, not a 'client service' framework	Develop fit-for-purpose support structures for survivor advocates that are distinct from therapeutic services. This includes peer supervision, reflective practice and policies that recognise advocates as contributors, not clients.



1.5	Recognise the tension between “grassroots” and institutional approaches	Avoid defaulting to institutional ways of working as the standard. Create space for multiple advocacy traditions, including grassroots and community-led approaches. Acknowledge the legitimacy of non-institutional knowledge, and avoid using strictly institutional metrics to define trust, readiness or expertise.
-----	---	---

RECOMMENDATION 02:

Build organisational insight into power and systemic trauma

No.	Recommendation	Action
2.1	Avoid replicating harm	Build capability to recognise how power and systemic trauma operate — not just between individuals, but through organisational structures, norms, and practices. Strengthen organisational literacy and accountability around dynamics such as parallel process, invisible power, and institutional harm.
2.2	Avoid transactional and extractive approaches to survivor engagement	Consciously work to avoid transactional, performative and extractive engagement. Ensure participatory processes are designed with transparency, shared purpose and sustained agency for survivor advocates. Approach survivor advocacy as a relational, rights-based practice — not a compliance exercise.

RECOMMENDATION 03:

Build organisational insight into power and systemic trauma

No.	Recommendation	Action
3.1	Build and nurture relational practice	Recognise relational practice as foundational to survivor advocacy. Commit to building and maintaining relationships at all levels — not only at the point of engagement, but across ongoing collaboration, governance and strategic work.
3.2	Understand — and apply — levels of participation correctly	Use participatory language with care and precision, and be transparent with advocates about the level of input and influence available. Be prepared to explain your rationale if deeper collaboration isn’t possible at particular points in time — and remain open to challenge and to planning for deeper participation over time.
3.3	Integrate survivor advocacy into organisational roles and structures	Invest in well-facilitated advisory structures with clear purpose, strong facilitation, and real influence. Create pathways for survivor advocates to be embedded in organisational roles with defined responsibilities, fair remuneration, and opportunities for leadership. Value their contributions not only as participants, but as collaborators and strategic partners.

RECOMMENDATION 04:

Strengthen inclusive, culturally responsive approaches to survivor advocacy

No.	Recommendation	Action
4.1	Embrace the diversity within diversity	Build capability to recognise how systems of oppression shape identity, access, and participation — and move beyond individual representation toward relational, community-informed approaches to inclusion and belonging.
4.2	Design for diversity in representation	Design participation and representation mechanisms that reflect a broad range of identities, abilities, experiences and worldviews — including those that challenge dominant narratives. Proactively include voices that are underrepresented or routinely excluded, and embed structural accountability for inclusion across all levels of influence.
4.3	Cultivate diversity awareness among survivor advocates	Build — and actively model — shared capability to understand and navigate difference through peer-based learning, reflective practice, and access to training in cultural humility, responsiveness, and all-inclusive approaches. Strengthen this capability across both advocacy and support roles, and foster cultures of mutual and continuous learning and development — rather than rigidity or static ways of working.
4.4	Recognise the value and relevance of living experience	Recognise lived and living experience as distinct but equally valid, and create flexible pathways that support advocates with ongoing experiences of FSV and other lived and living experience. Be guided by advocates — and in ongoing dialogue with them — about autonomy in decisions around timing, participation, and support.

RECOMMENDATION 05:

Embed trauma and violence-informed practice across all levels of work

No.	Recommendation	Action
5.1	Contextualise trauma-informed practice for FSV advocacy	Develop and embed trauma-informed approaches that are specific to the context of FSV survivor advocacy. Move beyond generic models by recognising the distinct power dynamics and impacts of FSV-related trauma, and ensure practice reflects the lived realities of survivor advocates.
5.2	Understand and address the impacts of trauma on professional growth	Provide survivor advocates with trauma-responsive, rights-based scaffolding that supports their professional development, wellbeing, and leadership. Recognise trauma as an ongoing context — not a disqualifier — and ensure timely, appropriate care is embedded into roles, rather than outsourced or treated as optional.
5.3	Weigh up risk versus autonomy	Develop shared, nuanced understandings of safety that distinguish between risk and discomfort, and centre autonomy and collaboration in decision-making.

5.4	Prioritise progress over perfection	Communicate openly about what's being trialled, invite honest feedback without defensiveness, and prioritise responsiveness and relational repair over perfectionism or fear of getting it wrong
-----	-------------------------------------	--

RECOMMENDATION 06:

Support survivor advocates to grow, specialise and lead

No.	Recommendation	Action
6.1	Enhance career development pathways and leadership capacity	Work alongside survivor advocates to create career and leadership pathways that recognise lived experience as a source of expertise and influence. Invest in training, skill-building partnerships, strategic support, and flexible progression opportunities that reflect diverse trajectories and aspirations. Strengthen organisational structures so advocates can grow, lead, and drive change — within and beyond the sector.
6.2	Build capability in the relevant areas	Support survivor advocates to build capabilities across a range of personal and professional domains, and provide opportunities for peer learning, reflection and real-world application. Value the emotional, relational and political dimensions of advocacy, and create space to develop community-informed, context-specific skills grounded in lived experience.

RECOMMENDATION 07:

Support survivor advocates to grow, specialise and lead

No.	Recommendation	Action
7.1	Ground survivor-led work in expansive, evolving principles	Evolve and expand the EBE principles in partnership with survivor advocates to better reflect their visions for leadership, restoration and systemic change. Embed values like authenticity, healing and power-sharing into everyday practice — not just policy. Treat these principles as living commitments that guide reflective, relational and future-focused work.

RECOMMENDATION 08:

Recognise and reflect survivor advocates' impact

No.	Recommendation	Action
8.1	Recognise and reflect survivor advocates' impact	Establish consistent and respectful processes to reflect impact and outcomes back to survivor advocates. Acknowledge both tangible shifts and slower, systemic ripple effects — recognising that advocacy shapes not just outcomes, but culture. Make feedback part of reciprocal practice, not just reporting — enabling advocates to see the difference they make and feel genuinely valued in the change they help lead.

RECOMMENDATION 09:

Align organisational readiness with values, not just process

No.	Recommendation	Action
9.1	Align organisational readiness with values, not just process	Organisational readiness starts well before recruitment or planning — it begins with values. Focus on a deliberate, organisation-wide approach that is purposeful, strategic, resourced and sustained over time. Don't wait for perfect conditions. Lead with purpose — especially when the work is complex or uncomfortable.

RECOMMENDATION 10:

Plan and advocate for fair remuneration and longer-term investment

No.	Recommendation	Action
10.1	Ensure clarity and support in remuneration practices	Be proactive and transparent about remuneration from the outset — including which benchmarks you are drawing from. Clearly communicate when, how and how much survivor advocates will be paid, so the burden doesn't fall on individuals to initiate these conversations. Where possible, contribute to broader sector clarity by sharing standardised rates, templates and tools that support fair negotiation.
10.2	Prioritise longer-term funding and more secure employment pathways for survivor advocates	Move beyond short-term or project-based approaches to survivor engagement. Plan for longer term, flexible funding that supports secure employment pathways, not just participation. Embed sustainability into organisational and funding strategies, and work collectively to address systemic gaps and embed survivor leadership across the sector.

RECOMMENDATION 11:

Create the conditions for supportive working environments for survivor advocates

No.	Recommendation	Action
11.1	Address employment inequities in survivor advocacy	Address employment disparities by ensuring survivor advocates have equitable access to workplace protections, entitlements and clear contracts. Recognise that casual, inconsistent or voucher-based arrangements can create unnecessary risk and instability. Move towards secure, accessible, well-supported roles that reflect the value of lived expertise and provide a stable foundation for growth.
11.2	Support flexible practice through responsive and fluid approaches	Adopt flexible practice approaches that respond to advocates' shifting needs, abilities, capacities and contexts. Build adaptable structures and team cultures that honour choice, recognising that what feels safe or possible may change over time.

11.3	Embed trauma recovery into the practice of survivor advocacy	Embed trauma recovery as a core part of survivor advocacy — especially for those in coordination and leadership roles, where practice demands are often more complex and relationally intensive. Support must be ongoing, tailored, and integrated into the work — not something advocates are expected to manage alone. Acknowledge that, in a sector shaped by cumulative impacts, recovery is not linear. Ensure consistent, relational support is built into team cultures and organisational systems, and recognised as essential to creating safe and sustainable working conditions.
11.4	Make accessibility systemic	Prioritise accessibility as a shared responsibility. Address practical barriers early — such as transport, preparation time, and accessible formats — and create space for advocates to name and refine their needs throughout engagement.
11.5	Provide access to tailored professional development	Provide survivor advocates with access to tailored professional development that supports safe, confident participation and strengthens lived experience leadership. Ensure opportunities reflect diverse roles, needs, and ways of knowing, and are embedded in organisational and funding strategies — not treated as an add-on.
11.6	Build trust through transparent and relational feedback	Build trust through transparent and responsive feedback processes. Create space for both formal and informal channels where concerns can be raised safely, early and without fear — and ensure feedback is met with openness and a commitment to learning.
11.7	Ensure conflict responses and protocols balance risk management with relational accountability	Create clear, trauma-aware conflict response protocols that balance risk management with relational accountability. Ensure responses allow space for reflection, dialogue, and repair — not just resolution — and are guided by a commitment to transparency and trust-building.

RECOMMENDATION 12:

Build specialist capability to work with children and young people as victim survivors in their own right

No.	Recommendation	Action
12.1	Build specialist capability to work with children and young people as victim survivors in their own right	Embed dedicated roles, co-led approaches and safe-enough processes that make their leadership possible — not tokenistic. Treat youth advocacy as essential to systems transformation, and invest in the relationships, structures and resources needed to support their leadership in ways that reflect their lived experiences, capacities, and calls for change.

The path ahead: Where to from here?

These recommendations are more than a reflection — they are a call to action.

We invite you to take what's been shared and make it your own. Embed these recommendations into your organisation or practice to help build the literacy, capability and care needed to sustain this critical work.

Following reflective interviews with survivor advocates and staff, Safe and Equal has begun implementing changes based on what we heard. These actions reflect our commitment to embedding lived experience across all areas of our organisation — not as a separate initiative, but as a core function.

These recommendations are not a destination, but a stepping stone. What is captured here will continue to guide the work of Safe and Equal — within our organisation and across the broader sector.

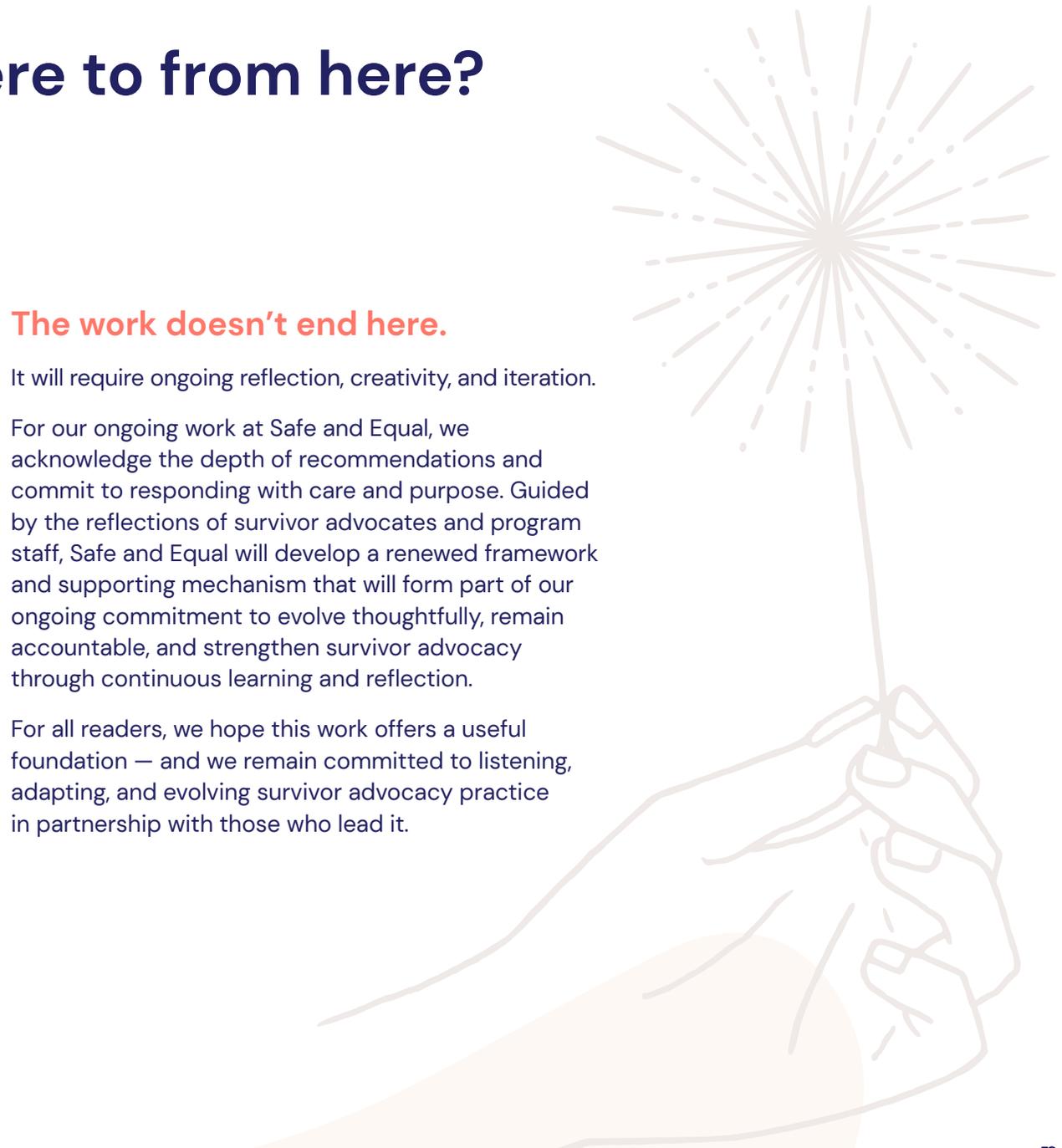
We acknowledge that frameworks alone are not enough. What matters is how they are used, adapted, and kept alive in practice.

The work doesn't end here.

It will require ongoing reflection, creativity, and iteration.

For our ongoing work at Safe and Equal, we acknowledge the depth of recommendations and commit to responding with care and purpose. Guided by the reflections of survivor advocates and program staff, Safe and Equal will develop a renewed framework and supporting mechanism that will form part of our ongoing commitment to evolve thoughtfully, remain accountable, and strengthen survivor advocacy through continuous learning and reflection.

For all readers, we hope this work offers a useful foundation — and we remain committed to listening, adapting, and evolving survivor advocacy practice in partnership with those who lead it.





SAFE+EQUAL

safeandequal.org.au