MULTI-AGENCY TRIAGE PROJECT
Implementing Stage 3 of the Multi-Agency Triage Model

Executive Summary

Background
The Multi-Agency Triage (MAT) project was delivered in three stages between 2012 and 2017. The Final Report tells the story of the successes and challenges of the third stage of the innovative MAT pilot. From December 2015 to December 2017 the MAT delivered daily collaborative multi-agency triaging of all police family violence reports (L17s) in the north-eastern region of Melbourne. An important part of this story is the operational and strategic collaboration between the University of Melbourne, DHHS Child Protection, Child FIRST, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Plenty Valley Community Health Men’s Active Referral Service (MARS) and Berry Street Specialist Family Violence Service, that enabled the project to achieve its aims. The report shows how the MAT project explored and developed a different way of managing and responding to police referrals of family violence incidents and the results of that. It also shows how the triage process was informed by the Safe and Together™ principles and lens at the “front-end” of intake and triage and how this can influence the whole case progression.

The MAT demonstrated, through collaborative multi-agency triage, risk assessment and referral using the Safe and Together™ Model better management for intake and intervention for children affected by family violence.

Aims of the MAT Project
- To model a “single door approach” where all police reports enter a central point in order that multi-agency representatives collaborate to undertake risk assessments, triage and referral
- To model a “differential response” where all women who are the subjects of police family violence reports, and who have children are not referred automatically to statutory Child Protection if they do not meet the threshold for further child protection investigation
- To adapt the Safe and Together™ Model for use in a front-end triage process
- To collaborate effectively at operational and strategic governance levels

The Safe & Together Model provides a framework that is critical to good outcomes and we need to ensure that the guiding principles are embedded in practice from the point of triage and assessment and then throughout the life of the case.  
Operations Group member

Methodology
An action research process was used throughout the project that enabled active problem solving in the MAT room and by the strategic partners. The presence of an action research project manager (University of Melbourne) throughout the project ensured that reflective processes, observations, professional development and active problem solving were fundamental features of the daily work of the MAT and the strategic groups. Mixed methods were used for data gathering including: collection of administrative data over three separate time periods; data from two questionnaires with the MAT team and their managers; and qualitative data gathering using semi structured interviews and surveys. This mixed method approach contributed to providing insights into different aspects of the project.

Results
By undertaking collaborative information sharing and multi-agency triage (risk assessment and referral) over two time periods in 2016 and 2017 the following results were seen:

- **3224** L17s with children were triaged by the MAT team.
- **7342** children including unborn infants were identified on L17 reports or by partner agencies at the MAT.
- **275** cases involving children were referred to child protection from MAT for protective investigation representing just over 10% of cases triaged.
- **90%** of cases referred to child protection were diverted from unnecessary intervention from statutory child protection.

This equates to almost 90% being diverted from unnecessary intervention from statutory child protection.
This achievement of providing a differential response for large numbers of children and their parents away from the tertiary statutory system is important - most families did not proceed to protective investigation. The practice of sending all referrals to Child Protection has been proven in other studies to be both inefficient and problematic given the stress that such referrals create for families (particularly women) living with domestic and family violence.

Also, the MAT project helped to identify the key attributes, skills and support requirements for staff from different agencies working collaboratively in a shared space.

In addition to the above results, the Tracking Project pointed to the uptake of referral pathways and suggests this is the next stage in which there needs to be a concentration of effort, as the responses to children in their family context were not well developed at the point of the project’s conclusion.

Conclusions

1. That a single door model of L17s intake and risk assessment is a significant factor in ensuring the efficient and effective risk assessment and referral of women and children.
2. That a differential response is possible and desirable to ensure women and children are only referred to Child Protection if they meet the threshold for a statutory response.
3. That multi-agency information sharing and collaboration at an operational level (in the MAT room) is effective for ensuring the most comprehensive view of the risk indicators for women and children and dangerousness indicators for male perpetrators. Structured application of Safe and Together™ as part of this collaborative approach ensured the focus on the perpetrator’s pattern of behavior.
4. That multi-agency collaboration is challenging and worthwhile at a strategic partnership level and is critical to providing the overall governance to the MAT process.
5. That appropriate supervision and support, professional development and opportunities for reflective practice are critical to MAT team well-being and effective functioning.

"I think it is imperative that a MAT worker is ... competent in assessment, confident to work in a group, understands the need to participate, demonstrates respect to all, has an understanding for the need to work together for better outcomes and has institutional empathy in regards to other staff/organisations roles and limitations."
(Operations Group member)

Challenges

1. Absence of police in the MAT room - this is a critical deficiency in terms of the Safe and Together™ key principle of keeping the perpetrator in view, therefore enabling improved risk assessments for women and children (based on information that may highlight the danger a perpetrator poses).
2. Lack of consistency with L17 police reports - this is a statewide issue that was amplified in the MAT project when significant numbers of children were identified by collaborative information sharing, despite frequent gaps in reporting on the L17.
3. Lack of services available to refer men, female respondents and violent adolescent subjects of L17s.

Next steps

All stakeholders in the MAT project have been driven by the desire to create a more effective, efficient, efficacious and ethical response to children living with domestic and family violence. The MAT project is a step in this direction and provides the foundation for future developments, especially in the context of the rollout of Support and Safety Hubs in Victoria which can create greater accountability and safety for children and their families.

"I very much enjoy working in the MAT team. I have amazing colleagues and very supportive managers so I...enjoy coming to work in the MAT room."
(MAT Team member)