

PROOF VERSION ONLY

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria

Traralgon – Thursday 22 May 2025

MEMBERS

Juliana Addison – Chair

Martin Cameron – Deputy Chair

Jordan Crugnale

Daniela De Martino

Wayne Farnham

Martha Haylett

David Hodgett

**Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee**

WITNESSES

Peta Speight, Chair, and

Kim Adams, Principal Strategic Adviser, Gippsland Family Violence Alliance.

The CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearing. It is great to be hearing from Gippsland Family Violence Alliance. Before we begin, I will run through some important formalities.

All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence you give. However, it is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside the hearing, even if you are restating what you said during the hearing.

You will receive a draft transcript of your evidence in the next week or so to check and approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted from in our final report.

Thank you so much for making the time to meet with the committee today. My name is Juliana Addison, and I am the Member for Wendouree, representing Central Ballarat.

Martin CAMERON: Martin Cameron, Deputy Chair, and I am the Member for Morwell, so I represent the Latrobe Valley.

Jordan CRUGNALE: My name is Jordan Crugnale. I am the Member for Bass, taking in Bass Coast, a bit of Cardinia and a sliver of Casey.

Wayne FARNHAM: Wayne Farnham. I am the Member for Narracan in the West Gippsland region.

David HODGETT: David Hodgett, the Member for Croydon.

The CHAIR: Terrific. We have got an apology from Daniela De Martino, the Member for Monbulk, and also Martha Haylett, the Member for Ripon.

Earlier today, just to kick off our discussions, we heard from Chris McNamara, the Network Coordinator for Gippsland Homelessness Network, and she said that family violence contributes to 23 per cent of homelessness in the region; that for the 2000-plus young people aged between zero and 17 who are homeless in Gippsland, family violence was a significant contributor to that; and that rates of family violence are very high in Gippsland, like they are in my home region of the Grampians. I am wondering if you could talk about the impact of family violence on homelessness, particularly for families and young people. And would you like to introduce yourself too?

Peta SPEIGHT: My name is Peta Speight. I am the Chair of the Gippsland Family Violence Alliance, which is a voluntary, non-paid position within the alliance. I am also employed by Anglicare Victoria as a program manager overseeing family violence programs.

Kim ADAMS: I am Kim Adams, and I am the Principal Strategic Adviser for the Gippsland Family Violence Alliance.

Peta SPEIGHT: In relation to family violence rates in Gippsland, all six LGAs of Gippsland sit in the top 30 LGAs out of 79 for the state, per capita, with East Gippsland in 2024 being number one and Latrobe being number two in 2024. We have seen an increase of 16.5 per cent on average for family violence incident police callouts over the last 12 months. We have one of the highest rates of breaches of intervention orders in the state. What is really concerning, in line with those increases, is also an increase in sexual violence as part of family violence overall.

Particularly for Gippsland an impact on homelessness is that we also, unfortunately, have a large portion of our population that receives Centrelink payments. The average rent in Gippsland is beyond the realm of a single woman or a single person with children being able to obtain rent in a lot of our areas. Gippsland is a very beautiful place. We have a lot of holiday destinations and really beautiful places to live, but unfortunately in

those areas the rent increases even more. And when a victim of family violence is forced to flee their home to ensure their safety and that of their children, they are often forced to leave their home town. Whilst that is problematic in itself, it has ripple effects for those women and young people. Children are unable to attend their childcare centre, their school or their after-school activities. Relocation means moving away from family, friends and support systems, which further disadvantages those families.

Kim ADAMS: We actually did a recent journey-mapping activity with Deakin University, where they interviewed a whole bunch of women who have experienced family violence in Gippsland, and what they found is that the impacts of family violence last for sometimes decades. We have the immediate crisis period for a victim-survivor, which is when they need often safety and security, and then we have got that longer term recovery. That is where safe and secure housing is really the most important element to be able to move somebody into that recovery period. If you are just trying to get your basic daily needs met, you are going to be really unable to focus on that mental health and providing a secure environment for your children and things like that.

Housing has a massive impact on how quickly we can support women in particular to recover from that family violence crisis incident. According to the Crime Statistics Agency, 3466 people across inner and outer Gippsland received a homelessness response as a result of family violence last year. That data has been pulled from a program called SHIP, which is a federal program that some of the agencies use to collect data. It is probably an underestimate because a lot of our services do not actually report through SHIP.

The CHAIR: Right. It is a very, very significant figure.

Kim ADAMS: Yes.

Peta SPEIGHT: One of the things that really concerns me is, since the Royal Commission into Family Violence, there has been a strong focus on children being victim-survivors in their own right. Whilst we often talk about family units needing to flee family violence, we also have young people that self-place outside of the home due to family violence. I am aware of a young person in Bass Coast who is currently living in a tent on public property due to being unable to return home due to fear of family violence. They have reported this to multiple agencies. There is nowhere for this young person to go. They are not eligible for Centrelink payments. There is no youth refuge close by. They are still self-attending school on a daily basis, but there is actually nowhere for them to go in Bass Coast currently where they can receive safe and affordable housing. As a result they are currently living in a tent and being supported by a number of community service organisations locally and by their school.

We do not have a youth foyer in Gippsland. It is something that is very, very desperately needed in this area because we have so many young people that are couch surfing and self-placing themselves in further dangerous and harmful situations, and there is not a dedicated system response to those young people currently in Gippsland.

Kim ADAMS: What we know about the long-term impacts of family violence, particularly on young children, is that if you have experienced family violence as a child you are more likely to either enter a relationship that is violent when you are older or become a user of violence if we do not intervene early and give you the supports that you need. If there is not that safe and secure housing for them, then it is really, really hard in those formative years to provide them the education and provide them the support that they need so that they can go on and form healthy relationships in their later lives. These things have a long-term impact, and we are creating intergenerational trauma for our region, which we do see in our numbers.

Martin CAMERON: Especially here in Gippsland, how does someone go about accessing the services? Does it vary in Gippsland to metropolitan Melbourne?

Peta SPEIGHT: It does not. Most people will come through the Orange Door service in Gippsland. What is really unique about Gippsland is the size of Gippsland and the ability to respond to people, particularly in rural and remote regions. We have the Orange Door based in Morwell, which is our central site, and then we have two access points in Warragul and Leongatha, and then in outer Gippsland we have a central point in Bairnsdale and an access point in Sale. People can be referred through to the Orange Door via an L17 from a police incident, they can self-refer or they can be referred by another agency. The Orange Door will then do an intake and assessment with that person and identify their needs and then refer them on to secondary supports.

That is a very short and sharp service in under, on average, 10 days from being reported into the Orange Door to being referred out. They do provide a level of emergency accommodation for women and children that come through that service, but they can only provide it for three days and then that person is referred to another agency who may provide the longer term housing support.

Waitlists are long for the Orange Door. In Gippsland we are very, very fortunate that a lot of work has been done to clear our backlog, but as we currently sit here there are about 200 people still awaiting a service on the waiting list in the Orange Door. We know that when young people are referred to the Orange Door there is nowhere to send them even if they do come into that service. So once a person has come through to the Orange Door they might be referred to a local community service, a housing service, a family violence case management service or a recovery program if they are at that point in their journey as well.

Martin CAMERON: With the 200 people that are on the waiting list, is that 200 mothers plus children?

Peta SPEIGHT: 200 individuals.

Martin CAMERON: 200 individuals, yes, okay.

Peta SPEIGHT: The Orange Door is also the central intake point for adults using family violence. I will use gendered language because in the majority we are speaking about men. That includes women, men and children.

Martin CAMERON: Thank you.

Peta SPEIGHT: In relation to men, there are often issues with accommodation for users of family violence as well. It is the best thing for families, if it is not safe for the family to remain together, for the woman and the children to remain in the family home and the man to be placed outside of the home. However, there are very limited options for men in terms of their referral pathways. Often we see men being placed in really unsafe, unacceptable circumstances – boarding houses or old run-down motels – where they are exposed to community violence or to drugs and alcohol and where it is very difficult for them to access their own support systems like mental health support and drug and alcohol support, which means that they are then not able to begin to address their own behaviour and are actually more likely to further perpetrate family violence or reattend the family home in an attempt to find somewhere safe to be.

Kim ADAMS: And even those options are not consistent across Gippsland. We do not actually have any registered rooming houses in outer Gippsland – at least we did not last time I checked.

The CHAIR: Jordan.

Jordan CRUGNALE: I have got a question around a young person in Bass Coast. Obviously the youth foyers are not going to happen overnight, so what other short-term things do we need to be considering to be able to support kids?

Kim ADAMS: Right now we are housing the majority of people in motels, and I am not a massive advocate for motels because, again, the people who work in motels are not even subjected to things like working with children checks. We do not actually know how safe those environments are, but we are spending an awful lot of money on those motels. By my estimate, and this is underestimating, if we spend an average of \$120 a night, just the specialist services are spending over \$400,000 a year on housing. That is not including what the family services are spending on housing family violence victims or what the homelessness sector is spending to house family violence victims.

The CHAIR: Is that 400k a year in Gippsland?

Kim ADAMS: In Gippsland.

Peta SPEIGHT: I would say that is severely underestimated at \$120 a night. You cannot get many places in Gippsland for that. It is just some rough maths.

The CHAIR: We have got very similar stuff going on in Ballarat too.

Kim ADAMS: Some of the things that we have suggested are: is there the ability to purchase blocks of units that young people can live in? Is there the ability to even look at more public housing where we can create communities for these young people? They are some of the suggestions that I know have been floated. I do know there have always been issues with housing people who do not know each other together. I am not the expert to speak on that, but I do think there are probably some other people who could talk about that.

Peta SPEIGHT: Social housing communities for young people where they are supported, supported accommodation. We know foster care is not appropriate for a lot of these young people. They are often in their later teens. They are not going to assimilate into a new family, and that is not going to be an option for them. What they need is support to become adults themselves. They need financial support to do that. They need therapeutic support to recover from their own experiences. They need a full wraparound service in order to be able to grow, go back to school, be a normal young person and then seek educational options. It is very hard to get a part-time job when you are a young person who is homeless and you do not have any of your documentation. You do not have a parent who can take you for drives on your L-plates or buy you your first car. We are actually creating a generation of young people who do not have opportunities to become really well functioning members of society, because they are not given the opportunities that we would want for our own children.

Kim ADAMS: We have got places where these services exist, and they could just be expanded, definitely. We have already got services in refuge. Could they be expanded to people who are living outside of refuge in motels or in short-term units or transitional housing? We have got family services providers like Anglicare and Berry Street. Could they be expanded? There are options that could be done in the short term if the youth foyer is a long-term goal or something like that.

David HODGETT: Can I explore a couple of things: Peta, you said an incident happens of family violence and they get three nights emergency accommodation, then they get referred on to other agencies for longer term. What is, for want of better words, the success rate of placing them in longer term accommodation?

Peta SPEIGHT: I do not have exact figures for you in front of me. I can only speak to my professional work and what I see. We see a lot of women who may go into refuge or emergency accommodation in not very great circumstances. So we place a mum and her three kids in a motel for three nights. The kids are not at school. They are getting on each other's nerves. There is not appropriate bedding. There is no room for the kids to play. Everything is too hard. What we see is that women think that this is not ever going to get any better, and so they make the difficult decision that it is actually better for their children to return to the home where the violence occurs. We see that time and time again. It would be interesting to know the statistics of when there has been an intervention order applied and when a woman has gone to court several days later to ask for that intervention order to be withdrawn so that she can return to the family home. That would be a statistic that I think would show the amount of people that are needing to return home.

What we do know about family violence is that a very strong element of family violence is around financial control. A lot of women who are leaving violent situations have no money. They have no access to their own bank accounts. They may have been in situations where their accounts have been drained. They have never been allowed to work. They have no super. Their name is not on the family property – all those things. And then to be living in a hotel and begin a legal proceeding to gain access to the family home and hire a lawyer is something that is not available to a lot of people. So we see the compounding impacts of that on their long-term financial stability. We know that rent is more than a mortgage payment for a lot of people. Women will not have access to a down payment for a new house, so they will be stuck in a rent cycle for the rest of their lives.

It is really concerning when you start to think about the long-term impacts and then the intergenerational impact for their children and their grandchildren. I have now worked in this industry for 20 years, and I am starting to see the grandkids of the women that I worked with in my early 20s come through in very similar situations. It is heartbreaking, because we are not actually making an impact and changing that cycle for these families.

David HODGETT: Although I know it is not a long-term solution, either, but as opposed to emergency hotel accommodation, how many go off to stay with other family or friends or to perhaps a better environment, even though it is still short-term?

Kim ADAMS: Again, we do not have those numbers, but what we do know is that very often people will move home or into another relative's house, but those relationships do break down very quickly. One of the I want to say quirks of the system is that unfortunately once we have established safety, which means immediate risk has been lowered for that woman – so she might enter into the family violence service system; we establish safety, because she is now sleeping at mum and dad's house. If that relationship with mum and dad breaks down and that user of violence is no longer perpetrating for whatever reason – if there is an IVO in place – she then re-enters the system if she has a breakdown in that relationship with mum and dad and if she does not want to live there or cannot live there anymore. She actually enters the homeless system at that point – she does not go back through the family violence system, because safety has been established – and they have even fewer resources than the family violence system. They can only pay for three nights accommodation if there is an exit plan, and then we are trying to get transitional housing, but that can take months. So essentially she will end up couch surfing, and that is the best-case outcome for her.

David HODGETT: Do you have any services or is there any provision made for pets in those circumstances? I only ask because in a former life we were looking at services where pets are sort of the forgotten part of family violence.

Peta SPEIGHT: There is a service that is available to provide emergency vet care and emergency updating of immunisation so pets can enter boarding kennels for a period of time. So there is a service; it is incredibly limited. What we know is that often a lot of hotels and accommodations will not take larger animals, obviously. One of the really concerning factors in Gippsland is the amount of times that we see women from rural properties having to make the difficult choice of leaving behind large animals like horses. It is incredibly difficult, particularly when that user of family violence has threatened that animal over and over again, and it is a very real threat because we know that there are often guns on properties and things like that. It is incredibly difficult to rehouse large animals at short notice.

Kim ADAMS: I was going to say, in East Gippsland I do know the new Willaneen refuge or core-and-cluster accommodation, which will be open in July, is going to be pet-friendly, within reason – I do not think you can bring a menagerie of animals. In terms of a service response I think there are some agencies that have deals with farms so that we can take those larger animals and things like that, but I do not think it is a system-wide response, particularly for those large animals. It is mostly for those smaller animals that we can potentially just move into catteries and things like that for short periods of time.

The CHAIR: Can I just say, David, in Ballarat we are building a brand new animal shelter that is going to provide a place for women fleeing family violence to drop the animal off first and keep moving and be able to have it held there. That has been one of the real considerations with our amazing new animal shelter that is being constructed, to really address these issues. But obviously we need to see that statewide.

David HODGETT: Yes. Absolutely. Thank you.

Wayne FARNHAM: I have got a couple of questions and probably a couple of concerns. I was pretty shocked to hear that East Gipps and Latrobe are number one and two in the state and that all of our LGAs through Gippsland are in the top 30.

Kim ADAMS: Top 28.

Wayne FARNHAM: Top 28, yes. It is not something I want to put on the mantelpiece. Why is that? I know you might not be able to answer it and I know it is a pretty basic question, but why?

Peta SPEIGHT: Low socioeconomics, unemployment, drugs and alcohol. The drivers of family violence are very much in line with gender norms. We know we have a community in some places that has very rigid gender views about the role of women and men; that does contribute to rates of family violence. You see in rural farming communities the old 'boys will be boys' and 'women should be seen and not heard' values that you think in 2025 should be long gone, but they are very much still prevalent. We have, in Gippsland, industry shutdowns that impact employment.

Kim ADAMS: I think when we look at how Gippsland has been formed, it has all been based around industry – it has been fisheries, forestry, farming et cetera. They have all been very masculine workforces, and they have all been led by men. Then you add to that that when all of that public housing was built in places like

Morwell, it started as worker housing, but it created a cycle of intergenerational dependency, to some degree, which exacerbated the extreme views of, you know, 'We need to prioritise those men in those industries.' It all became a cycle of that intergenerational prioritisation of men, really, and there have not been a lot of options for women to get out of that in Gippsland. We have not had a very strong university sector where we could study until we had access to online uni. Unless you wanted to go and be a nurse, there was not a lot offered locally. It was not until really recently that we had options to leave and find economic independence. I think all of that contributes to what we are seeing now. Like we have been saying, I think there is an intergenerational element to this. If you have seen your dad treat your mum like this, then you are more likely to treat your next partner like this, and so on and so forth. And this has been happening for decades at this point.

Wayne FARNHAM: Particularly in the Latrobe Valley and on the shutdown of the industries, we have lost forestry – the APM out at Morwell – and we have seen closure after closure: SEC et cetera. Do you think that has contributed to an escalation in family violence in these areas, whether it be through financial stress or that from the man's perspective he has lost his job and he does not feel worth anything anymore?

Peta SPEIGHT: I think what is really important when thinking about family violence causation is that we are very clear about causation versus correlation. Causation is men's views about women and their attitudes towards women and perpetrators taking accountability for their actions. The correlating factors are absolutely things like financial stress, drugs and alcohol, unemployment, unsettled economics, the community that you grow up in, the exposure of role models. All of those things are definitely correlating factors. They do not cause family violence but they definitely impact on the rates, and that is why we have such high rates in Gippsland.

Kim ADAMS: At the end of the day most of us, both men and women, have experienced times of stress in our lives. Whether we have lost our jobs, we are having fights with our partner or family or whatever, some people go home and choose to physically or sexually or coercively control their partners, and statistically that is men. If you can make a choice to not do that at work with your boss but you are choosing to go home and do that with your partner, it is a choice, and it is a choice that a lot of women are not making. So we have to put the ownership back on. It is a choice, regardless of whatever extenuating circumstances are happening in somebody's life.

The CHAIR: Yesterday we had the privilege of going down to GEGAC at Bairnsdale and meeting with May and Josh and talking about issues of regional housing with them. May talked at length about family violence within the Aboriginal community as well as racism that Aboriginal people face trying to get private rentals. Do you have any experience of or insights into private real estate agents' treatment of women fleeing family violence, whether they are First Nations or not?

Kim ADAMS: We had a motel project which was funded by the state government, which was supposed to look at how we use motels. This was a co-project between Gippsland Lakes and the Gippsland Family Violence Alliance that found that all of our ACCOs, so our Aboriginal services, experienced racism. One of our agencies actually uses a travel agent so that they do not call up and say, 'I'm from X,' they go through a travel agent to book their accommodation for their clients, and even that has not stopped their clients being turned away once they present.

Peta SPEIGHT: From an agency perspective we will often ring hotels and say, 'We are from X agency,' and we will be met with the response, 'We don't take your clients. We don't take those people here.' If we ring and want to book accommodation for our staff, they will happily take our business, but as soon as we put the booking in another person's name and we identify that they are not a staff member, they will often refuse to take the booking or they will ask to keep our credit card on file so that they can charge us for any damages that that person causes while they are in that accommodation.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Other questions.

Martin CAMERON: When, for argument's sake, domestic violence happens and the mother shows up on the doorstep with the kids, if you do need to move them to another region, is the help and support there for the mother to get the kids in a day care or into school? Or once you have made them safe, is that it, and then they go to another part of family help?

Peta SPEIGHT: The ideal client journey would be that a mother and her children present at the Orange Door, they are provided emergency accommodation, they are referred on to a family violence case management

program, who ensures that immediate safety, and then, once that immediate safety concern is established, they would refer on to family services or a secondary support service. What we know is that those secondary and auxiliary support services are overrun as well. We are talking about things like family services, support and recovery programs – there is not the level of support that wraps around these families post violence that provides a level of support for all facets of their life. I think we banded just enough to make sure that they are safe initially, and then they are left with a situation where they have got to figure it out for themselves.

Kim ADAMS: We have brokerage in all of our programs, whether it is family violence, family services et cetera, and in the ideal situation, yes, we would be supporting them to get into things like child care, because there are often fees associated with just going on the waitlist for some childcare centres et cetera. But unfortunately, as that bucket of funding has shrunk – all of our funding has shrunk over the years – we have to prioritise immediate safety. In family violence that will be things like changing the locks or getting personal safety devices or that kind of thing. In family services, yes, again, they have to prioritise their own thing. Usually it is things like making sure there are birth certificates, making sure there are identifying documents. With that bucket sometimes we can do that sort of stuff, but other times we might not be able to provide that sort of stuff. We would love to.

Wayne FARNHAM: Kim, just how much has your funding shrunk?

Kim ADAMS: It is very hard to tell. In terms of the flexible support packages. Do you want me to talk to it?

Peta SPEIGHT: Yes, you go.

Kim ADAMS: What was kind of happening is that we got a bucket of funding and were told that – when I say ‘we’, the agencies; I do not hold this funding. We have three agencies across Gippsland that hold this funding, one for the ACCOs and two other agencies. In times past, particularly over COVID, we got our quarterly funding, but if went over it we got top-ups. As of last financial year, we were told that there would be no top-ups. I have also been told that they did get a couple of top-ups, but that might have been a quirk of Gippsland. We did get a letter saying there would be no top-ups, so I do not know. We have got no guarantee, so we really have to operate within our funding – what we have been told we will be provided – and there is no guarantee that we will get additional funding, even though we have had 16, 17 per cent increases. Outer Gippsland has had 30 per cent increases, but that funding bucket has not grown. Where we might have been able to provide \$6,000 to a family, it is now \$3,000 because we are trying to make it stretch.

Peta SPEIGHT: I think what is really important to know is that a lot of these programs are not recurrently funded. In family services across Gippsland three-quarters of the funding is currently up for lapsing at the end of this financial year. That is three-quarters of the family services workforce who are waiting to find out if they have a job next year. What that creates is a disproportionate workforce, who are also women with caring responsibilities, who have to make the difficult choice of moving out of this workforce into a workforce that has more financial stability year to year. So not only are we seeing the disadvantage for our clients, who are women, but we are seeing the disadvantage for our women in the workforce. A lot of family violence programs do not have ongoing funding, and what is even more concerning is that the victim-survivor response does not have ongoing funding and the perpetrator services do not have ongoing funding either.

We have a very disproportionate funding system that is over three-quarters for victim-survivors and less than one-quarter for perpetrators. If you think about actually ending the cycle of violence, we need more funding in the perpetrator space. We need to be holding persons using family violence accountable for their behaviour. When I manage a program where I have 14 practitioners to respond to victim-survivors but I have three to respond to the men who have perpetrated the family violence, it really concerns me that we are funding a system to mop up the after-effects but we are not actually funding a system to address the core root of the problem.

Kim ADAMS: And often those men have multiple partners throughout their lives. They are not just causing harm to one family.

The CHAIR: Thank you for those powerful insights. Once again, I will just do some editorial about the saturation model we are doing in Ballarat, following the murder of three women. We are really trying to address this prevention piece, and it sounds like Gippsland could certainly do with a saturation model as well and really trying to look at the causation. Your causation and correlation response is –

Kim ADAMS: Very similar.

The CHAIR: really, really interesting. With the real focus on regional housing with this inquiry, how could the Victorian government support women to stay in their homes to try and prevent them from becoming homeless? What could we be doing to try and create scenarios where the mother and child/children stay in the home – interestingly, you are using the word ‘user’ rather than ‘perpetrator’, and I am really interested in that as well – and the user of family violence is taken out of the home, rather than the mother and children leaving the home? That was very long; I apologise.

Kim ADAMS: Do you want me to go?

Peta SPEIGHT: I am pretty passionate about this one.

Kim ADAMS: Okay, go for it.

Peta SPEIGHT: This is a really, really massive issue for us in a number of programs, and it is not a simple response, so I apologise if this is a little bit convoluted. I think, first of all, we need somewhere for these men to go, and that needs to be safe, supported accommodation. We need intervention orders to go through the courts in a timely manner. We need a police force who can serve those intervention orders and ensure that both parties understand the conditions of those intervention orders. We need support services for that man and a timely response for that man to understand his behaviour and the impact that it has had.

We need long-term recovery and support models for men who use family violence. We need intervention orders that do not actually put women at further risk. We need conditions on intervention orders that are about the safety of the victim and not about the rights of the man, and I will give you an example of that. We have recently worked with a woman who has suffered 13 years of significant family violence, and she finally was able to make the brave decision to report it to police. He was removed from the family home, an intervention order was put in place and he was given permission to daily come to the house to get his work equipment. So although he had been removed from the house and safety had been ensured, he was still able to attend the property on a daily basis. That is one of the issues that we have.

Kim ADAMS: I think the other issue is affordability, more than anything, because a lot of these women do not have access to the family money or their own source of income to start paying that \$500 or \$600 rent or mortgage. So that is another part of it, and I do not know how we solve that. I wish I had a solution beyond just saying, ‘Fund us.’ But that is a massive issue as well. I do know there are rental laws that will support her name being put on the lease. That is fine as long as she can pay that money, and in a lot of cases she cannot. We have had cases where they have met online, he has convinced her to move across borders and she is now down here and she is stuck. She has got no money or access to her finances anymore, and she is completely isolated from her friends and family. As part of family violence, they often will create unsavoury situations with your friends and family. So often your friends and family do not necessarily want to immediately take you back. So there are a lot of issues that can occur in terms of these women not having any support except for what we can provide in community services, which, as we have said, is limited.

Martin CAMERON: Does it make a difference also – sorry, Juliana – to keep the mother and the family in the house? If it is only the perpetrator’s name that is on the title, can they say, ‘I’m sorry, but I own the house. You’re not staying there’?

Peta SPEIGHT: There is the ability to have a man under an intervention order exited from the house, even if it is solely in his name. I think what a lot of victim-survivors would choose would be to leave that property for fear of long-term systems abuse. Family violence does not stop when the relationship ends. We often see women come through our programs decades later still suffering abuse through family law courts, divorce proceedings, vexatious reports to child protection and intervention order contesting in court. We see a lot of situations where women will come forward where the person using violence has put an intervention order against them, they have been slandered online or they have been threatened with exposure online by their personal material. So the systems abuse goes on for a very, very long time, and property settlement and the use of the children are probably the two biggest ways of continuing to abuse that person for decades after they leave.

Kim ADAMS: One of the people that Deakin interviewed on our behalf was still in the family home. They were both on the title because after 13 years of going in and out of family court there was still not a decision on how to divide that asset. She estimated that between both of them and what they had spent trying to go through family court, she could have paid him out with that money, but he had refused every offer and the family law court had refused to recognise the evidence of the family violence.

The CHAIR: I am conscious of the time. What we have asked every panellist who has come in to give evidence today is if there are three issues that they would really like us to take away from this. Are there three? It is so complex. Your presentation – obviously we will be looking at everything you have put forward. But are there three final things that you would really like to leave with us before we finish?

Peta SPEIGHT: I will do one, then you do one, and then we will go from there.

Kim ADAMS: Yes, okay.

Jordan CRUGNALE: Do three of each.

Kim ADAMS: Yes.

Peta SPEIGHT: We are both very passionate people about this issue. I really think the issue of users of family violence and accommodation for them to be safely removed from the home and be placed somewhere where they are able to receive supports and services is important to being able to keep women and children in the primary family home where possible.

Kim ADAMS: I think we need a massive, greater supply of both public and social housing but also that transitional housing. Transitional housing for a lot of our women would just be enough so that they can get on their feet and exit into private rental. I mean, transitional housing I think is supposed to be – what is it? – 18 months, and a lot of people are in there for three or four years because we have nowhere to exit them to. So if we had a greater supply of houses, then we would be able to get more women and children through.

Peta SPEIGHT: Now I have got to pick.

Kim ADAMS: Sorry.

Peta SPEIGHT: I do think that youth homelessness due to family violence is a massive issue, and given that you are sitting here, I did specifically raise that child in Bass Coast, but she is not the only one. We have children that are placing themselves in unsafe situations across Gippsland in order to leave an unsafe situation, and I think that is incredibly sad. I do not want to be seeing the grandchildren in another 20 or 30 years in this industry because we have not actually addressed the issue for these children now.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for the work that you do every day and for coming and talking to us today. I think we will all leave thinking about East Gippsland and Latrobe being numbers one and two in our state, and we will have further conversations about that. If there is further information that you would like to share with the inquiry and the committee, please do so. We will be tabling our report in November. Then you will receive a link to our final report, and then the government will have six months to respond to it. But I think you have raised some really significant issues for all of us to consider and follow up on as well as local members, so thank you very much for the work you do.

Witnesses withdrew.