

# Inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups

*From BATForce – A Community Services Perspective.*

*BATForce is proud to work across Wadawurrung, Gulidjan and Gadubanud Country, we acknowledge Elders past present and emerging.*

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## **Upfront Clarity**

We want to be clear: this submission is made from the perspective of a community service provider. BATForce is not a survivor network, and we don't claim to speak on behalf of survivors. Our role is to explore how the sector can offer timely, trauma-informed support and remove barriers that get in the way.

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## **About BATForce and the Dashboard**

BATForce has been supporting young people, families, and schools in our region since 2008. Over time, we've adapted our work to meet changing community needs — especially during and after COVID. We continue to evolve and maintain strong links with community.

In recent years this has meant leaning into change, putting our hand up for leadership roles when required, advocating for those who are not at the table and most importantly keeping Young People at the Centre of the work we do that by focusing on building the capacity of those who directly support Young People.

Our flagship initiative post COVID, the Community Wellbeing Dashboard (CWD), was co-designed to respond quickly to community-identified gaps. It's an agile, online resource hub built with and for the people it's designed to support. You can explore the dashboard here: <https://batforce.org.au/communitywellbeingdashboard/>

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## What We've Heard from Survivors

In our conversations with survivors, a few themes keep coming up:

- Community services can be overwhelming and messy, especially for people accessing them for the first time.
  - There are often long waits to access services. People need something while they sit in this 'holding pattern'.
  - A negative experience with one service can prevent someone from trying another service.
  - There is endless information everywhere—but it only becomes useful when people connect to it and it feels relevant, safe, and trustworthy. This is especially relevant for people who have experienced trauma.
  - People need time and space to consider and explore their support options.
  - Sometimes trust is something that must be earned – and we get that.
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## How This Work Began

After listening to Richard Baker's impressive podcast on institutional coercion and control, I reached out to him to both congratulate him on his work but also talk to him about what comes *next* for people impacted by these systems. A 'where to next' companion piece. Richard kindly pointed a few survivors our way, and we began our co+listening process, a core part of our co+design model.

**(Transparency note: BATForce has not been funded to undertake this work. It's progressed slowly as we've stretched our existing capacity. We're actively seeking the right funding partner to support it properly, but this is challenging trying to identify a source that will allow us to dedicate resources in the manner that is required.)**

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## Guiding Principles for the Project

We made a few things non-negotiable from the outset:

- No retraumatizing. Survivors are to be supported to reshape our resources.
- Clear referral pathways for survivors.
- A safe support network needs to be a closed group.
- A resource built on the identified needs of the group but one that remains a safe space and not connect survivors to the institutions they have left.

- Dual lens approach:
    1. Information for young people seeking to leave coercive and controlling environments.
    2. Life skills for adults who missed out on foundational life lessons (e.g. setting up a phone plan, understanding healthy relationships, navigating Centrelink).
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## **The Two Key Parts of the Project**

It was becoming clear that this project would need to have two clear parts.

### **1. Development of a Survivor-Informed Support Board**

We set out to create a practical, safe resource that could build on the informal support already happening in closed survivor groups. From the outset, it was important that we stayed outside the group itself while remaining responsive to the needs and priorities coming from within it.

When we introduced some of the survivors to our existing Trello-based support boards, the format really resonated—particularly the ability to embed videos and tailor the content. A few survivors volunteered to help us shape a new, private support board designed specifically for their community.

This bespoke board is currently closed to the public and operates on a co+design model. Survivors suggest topics they'd like to see covered, and our role is to find or create the most suitable, trustworthy resources to match.

#### **Example topic areas include:**

- What is coercive control
- Exploring support options, therapy types, sexual health and what to look for in a therapist
- Navigating everyday systems: phone plans, rental agreements, Centrelink, Afterpay, legal health checks and general finance
- Getting job-ready: tax file numbers, workers' rights, reconnecting into education

This approach follows a community development model, which means timelines aren't fixed. Survivors set the pace—sometimes the work moves quickly, and other times it pauses. That's part of the process. It may challenge traditional funding expectations, but if we're serious about co+design and the principle of “nothing about us without us,” we need to honour that pace. True partnership takes time.

## **2. Community Sector Readiness**

Alongside the support board, it became clear that the broader service sector also needs support—so when people *are* ready, services are actually prepared to help.

We've started identifying sector needs, but further development relies on funding this piece of work.

### **The sector needs upskilling in:**

- Screening tools
- How to ask the right questions
- Building language around institutional coercion and control
- A better understanding of the uniqueness of need

### **Examples of Where Systems Have Failed Survivors**

Through our conversations, survivors have shared several points where current systems are falling short:

- **Therapy Access & Clarity**  
Many survivors are unaware of the different types of therapy available or what might suit their needs. There's a need for simple, short videos explaining therapy styles in plain language.
- **EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)**  
EMDR is often recommended, but survivors struggle to identify who is actually qualified to deliver it safely and effectively. There's a real risk of misinformation or receiving inappropriate support.
- **Centrelink and Homelessness**  
Some young people are being denied homelessness support because parents claim they have somewhere to live—even when home is not a safe or viable option.
- **Sexual Assault Services**  
A number of survivors didn't know that support is still available for historical sexual assault cases. This lack of awareness can delay or prevent access to critical care.
- **Education and Homeschooling**  
Survivors who grew up in high-control environments often missed out on formal

education. Many feel scared or overwhelmed at the thought of returning to any form of schooling, even as adults.

We've had early conversations with local government, MELI, SAFV Centre, mental health social workers, and Q Psychology in Geelong to look at how we can improve service access for this group. Services are open to learning so they can better support survivors. The will is there—we just need the means to support them.

### **Final Thoughts**

This is slow work, but it's important work. We're deeply grateful to the survivors who've trusted us to walk alongside them, and to the sector partners who have been open to starting the conversation.

We believe this project—if properly supported—can bridge real gaps and make sure that when survivors reach out, there's something real and useful waiting on the other end.

For more information about BATForce;

[www.batforce.org.au](http://www.batforce.org.au)

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