

Submission on the Safe and Supported Second Action Plans

September 2026

About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country. Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family violence and modern slavery services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further information about The Salvation Army can be accessed at: < https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/>

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Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children. Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

The Salvation Army is a worldwide movement known for its acceptance and unconditional love for all people. We love unconditionally, because God first loved us. The Bible says, “God so loves the world” (John 3:16, RGT). As both a church and charity, we believe all people are loved by God and are worthy of having their needs met. Everyone is welcome to find love, hope, and acceptance at The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory wishes to acknowledge that members of the LGBTIQA+ community have experienced hurt and exclusion because of mixed comments and responses made in the past. The Salvation Army is committed to inclusive practice that recognises and values diversity. We are ensuring our services affirm the right to equality, fairness, and decency for all LGBTIQA+ people, rectifying all forms of discriminatory practice throughout the organisation.

We seek to partner with LGBTIQA+ people and allies to work with us to build an inclusive, accessible, and culturally safe environment in every aspect of Salvation Army organisation and services. Everyone has a right to feel safe and respected.

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion: <**salvationarmy.org.au/about-us**>



Executive summary

The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Department of Social Services in relation to the Safe and Supported Second Action Plans (Second Action Plans).

For over 140 years The Salvation Army's services have walked alongside many children, young people and families experiencing hardship and disadvantage. These experiences include, but are not limited to, poverty and financial hardship, family and domestic violence, homelessness, and those of people from diverse cohorts and communities. It is from their experiences, as well as those of our frontline staff, that we have approached this submission.

We believe that first and foremost, the Second Action Plans should reflect the experiences of children, young people and families across Australia, and should focus on addressing the structural elements that act as barriers to families accessing support.

Many of our recommendations come down to the need to ensure that the services children, young people and families engage with are focused on whole-of-family needs, are accessible and inclusive, acknowledge the diverse needs of this broad cohort, and are community-led to ensure best outcomes for all accessing support.

This submission is structured according to the questions provided in the discussion paper, and covers:

- **Supporting children, young people and families early.** We discuss the need to ensure services are specialised, accessible and acknowledge diversity, as well as the need for long-term flexible funding models.
- **Services and system coordination.** We point to the need for integrated services, partnerships and collaboration across services and sectors, and improved system navigation for children, young people and their families.
- **Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.** We discuss the need to adequately fund Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), invest in strong partnerships between ACCOs and the wider service sector, and build cultural competency.
- **Workforce capability and cultural safety.** We highlight the importance of strategic workforce planning and investment, and enhanced workforce confidence and capability.
- **Children and young people's perspective and participation.** We point to the need to embed the voices of children and young people both in the Second Action Plans, and in the programs and services they are accessing.
- **Accountability, data and measuring progress.** We discuss the importance of empowering organisations in data collection and outcomes measurement, and embedding the voices of children and young people in these processes.

The Salvation Army has made **23** recommendations for the Department of Social Services to consider. A summary of these recommendations follows on the next page.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

1.4 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans prioritise investment in specialised services for children and young people that address the diverse needs of this cohort.

Recommendation 2

1.11 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans prioritise the need for increased investment in early supports that are accessible for families.

Recommendation 3

1.17 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans prioritise investment in community-led responses to ensure services and supports are accessible and inclusive of all children, young people and their families.

Recommendation 4

1.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans highlight the need to increase the capacity of services to be culturally safe and accessible for children, young people and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation 5

1.25 The Salvation Army recommends that the Australian Government review social support payments, subsidies, and processes, to ensure they do not act as a barrier to children, young people and their families accessing support early, and living with dignity.

Recommendation 6

1.27 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans highlight the need for the child, youth and family sector to be accessible and inclusive of families with an experience of developmental delay or disability. This must include:

- *Increasing availability and accessibility of affordable healthcare for children, young people and their families; and*
- *Increasing the capacity of services to provide support to families with an experience of developmental delay or disability.*

Recommendation 7

1.30 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans highlight the need to increase investment in specialised services for children and young people with an experience of family and domestic violence.

Recommendation 8

1.32 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on increasing access to crisis, transitional, and longer-term housing, alongside tapered support options, for children, young people, and families.

Recommendation 9

1.40 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans highlight the need for increased funding to facilitate flexible service delivery to ensure child, youth, and family services are accessible to and inclusive of all families.

Recommendation 10

2.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus on delivering an integrated service system that is well-equipped to respond to the intersectional needs of children, young people and families. This could be supported by:

- *Investment in partnerships, embedded practitioners, and co-location of services and community supports; and*
- *Delivering sustainable funding to frontline services that recognises the cost of partnership work.*

Recommendation 11

2.14 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on the development of an information sharing framework for services working with children, young people, and families.

Recommendation 12

2.18 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans address the need to improve system navigation and coordination for children, young people, and families.

Recommendation 13

3.6 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus on the need to significantly increase investment in ACCOs to ensure they are fully-funded and well-equipped to achieve best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families.

Recommendation 14

3.12 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus on the importance of the development and maintenance of strong partnerships and collaboration between the wider service sector and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and community leaders.

Recommendation 15

3.15 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus on the need to strengthen the cultural competency of the child, youth, and family sectors. This should include:

- *Ensuring cultural competency training is available for the wider service sector, and is mandated and repeated regularly.*
- *Strengthening and building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.*

Recommendation 16

4.7 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on strategic workforce planning and investment to build and sustain the child, youth and family workforce.

Recommendation 17

4.11 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on the delivery of specialist training for all frontline workers who engage with children, young people, and families.

Recommendation 18

4.15 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus on ensuring frontline services are adequately funded to provide interventions and opportunities to address employee burnout and fatigue, and promote job satisfaction, including sustainable caseloads, staff supervision, and professional development.

Recommendation 19

5.5 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on the development of formal mechanisms that empower children and young people to provide advice to governments regarding service delivery, policy and legislative reform.

Recommendation 20

5.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans adopt co-design methods in all stages of its design, development, and implementation to ensure children and young people's knowledge, creativity, and lived experience is embedded.

Recommendation 21

5.19 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on ensuring multi-faceted, long-term funding across the entire frontline service system. This must include the cost of embedding the voices of children and young people within programs and services.

Recommendation 22

6.11 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans support organisations to develop and embed outcomes measurement frameworks to support best outcomes for children, young people, and families. This should include the development of a data and evidence eco-system led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities.

Recommendation 23

6.15 The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans highlight the need to ensure that the voices of children and young people are embedded within all data and outcomes measurement frameworks across the sector.

1 Supporting children, young people and families early

1.1 The Salvation Army points to the following priorities for consideration under the Second Action Plans to ensure all children, young people, and their families can access the support they need before concerns escalate.

Specialised services for children and young people

1.2 Children and young people are not a homogenous group. Transitioning through childhood and adolescence is a period of profound physical, physiological, emotional, cognitive and social change. A one-size-fits all approach to support will not be sufficient to address the age, developmental and other diverse needs of this broad cohort.

1.3 Children and young people require specialised support that is tailored to their diverse needs. As such, funding must reflect the creative and tailored responses required for this cohort, as well as the need for community-led and culturally safe approaches for children, young people, and families in diverse communities.

Recommendation 1

1.4 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans prioritise investment in specialised services for children and young people that address the diverse needs of this cohort.**

Investing in accessible early supports

1.5 The Salvation Army welcomes a focus on early support and child-centred responses in the Second Action Plans. Ensuring these early supports are accessible is critical to children, young people and families getting the support they need before concerns escalate.

1.6 In our experience, children, young people, and their families are significantly more likely to engage with programs that offer soft-entry points as opposed to formal service pathways. Soft-entry points offer a space to build trust with families, which leads to early and effective engagement with more structured and formal services and programs.

1.7 The Salvation Army has significant experience delivering soft-entry point style programs for children, young people and their families. We believe these programs minimise barriers to engagement, and are most effective when they are free, fun, play-based, and meet families where they are. See our Communities for Children and Youth Services examples below. Soft-entry style programs also play an important role in supporting engagement in regional and remote communities. In our experience, these communities do not always readily engage in help seeking, and there can be resistance to engaging with service providers.

1.8 Critical to offering soft-entry points for children, young people, and their families is funding models that support innovation and flexibility. This type of service offering is not always recognised under government funding and data collection models. Service providers need to be able to use funding according to local community needs. This is discussed further below.

1.9 We also point to the benefits of utilising existing frontline services to act as soft-entry points and improve accessibility of support. For example, The Salvation Army is a major provider of emergency relief and financial counselling services across Australia. As financial hardship is often a lead indicator of many forms of disadvantage, our staff are equipped to ensure our supports can act as a soft-entry point for further engagement. This helps us to identify and respond to community members and their families' needs early and assist before they escalate.

1.10 It is important to ensure dedicated investment is also provided to early support initiatives driven by, and designed in collaboration with, priority cohorts – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, and LGBTIQA+ communities. This is discussed further below.

Recommendation 2

1.11 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans prioritise the need for increased investment in early supports that are accessible for families.**

Communities for Children Logan School Holiday Program

In 2025-26, The Salvation Army's Communities for Children service in Logan coordinated and supported 30 free school holiday activities as part of *Logan's Big Summer Play-List.*

Delivered in partnership with local organisations, these activities engaged 1,184 children and adults, and contributed to positive mental health and wellbeing, increased family participation in community life, and stronger connections to social supports. The variety of activities held in different locations encouraged families to connect with new spaces and people contributing to broader community participation. The initiative also strengthened community cohesion, with 22 services collaborating to deliver activities, and 30 services working together across the broader school holiday program.

Participating organisations reported increased confidence and capability in planning quality play-based events through the modelling and mentoring provided by our team. Additional outcomes included increased sport participation through growth in local club memberships, new community partnerships, increased accessibility through the inclusion of Auslan activities, expanded holiday programming in response to community demand, and stronger cross-sector relationships that continue to build community capacity and create inclusive opportunities for Logan families.

The Salvation Army's Youth Drop-In Program

The Salvation Army provides a drop-in program in the Central Coast and Hunter region of New South Wales. This program provides safe, flexible, and responsive support for young people to build relationships, discover new interests, and engage in social and recreational activities. It offers a welcoming, accessible environment where people can seek information, guidance, practical assistance, and connection to community resources at a time that suits their needs, with the intention of reducing barriers to accessing support.

The service plays a vital role in strengthening community connections by creating opportunities for people to build relationships, reduce social isolation, and develop confidence in accessing supports independently. By providing a consistent and trusted point of contact, the service fosters a sense of belonging, safety, and engagement within the community.

The drop-in service model has demonstrated positive outcomes for young people, including:

- Improved access to support through flexible and timely service delivery;
- Earlier identification of emerging issues, allowing intervention before concerns become more complex or reach crisis point;
- Increased engagement and reduced barriers to accessing other support services, such as counselling, casework, and education;
- Enhanced social connection and reduced feelings of isolation through regular contact and community participation;
- Greater awareness of available supports, services, and community resources;
- Improved confidence, self-advocacy, and capacity to navigate support systems independently;
- Stronger relationships between participants and service providers, leading to increased trust and ongoing engagement; and
- Positive improvements in wellbeing, stability, and overall participant outcomes through consistent access to support and guidance.

Targeted support that acknowledges diversity

1.12 The Salvation Army believes that the Second Action Plans must focus efforts on building a service sector that is well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of children, young people and families to ensure they can get support early.

1.13 We point to the following for consideration under the Second Action Plans.

Investing in community-led responses

1.14 Wherever possible, grassroot communities and organisations should be empowered to drive, lead and develop projects and responses in a manner that is tailored to their community needs.

1.15 A one-size-fits-all approach fails to acknowledge the diversity of local communities and is unlikely to be effective in addressing barriers to engagement. Local communities know the outcomes they need, and how to best achieve them. Place-based services can be responsive to local, cultural, economic, and social needs, and build on existing resources and strengths to develop local capabilities and deliver support in areas of need for greatest impact.[1]

1.16 Community-led responses are also critical to ensuring inclusive and culturally appropriate responses for priority cohorts – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, and LGBTIQA+ families. These families and communities know how to best support the needs and development of their children, young people, and families, and should be enabled to do so. We also suggest the need to invest in initiatives that are co-designed and implemented in consultation with community organisations and leaders from priority cohorts to ensure culturally appropriate responses.

Recommendation 3

1.17 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans prioritise investment in community-led responses to ensure services and supports are accessible and inclusive of all children, young people and their families.**

Supporting families facing additional barriers to support

1.18 We also highlight specific recommendations for some of the priority cohorts we work alongside, who face additional barriers to accessing support.

Children, young people and families from culturally and linguistically diverse communities

1.19 Families from culturally and linguistically diverse communities can face additional barriers to accessing and engaging with support. This can include language barriers, a history of trauma, competing settlement challenges, racism and discrimination, minimal culturally appropriate support options, and differing family structures. Our services have also reported that these families do not always have access to basic information and have outlined instances where parents are hesitant to engage with support for fear of statutory child protection involvement.

1.20 We highlight the need to ensure that services and supports for this cohort are culturally safe and accessible. This should include investing in cultural competency training delivered across the sector, the wide distribution of multilingual information materials, and ensuring access to qualified interpreters.

[1] Moore, T. & Fry, R. (2011). *Place-based approaches to child and family services: A literature review*. Murdoch Children's Research Institute and The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health. https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccch/Place_based_services_literature_review.pdf

Recommendation 4

1.21 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans highlight the need to increase the capacity of services to be culturally safe and accessible for children, young people and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.**

Children, young people and families experiencing poverty and economic disadvantage

1.22 For families experiencing poverty and economic disadvantage, the costs associated with support can act as significant barriers to accessing services. This is only becoming more of a concern with rising costs of living.

1.23 We continue to call on the Australian Government to increase income support payments, such as the JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance, in line with the recommendations of the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee.[2] This is foundational to ensure all children, young people, and their families can live with dignity.

1.24 The Australian Government could also improve the accessibility of Centrelink application processes by ensuring they are simple, more responsive, and trauma-informed. They should also be age-appropriate and consider the unique needs of young people.

Recommendation 5

1.25 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Australian Government review social support payments, subsidies, and processes, to ensure they do not act as a barrier to children, young people and their families accessing support early, and living with dignity.**

Children, young people and families with an experience of developmental delay or disability

1.26 Families with an experience of developmental delay or disability face significant barriers to accessing appropriate supports in the early years. The onus is placed on parents to navigate complex systems such as healthcare, early intervention, and disability supports, to better understand and meet their child's developmental needs. This is further exacerbated by long waitlists or a complete lack of appropriate local services.

[2] Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee. (2026). *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee: 2026 report to government.* https://www.dss.gov.au/committees-councils-groups-and-panels/resource/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2026-report

Recommendation 6

1.27 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans highlight the need for the child, youth and family sector to be accessible and inclusive of families with an experience of developmental delay or disability. This must include:**

- **Increasing availability and accessibility of affordable healthcare for children, young people and their families; and**
- **Increasing the capacity of services to provide support to families with an experience of developmental delay or disability.**

Victim-survivors of family and domestic violence

1.28 Experiencing family and domestic violence has been linked to lifelong harms for children and those around them, including psychological and behavioural impacts, health and socioeconomic impactions, and intergenerational violence and re-victimisation.[3]

1.29 In our experience, current access to specialised services and practitioners for children and young people who are victim-survivors of family and domestic violence are limited or difficult to access. Our services highlight significant gaps regarding education support and therapeutic counselling responses, noting that these services are under-resourced and costly for families.

Recommendation 7

1.30 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans highlight the need to increase investment in specialised services for children and young people with an experience of family and domestic violence.**

Children, young people and families with an experience of housing insecurity and homelessness

1.31 Access to safe, appropriate, affordable, and secure housing is fundamental to living with dignity and critical to wellbeing. Insecure housing is often a disruption to a child or young person's entire world, compromising their ability to learn, play and relax and often enduring long after the experience has ended. These consequences can place them on a trajectory of compounding disadvantage. Family breakdown and violence are major factors in young people accessing crisis accommodation. Transitioning from out-of-home care, inadequate social security payments, and a lack of educational or employment opportunities also result in young people experiencing housing insecurity.

[3] Richards, K. (2011). Children's exposure to domestic violence in Australia. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*. No. 419. Australian Institute of Criminology. https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi419

Recommendation 8

1.32 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on increasing access to crisis, transitional, and longer-term housing, alongside tapered support options, for children, young people, and families.**

Long-term and flexible funding models

1.33 The service sector must have sufficient funding that can be flexibly allocated to respond to the needs of children, young people, and families early, and over extended periods of time.

1.34 In our experience the restrictive nature of short-term funding contracts hinders services' ability to implement successful initiatives that meet community needs. This in turn impacts program effectiveness, outcomes, and impact. Longer-term funding cycles allow for appropriate development, implementation, and evaluation of programs.

1.35 A lack of flexibility can further complicate access to supports for children, young people, and families, due to a lack of appropriate service and program availability. For example, many parents and carers work during standard business hours, and families may be unable to access support due to public transport limitations, financial hardship, or other caring responsibilities.

1.36 Funding structures and arrangements must be flexible to support innovation, allowing organisations to pivot and redirect funding and resources according to identified service gaps, needs and opportunities within their local communities. We point to our Children and Parenting Support Services and Tuning into Teens examples below.

1.37 We have found especially in rural and remote areas, where there can be limited access to services and resources, overly prescriptive funding arrangements limit the ability of local services to find creative solutions and harness local resources. Investment and funding models must also account for the unique challenges and costs of service delivery in regional and remote areas.

1.38 We suggest that a key mechanism to achieve flexible funding could include building surge capacity into funding grants, allowing community services to respond to need as it evolves over the funding cycle.

1.39 Ultimately, we believe that flexible funding encourages and empowers service innovation and produces higher quality and diversified service delivery, leading to better outcomes for children, young people, and their families.

Children and Parenting Support Services

The strength of the Department of Social Services' Children and Parenting Support funding has been offering services flexibility to respond to emerging needs within communities rather than being limited to fixed programs. The Salvation Army has been able to develop and tailor a range of programs in response to community needs.

Parenting Through the Storm. Across 2024 and 2025, there were a number of serious knife-related incidents in Melbourne's west, including the fatal stabbing of a 16-year-old at Woodgrove Shopping Centre, followed by further fatal stabbing incidents in Wyndham Vale and a secondary school at Melton. These events created considerable concern among the community around youth violence and keeping children safe. In response, The Salvation Army developed the Parenting Through the Storm program that focused on helping parents navigate periods of heightened community concern, communicate with young people, understand risk and behaviour, and strengthen protective factors within families. The program was very well-received by families, schools, and community organisations

Be Their Hero. Following the significant child safety concerns that emerged in 2025 around an accused childcare worker who had worked across a number of services in Melbourne's west, we saw increased concern from parents about child safety more broadly. Families were seeking practical information about safeguarding, online safety, bullying, recognising warning signs, understanding their rights, and knowing what they should expect from organisations responsible for their children. In response, The Salvation Army developed the Be Their Hero program. Rather than limiting the response to one incident, Be Their Hero was developed as a broader child safety program supporting parents from early childhood through to early adulthood.

Parenting in a New Culture (PING). This program was developed after schools and community organisations identified that many parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were struggling to navigate parenting, education, services, and expectations within a new cultural environment. Outcomes measurement has shown improvement in the areas of parenting knowledge and capacity after engagement with the program.

Doorways to Parenting – Tuning into Teens Program

Our Doorways to Parenting service in North-West Tasmania received funding from CatholicCare to train staff to facilitate the Tuning into Teens program.

Tuning into Teens is a free educational program for parents and carers of children aged 7 to 12 that supports them to strengthen their emotional connection with their child.

In August 2024, we facilitated a Tuning into Teens after-hours program after identifying an opportunity to engage parents who were unavailable during usual business hours. The program ran from 5:30pm to 7:30pm over a period of 6 weeks. Six parents and carers successfully completed the program.

Some of the feedback we received from clients related to the after-hours program included:

- "My daughter is noticing the changes in my parenting and is reminding me to keep up with it."
- "I wouldn't have been able to come otherwise [if Tuning in to Teens wasn't after hours]."
- "We have actually been doing this at home all together [mindfulness resources received after completing Tuning into Teens]."

Recommendation 9

1.40 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans highlight the need for increased funding to facilitate flexible service delivery to ensure child, youth, and family services are accessible to and inclusive of all families.**

2 Services and system coordination

2.1 The Salvation Army points to the following for consideration under the Second Action Plans to improve coordination and system navigation across child, youth, and family services and the wider service sector, to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

Integrated services that meet the needs of the whole family

2.2 The Salvation Army believes that an integrated service system that supports the needs of families alongside children and young people, delivers better outcomes.

2.3 Disconnected and siloed service systems, where service providers and specialists take different approaches and have little or no communication with each other, significantly reduces the quality of care and support and can even be harmful. In our experience, children, young people, and families can become confused or overwhelmed and disengage, especially those who face additional barriers to support.

2.4 Community-based spaces that are widely available and accessible, provide opportunities to build trust, connection and capacity within families and communities. They enhance cross-service collaboration, warm-referrals and promote more culturally safe and appropriate service delivery.

2.5 Integrated responses minimise the number of access points encountered by children, young people, and families, which in our experience, improves referral pathways and facilitates meaningful engagement and access to holistic support. We believe that critical to this, is fostering service collaboration and partnerships. For example, our frontline youth services have reported the benefits of high-risk panels in identifying risks of harm and improving outcomes for young people.

2.6 We suggest that integration between services could be bolstered by investing in:

- **Partnerships.** Funding services to work collaboratively in partnership with each other promotes holistic support, enables effective warm referrals to be facilitated alongside families, and improves the quality of care provided. It is important to note that funding stability for staff is a key factor in strengthening connections between services. When staff have job security, they can build strong relationships and maintain warm referral pathways. Consideration therefore also needs to be given to maintaining service and sector partnerships in regional and remote areas, which are often characterised by high staff turnover, recruitment challenges, and long waitlists for services.

- **Embedding specialist services and practitioners.** Embedding key specialist services or practitioners within select organisations can provide more holistic and specialised responses to children, young people, and families experiencing disadvantage and intersectional needs, while also providing benefits for other staff within the service. For example, in Victoria, we have seen the benefits of the Family Violence Child Protection Partnership that places senior family violence advisors within child protection offices to strengthen responses. Further, in Queensland, our homelessness services internally fund a Children's Practice Specialist to work across our homelessness services. This role provides secondary consultation and support to ensure that services are child-focused. See the Rivers family's story on the following page.
- **Co-location of services and community supports.** Children, young people, and families experiencing disadvantage can be more likely to access services when they are co-located.[4] Providing easy access to a range of services where children and families gather, such as hub environments, mainstream services or schools, improves engagement and supports integration. These spaces provide an opportunity for place-based and integrated responses that recognise the diverse needs of local communities and remove barriers and processes that gatekeep support services – such as eligibility criteria, costs and waitlists. We have seen great outcomes through our Family Zone service in Ingle Farm, as described below.

Family Zone – Ingle Farm

The Family Zone in Ingle Farm was developed in 2005 following consultations conducted by the Salisbury Communities for Children initiative. The service is located on site at Ingle Farm Primary School in the north of Adelaide.

The Family Zone engages with families who have children at risk of abuse or neglect through an innovative and progressive model. The service offers integrated support facilitated by relevant professionals and agencies in a co-located space. It models a 'one-stop-shop' concept, seeking to provide a 'soft, single-point entry' for stressed and isolated families, and to avoid stigmatisation of families who are experiencing hardship. Opportunities include parenting courses, culturally and linguistically diverse parenting groups and English classes, men's support, home visiting programs, playgroups, cooking groups, and 'pop-up' connections, such as family BBQ events.

[4] Centre for Policy Development. (2021). *Starting Better Report*. https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CPD-Starting-Better-Report.pdf.

The Rivers Family's Story*

The Rivers family is a blended family with seven children under 18 years of age who were accessing The Salvation Army's homelessness services. The youngest child in the family lives with a disability and has related care needs. At the time of our engagement, the Rivers family were receiving support from six different services including child safety, health, education, justice, The Salvation Army and another community organisation. Despite this intensive amount of support, family stress and crises only seemed to be increasing. The school the children attended reported being overwhelmed by the children's needs, and emergency services were attending the home frequently.

Our Children's Practice Specialist met with the parents and some of the children in the family to understand their concerns, views and experiences. A common theme emerged that the family felt overwhelmed by the number of professionals visiting the home, and that they had very little time to simply be together as a family.

Our Children's Practice Specialist shared the views of the family during a stakeholder meeting attended by child safety and support services. They highlighted that the volume of visits was adding pressure and stress to the family and advocated for a more coordinated approach that considered the family's need for privacy, routine and family time.

Services agreed and a new coordinated approach to home visits was developed. As a result, the family reported feeling less overwhelmed, incidents and crises reduced, and services were able to continue to support the Rivers family whilst respecting their need for space.

By listening to the family's experiences, the Children's Practice Specialist was able to:

- Ensure both the children's and parents' lived experience informed service planning;
- Advocate for a family-centred approach to support;
- Facilitate improved collaboration between agencies; and
- Contribute to reduced stress and better outcomes for the family through simple but meaningful changes.

**Names changed for privacy*

2.7 Our services report that funding is often a limiting factor when it comes to collective impact and genuine place-based approaches. Providing effective integrated support involves developing meaningful relationships and building trust with children, young people, and their families, as well as with other services and within the broader community. Funding models must reflect this, and account for the time and resources required to provide integrated, streamlined support.

Recommendation 10

2.8 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus on delivering an integrated service system that is well-equipped to respond to the intersectional needs of children, young people and families. This could be supported by:**

- **Investment in partnerships, embedded practitioners, and co-location of services and community supports; and**
- **Delivering sustainable funding to frontline services that recognises the cost of partnership work.**

Information sharing framework

2.9 The Salvation Army believes that the development of an information sharing scheme for services working with children, young people and families, could assist to strengthen partnerships and collaboration with other services and sectors, and lead to better outcomes.

2.10 Improved communication and information sharing processes would assist in establishing holistic, wrap-around service provision to, and lead to better outcomes for, children, young people and their families.

2.11 Participating agencies could include health, education, social services, police, courts and tribunals. Shared information could include support needs and any risk or safety concerns, and interventions between relevant bodies. This must be supported by robust privacy and consent processes to ensure children, young people, and families know what information will be shared and how it will be used. Gaining consent from families regarding the sharing of information related to their children should be prioritised unless there is serious or imminent risk to the children.

2.12 Information sharing frameworks should include processes to support closing the loop, especially when a particular type of support is unavailable. For example, our staff have reported an instance where a young person reached out for support, but their situation did not meet the threshold for child protection intervention, and their parent declined support. There was no mechanism in place to contact or share information back to the young person regarding the service limitations or to provide other support options.

2.13 Improved information sharing and coordinated responses across government and community service systems are critical to identifying cumulative risk factors and preventing children, young people, and families from falling through service gaps.

Recommendation 11

2.14 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on the development of an information sharing framework for services working with children, young people, and families.**

Improving system navigation

2.15 As previously discussed, children, young people, and families experiencing disadvantage and intersectional needs can face significant barriers to accessing appropriate supports. The onus is placed on parents, families or individual young people to navigate complex systems, such as healthcare, housing support, disability support, and financial assistance. This is particularly challenging for families who have an experience of trauma or are in crisis, have intersectional needs, or for those from diverse cohorts and communities.

2.16 In our experience, it is often unclear across the sector, particularly when multiple services are involved, who is responsible for the coordination of services and case management with each child, young person, or family. Services' ability to support families to coordinate and navigate systems is also limited according to service capacity and insufficient funding.

2.17 We call for increased investment in coordination and support to children, young people, and families to navigate support systems. We suggest that this could include investment in:

- **Multi-agency case coordination models,** which involve stakeholders from various organisations coming together to discuss and workshop how to achieve best outcomes for children, young people, and families with complex needs.
- **Frameworks that set clear responsibilities for services,** similar to that of the Victorian Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) framework. The MARAM has established clear responsibilities for services regarding the identification and management of risk related to family and domestic violence.[5]
- **Services that support families to navigate support systems**, such as The Salvation Army's Pathway of Hope program as outlined on the following page.

[5] Victorian Government. (2021). *MARAM Practice Responsibilities for Professionals*. https://www.vic.gov.au/maram-practice-guides-foundation-knowledge-guide/maram-practice-responsibilities-professionals

The Salvation Army's Pathway of Hope program

The Salvation Army's Pathway of Hope is a pilot program operating in Tasmania offering free, tailored support to families with children aged 0 to 12 years who may be experiencing hardship, vulnerability or social isolation.

Pathway of Hope works with families before they reach crisis, helping to build resilience, strengthen relationships, increase community connection and address challenges early. It brings together corps (churches), community services, volunteers, and community partnerships to provide coordinated wraparound care.

The model aims to:

- Increase hope and resilience and improve family wellbeing;
- Strengthen parenting confidence and skills;
- Improve parent-child relationships;
- Increase community connection;
- Improve stability and resilience across areas such as housing, finances, and wellbeing; and
- Help break cycles of disadvantage and poverty.

The Smart Cookies initiative grew as part of the Pathway of Hope approach. Local corps mission teams worked with schools and the local community to address an issue of low literacy seen in their community. The corps started a homework group, a safe space to connect over educational games and sensory play, where parents are encouraged to join in. This group is a space where parents and the corps team build trust, acting as a soft-entry point to access additional support without pressure.

At its heart, Pathway of Hope believes that every child deserves to grow up in a family that is strong, supported, and full of possibility.

Recommendation 12

2.18 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans address the need to improve system navigation and coordination for children, young people, and families.**

3 Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

3.1 The Salvation Army suggests the following actions to improve support and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families.

Adequately funding Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

3.2 The Salvation Army calls on governments to invest in and emphasise programs and initiatives developed and facilitated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to ensure program design and delivery are culturally informed, culturally responsive, and culturally grounded.

3.3 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are best placed to understand the cultural and geographical needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and can draw on cultural strengths in service delivery to achieve best outcomes. We affirm the ACCO investment and commissioning priority identified in the discussion paper. Investing in ACCOs is essential to ensure that a range of culturally responsive resources are available across the child, youth, and family services sector and beyond.

3.4 The Salvation Army also points to the need to ensure ACCOs are fully funded and well-equipped to establish and deliver services within their community. Our services report that in their experience, when local ACCOs do not have access to sufficient funding and supporting infrastructure, this makes the establishment of community-led services more difficult and has risked overburdening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

3.5 We highlight also the importance of partnerships between the ACCO and wider service sectors, to ensure that ACCOs are well-supported to deliver frontline services. We suggest that existing services with backroom support can be funded to partner with and support ACCOs in their responses. We discuss this further below.

Recommendation 13

3.6 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus on the need to significantly increase investment in ACCOs to ensure they are fully-funded and well-equipped to achieve best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families.**

Investing in strong partnerships between ACCOs and the wider service sector

3.7 We draw attention to the need for strong partnerships and genuine collaboration to strengthen outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families.

3.8 Our services work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in kinship care or being cared for by non-Indigenous parents and carers. In our experience, these families do not always feel comfortable accessing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

3.9 We draw attention to the need for strong partnerships and genuine collaboration between the wider service sector and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and community leaders to ensure that mainstream service responses are also culturally safe.

3.10 We have learned firsthand the impact that partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and leaders can have on improving outcomes for community members. We point to our Children and Parenting Support Services programs below that have partnered with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and Elders to improve outcomes.

3.11 In our experience, funding does not currently recognise the monetary investment and resources required to develop and maintain strong partnerships. Encouraging collaboration and partnership could include quarantining some grant funding for partnerships with ACCOs.

Tida Bunji: A Cultural Bridge Empowering Generations

Tida Bunji was launched in 2022 at The Salvation Army's Children and Parenting Support Services program in Melton, Victoria. The group runs fortnightly and has an average attendance of 15 families, including Elders, young mothers, and their children.

Tida Bunji's purpose is to strengthen the bonds between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and younger mothers, providing a culturally safe space for mentorship, connection, and shared learning. Through storytelling, cultural teachings, and traditional activities, Elders share wisdom and provide guidance on parenting and the importance of nurturing children's connection to their culture. Through yarning circles, participants can openly discuss challenges without fear of judgment, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support.

Tida Bunji focusses on mutual learning. While Elders impart cultural knowledge and parenting guidance, young mothers contribute by sharing their skills, for example, teaching Elders how to navigate smartphones and social media. This reciprocal exchange enriches both groups – empowering Elders to stay connected in the digital world and helping young mothers gain valuable parenting insights rooted in cultural traditions.

Tida Bunji is more than just a group – it is a lifeline of cultural and emotional support. It provides young mothers with the tools to become confident parents, while helping them build a strong social network that reduces isolation. The Elders, in turn, feel valued and engaged, as their wisdom and traditions continue to guide and inspire the community.

A notable example of Tida Bunji's success is a collaboration between a young mother and an Elder. The young mother assisted the Elder in accessing online services to submit an aged care application to ensure they could access required support services. The young mother later experienced family and domestic violence, and the Elder provided her with a safe place to stay until formal support could be secured to help her transition to safe long-term accommodation.

Recommendation 14

3.12 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus on the importance of the development and maintenance of strong partnerships and collaboration between the wider service sector and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and community leaders.**

Building the cultural competency of the wider service sector

3.13 We believe that cultural competency and capability is inherent in ensuring culturally safe service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Cultural competency and capability ensure inclusive and culturally safe environments that are accessible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and enable them to feel valued and thrive.

3.14 Every part of the system needs to be culturally safe and responsive to holistically address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We point to the following reforms that we believe can enhance cultural competency, and ultimately lead to more culturally safe and culturally aware service provision:

- **Training for frontline services.** Our services have identified a significant gap in service providers' understanding of different cultural approaches and beliefs related to caring for children, parenting, health, and wellbeing. This is particularly prominent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and culturally and linguistically diverse families. We stress the need for greater cultural education across children, youth, and family programs to ensure culturally appropriate service provision. Training should be mandated and repeated regularly. We suggest that training should cover topics including cultural strengths and healing, racism, unconscious bias, parenting within a cultural lens, and the unique barriers that prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families from engaging with services and seeking help.
- **Investing in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce** across the child, youth, and family service sector. Critically this includes developing and investing in culturally appropriate educational and upskilling pathways – such as traineeships, graduate programs, paid work placements, and study grants – that are accessible and culturally safe. Renumeration for identified roles should recognise cultural expertise. Human resources and employment processes also need to be culturally aware and not act as a barrier to onboarding or retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Our experience is that implementing options for staff to job-share has reduced the likelihood of staff burnout.

Recommendation 15

3.15 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus on the need to strengthen the cultural competency of the child, youth, and family sectors. This should include:**

- **Ensuring cultural competency training is available for the wider service sector, and is mandated and repeated regularly.**
- **Strengthening and building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.**

4 Workforce capability and cultural safety

4.1 The Salvation Army points to the following to strengthen the child, youth, and family workforce so that children, young people, and families have access to safe, high-quality, and culturally responsive support.

Strategic workforce planning and investment

4.2 Across Australia, there are child, youth, and family services facing critical workforce challenges, especially within regional and remote areas.

4.3 Sustained and targeted investment is required to recruit, retain, upskill, and support the child, youth, and family workforce, especially in areas experiencing significant challenges with recruitment, high turnover of staff, and roles that require a high level of skill and experience. Recruitment and training pathways must be improved to build the capacity of junior staff, equip staff for high-demand roles, and support staff to specialise or perform roles that require significant skills and experience.

4.4 We recommend Australian governments invest in:

- **Paid internship programs and graduate roles**, with a well-developed training and capacity building model.
- **Accessible and flexible training pathways** that enable workers to commence employment and be supported to work towards attaining minimum qualifications whilst employed.

4.5 Workforce investment must also prioritise the recruitment, retention, and professional development of staff from priority cohorts, including culturally and linguistically diverse communities and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, addressed above in Chapter 3.

4.6 We highlight the benefits of building a multi-disciplinary workforce to build service and sector capacity, deliver holistic support and improve outcomes for children, young people, and families. Within The Salvation Army's Children and Parenting Support Services in Victoria, we have seen the benefits of a multi-disciplinary team that brings together staff with backgrounds in psychology, counselling, social work, mental health, community services, and culturally responsive community work. These benefits include:

- **Delivering holistic support.** Families rarely present with one isolated issue. A multi-disciplinary approach helps the team understand and respond to a range of issues together.
- **Matching families with the most appropriate practitioner.** The team can consider the family's needs and circumstances and, wherever possible, match them with them with the practitioner whose experience and professional background are most relevant.

- **Providing continuity of support.** Wherever appropriate, the practitioner who has already developed the relationship with the family can remain involved, while drawing on additional expertise behind the scenes. Families are therefore less likely to be repeatedly redirected or required to retell their circumstances to different people.
- **Improving capability across the team.** Sharing knowledge across disciplines strengthens the capability and resilience of the whole team and reduces over-reliance on individual staff members.

Recommendation 16

4.7 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on strategic workforce planning and investment to build and sustain the child, youth and family workforce.**

Enhancing workforce confidence and capability

Workforce training

4.8 We agree, as identified in the proposed priorities in the discussion paper, that continued investment in workforce strategies, training, and capability building, especially in regional and remote areas, will help strengthen supports for children, young people, and families. All frontline services must be equipped to provide child-centred, trauma-informed and culturally safe responses.

4.9 We have observed the need for increased levels of effective and tailored education, training, and workforce capacity building across the frontline service sector. This should include:

- **Child-centred practice.** All frontline services must be equipped to engage with children, young people and families. This includes engaging directly with children and young people, not just through the adults in their lives.
- **Trauma-informed care.** Staff must feel confident working in a strengths-based framework that is grounded in responsiveness to the impacts of trauma and that emphasises physical, psychological and emotional safety for children, young people, and families.
- **Cultural competency and capability.** We highlight the need to increase services' capacity to provide support that is culturally appropriate and safe. Cultural competency training is covered in Chapter 3 for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in Chapter 1 for working with culturally and linguistically diverse people.

4.10 Cross-sector training between services is a beneficial way to upskill frontline workers, build the capacity of services to respond to children, young people, and families, and ultimately improve the safety and wellbeing of children, young people, and families. We recommend the development of a shared training loop by and for healthcare professionals, youth, homelessness, education, and family and domestic violence services.

Recommendation 17

4.11 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on the delivery of specialist training for all frontline workers who engage with children, young people, and families.**

Preventing burnout and fatigue

4.12 Supporting children, young people and families in a frontline role can be emotionally taxing. Exposure to trauma, combined with high workloads, time pressure and limited resources can result in distress, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burnout among frontline workers. Burnout is a critical concern with significant implications for both the workforce's wellbeing and the ability of the workforce to continue to provide quality care and support.[6]

4.13 Counteracting fatigue and burnout in the frontline workforce will promote staff retention, job satisfaction and wellbeing. This will preserve the workforce, the sustainability of services, and the provision of quality support. This can take the form of organisational interventions (such as providing workers with autonomy and control in the way they conduct their work) and individual interventions (such as supervision, professional coaching, or education).[7] Central to staff wellbeing is ensuring that services are adequately funded and staffed to meet the demand and provide individual caseloads that are sustainable. Opportunities and support for reflective practice and supervision are also important for staff wellbeing and practice development.

4.14 Employees across the frontline should have access to opportunities that can cultivate skills and build their experience in a meaningful way. Access to professional development activities can build self-confidence, increase work engagement, and reduce staff burnout and high staff turnover rates.[8] Increased and dedicated capacity building funding would allow all staff to engage in professional development.

Recommendation 18

4.15 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus on ensuring frontline services are adequately funded to provide interventions and opportunities to address employee burnout and fatigue, and promote job satisfaction, including sustainable caseloads, staff supervision, and professional development.**

[6] SafeWork NSW. (2024). *Evidence check: Burnout in the health care and social assistance sector*. NSW Government. https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1379414/Evidence-check-burnout-in-the-health-care-and-social-assistance-sector.pdf
[7] Ibid.
[8] Safe + Equal. (2022). *Health, safety and wellbeing self-assessment: Tool handbook*. https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Health-Safety-and-Wellbeing-Self-Assessment-Tool-Handbook.pdf

5 Children and young people's perspective and participation

5.1 Lived experience is critical in shaping all policy, legislative or program reform for children, young people, and families. Children and young people have a wide range of experience, stories and knowledge, all of which are of value. Wherever able, children and young people should be engaged as individuals, with strengths, agency, and decision-making abilities, through forums that are tailored according to their age and development.

5.2 Meaningful engagement will create safer, more effective, and more efficient policies, programs and legislation. Participation offers a positive opportunity for children and young people to develop their identities, improve their confidence, and increase their social and professional networks.

5.3 It is important that the language and method of engagement is age-appropriate, accessible and reflective of the wide range of abilities and experiences of children and young people. Engagement should be sought proactively, be flexible and engaging, and encourage a sense of safety.

5.4 To be meaningful, this approach must:

- Embed the voices of children and young people in reform and oversight mechanisms, ideally throughout the entire duration of a consultation;
- Move beyond tokenism and proactively seek the feedback of children and young people;
- Establish both formal and informal participation pathways;
- Equip and empower children and young people to engage in a way that feels accessible and meaningful to them; and
- Ensure diverse perspectives are actively sought, with adequate representation from marginalised communities.

Recommendation 19

5.5 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on the development of formal mechanisms that empower children and young people to provide advice to governments regarding service delivery, policy and legislative reform.**

Embedding the voices of children and young people

In the Second Action Plans

5.6 The Salvation Army is supportive of the need to ensure that the voices of children and young people are embedded in the design and implementation of the Action Plans.

5.7 Children and young people should have opportunities throughout the development and implementation of the Action Plans to reflect on issues which affect them, create, and guide solutions, and identify their specific needs.

Recommendation 20

5.8 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans adopt co-design methods in all stages of its design, development, and implementation to ensure children and young people's knowledge, creativity, and lived experience is embedded.**

Within programs and services

5.9 The child, youth, and family sectors must be sufficiently resourced to support tailored, meaningful engagement with children and young people in the design and delivery of services and programs.

5.10 At The Salvation Army, young people are provided opportunities to meaningfully contribute to shaping our physical environments, service design, and delivery. We provide a range of platforms that enable young people to contribute in ways that consider their skills and interests. We encourage and support young people to identify their strengths and ways that they can participate. Across our youth services, levels of engagement include low (inform and consult), medium (involve and collaborate), and high (partnership and co-design).

5.11 Meaningful consultation with children and young people is resource intensive. Services require long-term, sustainable, and flexible funding to be able to support children and young people to meaningfully participate in service design and delivery.

5.12 The Salvation Army aims to remove or reduce the barriers for young people to participate, which could include support with transport, information technology literacy training, opportunities for flexible participation, language and translation services, and ongoing staff support to increase participation, confidence, and ability.

5.13 Children and young people should also be appropriately remunerated for their advice and expertise and provided with appropriate therapeutic supports.

5.14 The Salvation Army aims to support young people to engage meaningfully in matters that impact them through several avenues. These include ensuring that there are a variety of youth-friendly feedback mechanisms available to young people accessing our services and allowing young people to choose how they provide feedback. For example, sitting around a table may not be an effective environment to engage a child. A simple way to encourage engagement is to ask the young person how and where they wish for consultation to occur.

5.15 Services must consider a range of opportunities and creative ways to engage children and young people, including written, face-to-face, anonymous, virtual, through case plans, as part of an interview panel, in program design, and by participating in advisory and focus groups.

5.16 Children, young people, and service providers, experience positive outcomes when children and young people can be actively engaged throughout the lifespan of an initiative or program and actively involved in the decision-making process. This involves services providing feedback throughout the process to children and young people, including when their ideas are unable to be adopted and the reasons why.

5.17 Importantly, services must move beyond tokenism and embed children and young people's voices within their outcomes and accountability frameworks.

5.18 Children and young people's participation must also be actively and directly sought by all services accessed by children, young people, and families, not just through their parents and carers. This is addressed in further detail in Chapter 4.

Recommendation 21

5.19 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans focus efforts on ensuring multi-faceted, long-term funding across the entire frontline service system. This must include the cost of embedding the voices of children and young people within programs and services.**

6 Accountability, data and measuring progress

6.1 The Salvation Army has significant experience in collecting, analysing and reporting on data through our own Research team. This has allowed our services to better understand how our support contributes to meaningful and sustainable improvements in community members' lives. It allows us to improve the quality of our services by innovating, adapting based on what is working well, and supporting continuous learning. It ensures our programs are based on real-world evidence.

6.2 Based on our extensive experience in data collection and outcomes measurement, we point to the following areas for consideration under the Second Action Plans to support improved outcomes measurement for child, youth, and family programs.

Empowering organisations in data collection and outcomes measurement

6.3 Empowering organisations in data collection and outcomes measurement is an important step to better understand whether supports and services delivered under the Second Action Plans are improving outcomes for children, young people, and families. Data collection and outcomes measurement are crucial to understanding what works well and how services can be improved. It strengthens service quality, system accountability, efficient resource distribution, and successful innovation across the service sector.

6.4 In our youth services, The Salvation Army collects data using validated and evidence-based tools to gather feedback from young people at the point of entry to our services and at regular intervals thereafter. We use a variety of age and developmentally appropriate methods, often framed visually and delivered through short, conversational interactions. Not only does this foster continuous improvement to our programs, but it can be used as a tool for frontline practitioners to guide meaningful conversations, tailor support plans, and track progress with young people in ways that are relevant and empowering.

6.5 Service delivery models and offerings are diverse across the child, youth, and family sector. We believe that service provider-specific outcomes measurement frameworks are an important tool to accurately measure success. These frameworks allow each service provider to understand what works and what does not work regarding their service provisions, and monitor changes of outcomes arising from innovation and continuous improvements.

6.6 Provider-specific outcomes measurement frameworks also enable service providers to measure outcomes using one consistent framework that aligns with their theory of change and model of care. This approach avoids the need to use multiple and potentially overlapping outcome frameworks mandated by different funding bodies, which may overlook outcomes unique to service providers, local areas, and their client groups. It also minimises the administrative burden of data collection and reporting. Service providers can then map and report their outcomes to various funding bodies and sector outcomes frameworks.

6.7 The Salvation Army believes that, where available, service providers should be able to use their own client management system and outcomes measurement frameworks, as opposed to being prescribed government systems and tools.

Culturally safe outcomes measurement

6.8 Culturally safe and appropriate outcomes measurement processes, including data collection, are essential when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and families. Each aspect of development should involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and embed the four AIATSIS principles of self-determination, Indigenous leadership, impact and value, and sustainability and accountability.

6.9 It takes time to do this well – to build relationships, establish knowledge exchange between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and evaluators, and identification and reduction of decolonising principles (for example, evaluators engaging in critical reflexivity, and considering and reducing power dynamics). This is even more true when mainstream outcomes measurement methods are not fit-for-purpose and there are limited validated outcomes measurement tools suitable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the sector.

6.10 We suggest that the Second Action Plans should include a specific commitment to support the development of a data and evidence eco-system that is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities.

Recommendation 22

6.11 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans support organisations to develop and embed outcomes measurement frameworks to support best outcomes for children, young people, and families. This should include the development of a data and evidence eco-system led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities.**

Embedding the voices of children and young people in outcomes measurement

6.12 Embedding the voices of lived experience within data collection and outcomes measurement is critical to understanding whether initiatives under the Second Action Plans are improving outcomes for children, young people, and their families.

6.13 At The Salvation Army, we believe that data collection and outcomes measurement processes must be adapted to amplify the voices of children and young people accessing our programs. This should include considering the need to adapt language, questions, and data collection methods according to the age and development of the children and young people engaging with our services.

6.14 For example, within our youth alcohol and other drug services, young people are provided multiple ways to provide feedback and data, including anonymously through QR codes, or directly to the internal research team where responses can be de-identified. Providing these options gives young people greater choice and confidence in sharing their views. Also, within our Transitional Support Service, we complement measures mandated by our funding bodies with our own outcomes measures to provide young people with an opportunity to reflect on the areas of their lives that matter to them. This ensures that data collection is not limited to contractual requirements but also provides a broader understanding of the outcomes that matter to young people.

Recommendation 23

6.15 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Second Action Plans highlight the need to ensure that the voices of children and young people are embedded within all data and outcomes measurement frameworks across the sector.**

7 Conclusion

7.1 The Salvation Army thanks the Department of Social Services for the opportunity to provide a written submission.

7.2 The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory

September 2026