

It's not often that in that moment where you are struggling with the inadequacies of your own work, and the work context, that an idea (or set of ideas) reveals why that struggle is warranted and why the work is left wanting.

In 2015 I proactively entered the family violence sector in NSW Australia, curious to understand how violence was being understood in the service system design and culture. I soon began asking questions that only led to more questions. Whose safety are we talking about? Who defines safety? Who determines what is safe enough? What is our role in someone's safety? Who defines the scope and how useful that is? Why do the things that exist as responses exist and where did they come from? Whose agenda do the ideas serve? How does this stack up at scale?

These questions led to the distilling of DVSM's simple concept called 'the safety trio' (below) – three intermediate parts that acknowledge a victim of violence is constantly and actively (1) self-assessing their safety, (2) inventing and refining safety strategies for their context and circumstance, and (3) building their safety awareness in the process as they sense make what works and what doesn't in creating, sustaining safety for themselves and people they care about.



We found that despite the largely accepted and evidenced idea that the victim of violence is best placed to know and predict the risk of violence, little, by way of models, tools and resources began from this premise, and so began DVSMs project [concepts of safety](#).

In 2016 I bumped into response-based practice ideas by chance. This marvelled and troubled me. I marvelled (and still do) at how profoundly important the ideas are and troubled by how problematic it was that I may not ever have seen, known or noticed these ideas but by chance. I'd had every opportunity to be taught or exposed to these ideas yet hadn't, and the ideas made immediate sense, personally, professionally and practically.

Two of the key response-based practice ideas that have significantly pivoted our work:

(1) '*Resistance and responses to violence are part of the fact pattern.*' Dr Allan Wade

I welcomed this idea as being immediately relevant, applicable and important. I could readily see that the absence of this focus was not only costing the individual victim but a critical flaw in the system was staring at us all and had been at play all along, and worse, we were part of that problem. I began to reflect on how I had not understood or honed my role as a custodian of evidence and recognised the challenge to confront the lines of scope to my work.

I understood the opportunity of this idea to be an essential way of seeing, noticing and respecting context and meaning set by the individual. This was counter to the context I thought I brought and defined as the 'professional'. I was guilty of, even with the best intention, determining what was in scope or relevant in someone's life. Guilty of ascribing meaning from my 'professionalised ideas' to match my (or my funders) preferred outcomes. I had thought this was helpful, and what the helping professions are meant to 'bring' to the work, but in recent years, and having worked across many sectors, had become increasingly uncomfortable with this stance. Uncomfortable ethically, and troubled by its recurring shortcomings.

I think somewhere in the compass from which I work, I committed to no longer disappear such evidence from view nor devalue it. This meant starting the work (which continues) to change what I see, notice, talk about, write about and bring into view.

(2) ***“Social responses are the most potent powerful preventative force”*** Dr Linda Coates

I was flawed by the gravity of this idea. Welcoming it and equally wondering about it. How could it be that the economy of ‘interventions’ skips passed the most integral intervention itself – ‘us’?. ‘Us’ as responders who are responding all the time, inside and outside the lines of programs or interventions, responding in how we live, act, speak, write, spend and shield one another ‘out in the open’ where the stakes are high.

This was the most energising possibility. An idea, at last, transcending the ‘interventions economy’ and the short comings of prescriptive programs. An affordable accessible achievable opportunity that rests with and within us all. Something seemingly so simple but so counter to the human service economy and tide of evidence hierarchy.

Taking up and taking forward the ideas

It’s from exposure to these two key ideas particularly, and the broader set of response-based practice tenets that we have pivoted our work. We wondered why these ideas were and are so hidden, overlooked or dismissed, and began to engage in how we could begin to take up the ideas ourselves and take them out to others.

In late 2017 we designed [Insight Exchange](#) We invited Dr Linda Coates and Dr Allan Wade to collaborate in the founding design of concept and intent. We wanted to create an initiative that both applies the ideas and brings the ideas into view for and with others, and to do so in an inviting and supported way that uses the practice itself.

Insight Exchange Concept Summary:

The **Insight** component of Insight Exchange invites people with lived experiences of Domestic and Family Violence and other adversities to share their experience through a safe and ethical process that affirms agency and upholds dignity. The insights are grouped into projects or initiatives: [Follow My Lead](#) | [Voices of Resistance](#) | [Voices of Insight](#) | [Voices of Reflection](#)

The **Exchange** component of Insight Exchange shares a person’s insights in a de-identified way with individuals, communities and organisations. More accurate insights can better inform our awareness, responsibility, and how we all respond to Domestic and Family Violence. The Exchange component is also an opportunity to bring together people and organisations that wouldn’t normally intersect to enable access to ideas, evidence, reflections and resources that build awareness about violence and inform social responsibility and social action. ‘Exchange initiatives’ are created as opportunities for sharing and learning about each other’s challenges, contexts and contributions. There are several Exchange initiatives: [Creating Conversations](#) | [Language Lab](#) | [Practice Exchange](#) | [Understanding Financial Abuse](#) | [Follow My Lead](#)

In 2018 we wanted to unapologetically represent, and build awareness about, the complexity of experiencing violence. To create an awareness raising resource that reveals and values the agency and deliberation of navigating safety. We wanted to challenge the idea about ‘who is leading who’ in supporting safety. In an effort to do so, we transposed the key messages from DVSM *Concepts of Safety* report into a resource for all social responders ‘[Follow My Lead](#)’ – a resource drawing from work we had begun and drawing from the integral ideas of response-based practice.

The engagement of people with lived experience of violence and of professionals and communities alike has been hopeful and straddles the response continuum from informal to formal social, service and system responses. Read more about engagement here - [Insight Exchange Engagement Report](#) on the on the [About Insight Exchange](#) Page.

If you are interested in discussing our experience in learning from these ideas please [contact us](#)
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