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REPORT BY **SHARNI LAWLER** CHURCHILL FELLOW

2019 CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP

TO EXAMINE INTERNATIONAL TECHNIQUES FOR THE FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER ROLE IN HOMICIDE INVESTIGATIONS.

AWARDED BY THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

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Report by Sharni Lawler, Churchill Fellow, 2019 Churchill Fellowship to Examine international techniques for the Family Liaison Officer role in homicide investigations.

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SIGNED: *Sharni Lawler* DATE: 20 APRIL 2024



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A highly experienced detective who generously dedicated her time and continual support. Our initial discussion about the Fellowship sparked a journey filled with her invaluable assistance and encouragement.

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I respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to the land, waters, and community and in particular the traditional owners of the Whadjuk boodjar on which I write this report. I pay my respects to all members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their cultures, and to Elders past and present.

DISCLAIMER

The views, recommendations and opinions expressed in this report remain those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Western Australia Police Force or any external agencies.

Acknowledging the sensitive and intricate aspects integral to the role of a Family Liaison Officer, certain details will be omitted in this public report. I will offer an insightful overview of my learnings, ensuring that further comprehensive information can be shared with law enforcement upon request.



CONTENT WARNING

This report contains sensitive topics related to homicide, death, and grief.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019 I was awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship to examine international techniques for the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) role in homicide investigations. I travelled between August and November 2023 to the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), and Canada. I met and had discussions with homicide detectives from multiple law enforcement agencies and support specialists who provided invaluable insights and learnings. These learnings could significantly benefit the Western Australia Police Force (WA Police Force) Homicide Squad and extend to all Australian policing jurisdictions.

The FLO models utilised by the Metropolitan Police Service and Police Scotland in the UK stood out as the most robust, well tested, and scalable. These are ideally suited for implementation within the existing homicide investigation framework of the WA Police Force Homicide Squad. Implementing these models would additionally offer scalability and support the deployment requirements for mass fatality incidents in line with a WA Police Force function to manage and coordinate emergencies. Moving in this direction would ensure the people of the WA Police Force can efficiently and effectively perform at the high level that is expected by the community.

The following key recommendations are proposed, and are drawn from international insights and expertise:

FLO ROLE AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

1. FLO ROLE ENHANCEMENT:

- Develop a specialised training course for FLOs mirroring the models of the Metropolitan Police Service and Police Scotland in the UK.
- Training to include a minimum one-week course in line with policy, legislation, and Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) training guidelines.
- Establish an application process for the FLO role.
- Establish and implement new Family Liaison Coordinator (FLC) roles in line with these above models to oversee the management, deployment, and ongoing welfare support of FLOs. Additionally, this would put the WA Police Force in a strong position to provide an effective scalable response for homicides and mass fatality incidents.

2. STATE FAMILY LIAISON RESOURCE COORDINATOR:

- Create a centralised full-time position for a State Family Liaison Resource Coordinator at the Major Crime Division that oversees the Homicide Squad. This position would take on functions similar to the National Family Liaison Advisor (National Crime Agency, UK) Family Liaison Disaster Management Team (Metropolitan Police Service) and National Family Liaison Coordinator (Police Scotland) including:
 - Manage the application and recruitment process for FLO and FLC roles.
 - Improve existing resources and documentation currently relied upon by the FLO. This will include a comprehensive brochure to be provided to families of homicide victims outlining the FLO role.
 - Develop and deliver contemporary training for FLO and FLC roles.
 - Oversee continual professional development for FLO and FLC roles, including biannual group development.
 - Maintain a central repository of all FLO deployments.
 - Oversee the drafting and implementation of policy and guidelines.

- Foster and develop continued positive partnerships with support services and external stakeholders.
- The State Family Liaison Resource Coordinator would form part of the management of FLCs and FLOs and provide support to the Senior Investigating Officer and/or the Senior Identification Manager in the event of a mass fatality or disaster victim identification incident.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY OF POINTS 1. AND 2. IS RECOMMENDED AS FOLLOWS:

- **Short term:** Focus on directing specific training and implementation towards FLOs and FLCs within the Homicide Squad.
- **Long term:** Once sufficient FLOs and FLCs are trained within the Homicide Squad, expand training availability to other business areas of the WA Police Force to create state-wide resource availability and assist with a scalable response.

3. ESTABLISH A CASUALTY BUREAU

- Establish a Casualty Bureau structure to manage and coordinate resources in the event of a mass fatality or disaster victim identification incident where significant FLO resources are required.
- Conduct further inquiries into the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System (HOLMES) case management system that is currently used by Casualty Bureau in the UK.
- Establish training for Casualty Bureau personnel.

VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICES

These warrant further discussion and consideration with agencies external to the WA Police Force:

- Establish a dedicated 24/7 victim service response specifically dedicated to homicide investigations. This immediate crisis support would provide a real time assistance service to families of homicide victims, witnesses and support the FLO role.
- Establish a homicide support group for families of homicide victims.
- Establish a specialised support and grief service for families of homicide victims and eyewitnesses to homicide, in addition to general victim support services already provided.
- Enhance post-sentencing support to include specific counselling.
- Implement a Family Justice Centre style model to assist with access to multiple services tailored to the needs of families of homicide victims.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Specialised civilian victim support workers who are external to the investigation process and available 24/7. This consideration is drawn from the successful model of Victim Services York, Ontario Canada.
- Inclusion of specialised civilian victim support workers to be positioned within the Homicide Squad. This consideration is drawn from the successful models used within:
 - Jefferson County, Colorado USA
 - Metropolitan Police Department Homicide Branch, Washington DC USA
 - Fairfax County Police Department Homicide Squad, Fairfax Virginia USA
 - Ontario Provincial Police, Canada
 - Royal Canadian Mounted Police Integrated Homicide Investigation Team, Canada.

Continuous dialogue and exploration of these recommendations and models are crucial for effective adaptation within the WA Police Force. These proposed enhancements could serve as a foundation for broader implementation across various other business areas within the WA Police Force and support services for all

victims of crime. The aim is to significantly enhance operational successes beyond the Homicide Squad in Western Australia to all policing jurisdictions in Australia.

A PROACTIVE POLICE FORCE SHOULD LEARN FROM OTHERS, AND NOT WAIT FOR A REVIEW OF THEIR OWN PERFORMANCE TO IMPLEMENT CHANGE.

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1. INTRODUCTION

IMAGINE. The worst news has just been delivered. You have been notified that a loved one has been the victim of a homicide. The details are on the news. It is on the radio. It is in your social media feed. This is confronting. Your world has been turned upside down and everything has changed in an instant.

In the aftermath of a homicide, when a family or loved ones are shattered by loss, the pivotal role of the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) emerges as not only an investigator, but as a guiding light offering support, empathy, and direction through the darkest of times. They will help you navigate through what can be a lengthy, emotional, and at times, frustrating journey that you never wanted to take.

The FLO ensures an effective, timely exchange of information between investigators and the victim's family. As an integral member of the investigation team, they obtain vital information relating to the victim and assist with other crucial investigative aspects. The actions of the FLO can impact the victim's family, the investigation and even their own welfare. The FLO will be the single point of contact from the investigation team to a single point of contact from the family of the homicide victim. This strategy is used to assist with accurate and timely information flow. The nominated point of contact within the family disseminates information to other family members and is the conduit for questions that may arise. There will at times be unique circumstances where more than one person in the family is in contact with the FLO. The families of homicide victims may reside locally, inter-state or even internationally.

The FLO role is conducted by a police officer, not a counsellor. Their involvement highlights the important need for effective partnerships with external support agencies. These agencies should be equipped with the expertise to offer tailored grief counselling and specialised emotional and practical support to families dealing with the trauma of losing a loved one to homicide. This collaborative partnership approach ensures families receive comprehensive and specialised support.

The impact of homicides extends beyond the victim's immediate family and loved ones. It can affect the broader community emotionally, socially, economically, and politically. Often, victims are tragically murdered by someone they know, intensifying the profound impact on families and friends. The effective performance of the FLO role benefits the homicide investigation and contributes to fostering continued trust and confidence from the community in law enforcement agencies. This highlights the importance of ensuring that FLOs operate at the highest standard, emphasising professionalism, empathy, and support for the families affected by such tragedies.

I commenced my career with the Western Australia Police Force (WA Police Force) in 2007 and became a detective in 2013, working in numerous frontline positions. During my time at the Homicide Squad, I saw the invaluable importance of the FLO role within homicide investigations. Since then, I have dedicated my time to understanding and improving practices relating to engagement with key secondary victims, who will be referred to as families of homicide victims in this report. Throughout my career, I have endeavoured to model my interactions based upon how I would want to be treated. Over the years I have developed an understanding and awareness that to be an effective police officer involves acknowledging your human side, which at times includes making mistakes. I have always strived to do my best, pursuing continual improvement, and actively working to professionally develop others around me. I support the vision of the WA Police Force *"To be an exceptional police force for our community."* (Figure 1; Western Australia Police Force 2023).

Exploring various international techniques has provided an opportunity for the WA Police Force to enhance how the FLO role can be adapted to each family and investigation. This research will assist with building crucial rapport and further developing effective working relationships between the FLO and families of homicide

victims. The limitations of this report are that I have not spoken with every police force that utilises the FLO role. I have spoken with a number of police forces and support services in the locations that I travelled, and obtained an overview that has provided an evidence-based foundation for my recommendations. There is always value and additional learnings that could be gained from other police forces that utilise the FLO role. Throughout the report, recommendations are provided for the FLO structure, training, welfare management of FLOs and strategies to ensure appropriate support for, and respectful management of, families of homicide victims.

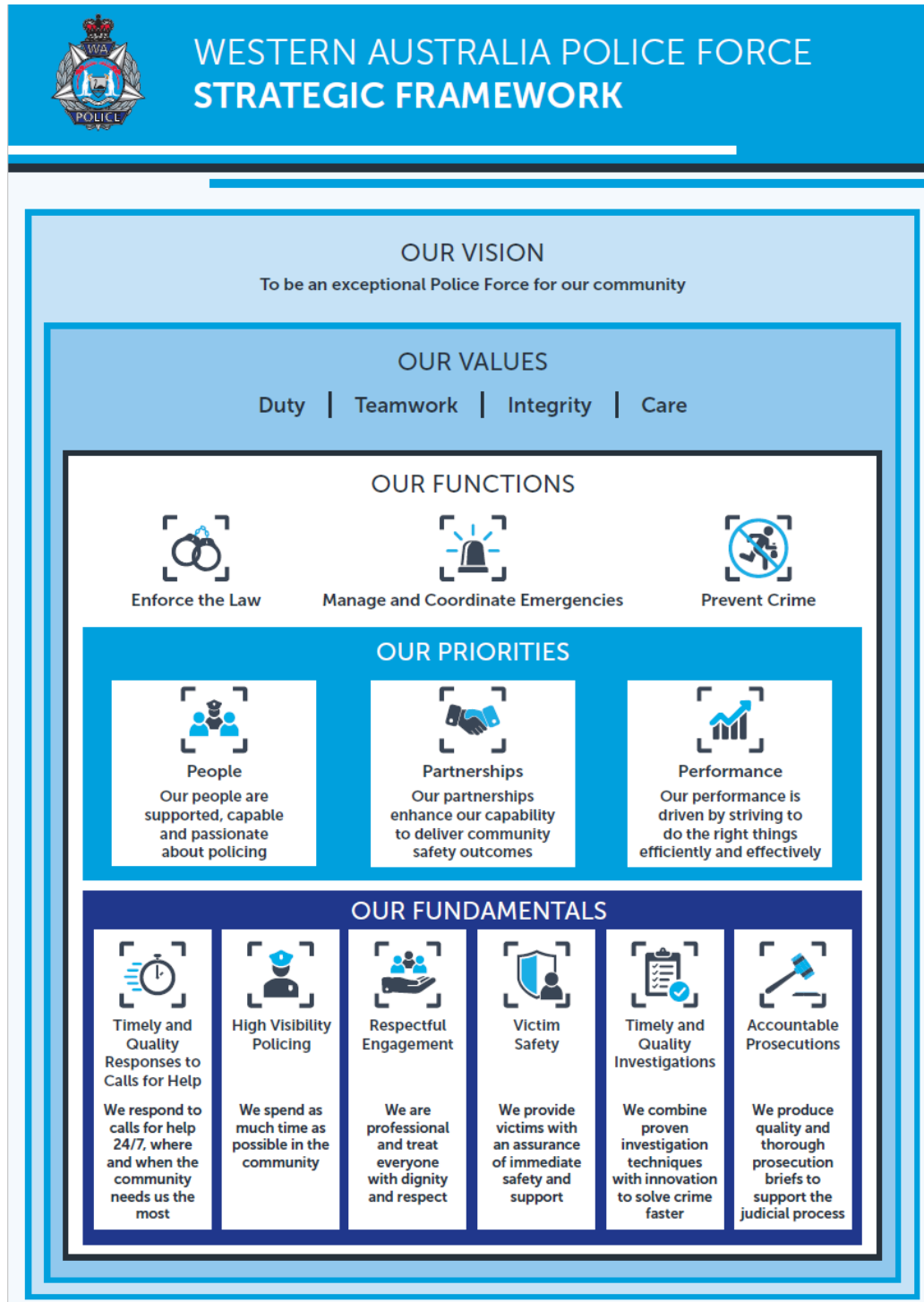


Figure 1: WA Police Force Strategic Framework. Extract from 2023 WA Police Force Annual Report (Western Australia Police Force 2023).

2. ITINERARY

| DATES (2023) | LOCATIONS |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 16 AUGUST | Departed Perth, Western Australia |
| 17 AUGUST - 7 SEPTEMBER | <p>LONDON ENGLAND, UNITED KINGDOM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metropolitan Police Service • Metropolitan Police Service Crime Academy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family Liaison Officer Course (one week) ○ Disaster Victim Identification ○ Discuss Family Liaison Coordinator Course ○ Senior Investigating Officer Course – Family Liaison Officer Day ○ Casualty Bureau • Family Liaison and Disaster Management Team • New Scotland Yard • Major Investigation Team • Counter Terrorism Policing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SO15 ○ Family Liaison Officers • Foreign Commonwealth Development Office <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Special Cases ○ Murder/Manslaughter Team ○ Crisis Hub • Home Office <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victims of Terrorism Unit • National Homicide Victim Support Service England • Victim Support Service • Citizens Advice Witness Service • Independent Office for Police Conduct • National Family Liaison Advisor – National Crime Authority |
| 7 SEPTEMBER - 14 SEPTEMBER | <p>GLASGOW SCOTLAND, UNITED KINGDOM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police Scotland • Major Incident Support and Coordination Unit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National Family Liaison Coordinator ○ Homicide Governance Review Team ○ Disaster Victim Identification ○ HOLMES case management • Major Investigation Team • Victim Support Scotland • Scottish Families Bereaved by Crime • Family Liaison Training & Consultancy Limited <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Director |
| 14 SEPTEMBER - 22 SEPTEMBER | <p>JEFFERSON COUNTY COLORADO, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PorchLight (Family Justice Centre) • Victim Witness Unit, District Attorney’s Office • Met with first Director of Victim Outreach Incorporated (retired) • Victim Outreach Incorporated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deputy Director |

| DATES (2023) | LOCATIONS |
|--------------------------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Training day with police departments ○ Victim's Rights Act specialist ○ District Attorney's Office ● Arvada Police Department <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arvada Police Academy ● Jefferson County Sherriff's Office ● Wheat Ridge Police Department ● Colorado Bureau of Investigation ● Colorado Organisation for Victim Assistance |
| 25 SEPTEMBER - 29 SEPTEMBER | <p>WASHINGTON DC UNITED STATES OF AMERICA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Homicide Branch Criminal Investigations Division, Investigative Services Bureau, Metropolitan Police Department <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family Liaison Specialist Unit ○ Homicide Branch <p>VIRGINIA UNITED STATES OF AMERICA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fairfax County Police Department <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victim Services Division ○ Homicide Squad ○ Crime Scene Section |
| 29 SEPTEMBER - 3 OCTOBER | <p>NEW YORK CITY UNITED STATES OF AMERICA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New York Police Department Head Quarters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Real time crime centre ● Special Victims Division ● Brooklyn North Homicide |
| 3 OCTOBER - 11 OCTOBER | <p>CONNECTICUT UNITED STATES OF AMERICA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yale – New Haven Children's Hospital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victim Services, Multidisciplinary Team ● New Haven Police Department <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victim Services Officer ○ Major Crimes ● Connecticut State Police <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Commanding Officer Office of Administrative Services ○ Community Trust Liaison Program ○ Executive Officer – Eastern District Major Crimes Squad ● Connecticut State Police <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Retired Colonel who oversaw the investigation for the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012 ● Plainville Police Department <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Current Chief who was first responder to Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012 when previously stationed at Newtown Police Department ● Connecticut Police Academy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victim advocate who is now a State Trooper ○ Training programs ● Law Enforcement Services Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Director – retired Connecticut State Police Major Crimes Squad ● Newtown <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ First responders to Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012 including: |

| DATES (2023) | LOCATIONS |
|----------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Retired Captain from neighbouring Police Department ○ Family Liaison Officer ● Office of Victim Services Connecticut Judicial Branch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Director ○ Training Officer ○ Compensation Manager |
| 11 OCTOBER - 24 OCTOBER | <p>YORK REGION & TORONTO ONTARIO, CANADA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ontario Police College ● Major Case Management Course <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victim Liaison Officer ● Victim Witness Assistance Program ● Ontario Provincial Police <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deputy Commissioner ○ Program Manager and Team Lead Victim Centred Approach Team, Investigation and Support Bureau ○ Victim Response Support Unit ○ Victim Specialists ○ Counter Exploitation and Missing Persons Section ○ ONCMPUR & Provincial Anti-Human Trafficking Unit ○ Major Case Manager Criminal Investigation Branch ○ Child Sexual Exploitation Unit ○ Serious Fraud Office ● Victim Services York Region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Executive Director ● Toronto Police <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victim Management Response ○ Family Liaison Officer program coordinator ● York Regional Police <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Major Crimes Bureau Homicide Unit |
| 10 NOVEMBER | <p>SURREY BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Royal Canadian Mounted Police E-Division ● Integrated Homicide Investigation Team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victim Services Manager ○ Officer in Charge ○ Team Leader ○ Investigation Team |
| 16 NOVEMBER | Returned to Perth, Western Australia |

3. WESTERN AUSTRALIA POLICE FORCE BACKGROUND

The WA Police Force is the world's largest single policing jurisdiction covering approximately 2.6 million square kilometres with a population of approximately 2.8 million people. There are over 150 police stations across eight metropolitan and seven regional districts, with a significant amount of geographical isolation within the state (Figure 2; Western Australia Police Force 2023).

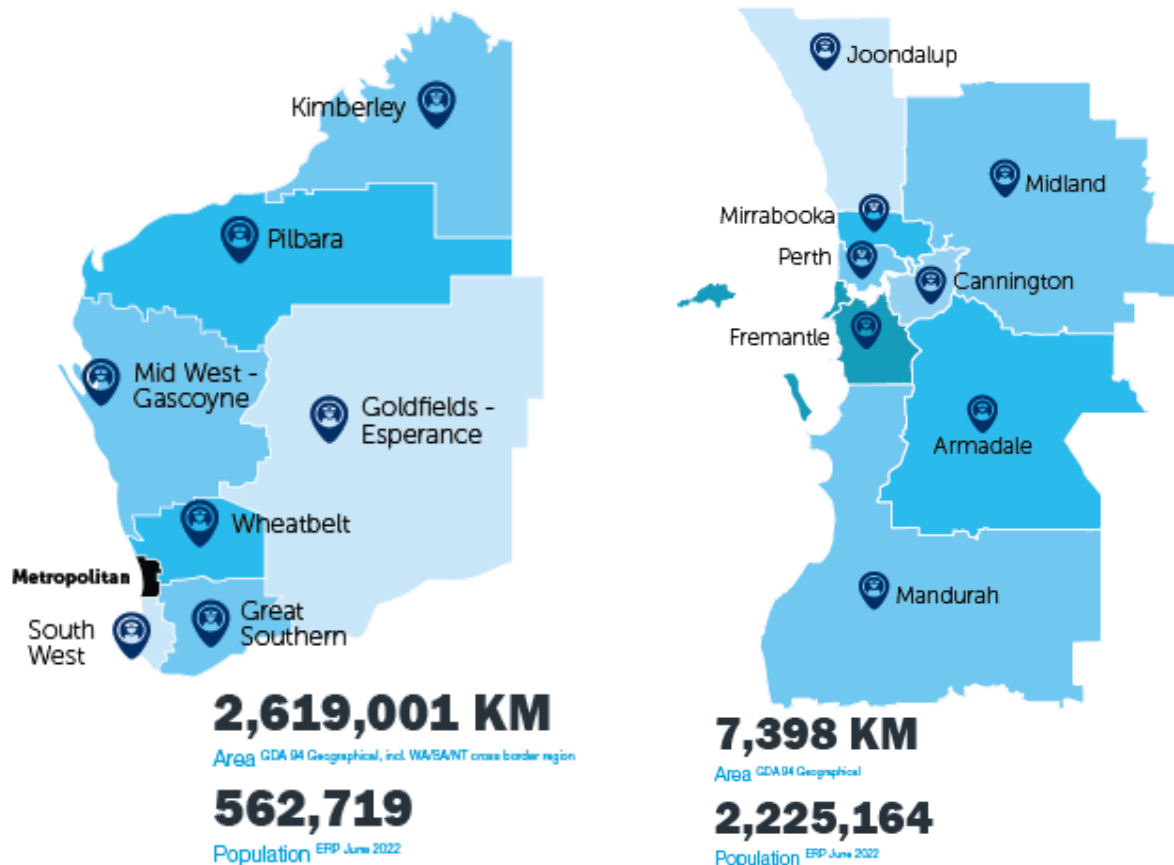


Figure 2: Western Australia (left) and Metropolitan area (right). Extract from 2023 WA Police Force Annual Report (Western Australia Police Force 2023).

The WA Police Force Homicide Squad is situated in the capital city of Perth. Between 2015 and 2023, there were on average 35 homicides per year throughout the state of Western Australia; some investigations included the death of multiple victims.

The Homicide Squad is primarily responsible for the investigation of:

- Homicide.
- Suspicious death.
- Deaths in custody.
- Critical incidents involving police where death or serious injury occurs as a result of police action, involvement, or presence.
- Acts of Terrorism resulting in death.

The Homicide Squad has a specific investigation structure which includes a detective from the investigation team being appointed the role of the FLO for each investigation they have carriage of. Currently there is no formalised training for the FLO role. Whilst positioned at the Homicide Squad, I created and presented learning events to detectives and advanced detective training courses specific to the FLO role for homicide investigations. These learning events provide an overview of the FLO role and discuss the numerous challenging aspects that may be encountered. Due to the unique nature of the role, I created these learning events to assist new detectives who were commencing at the Homicide Squad. The WA Police Force currently has an information document that provides a brief overview of the FLO role.

CURRENT LIMITATIONS

Current limitations relating to the WA Police Force Homicide Squad FLO role:

- No formalised training or ongoing professional development.
- No selection process for who is appointed to the role.
- Limitations on scalability for mass fatalities.

VICTIM DEFINITION

A victim under the *Victims of Crime Act 1994* is defined as:

- (A) A person who has suffered injury, loss, or damage as a direct result of an offence, whether or not that injury, loss or damage was reasonably foreseeable by the offender; or
- (B) Where an offence results in a death, any member of the immediate family of the deceased.

Currently the WA Police Force applies maximum tenure restrictions determining how long officers can work in one single business area and up until 2020, I was working at the Homicide Squad. Following on from that position, I worked at the Child Abuse Squad and now am an instructor at the Detective Training School, located within the WA Police Force Academy. Although I am no longer at the Homicide Squad, I have dedicated my time to continue to present the Homicide FLO learning event and strive to ensure ongoing improvements in this area.

The FLO role includes providing the continual flow of information and relevant updates to the victim's family, as well as complying with legislative requirements. The *Victims of Crime Act 1994* (Victims of Crime Act) provides guidelines as to how victims of crime should be treated in Western Australia. These are outlined in Schedule 1 of the Victims of Crime Act.

KEY PARTNER AGENCIES

The Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime (The Office) promotes and safeguards the interests of victims of crime in Western Australia. The Office administers payments to eligible families of homicide victims which includes the Homicide Funeral Assistance Scheme, post-homicide biological and forensic cleaning, and ambulance costs. The Office is currently working on acquiring funding for new initiatives that could provide additional support for individuals bereaved by homicide and to assist them as they navigate throughout the criminal justice system (Government of Western Australia 2023a).

Currently there are two main support services available through all courts in Western Australia: The Victim Support Service and Child Witness Service. The Victim Support Service has eight full time equivalent (FTE) positions that service the entire Metropolitan area, and 18.6 FTE positions that service regional Western Australia. There are approximately 20 volunteers who provide 'on the day' court support in the Metropolitan area. The Victim Support Service provides a range of trauma informed services, primarily including information and support around the criminal justice system. They provide court information and witness preparation, victim impact statements and compensation information. The Victim Support Service can provide a limited number of targeted counselling sessions focussed on reducing trauma symptoms. They have a limited capacity to provide support for eyewitnesses to crime (Government of Western Australia 2023b).

CURRENT LIMITATIONS

Current limitations relating to victim services in WA include:

- No 24/7 homicide support availability for after-hours incidents.
- No dedicated homicide-specific support services.
- Limitations with victim support services post-sentencing; including specific counselling.

Post-sentencing, the Victim-Offender Mediation Unit offers services to assist the victim from receiving unwanted contact from the offender through the imposition of conditions on supervised orders. The Victim-Offender Mediation Unit can also facilitate voluntary face to face meetings between the victim and offender for therapeutic purposes. The Victim Notification Register provides written updates about the offender to eligible individuals regarding prisoner movements, upcoming parole, and release. There is currently no capacity to provide counselling or further Victim Services post-sentencing (Government of Western Australia 2023c).

I have developed a close working relationship with The Office and Victim Support Service over my time as a detective. Whilst both services have passionate and dedicated workers, they constitute a limited resource and manage a heavy, demanding workload providing a service to families of homicide victims, and all victims of crime in Western Australia.

4. UNITED KINGDOM, ENGLAND, LONDON

The United Kingdom (UK) has 39 police forces in England, four in Wales, one in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland, including some others that are not Home Office Forces. All UK forces have FLO capacity and work differently based on their geography and staffing levels. I met with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) which is the largest in the UK.

The MPS covers 998 square kilometres and serves more than eight million people with over 34,000 police officers. The MPS polices 32 boroughs within Greater London, excluding the City of London. There is an average of approximately 130 homicides per year in their jurisdiction.



LEGISLATION

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (The Code of Practice) outlines the rights of victims and families of homicide victims, and states they are entitled to a FLO if deemed appropriate. They have the right to be referred to services that support victims and have services and support tailored to their specific needs, which includes homicide specific support services. The Code of Practice outlines the National Homicide Service which is a free service that provides emotional, practical, specialist and peer support to families bereaved by murder or manslaughter, including after an act of terrorism. There is a provision for witnesses, enabling them to access the same support services. This is particularly important in the case of homicide investigations where there is a direct eyewitness (Ministry of Justice 2020a).

FAMILY LIAISON OFFICERS

The deployment of FLOs remains pivotal in investigations, emphasising the necessity to engage with families of homicide victims professionally and empathetically while respecting their beliefs and traditions. Being a FLO is in addition to their usual day to day role as a police officer. It is a voluntary role which involves an application process that includes a psychological evaluation component. There is an intensive one-week FLO training course, and a requirement for continuous professional development training. The Major Investigation Teams (MIT) who investigate homicides, have trained FLOs within their investigation teams. If a MIT FLO is not performing a FLO role, they will conduct other investigative inquiries within the investigation team.

In the MPS, the core function of a FLO is that of an investigator. A FLO must be a detective unless they are a roads policing officer who investigates road traffic deaths. Their role is to gather evidence and information from the family in a sensitive manner which contributes to the police investigation/action and preserves integrity. They provide a documented, two-way communication channel between a single point of contact from the family of the homicide victim, which is fully recorded using the FLO Log. FLOs should always be deployed in pairs, with one being the lead officer. The FLO provides support and information, securing the confidence and trust of families of homicide victims, ensuring they are given timely information in accordance with the needs of the investigation (College of Policing United Kingdom 2023a).

A FLO will not usually be the first point of police contact for a family of a homicide victim. It is best practice for the death notification to be conducted separately by another officer, and a comprehensive engagement plan created prior to deploying a FLO. Thoughtful assessment should be given to determine the most suitable individual for the FLO role for each homicide investigation.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

The National Guidance Document by the College of Policing in the UK outlines family liaison can be used across a broad spectrum of investigations including but primarily for:

- Murder and manslaughter.
- Fatal road traffic collisions.
- Mass fatality incidents.
- Rail fatalities.
- Critical incidents where family liaison might enhance the effectiveness of the police response.

The deployment of a FLO is determined by a police investigation, not because a crime has been definitively determined (College of Policing United Kingdom 2023b).

Superficially, a FLO may seem like a practical resource that could be deployed into every police investigation. It is important to understand the objectives of the role and why this is not the case. This does not preclude all police officers from adopting a victim centred approach. With all police investigations there will generally be some form of contact between the police and the victim. This highlights the importance of ensuring all police officers act with empathy and care when engaging with victims of crime and refer them to the appropriate support services as soon as possible. It is important to remember that police officers are not counsellors.

WHAT HAS SHAPED THE FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER ROLE?

Understanding the historical context of the FLO role in the UK provides valuable insights into its evolution and significance within law enforcement practices. The UK has undergone various public inquiries into investigations. In 2017, the country faced numerous serious terrorist attacks and the devastating loss of lives in the Grenfell Towers fire, marking a challenging period. These tragic events, and others, have prompted significant changes in policing policies and procedures.

The investigation into the death of Stephen Lawrence, and the subsequent Macpherson report, was the catalyst for the development of family liaison. On 22 April 1993, 18-year-old Stephen Lawrence was murdered in a racially motivated attack by a group of white youths in South London. The case drew widespread attention due to its racial implications and the initial mishandling of the investigation, which led to criticism of the police and the justice system. This sparked significant public outcry, inquiries, and eventually, reforms in the UK's criminal justice system regarding race relations, police procedures, and community engagement.

The Macpherson Report emphasised the vital role and increased recognition of FLOs in homicide investigations. It highlighted the need for better training, improved communication, and increased sensitivity in dealing with families of homicide victims. The report highlighted that FLOs should be culturally aware, ensuring effective support and communication to build trust and understanding between law enforcement and affected families during such sensitive and challenging times. The inquiry significantly influenced the approach of the police towards supporting bereaved families of homicide victims (Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny 1999).

ROLES LINKED TO THE FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER

SENIOR INVESTIGATING OFFICER

The Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) in the MPS holds a key leadership position within major investigations. They oversee complex cases, manage investigative teams, and make strategic decisions to ensure efficient and effective investigations. The SIO will make the determination on the information that can be provided through the FLO, and what information needs to be obtained. The MPS Crime Academy delivers a five-week course to

ensure SIOs have specialised training to undertake this role. Family liaison is part of this in-depth training (College of Policing United Kingdom 2023c).

SENIOR IDENTIFICATION MANAGER

The Senior Identification Manager (SIM) is activated in cases of mass fatalities. The SIM is responsible for overseeing the recovery and identification process. They will work closely with the Coroner to prepare evidence for the Identification Commission and the SIO (College of Policing United Kingdom 2023d). They are primarily used in the event of Disaster Victim Identification incidents. Disaster Victim Identification is the method used to identify victims of mass fatality incidents. The UK and Australia utilise the same Interpol Disaster Victim Identification protocols (Interpol 2024).

FAMILY LIAISON COORDINATOR

The Family Liaison Coordinator (FLC) is usually the rank of Detective Sergeant and is a voluntary role with an application process. They oversee the management, deployment, and ongoing welfare support of FLOs. If a FLO is required for an investigation, the SIO will request a FLO through the FLC. At the direction of the SIO, the FLC will provide a documented engagement and withdrawal strategy and risk assessment for the FLO. These will then be reviewed and approved by the SIO. Subsequently, the SIO will task the FLO throughout the investigation and regularly receive briefings from them. The FLO Log, recording all contact with the FLO and the family, will regularly be reviewed by the SIO. Careful consideration is given when selecting a FLO to ensure the appropriate person is identified for the investigation, and due consideration given to their personal circumstances and workload. The MPS Crime Academy delivers a three-day course for FLCs.

The FLC will coordinate FLO deployment, provide specialised guidance, offer supervision during emotionally challenging situations, assist in resource allocation and training, ensure policy adherence, and maintain quality assurance. Their support is crucial for FLOs engaging with families in distressing situations. The FLC will manage peer support and welfare services, arranging professional development, and foster continual improvement. Importantly, FLCs are responsible for the welfare management of FLOs during their deployment. There are numerous trained FLCs in each MIT and various police units in the MPS. The role of the FLC becomes crucial if multiple FLOs need to be deployed. FLCs form part of the tier of management for information flow from the FLOs to the SIO or SIM (College of Policing United Kingdom 2023e).

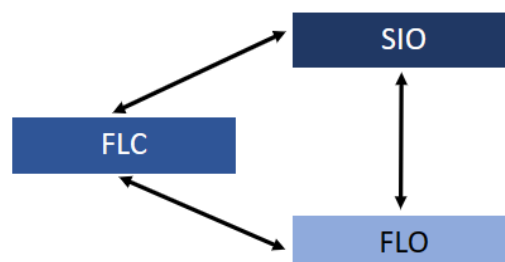


Figure 3: Family Liaison information flow (Image by author Sharni Lawler).

FLO WELFARE IS CRITICAL TO MANAGE

| VICARIOUS TRAUMA | COMPASSION FATIGUE |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Emotional and psychological stress that occurs when an individual is repeatedly exposed to traumatic experiences indirectly, often through hearing or working with those who have experienced trauma. ➤ Can lead to symptoms like post-traumatic stress disorder, impacting one's mental and emotional well-being. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A state of emotional and physical exhaustion that can occur when someone is exposed to others' trauma on a consistent basis. ➤ Often affecting caregivers, healthcare professionals, or individuals in helping professions, leading to a decrease in empathy, increased stress, and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the needs of others. |
| BURN OUT | SELF-CARE |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress, often stemming from work-related pressures. ➤ Characterised by feelings of detachment, reduced efficiency, and a sense of being drained, leading to a decrease in motivation and productivity. ➤ Occurs in the absence of trauma and occurs gradually over time when your workload exceeds your capacity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Intentional actions taken to preserve, improve, or maintain one's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. ➤ Involves activities that prioritise rest, relaxation, healthy habits, and activities that bring joy or reduce stress, contributing to overall personal wellness. ➤ Human beings can be like mobile phones – we need to recharge too. |

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it, is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water and expecting not to get wet.”

– Rachel Naomi Remen

The investigation into the death of Daniel Morgan led to changes for family liaison in the MPS.

On 10 March 1987, Daniel Morgan, who was an investigative journalist, was murdered in a London car park.

In 2013, Operation Drayfurn was established to respond to the independent panel report into the investigation. As a result, a recommendation was made that the role of the FLO is never carried out by the SIO as there is an inherent conflict between the two roles. This does not preclude the SIO from meeting a victim's family at various stages of the investigation in company with the FLO if required (Metropolitan Police United Kingdom 2022).

The investigation into the deaths caused by Stephen Port and subsequent Stephen Port inquiry, led to changes for family liaison in the MPS.

Stephen Port was a serial killer who was convicted of murdering four men between June 2014 and September 2015. The investigation faced criticism for its initial handling, with concerns raised about police response and potential biases affecting the investigation. It highlighted issues related to communication, procedures, and the handling of evidence. This resulted in inquiries and recommendations for improvements in police procedures, especially concerning vulnerable communities and missing persons cases.

The Stephen Port inquiry made recommendations to ensure adequate information was provided to the families of homicide victims. As a result, a pamphlet was created that is provided to families of homicide victims to clearly outline the FLO role. This is a simple, yet effective tool (Metropolitan Police United Kingdom 2023).

The Stephen Port inquiry also highlighted the need for FLOs to be appropriately screened to assess their suitability for the role. It drew attention to the importance for FLCs to operate independently from the SIOs. This ensures family liaison strategies are implemented, and there is oversight of the FLO role including welfare management. The recommendation emphasised the importance of maintaining a clear and distinct support structure for families affected by such incidents (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services 2023).

CASUALTY BUREAU

The Casualty Bureau operated by the MPS utilises the National Mutual Aid Telephony number, specifically dedicated to handling extensive communication during major incidents. This separate line ensures effective crisis management while keeping regular police contacts available for routine duties. Casualty Bureau uses the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System (HOLMES) case management system. HOLMES enables nationwide accessibility, aiding call diversion and streamlining response efforts during crises.

The Major Incident Public Portal (MIPP) serves as a centralised platform within the MPS. It provides essential information, reports, and resources for daily operations, ensuring efficient decision-making and resource allocation across various police departments and assists Casualty Bureau. The MIPP is an online reporting tool for the public, police, and partner agencies. It allows for submission of information and digital media directly into HOLMES (Unisys 2024).

The Family Liaison model is essential for supporting and reuniting families during critical incidents like terrorist attacks or natural disasters. This structure ensures families receive the necessary assistance and forms a fundamental aspect of the crisis response framework. The SIO or SIM will deploy FLOs as required based on information received by Casualty Bureau (Figure 4). This highlights the importance of a homicide FLO structure that is scalable. Clear lines of communication are required to ensure information flow to the SIO or SIM and the investigation component of the incident. The size of the incident will determine how many FLCs are required to manage the FLOs.

In the event of an incident that requires a significant number of FLOs, FLCs can be managed by Family Liaison Managers and Family Liaison Advisors (Figure 5). This structure allows for appropriate supervision, management, and welfare management of FLOs and ensures the information flow is managed efficiently. Ultimately the information for FLOs to obtain from and provide to families will be directed by the SIO or SIM depending on the investigation type. Specific coordination between law enforcement, support services, medical services, and coronial services would be required. A physical structure often referred to as a Family Assistance Centre needs to be in a location where people can attend to obtain and provide information. This is crucial for identification and reunification of survivors. FLOs form an integral role in this model.

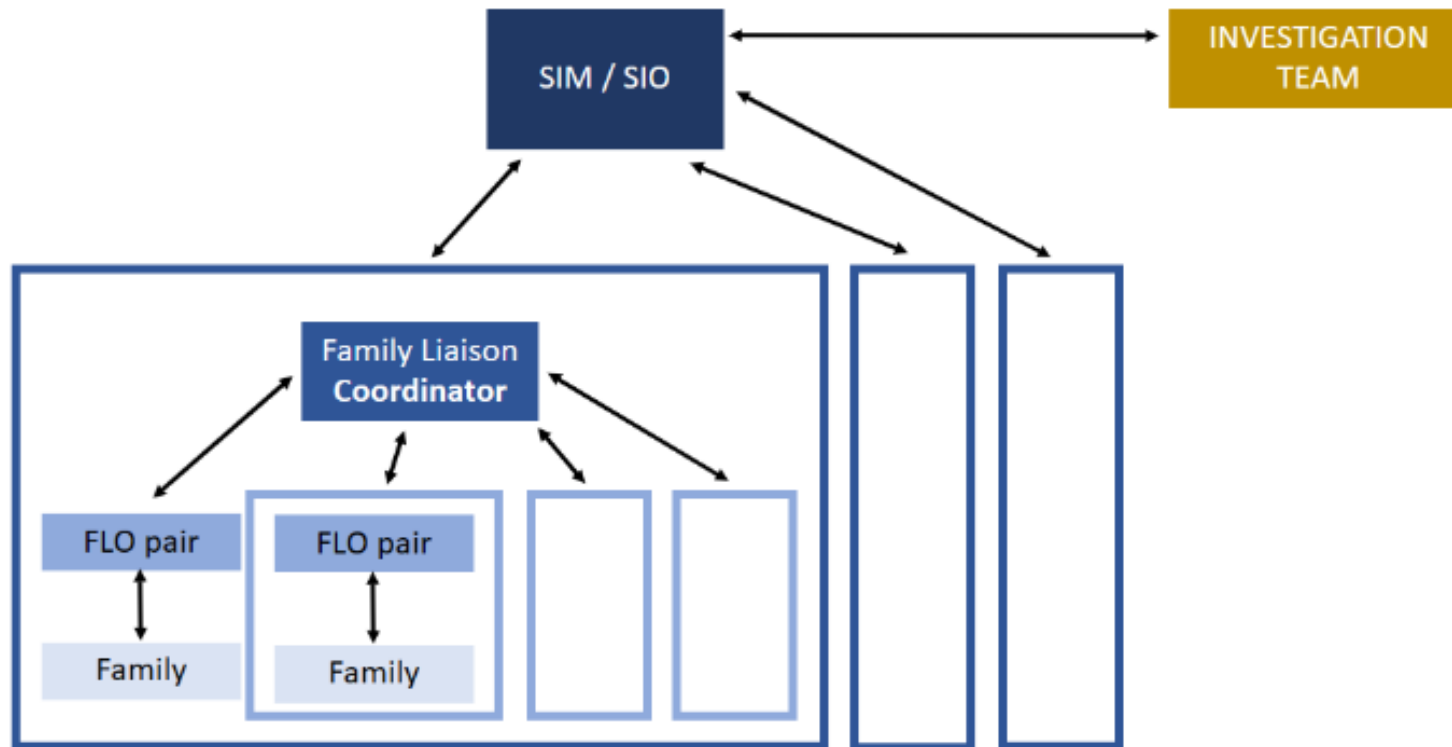


Figure 4: Family Liaison structure (Image by author Sharni Lawler).

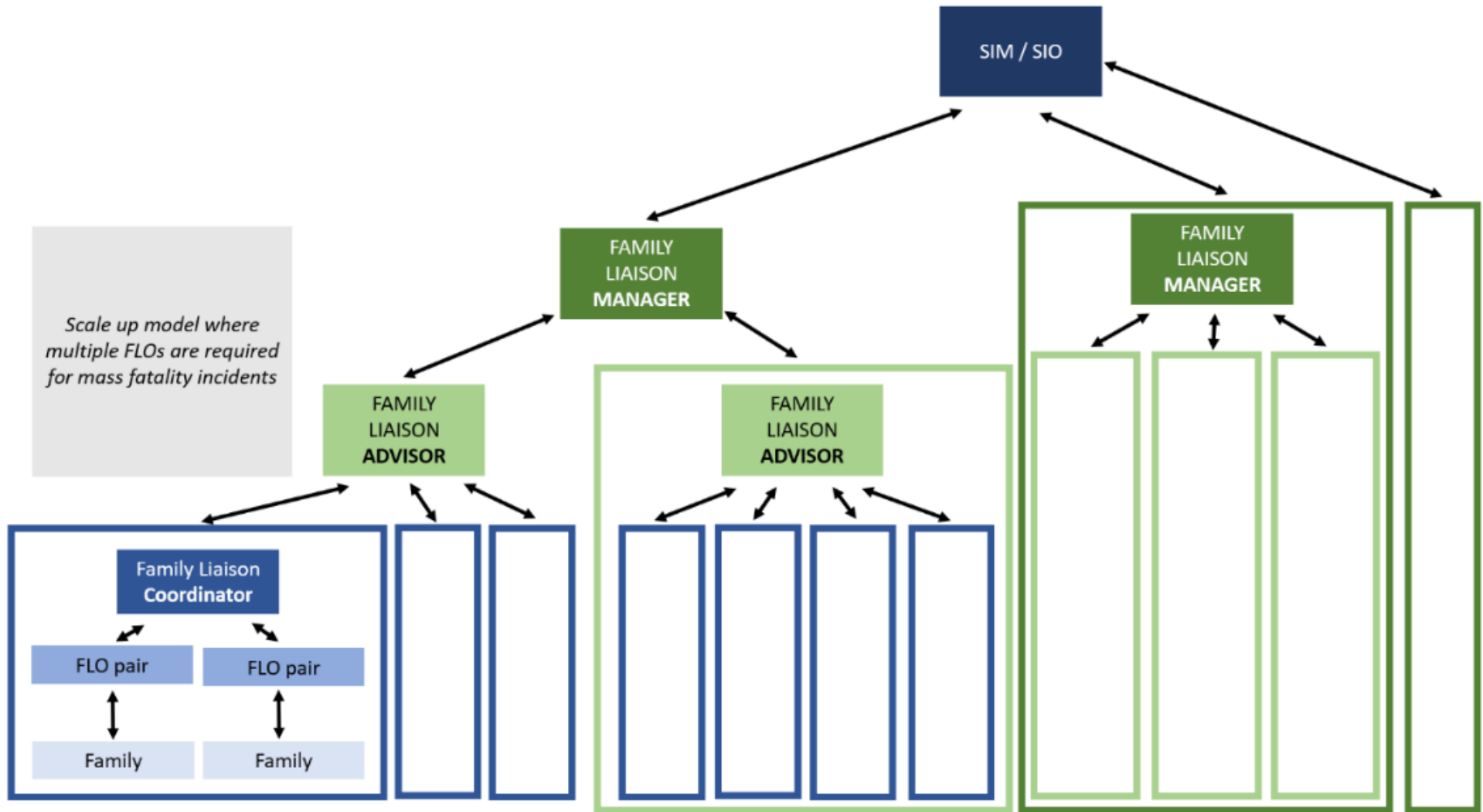


Figure 5: Family Liaison structure for large scale FLO deployments (Image by author Sharni Lawler).

FAMILY LIAISON AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Family Liaison and Disaster Management Team (FLDMT) is made up of Family Liaison Advisors, Disaster Victim Identification, Casualty Bureau, and a Coroner's manager who is a liaison to the Coroner's Office. The FLDMT supports FLOs by including but not limited to providing advice, monitoring, recording all deployments and offering ongoing training and support. They conduct debriefs, deliver presentations, organise training programs, and ensure continuous professional development.

The FLDMT support the provision of Family Liaison within the MPS and externally, including the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office. FLOs are a national resource, and if there is a large incident that requires assistance from multiple FLOs, the FLDMT team contacts the FLCs who then contact their FLOs.

The Marchioness Inquiry highlighted the importance of FLOs in providing support to the families affected by the tragedy. On 20 August 1989, the pleasure boat Marchioness collided with the Bowbelle dredger on the River Thames in London. The collision led to the loss of over 50 lives. More than a decade later, an official inquiry, known as the Marchioness Inquiry, was conducted to investigate the circumstances surrounding the collision and determine contributing factors.

The Marchioness Inquiry made a number of recommendations for FLOs including:

- Early engagement from FLOs.
- Continuous support to families throughout the investigation and legal process.
- Cultural sensitivity recognising and respecting diverse backgrounds.
- Providing specialised training and preparation for FLOs.
- Collaboration between FLOs and support agencies to ensure families receive comprehensive support.

FAMILY LIAISON WITHDRAWAL

The withdrawal from the family is a challenging aspect of the FLO role. Implementing a withdrawal strategy and clearly outlining the FLO role and objectives assists in this phase. This articulates the importance of the FLC role as they are integral to creating this strategy with the FLO at the initial deployment stage. The withdrawal occurs when FLO objectives are completed, often after sentencing occurs when charges have been laid or when investigations reach a conclusion without charges. Ceasing contact might seem uncaring but is necessary once specific objectives are met, to ensure the well-being of both the family and the FLO. The FLO's withdrawal is vital for the family's forward progress. Facilitating this transition through transparent communication and connecting them with support services assists the family's journey forward.

FLO deployments should always involve an investigative function, not solely a support role, whilst maintaining a balanced, empathetic approach. When withdrawing, joint explanation from the SIO and FLO is beneficial. Connecting families of homicide victims with ongoing support services early in the investigative process is fundamental for their sustained assistance after the FLO withdrawal.

For cases requiring prolonged contact with the family that do not meet the criteria for a FLO, a Single Point of Contact can facilitate ongoing communication between them and the investigation team. Any welfare concerns must be directed to suitable support organisations for assistance. A Single Point of Contact is a similar role that

every police officer performs when they are investigating any offence, as there are updates and support that must be provided to the victim throughout any investigation.

INDEPENDENT OFFICE FOR POLICE CONDUCT

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) is a non-departmental public body responsible for overseeing the system for handling serious conduct issues and complaints made against police officers and staff from police forces in England and Wales. They conduct investigations into death or serious injury that occur as a result of police action. The IOPC appoints Family Liaison Managers who perform a similar role to a FLO. The IOPC provide a document to the family that outlines the role of the Family Liaison Manager. This highlights the importance placed upon this role in many investigations (Independent Office for Police Conduct United Kingdom 2020).

NATIONAL FAMILY LIAISON ADVISOR

The National Family Liaison Advisor is a National Crime Agency position. They assist police forces in the UK, the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office, National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), UK Disaster Victim Identification and Interpol in the development and delivery of family liaison strategies. They can assist with complex investigations or sensitive matters. The NPCC provides practice advice for family liaison deployment and serves as a comprehensive framework for FLOs across law enforcement agencies in the UK. This establishes a standardised framework to ensure consistency, professionalism, and ethical conduct among FLOs nationwide, enhancing their effectiveness in supporting families during challenging circumstances.

VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICES

In England, independent charities are commissioned to deliver support to victims and witnesses affected by crime. The Victim Support Service primarily focuses on guidance and support to individuals affected by crime, helping them cope with the emotional aftermath and offering ongoing assistance tailored to their needs. Support with attending court is provided pre- and post-trial by organisations providing support to witnesses in criminal trials (HM Government 2024).

CITIZENS ADVICE WITNESS SERVICE

The Citizens Advice Witness Service (CAWS) provides free and independent support for both prosecution and defence witnesses in every criminal court in England and Wales. They are a charity organisation overseen by Citizens Advice, that is staffed by civilian volunteers and is separate to Victim Support Services. Assistance from the CAWS can be requested by the FLO, investigating officer, Victim Services, defence lawyers or Crown Prosecutors. CAWS volunteers offer practical information about the court process, accompany witnesses when they give evidence and provide support on the day of trial, at verdict and sentencing, assist with expense claims, collaborate with other agencies and refer to partner organisations for additional support (Citizens Advice 2024).

VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICE

The Victim Support Service in London is an organisation dedicated to aiding victims of crime. They offer emotional support, practical assistance, and guidance to individuals affected by crime via a range of support services. The Victim Support Service has major incident training, with a partnership approach to mass fatalities and major critical incidents. The Victim Support Service do not replace functions of the FLO role but provide a complementary support approach with the FLO. Victim Support Service provide in person support and have an established network of online support modules available and a 24/7 support line (Ministry of Justice United Kingdom 2020b).

VICTIM SUPPORT HOMICIDE SERVICE

The Victim Support Homicide Service (VSHS) covering England and Wales focuses specifically on aiding families and individuals directly affected by homicide. The VSHS was commissioned in 2010 and is funded by the Ministry of Justice and the service supports approximately 2000 clients per year. Specialist case workers offer comprehensive support, including emotional guidance, practical assistance, and specialised services to those bereaved by homicide or who are a direct witness to homicide (Ministry of Justice United Kingdom 2023c).

The VSHS can provide long-term support, understanding the unique challenges faced by families dealing with the aftermath of such tragic events, offering them the necessary resources to learn to cope; understand their trauma and grief and to navigate the complex legal and emotional journey ahead. VSHS specialist case workers do not provide counselling themselves but do provide psychosocial education helping those they support to understand the impact of trauma and grief. VSHS specialist case workers serve as a point of contact to a range of agencies and provide practical and emotional support directly to service users. They coordinate referrals to trusted partner services including bereavement and/or trauma counselling, restorative justice, debt, legal and housing advice.

The VSHS deliver homicide specific Peer Support including bespoke peer support groups and have one-to-one peer support workers. There are case workers across the country to ensure face-to-face services can be provided on or off-site. There is an online peer support platform that is moderated 24/7. This includes access to online modules and information to cater for varying needs such as how to support your child and better sleep. The VSHS is independent from police and legal authorities, which can be an important factor particularly if people have a distrust in police (Ministry of Justice United Kingdom 2023d).

If criminality has not been established and a death is still being treated as suspicious, the Victim Support local 'multi-crime' services will assist. It will only transition to the VSHS once the death has been confirmed as homicide.

VICTIM LIAISON OFFICER

The Victim Liaison Officer is a Prison/Probation Service role provided to families who are victims of serious crime. Once sentencing has occurred, support will transition to Victim Liaison Officers. Victim Liaison Officers keep victims informed about key stages or events in the offender's sentence including, prison movements, change in conditions, impending release, or parole. The Victim Support Service will usually provide a hand over to the Victim Liaison Officer. By having a human element to the updates, not just an automated service, it ensures victims of crime are treated in a trauma informed way and assists with the restorative justice process. As the FLO usually withdraws once sentencing has occurred, this additional civilian role assists with providing continued support throughout the judicial process.

COUNTER TERRORISM POLICING

Counter Terrorism Policing is a network of forces across the UK who reduce the risk of terrorism. Counter Terrorism Policing have FLCs who manage and oversee deployment of FLOs. There is a specific FLO Counter Terrorism course in addition to the one-week FLO course. I had the opportunity to speak with FLOs who have been deployed overseas in response to terrorist incidents that claimed the lives of British Nationals, and those who have worked on high profile cases in England. They provided valuable insight into challenges faced within the FLO role.

Meeting with the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office I discussed the support that is available to families after murder or manslaughter occurs abroad as they work closely with FLOs (Foreign Commonwealth

Development Office 2022). I met with the Victims of Terrorism Unit at the Home Office and discussed the support options available and how they work with Victim Services (HM Government 2023).

In the event of a mass fatality incident, whether it be a Disaster Victim Identification incident or multiple deaths relating from a criminal or terrorist incident, the FLO structure utilises the same principles: FLOs will be deployed in pairs, and FLOs will fall under the management of FLCs. FLOs will be tasked by the SIO or SIM.

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR THE WA POLICE FORCE

Document/Resource Framework:

- Updating current FLO documentation and resources would clearly define roles, management strategies, and deployment guidelines.
- Establishing new FLC roles would provide oversight and welfare management of FLOs for homicide investigations, and bolster scalability for mass fatality incidents.

Training and Selection:

- Mandating comprehensive FLO training that includes a minimum one-week course, establishing specific criteria for FLO selection, and introducing a psychological assessment in the application process would ensure a standardised approach and foster a talent pool of specialist trained and skilled FLOs dedicated to fulfilling this critical role.
- Training for FLOs and FLCs should be aligned to policy, legislation, and Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) training guidelines.
- Including support services in the training development and process to equip FLOs with comprehensive knowledge of available resources and appropriate referral pathways is crucial. This will also strengthen partnerships through continued collaboration.
- Including cultural awareness in training is in line with numerous recommendations made from inquiries into investigations.
- The aim would be to build a cadre of FLOs, initially commencing with the Homicide Squad as a primary focus. Once established and implemented, this expertise can be expanded to regional areas and other areas within the WA Police Force, facilitating broader training and awareness across the state.

It is critical to note that the Homicide Squad should retain the lead FLO role for homicide investigations and be deployed from within the homicide investigation team.

With some investigations, it may seem respectful to send a high-ranking police officer to engage with the family of a homicide victim initially. What is more imperative, is that a trained FLO who is a specialist in this field, be deployed also, and remains the primary and single point of contact.

On-going Training:

- Mandating continual professional development days will ensure FLOs and FLCs remain contemporary and appraised with changes that occur and provide the opportunity for peer-to-peer support.
 - Continual professional development days could include presentations by FLOs as well as instruction on updates in policy or support services.
- Including 'tabletop scenarios' in training exercises will ensure optimal preparedness in handling diverse and differing situations.

Resource for Families:

- Developing a detailed explanatory pamphlet that allows families to understand the FLO role better, could enhance transparency and cooperation during discussions. This would be beneficial to support the withdrawal strategy once FLO objectives are complete. The withdrawal ensures the well-being of both the family and the FLO and is vital for the family's forward progress.

Coordinator Role:

- Establishing a State Family Liaison Resource Coordinator within the Major Crime Division that oversees the Homicide Squad would support the provision and strategic direction of family liaison in the WA Police Force.
 - This role would encompass managerial responsibilities, overseeing FLO applications, training initiatives, maintaining records of FLO deployments, managing, and maintaining a centralised database of qualified FLOs and FLCs, and overseeing policy updates like the existing FLDMT structure in the MPS.
 - This strategic position would serve as a central liaison, fostering partnerships both nationally and internationally to ensure adherence to best practices.
 - While having a team in this role would offer additional support, this position would assume a pivotal role as part of the strategic leadership, fostering partnerships and performance for continual improvement and excellence.

Casualty Bureau:

- Establishing a Casualty Bureau structure with a case management system like HOLMES, would improve information management during mass fatality and disaster victim identification incidents.
 - Casualty Bureau is the coordination point for information that is crucial for FLO deployment.

Mass Fatalities:

- Implementing a tiered FLO management would place the WA Police Force in a strong position to provide a scalable response for incidents involving mass fatalities. This would include FLCs overseeing a group of FLOs. This tier of management is important to ensure information flow to and from FLOs to the SIO or SIM. It would be ineffective to utilise one person to singularly oversee a mass FLO deployment. FLCs also serve as an important tool for welfare management.
- Ensuring a pool of adept FLOs are available for deployment in the case of a mass activation is essential for preparedness.
 - There should be sufficient FLOs to deploy in pairs as this is best practise.
- Expanding training, once established within the Homicide Squad, to other business areas would ensure the increase of resources throughout the state.
 - If the FLO program is expanded, and FLC roles are established, a FLC could be situated in each policing district to assist and facilitate FLO deployment. The State Family Liaison Resource Coordinator would oversee and manage FLCs and maintain a database of all FLO deployments.

Homicide Support Services (external to the WA Police Force):

- Developing specialised support services for families of homicide victims and eyewitnesses to homicide in addition to current Victim Support Services could increase support available.
- Implementing a 24/7 victim support contact line for immediate assistance could be beneficial for incidents that occur outside of normal business hours, especially on a weekend.

- Implementing a homicide support group external to the WA Police Force with qualified oversight would ensure that dedicated specialised support is available for families of homicide victims.
- Enhancing post-sentencing support to include specific counselling could be beneficial to families of homicide victims.

5. UNITED KINGDOM, SCOTLAND

The population of Scotland is approximately 5.5 million people covering an area of 77,910 square kilometres. Police Scotland (PS) is the national police force for Scotland operating across the entire country. It was formed in 2013 by the merger of regional police forces and has over 16,600 police officers. Scotland has a very similar FLO structure to that of the MPS and the country has approximately 60 homicides per year.



DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POLICE SCOTLAND AND METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE LONDON, ENGLAND IN RELATION TO FAMILY LIAISON

The main difference is that Scotland has a Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) who takes over the role that is conducted by both the Coroner and Crown Prosecution in England. The COPFS has Victim Information and Advice (VIA) officers who will take over from the FLO. The VIA Officer is a civilian who provides all updates relating to the judicial process. The FLO will hand over all contact with the family of the homicide victim to the VIA Officer at an appropriate point in the investigation. This point is often after a charge has been laid, the funeral has occurred, and where there are no further investigative actions required from within the family. The FLO is not engaged with the family during the judicial process. As a result, FLOs from PS have a significantly shorter engagement time than FLOs from the MPS. Following the FLO withdrawal strategy, if a charge has been laid, all further updates will be provided by the VIA Officer.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN POLICE SCOTLAND AND METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE LONDON, ENGLAND IN RELATION TO FAMILY LIAISON

- The role of the FLO, FLC, SIO and SIM have similar definitions provided in the **Family Liaison Officers and Roles Linked to The Family Liaison Officer** sections.
- For PS, trained FLOs are usually detectives except in some regions in Scotland where uniformed officers who are deemed suitable can conduct the role. As the FLO is primarily an investigative role it is important that FLOs have specific investigative training and awareness.
- The role of a FLC includes the responsibility for the administrative supervision of FLOs. They assist the SIO or SIM, ensuring the records of FLOs under their supervision are up to date with deployment and contact details. The FLC ensures the continuous professional development and provides continual support and advice to FLOs.
- The SIO holds the duty of ensuring that the FLO is only deployed for the required duration to address the initial requirements of both the family and the investigation. Once these objectives have been fulfilled, it is important to initiate an exit strategy for the FLO. Subsequently, responsibility for supplying information to the family transitions to the COPFS, facilitated by the VIA Officer. An exit has the same definition for withdrawal in the **Family Liaison Withdrawal** section.

- MITs have the same structure which includes FLCs who manage FLOs.
- The Casualty Bureau in Scotland operates on the same principles as that of the MPS and uses MIPP and HOLMES with dedicated phone lines. There is specific training, and like the FLO role, it is voluntary and in addition to your day-to-day role. Casualty Bureau has ongoing training including a multi service scenario training incident that includes the use of FLOs. In the event of an incident, there is a text alert system that will send a notification to all FLOs and Casualty Bureau staff. This system is regularly tested to ensure its functionality and to check everyone's contact details are current.
- In Scotland, a contact officer is the police officer who provides updates if an investigation is prolonged. This role is different from a FLO as there is no investigative component and will usually be the officer in charge of the investigation. This is similar to a Single Point of Contact from the MPS (section **Family Liaison Withdrawal**).

FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER DEPLOYMENT

There is a joint protocol between the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and the COPFS that outlines deployment of FLOs (Scottish Government 2011). The following outlines when a FLO may or will be deployed.

| FLOs WILL BE DEPLOYED IN THE FOLLOWING CASES | FLOs MAY BE DEPLOYED IN THE FOLLOWING CASES |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Murder. ➤ Suspicious deaths where there is an obvious or apparent criminality. ➤ Missing person enquiry where there is reason to suspect foul play. ➤ Any other criminal enquiry where deployment of a flow would be beneficial to the progress of the enquiry. ➤ Deaths in police custody. ➤ Victims of families of police shootings. ➤ Police related road deaths. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Deaths which are likely to be the subject of a fatal accident inquiry. ➤ Multiple deaths due to public transport incident. ➤ Any death which is likely to raise serious public concern and generate significant and sustained media interest. ➤ The investigation of every road collision involving a fatality, potential fatality, or life changing injury. |

VICTIMS CODE FOR SCOTLAND

The Victims Code for Scotland outlines the rights and support available to victims of crime and families of homicide victims. It ensures their access to information, support, and protection throughout the justice process. Key elements include timely updates on their case, support services, and the right to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect. This includes access to victim support services even if a crime has not been reported to police (The Scottish Government 2018).

HOMICIDE SUPPORT SERVICES

In 2019, Victim Support Scotland received extra funding to establish the Support for Families Bereaved by Crime (SFBC) to provide homicide specific support at a national level. This service works closely with the FLO and the COPFS VIA Officer during homicide investigations. Based in Glasgow, the SFBC team offers in-person visits, extending this service to remote areas in Scotland for consistent accessibility. While FLOs and VIA Officers can

change during the investigation, SFBC remains a stable support for families of homicide victims, offering both practical and emotional assistance. They act as a central point for referrals to necessary support and financial agencies, as well as providing information and advocacy on a range of matters. The SFBC also hosts a Family Reference Group, where families affected by homicide can meet collectively to input into policy and legislation consultations, as well as providing valuable feedback to help co-deliver the SFBC service and its resources.

Like England, when a death is suspicious and under investigation, Victim Support Scotland will be the primary contact. If it is confirmed as criminal SFBC takes over the support role. Witnesses of homicides also receive support from the local community teams at Victim Support Scotland, with guidance available from SFBC. SFBC present on FLO training courses demonstrating the importance of inter-agency collaboration. It is crucial for FLOs to be well-informed regarding available support services and their referral processes. In 2022, the SFBC service extended to support families bereaved by crime abroad in partnership with the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office.

SCOTLAND NATIONAL FAMILY LIAISON COORDINATOR

The National Family Liaison Coordinator oversees all family liaison resources and databases. Due to the amalgamation of multiple police forces, FLO resources cover a vast geographic area, similar to the resource allocation structure in Western Australia. Each region in PS has a dedicated FLC managing FLO deployments. If an FLC is not available locally, the National Family Liaison Coordinator allocates FLOs for deployment as required. The National Family Liaison Coordinator handles various responsibilities like that of the FLDMT in the MPS. PS has a search capability function that shows all trained FLOs and FLCs and a filtering option to identify their location and if they are on duty.

THE MAJOR INCIDENT SUPPORT AND COORDINATION UNIT

The Major Incident Support and Coordination Unit (MISCU) has numerous key management roles including the National Family Liaison Coordinator, Casualty Bureau Coordinator, HOLMES Manager, National Disaster Victim Identification Coordinator, Homicide Governance and Review and others. This structure maintains all key management roles in one location.

FAMILY LIAISON TRAINING

Guidelines for selecting FLOs emphasise professionalism, sensitivity, and genuine dedication to the role. Officers volunteer and must demonstrate a strong motivation. Applications require managers approval and awareness, and applicants must undergo an interview to be deemed suitable. The selection prioritises skills, emotional intelligence, and personal attributes crucial for effective and sensitive family interaction during challenging situations.

Managed by the National Family Liaison Coordinator, FLO training is a one-week course with guest presenters, investigation examples, and discussions on key FLO role topics. Additionally, there is a three-day FLC course, ensuring national standard training for all FLOs and FLCs. Scotland hosts a yearly National Family Liaison Conference attended by all FLOs. The structure of FLO and FLC training is similar to that of the MPS.

FAMILY LIAISON TRAINING & CONSULTANCY LIMITED

In Scotland, I met with the Director of Family Liaison Training & Consultancy Limited who before retirement, was the National Police Family Liaison Advisor working with UK Police Forces (Family Liaison Training & Consultancy Limited 2024). He has been involved in family liaison management and been team leader for the response to several well-known worldwide incidents, including the Twin Tower attacks in New York on 11 September 2001

and the Ladbroke Grove train crash in London on 5 November 1999. He has assisted numerous police forces worldwide establish FLO training, and from our discussions, my key learnings were:

- Need for a central coordinator to manage all FLO and FLC resources.
- Need for sufficient training that covers all relevant aspects of the FLO and FLC role.
- Need for clear guidelines around the deployment of FLOs including selection, training, and continuous professional development.
- Importance of planning and preparing in 'peace time' including training scenarios.
- A homicide model that is scalable and can be utilised in the event of a mass fatality incident.
- Importance of welfare management and de-briefing for FLOs.

The investigation into the Ladbroke Grove train crash and subsequent inquiry, led to changes for family liaison for mass fatality incidents. On 5 October 1999, a train crash occurred near Ladbroke Grove in London. It involved the collision between a Thames Trains service train and a Great Western Trains service train. The crash resulted in over 30 deaths and injuries to over 400 passengers. This incident led to improvements in rail safety measures and a *'review of casualty bureau procedures, family liaison arrangements and identification process'* (Metropolitan Police United Kingdom 2000). Recommendations were made in relation to:

- Casualty Bureau structure and recording of information.
- Ensuring sufficient FLOs are assigned to Casualty Bureau.
- Structure to include Family Liaison Coordinators, highlighting family liaison team leaders as best practice.
- The need for the role of a Senior Identification Manager to be created.

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR THE WA POLICE FORCE

Police Scotland follow similar family liaison principles as the MPS. PS does not have a FLDMT, and their functions are performed by the National Family Liaison Coordinator. This model could be implemented by creating a State Family Liaison Resource Coordinator within the Major Crime Division that oversees the Homicide Squad. Like the National Family Liaison Coordinator for PS, they would manage FLO and FLC resources, training, development, and databases, reinforcing the same points from the UK London section, **How This Could Work for The WA Police Force.**

6. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, COLORADO

The population of Jefferson County, Colorado is over 600,000 covering an area of approximately 2,005 square kilometres. Jefferson County is home to numerous different police departments. In 2022, Jefferson County Colorado investigated 23 homicides.



HOMICIDE INVESTIGATION STRUCTURE

In Jefferson County, the lead detective is the point of contact for the family of homicide victims. There is no dedicated Homicide Squad or FLO role. Initially my thoughts were that the lead detective would be overburdened and inundated with the workload of managing a homicide investigation as well as being the point of contact for the family of the homicide victim. These two roles are both very time consuming and complex. Managing the two roles together is made possible due to the significant involvement and assistance from Victim Services who manage a considerable number of tasks generally completed by the FLO role in other jurisdictions.

COLORADO CRIME VICTIM RIGHTS ACT

In 1992, Colorado passed a constitutional amendment that provides victims of crime with certain and specific rights known as the Crime Colorado Victim Rights Act (VRA) (Colorado Department of Public Safety Division of Criminal Justice 2022).

VICTIM'S RIGHTS

On 30 March 1981, President of the United States Ronald Reagan (President Reagan) was shot and wounded. Subsequently, on 23 April 1982, the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime was established. President Reagan realised he did not have many rights as a victim of crime and was not being provided with updates. As a result, 68 recommendations were made which included seeking amendments to state constitutions in at least 37 states to establish victim rights.

The core of victim's rights is that they shall be:

- Treated with fairness, respect, and dignity.
- Informed, present, and heard (at critical stages).

The VRA outlines the requirements of numerous agencies individually including:

- Law Enforcement.
- Jails.
- District Attorney's Office.
- Courts.
- Probation.
- Community Corrections.
- Department of Youth Services.
- Department of Corrections.
- State Hospitals.

In Colorado, updates will be provided to victims of crime until they advise they no longer want to receive them. A requirement for law enforcement is to provide a victim of crime (for offences specified under the VRA) with a brochure that outlines their rights, and to advise victims of the availability of resources and services. This extends

to the family of homicide victims. Training is mandatory for all law enforcement officers in relation to the VRA and penalties can apply for non-compliance.

VICTIM OUTREACH INCORPORATED

Victim Services commenced in Jefferson County in 1986. Initially it was a service to work with the smaller police departments who could not fund support resources themselves. The police forces who utilised the service provided payment based on population size. The larger police departments, such as Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, employ their own victim advocate who is part of their office.

Victim Outreach Incorporated (VOI) is a not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to support victims of crime and other trauma, empowering them to access resources that protect their rights and promote safety, healing, and hope. They provide crisis support, information about victim's rights and the criminal justice system, and offer referrals to help clients deal with the resulting trauma and life changes. Their services continue through the criminal justice process (Victim Outreach Incorporated 2021).

VOI victim advocates are civilians who are embedded in police stations and provide a 24/7 on scene response. VOI includes full time and volunteer positions. Volunteers are trained and engage in professional development to ensure they provide quality crisis support and ongoing support to the community as required. When a homicide occurs, a VOI victim advocate will attend on scene to assist grieving families and witnesses process the immediate trauma and grief. This immediate crisis support assists the police with obtaining vital information required for the investigation. VOI continue to assist throughout the investigation and provide support at follow up meetings between the police and families of homicide victims. Due to the close working relationship, there is no limitation on information sharing from the police to VOI. VOI can provide information to the police, as there are no restrictions on confidentiality. The VOI victim advocate can provide investigation updates on behalf of police and direct questions from the family to the lead detective, similar to the role of a FLO.

HOMICIDE SUPPORT

There is a homicide specific support group that is a not-for-profit peer driven group. This includes families that are at different stages of the investigation process, and families that have gone through the justice system. VOI discuss available support groups and assist with connecting families to services they may benefit from.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES

VOI provide support for non-criminal investigations and to witnesses. VOI will accompany police to death notifications for a non-suspicious death. Often the VOI victim advocate will discuss with the attending officer how to best deliver the death notification before they notify the family together. This partnership approach benefits the family and the welfare of the officer. A homicide victim's family is more likely to engage and have a greater positive experience with the criminal justice system if the first interaction with police includes a supportive approach. VOI services ensure police immediately provide the best trauma informed approach on scene and follow up thereafter. This in turn assists the investigation and judicial process. VOI provide a full day training to all police departments that use their service. The training highlights the specifics of their role, and the benefits of having victim advocates as the liaison between police and victims, and families of homicide victims. By utilising this team approach, it alleviates some of the challenges faced by police, which results in the best trauma informed support being provided.

The Columbine High School shooting prompted a re-evaluation of emergency response protocols and led to the development of more comprehensive victim support systems in Colorado.

On 20 April 1999, a mass shooting occurred at the Columbine High School where 13 people were killed and more than 20 people injured. This marked a significant shift in how victim support services were approached in the aftermath of such tragedies. I spoke with victim support workers who were part of the support response and attending police who provided invaluable insight into the challenges faced.

Following this incident, there was a focus on efforts to provide immediate crisis counselling, mental health services, and support to the victims and their families. This tragedy highlighted the importance of rapid, coordinated responses from law enforcement, mental health professionals, and community support organisations. The need for sustained mental health resources and ongoing assistance for those affected by trauma became apparent. This led to the establishment and expansion of programs catering specifically to victims of mass shootings and similar incidents.

COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

Following the Columbine School Shooting, a Community Crisis Response Team was formed, uniting law enforcement with support services. This team prioritises clear communication and structured procedures. Members carry identification cards showing their training which ensures operational security in the event of an activation. They work together on strategies for reuniting people affected by trauma, including natural disasters and large-scale incidents. The team undergoes biannual training and builds relationships between Victim Services and police departments. Victim Services play a critical role in mass fatality incidents, assisting with information flow with law enforcement through providing support. For larger incidents, they can obtain additional resources from nearby police departments or federal support.

VICTIM WITNESS UNIT

The Victim Rights Act states that whenever practicable, to have a safe, secure waiting area during court proceedings. The Victim Witness Unit (VWU) is part of the District Attorney's (DA) Office. They are located in the Victim Witness Centre at the Jefferson County First Judicial District Court. The VWU is court-based support which includes a specialist homicide team. The VWU specialist, who is a civilian, provides support to victims and families for crimes that are designated under the Victim Rights Amendment, which includes homicide. They assist the prosecution by coordinating witnesses for trial, ensuring that the provisions of the VRA are adhered to and support victims and families during the criminal justice process. All victims and witnesses can wait in a designated area in the Victim Witness Centre until they are required for court. The DA is involved with detectives from the outset of the investigation and often attend on scene for homicides. The decision to charge is made by the DA's Office who will often explain the charges laid to the family. The VWU works closely with the DA's Office

and are present for most meetings. There are no limitations with what information can be shared with the VWU in relation to the investigation by the DA's Office or police. All updates regarding court appearances are provided by the VWU, and not the lead detective. The VWU has a close working partnership with the DA's Office, Victim Services, including **Victim Outreach Incorporated**, **PorchLight Family Justice Centre**, and law enforcement (Colorado First Judicial District Attorney's Office 2023).

PORCHLIGHT FAMILY JUSTICE CENTRE

PorchLight operates as a Family Justice Centre serving Jefferson and Gilpin County. Established in 2021 it addresses issues encountered by victims of crime in accessing support services, simplifying their journey by consolidating multiple services under one roof. Often, victims struggle to access scattered resources, facing barriers like travel, childcare, and transportation, ultimately forcing some to return to their abusers for essential needs (PorchLight a Family Justice Centre 2023). This is similar for the family of homicide victims, as there are so many unexpected challenges they face; from planning a funeral to disconnecting a mobile phone service or closing bank accounts. These are real challenges faced, and as much as a FLO wants to help with these, it is outside the scope of their role and that of a police officer. Police officers being human will want to assist with these tasks, and this is when referring to relevant support services becomes important.

PorchLight, welcoming walk-ins, refers to visitors as 'guests' and assigns a 'navigator' to guide them through various in-house agencies. Over 900 guests were assisted within the initial ten months of operation, with an exponential increase since. Partnering with over 75 agencies, including unique services like temporary pet sheltering for domestic violence survivors' pets, remote courtrooms, legal assistance, and childcare, PorchLight works closely with the DA's Office, VOI, and local law enforcement. In 2007, a report by the United States Department of Justice cited that Family Justice Centres are best practice. A San Diego Family Justice Centre saw a reduction of nearly 95% in domestic violence homicides over a 15-year period and was hailed as a national and international model of a comprehensive victim service and support centre (United States Department of Justice 2007).

NOTIFICATION SYSTEMS

The Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) system provides updates once charges have been laid in relation to bail notifications, court dates and other relevant information. Most states in the United States of America utilise the VINE system (VINE 2023). The State of Colorado has ArrestWatch which is a system that is only accessible by law enforcement and Victim Services. ArrestWatch allows victim contact information to be entered, ensuring victims and families of homicide victims receive an automated notification when a suspect has been arrested (ArrestWatch 2016). This ensures compliance with the VRA requirement of notification of an arrest. Once a matter has been finalised in court and sentencing has occurred, the Department of Corrections has a victim advocate who will provide updates and necessary support surrounding parole and release.

COLORADO BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

The Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is a state-level agency responsible for criminal investigative support, forensic services, and criminal justice information for law enforcement agencies and the public in Colorado. It assists in solving crimes, providing forensic analysis, maintaining databases, and offering various resources to support law enforcement and the justice system within the state. CBI serves as a central repository for

information on all missing children and adults in Colorado. CBI will engage at the request of an agency and will assist, or take carriage of, the investigation for smaller police jurisdictions. This includes serious offences, homicides and officer involved shootings. There is a strong acknowledgement of the importance of Victim Services, with CBI having a victim/witness assistance policy, and a victim advocate based in Denver. CBI will also utilise local Victim Services during investigations. Once charges are laid, the victim advocacy transfers to the DA's Office and the VWU.

COLORADO ORGANISATION FOR VICTIM ASSISTANCE

The Colorado Organisation for Victim Assistance (COVA) is dedicated to supporting victims of crime, their families and communities through leadership, education, and advocacy. In the event of a mass fatality incident, if COVA is requested, they will attend on scene and establish a Family Assistance Centre and notify and coordinate support services. They manage a database of all volunteers and have plans in place to ensure the longevity of support by managing scheduling. COVA focuses on raising awareness about victims' rights and providing education and training to professionals working in Victim Services and law enforcement. They host conferences that include attendees from government agencies, district attorney offices, law enforcement, victim service field professionals, victim advocacy non-profit organisations, crime victims and survivors (COVA 2022b).

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR THE WA POLICE FORCE

- Incorporating a 24/7 victim advocate support service like the Jefferson County model would be beneficial and support the FLO role. Whilst Jefferson County is smaller than Western Australia, a 24/7 victim advocate support model could be incorporated within the Homicide Squad. Embedding advocates into the Homicide Squad building and deploying them state-wide could work alongside the current FLO framework. This model could require a separate court support service like the VWU and an advocate to provide post-sentencing support. Alternatively, the 24/7 victim advocate support service could provide support at every stage of the judicial process if they were a homicide specific resource.
- Expanding a 24/7 support model to other areas of the WA Police Force would be beneficial to all victims of crime and other trauma. The VOI model relies heavily on volunteers with management by victim advocates. Victim support volunteers could be trained and managed by a Perth hub. They could be deployed from within a community, like the volunteer firefighters in rural areas of Western Australia. This would be beneficial if a mass fatality incident occurred, or a homicide in a rural area, as there would be additional support resources throughout the state.
- Families of homicide victims often seek help beyond that of police duties, for example legal or funeral matters. A specialised engagement team modelled on a Family Justice Centre structure, could efficiently address these needs. Family Justice Centres have been seen to drastically lower homicide rates, especially in the case of domestic violence homicides (United States Department of Justice 2007). Having a structure like this could benefit families of homicide victims and all victims of crime in Western Australia.

7. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, WASHINGTON, DC

WASHINGTON DC

The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) Homicide Branch covers a jurisdiction of 110 square kilometres with a population of approximately 600,000 people. In 2022, there were over 200 homicides recorded. There is no dedicated FLO role, with the lead detective maintaining contact with the family of homicide victims.



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA LAW

Under the District of Columbia Law (23 D.C. Code Section 1901 et seq.), crime victims have rights which include the right to be notified of any available victim advocate or other appropriate person to develop a safety plan and access to appropriate services (United States Department of Justice 2021).

FAMILY LIAISON SPECIALIST UNIT

The MPD's Victim Services Branch employs civilians who bridge the gap between the police and victims during investigations, facilitating connections with support services. The Family Liaison Specialist Unit (FLSU) is part of the Victim Services Branch and is situated in the same building as the Homicide Branch (District of Columbia 2023). The FLSU supports families of homicide victims by connecting them with detectives, providing emotional support, updates, and information on victim rights and referrals. The FLSU Liaison Specialists have a master's degree in counselling or social work and offer crisis support. They do not provide counselling or have a 24/7 response capacity. They have a dedicated support space within the Homicide Branch which is beneficial for when families attend for meetings. The FLSU is provided with a copy of the police report, with no limitations on what information can be provided to them from police. Detectives advised that the partnership with the FLSU allows them to focus on the investigation whilst families of homicide victims are receiving specialist support. The FLSU presents on the Homicide Training School that all detectives must complete prior to commencing at the Homicide Branch.

The Victim Services Branch also has a Major Case Victims Unit that serves victims of violent felony offences and a Victim Specialist Unit that serves victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

MAINTAINING LONG TERM CONTACT WITH FAMILIES

The FLSU uses flyers to invite immediate family members of open homicide cases to meet with assigned detectives, specifying the year of the homicides. Families of homicide victims contact the FLSU to arrange these meetings. Additionally, the Victim Services Branch sends a quarterly newsletter called Empower to families of cold case homicides, providing updates and information on upcoming events. This contact ensures families know they are not forgotten, especially when there are no updates to provide.

VICTIM WITNESS ASSISTANCE UNIT

Once a charge is laid, the United States Attorney's Office has a Victim Witness Assistance Unit who will take over from the FLSU liaison specialists. They assist victims and witnesses of serious crime while they are involved with the criminal justice system. After sentencing has occurred, parole and probation have advocates who will engage with families of homicide victims to provide updates and support (U.S Department of Justice 2023).

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR THE WA POLICE FORCE

- Co-locating Victim Services within the Homicide Squad building could assist with fostering a close partnership and provide immediate support to families meeting with detectives.
 - This framework supports families of both current homicide and cold case homicide, ensuring ongoing contact and information flow.
 - The quarterly newsletter stands as an example of maintaining on-going communication, separate from FLOs for cold case homicide investigations especially when there are no updates to provide for an extended period.

8. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, VIRGINIA

FAIRFAX COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Major Crimes Bureau Homicide Squad for The County of Fairfax covers a jurisdiction with an area of 1,052 square kilometres and over 1.14 million people with approximately 20 homicides per year. There is no dedicated FLO role, with the lead detective maintaining contact with the family of homicide victims.



VIRGINIA LAW

Virginia Law affords certain rights to crime victims under the Crime Victim and Witness Rights Act which includes ensuring victims and families of homicide victims receive authorised services (Commonwealth of Virginia 2023).

VICTIM SERVICES DIVISION

The Victim Services Division is among Virginia's 16 Victim Witness Programs situated alongside law enforcement. They offer comprehensive support to victims from the immediate aftermath of a crime throughout the legal process and beyond. Operating under a victim-centred, trauma-informed approach, the Victim Services Division comprises specialists with at least a bachelor's degree in fields like social work, psychology, or criminal justice, along with three years of victim-based service experience. Co-located with the Homicide Squad, they provide a 24/7 on-scene response. There is no limitation on information sharing between Victim Services Division and the

Homicide Squad. The Victim Services Division provides training to all police recruits (County of Fairfax Virginia 2023).

VICTIM SERVICE SPECIALISTS

When a homicide occurs, the lead detective contacts on-call Victim Service Specialists to provide immediate on-scene assistance. If the death notification is provided by another officer, the presence of Victim Service Specialists during initial meetings helps establish familiarity for later introductions with the lead detective. Victim Service Specialists do not offer counselling, they provide crisis support and guide families to appropriate services. The Victim Service Specialists provide court updates and support throughout legal proceedings which includes in-court support, ensuring continuity in assisting families throughout the entire journey. In cases of mass fatalities, victim specialists are trained to deploy and assist families. Additionally, there is a dedicated support group for families of homicide victims and various community events.

Following sentencing, the Department of Corrections assigns a dedicated victim advocate to update families on releases and prisoner movements. The Victim Services Division remains available if families of homicide victims reach out after sentencing, seeking further assistance or services.

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR THE WA POLICE FORCE

Having a Victim Services Division within the Homicide Squad offers numerous benefits:

- Co-location would ensure a close working partnership and enables a 24/7 on-scene crisis response. By providing immediate crisis support by skilled and experienced Victim Service Specialists, the FLO could focus on the investigative aspects of their role whilst still ensuring support is provided.
- The Victim Specialist's civilian status would ensure continuity, unlike detectives who might change work locations frequently within the WA Police Force due to tenure.
- The Victim Services Division could offer consistent assistance for the Homicide Squad from the commencement of the investigation up to the offender's release. This would ensure sustained and consistent support throughout the judicial process.
- In cases of mass fatalities, a strong partnership between Victim Services and police, accustomed to working closely, proves advantageous.
- While additional resources would be necessary, establishing a core team at the Homicide Squad in the short term would be beneficial.

9. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, CONNECTICUT

Connecticut is approximately 13,000 square kilometres with a population of approximately 3.6 million people recorded in 2021 across 169 municipalities (towns). There are approximately 130 homicides per year. There are 94 separate and distinct municipal police departments, some with fewer than 20 officers, and the Connecticut State Police.



NEW HAVEN POLICE DEPARTMENT

The New Haven Police Department does not have a Homicide Squad; the detectives investigate all serious crime including homicides. New Haven is approximately 52 square kilometres with a population of approximately 140,000. There were approximately 20 homicides in 2022.

VICTIM SERVICES OFFICER

There is no FLO role for homicide investigations, updates are provided by the lead detective. New Haven Police Department assigns a Victim Services Officer who is a police officer that provides support to all victims of crime in New Haven, including families of homicide victims. The Victim Services Officer attends in-person meetings with the family and lead detective and discusses available support services. The Victim Services Officer manages a homicide support group tailored to members' preferences. The Victim Services Officer does not provide investigative updates, they communicate family inquiries to the lead detective (The City of New Haven 2023).

CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE

The Connecticut State Police (CSP) operates Major Crime Units in different districts of the state covering various regions. There are over 900 troopers responsible for state-wide law enforcement and highway patrols, especially in areas lacking a police department. Processing over 50% of crime scenes due to limited forensics units in police departments, CSP can take charge or assist in homicide investigations. While there is no dedicated FLO role, the lead detective maintains contact with families of homicide victims. Post charges, a court-appointed victim advocate engages with families, providing updates on court appearances.

The importance of FLOs was highlighted with the investigation into the shooting that occurred at the Sandy Hook Elementary School.

On 14 December 2012, a shooting occurred at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. The gunman shot and killed 20 students, and six staff members, after killing his mother at his residence. The CSP, working with the Newtown Police Department, took control of the crime scenes and provided resources and support to the community in the aftermath of the shooting.

The CSP Colonel (Colonel) who oversaw the investigation retired in 2014. The Colonel was previously the Captain in charge of the Bradley International Airport. In the event of a downed or missing plane, an airline employee would be assigned to every family of a passenger. The employees stayed in touch with every family directly during and after the incident. With these principles, the Colonel recognised the need for FLOs in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting investigation. Utilising any available sworn officer at the scene, he instructed them to act as direct points of contact for each family, offering guidance, coordinating resources, and facilitating communication among families, law enforcement, and support services. Despite the absence of formal training or structures for this role, over 40 FLOs were assigned to families. FLOs were engaged with families for years following the incident. Recognising the importance of long-term welfare management and care of FLOs, the Colonel encouraged and adopted various support strategies. At the conclusion of the investigation, the Colonel put forward a proposal for Family Liaison training for the CSP.

I had the opportunity to speak with police officers who were first responders and involved in the investigation and resource management including a FLO. These conversations provided insight into the challenges that were faced, and the lasting impact of the incident. These discussions highlighted the need for training, protocols, and robust support measures for FLOs. It emphasised the importance of long-term management and support for both the families of homicide victims and the FLOs themselves.

THE CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE AFTER ACTION REPORT

The CSP After Action Report (Connecticut State Police 2018) outlines recommendations from the investigation into the shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School. Recommendations in the After Action Report are in relation to the police response and management of the investigation, some of which are relevant to the WA Police Force FLO role:

- Importance of interagency relationships and communication that need to be established long before a critical incident takes place.
- Dedicated phone number for critical incidents.
- Designating an appropriate area for families, with consideration to separating families of deceased and surviving victims.
- Release of information with the balance of keeping families informed, weighted against the risk of information being leaked that could harm the investigative efforts.
- Appropriate and respectful death notifications be made as soon as possible and made by someone with training and experience.
- Welfare management of FLOs including management of shifts to allow respite.
- Establishment of the CSP Family Liaison Program and dedicated training for the FLO role.

The CSP do not currently have a family liaison program or provide training for the FLO role.

COMMUNITY TRUST LIAISON PROGRAM

The CSP initiated the Community Trust Liaison Program and officer welfare management initiatives (Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection 2020). Community Trust Liaison Officers were introduced as a response to the increasing need for stronger connections between law enforcement and the public. Community Trust Liaison Officers are specially trained State Troopers who address trust, communication, and collaboration, fostering positive relationships and mutual understanding between police and the community. Their role includes building relationships with residents and community organisations, gathering feedback to improve services, and facilitating easier communication between the community and the CSP. I spoke with Community Trust Liaison Officers who advised they could serve as FLOs in the event of an incident requiring such support.

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR WA POLICE FORCE

The WA Police Force can implement recommendations from the After Action Report, emphasising the crucial role of a FLO. Establishing a structured framework within the Homicide Squad, including training, welfare management, and a coordinator, would provide significant enhancements for homicide investigations, and increase readiness to provide a scalable response for mass fatality incidents.

OFFICE OF VICTIM SERVICES, CONNECTICUT JUDICIAL BRANCH

The Office of Victim Services (OVS) in Connecticut is dedicated to supporting victims of crime by offering financial assistance, counselling, advocacy, and specialised referrals. Their aim is to empower victims through the criminal justice process, ensuring their rights are respected, in accordance with the Constitution of Connecticut, article first, Section 8b. There is an OVS victim advocate assigned to each court, with additional advocates in the larger court jurisdictions.

Police must provide a card to every identified victim of crime outlining victim rights and contact information for OVS and other state-wide Victim Services. A copy of the police report is available to OVS victim advocates and the Compensation Unit. OVS victim advocates engage with families of homicide victims once charges have been

laid. They provide support during court proceedings, system information, ensuring awareness of their rights, assisting with victim impact statements, and making social service referrals. OVS administers funds that assist homicide support groups, facilitated by a qualified coordinator, providing peer-to-peer support.

OVS provides assistance to families of homicide victims and survivors, which includes assisting with compensation, support and advocacy. Connection to these services may be made through OVS outreach following a criminal incident, though interaction at a Family Assistance Centre such as in a mass fatality crime, or by contacting OVS directly (State of Connecticut Judicial Branch 2023).

In addition to court-based victim advocacy services, OVS has information, notification, and support services available to victims and the general public:

- OVS Helpline with Victim Services advocates operating during business hours.
- Connecticut State-wide Automated Victim Information and Notification (CT SAVIN) is an automated and confidential system providing victims of crime and other interested parties with information and status updates as a case proceeds through the criminal justice system.

In Connecticut, notifications can be received from CT SAVIN through VINELink by an application that can be downloaded to a mobile phone, via text message, email or automated phone call making them available through a number of platforms (State of Connecticut Judicial Branch 2024).

POST SENTENCING ADVOCATES

At the Board of Pardons and Paroles, three OVS victim advocates offer support. This includes updates on the post-conviction process, ensuring awareness of rights, assisting with victim impact statements, advocating for victims, and providing social service referrals. Additionally, the Department of Corrections has a Victim Services Unit that provides notifications for pre and post sentencing for incarcerated offenders.

COMPENSATION UNIT

The OVS Compensation Unit assists applicants by completing paperwork and obtaining necessary documentation, such as medical records with their consent. This alleviates the applicant having to negotiate the application process themselves which can be beneficial for individuals still grappling with grief and trauma.

TRAINING

The OVS Education Unit offers training to the victim assistance community, coordinates public education, and distributes OVS publications. This unit conducts training at Connecticut Police Academies as part of the Police Officer Standards and Training program. The training covers OVS services, trauma, victim needs, specific victim categories, and death notifications. It also addresses critical topics like burnout and vicarious trauma for police officers. Connecticut Police Officers are required to attend recertification training every three years to stay updated and contemporary. OVS participates in this training process.

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR WA POLICE FORCE

- Victim Support Service training is provided to all recruits at the WA Police Force Academy. There is currently no refresher training. On-going refresher training would ensure officers remain contemporary and aware of changes.
- Having a dedicated training coordinator within Victim Services (external agency) could allow for additional training to be delivered without affecting day-to-day advocacy. Continued face to face contact could assist with building stronger partnerships with support services.

- Establishing a homicide-specific support group external to the WA Police Force with a qualified coordinator would assist FLOs by providing a specialised support service to families of homicide victims.
- Having additional victim advocates in Western Australia external to the WA Police Force as part of post-sentencing support, could allow for additional services such as specific counselling to be provided.

CONNECTICUT COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence actively works to end domestic violence by advocating for policy changes, providing support services, and promoting preventive measures. Collaborating with various stakeholders, they raise awareness and offer resources to create a safer environment for those affected by domestic violence in the state (Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence 2023).

The Connecticut Domestic Violence Fatality Review Task Force focuses on preventing intimate partner homicides by analysing cases and involving multiple stakeholders. Since 2000, they have examined over 100 cases, drawing insights from experts in advocacy, law enforcement, judiciary, healthcare, child protection, and offender services to enhance prevention and intervention strategies.

A full time qualified domestic violence advocate is available via phone 24/7 who can provide support and arrange immediate services. These advocates do not go to the scene; however, some police departments do have a domestic violence advocate who will attend on scene when an incident occurs and provide real time assistance to officers.

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR THE WA POLICE FORCE

- In geographically isolated areas of Western Australia, having 24/7 victim support services for families of homicide victims available remotely, via a dedicated phone line, could offer immediate crisis support.
 - While face-to-face interaction is best practice, this immediate communication provision could ensure timely assistance, acknowledging the challenges of remote locations.

10. CANADA, ONTARIO

Ontario is Canada's second largest province (state) covering more than one million square kilometres with over 13.6 million people. There are a number of different police forces within Ontario.



CANADIAN VICTIMS BILL OF RIGHTS

The Canadian Victims Bill of Rights 2015 aims to enhance the rights of victims within the criminal justice system. It establishes statutory rights to information, protection, and participation and to seek restitution. It ensures

that a complaint process is in place for breaches of these rights by a federal department or agency (Government of Canada 2023).

ONTARIO VICTIMS' BILL OF RIGHTS

The Ontario Victims' Bill of Rights 1995 outlines the rights of victims within the province's criminal justice system. It focuses on ensuring that victims are treated with respect, receive information about their case, have the right to participate in the legal process, and are provided with support and assistance. This legislation aims to empower and protect the rights of victims throughout their interaction with the justice system in Ontario.

ONTARIO MAJOR CASE MANAGEMENT

Homicide investigations are conducted utilising the principles of the Ontario Major Case Management Manual. One of the Major Case Investigative Functions and Responsibilities include the appointment of a Victim Liaison Officer (VLO). The function of the VLO is similar to that of a FLO and should not be the lead detective. There is no training specific for the role of the VLO, however its role and function is discussed on the two-week Major Case Management Course.

VICTIM/WITNESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM YORK REGION

Under the Ontario Government's Ministry of Attorney General, the Victim/Witness Assistance Program (VWAP) supports victims of crime and witnesses by offering court process information, emotional support, and referrals. VWAP's goal is to keep individuals informed and supported throughout their interaction with Ontario's justice system. The York Region VWAP provides training to York Regional Police, including on investigative courses. They work in close partnership with police and Crown Attorneys, receiving unrestricted information. Once charges have been laid, the York Region VWAP office arranges a meeting with the family of homicide victims and the Crown Attorney, ensuring consistency from initial appearance to trial. Functioning as a liaison between victims and Crown Attorneys, York Region VWAP offers court support, assistance with victim impact statements, and ongoing updates regarding court proceedings. Each court has a VWAP office staffed by civilians typically with a social services background. Focusing on guiding individuals through legal procedures, VWAP operates within the criminal justice system, emphasising support, information, and court-related assistance for victims and witnesses in criminal cases (Government of Ontario 2023a).

The inquiry into the deaths of Randy Isles and Arlene May led to changes around victim support in Ontario, Canada.

On 8 March 1996 in Oshawa Ontario, Randy Isles shot and killed his wife Arlene May, then killed himself. In 1998 the inquest into these deaths resulted in numerous recommendations. Recommendations of note include:

- Victim Services should be immediately made available across the province to assist the victim from the time of victimisation to the conclusion of the court process and beyond.
- Victims, wherever they are located in the Province of Ontario, should be entitled to an equal level of service independent of the Criminal Justice System on a 24-hour, seven day a week basis.
- Victim Services should have access to police synopsis of the incident.
- Victim Services should be fully funded by the Government of Ontario.
- Training should include the effective use of the Victim Services available through the VWAP and/or community-based Victim Services programs.

The report stated that the VWAP must be migrated to all jurisdictions immediately and highlights the preference for Victim Witness Services (court-based services) and Victim Services to be separate (Presiding Coroner, Deputy Chief Coroner of Inquests 1998).

VICTIM SERVICES YORK

The Ontario Police Services Act, 2019 – Bill 68 mandates police officers to assist victims of crime, ensuring each police service has a Victim Services program, which can include police based or community based. Victim Services York (VSY) is a community-based organisation offering emotional and practical support, crisis counselling, funding guidance, referrals, and educational resources. VSY is staffed by civilians who hold relevant university degrees, and volunteers who cater to the York Region's needs in Ontario (Victim Services of York Region 2017). VWAP is specifically tied to the legal process, whereas VSY offers a broader range of services addressing community and individual victim needs beyond the legal context. VSY works in partnership with the police, providing 24/7 in-person and on-scene crisis support response for persons victimised by crime or tragic circumstance.

Maintaining a separation between VWAP and VSY proves effective as clients often feel more comfortable engaging with VSY for support, detached from the judicial process. This distinction allows individuals to process grief separately from legal proceedings. VSY employs a victim-centric, trauma-informed delivery model, backed by trauma specialists within the York Regional area. They offer training to recruits and detectives on engaging with victims of crime using a trauma-informed approach.

Government-funded and not-for-profit, VSY operates within police premises, receiving full police reports without information limitations. VSY uphold confidentiality, requiring client permission to share information with the police. VSY provides crisis counselling sessions and refer clients to external services for further sessions if required, addressing immediate needs alleviating extensive counselling waitlists.

Offering a 24/7 on-scene response, VSY assist in non-crime-related trauma, such as attending non-criminal death notifications or missing persons cases. They conduct community group debriefings and set up support posts for incidents affecting community groups. VSY extend support for global tragedies that impact community members within the York Region. Additionally, VSY has a protocol for mass support activation for primary, secondary, and tertiary victims.

The police fund a homicide bereavement support group that utilises a psychoeducational model that involves 12 structured sessions. The group is run by a facilitator with a master's in social work and an individual with a lived experience. The program is run multiple times a year with each session focussing on a different topic. This structured approach has proven more effective than open-ended sessions. In remote indigenous communities, VSY has provided support by flying in workers to teach and provide support for homicide bereavement.

FEDERAL VICTIM SURCHARGE

Funding limitations pose a common challenge for victim support services. To address this, Canada introduced the Federal Victim Surcharge in 1988, later implemented in 1989. This surcharge is an additional penalty imposed on offenders during sentencing. The collected funds are allocated to support programs and services tailored for victims of crime within each province or territory (Department of Justice Canada 2016).

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR THE WA POLICE FORCE

- Establishing a victim service external to WA Police Force to provide a 24/7 on-scene response to homicides would be beneficial. This would ensure a trauma informed approach and support is in place for families of homicide victims including the wider community from the outset of the investigation.
- Providing support for non-criminal incidents and aiding in mass activations benefits both law enforcement and the community.
- This level of service is made possible with the separation between Victim Services and court-based services such as VWAP. VSY do not provide any investigative or court updates as it is important for them to remain separate from the investigative and judicial process. This would complement the FLO model utilised in the UK as it relies upon the police to provide investigative updates through the FLO.
- Given the complexities of homicides, a dedicated homicide support group external to the WA Police Force with structured sessions and facilitation would be beneficial. This model, achievable in Western Australia, could be run by Victim Services if a 24/7 service for the Homicide Squad was established.
- Exploring a State 'victim surcharge' could significantly bolster funding for victim support services.

YORK REGIONAL POLICE

The Regional Municipality of York has an area of 1,758 square kilometres with a population of over 1.2 million people. The region averages approximately 20 homicides per year. With over 1,600 police officers, the York Regional Police have a Major Crimes Bureau with a Homicide Unit. The Homicide Unit has similarities in their investigation structure to that of the WA Police Force. Under the Major Case Management Manual, a VLO is appointed for all homicide investigations. It is best practice for the VLO to be separate to the lead detective.

The investigation into the shooting that occurred at the Bellaria Residences condominium tower highlighted the importance of the VLO role.

On 18 December 2022, a mass shooting occurred at the Bellaria Residences condominium tower in Vaughan, Ontario, Canada. Six people were killed, including the offender. This was investigated by the York Regional Police, and I discussed the challenges faced by the VLO. Much like the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut, it became important that the VLO was the single point of contact, and conduit to the families to ensure management and accuracy of information. De-briefing for the VLO to manage welfare and to reflect and evaluate successes and areas for improvement is an important aspect. Communication between the police and victim services becomes vitally important in these incidents.

TORONTO POLICE SERVICE

Toronto is the capital of Ontario with a size of 630 square kilometres, and a population of approximately 6.4 million people serviced by approximately 5,000 police officers. The Toronto Police Service (TPS) Homicide Squad operates under the principles of the Major Case Management Manual and appoints a VLO for homicide investigations. There were approximately 70 homicides in 2023.

FAMILY LIAISON OFFICER

After incidents that occurred in 2018, the TPS implemented a FLO model for mass fatality incidents that is separate to the VLO role in homicide investigations. FLOs provide an on-call availability with sworn and unsworn (civilian) officers. FLOs are deployed in pairs, and unsworn officers are paired with sworn officers.

TORONTO INCIDENTS

- In 2018, there were two incidents that shaped the FLO model for mass fatalities for the Toronto Police Service.
- On 23 April 2018, a targeted attack involving a vehicle striking pedestrians occurred along Yonge Street in Toronto during a busy period of the day. The attack resulted in the death of 11 people and injuring 15.
- On 22 July 2018, a mass shooting occurred on Danforth Avenue in Toronto. The gunman killed two people and wounded 13 others.

A unique difference with the Incident Command System of the TPS, is a separate and designated pillar for a Victim Management Chief. This pillar is separate to the Investigative Chief pillar that manages the investigation and there is a clear communication conduit between the two. The Victim Management Chief is the most trained and qualified officer, not the most senior in rank. The Victim Management Chief will oversee the deployment and management of FLOs and disseminate information to be provided to and obtained from families.

I was unable to attend the FLO training, and instead, discussed the content with the course facilitator. The three-week FLO training for mass fatalities is innovative and immersive, using realistic scenarios and international guest speakers via video calls to cover various aspects of family liaison. It emphasises welfare management, engaging

external stakeholders and developing partnerships, and sustaining ongoing support. A FLO is a voluntary role that includes a psychological assessment as part of the application process, before completing the training. Being a FLO is in addition to regular duties.

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR THE WA POLICE FORCE

- Integrating a Victim Management Chief or similar into the WA Police Force's Incident Command Structure for critical incidents would ensure dedicated oversight and resource allocation.
 - To support this, appropriate management, training, and selection for the FLO role would be required and could work well with the FLO structure of the UK.

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) has approximately 5,800 uniform officers, 2,600 civilian employees and 600 auxiliary officers who are responsible for policing over one million square kilometres of land and waterways. The OPP cover some remote areas with indigenous populations like that of Western Australia. Homicide investigations within the OPP operate under the Major Case Management Manual and have a VLO role. There is no specific training for the VLO role and previously, the role was primarily conducted by the lead detective for the investigation. In 2023, there were 47 homicides investigated by the OPP.

VICTIM SPECIALIST PROGRAM

The OPP's Victim Specialist Program focuses on supporting victims within investigations using civilian Victim Specialists (Government of Ontario 2023). The program is governed by the framework for a victim-centred approach and managed by the OPP Victim-Centred Approach Team. It is a dedicated police-based program, which is separate and distinct from Victim Services. Collaborating with local community support services was integral to its implementation and success within the OPP.

The victim-centred approach framework focuses on:

- Effective communication and information.
- Victim needs assessment.
- Clear expectations.

In regions where the service is available, 24/7 Victim Services which are community-based support, may attend on scene for crisis support and to meet initial safety needs and concerns. This is based on their local mandate and capacity to respond. Victim Specialists are mandated to engage to support the investigative process during regular business hours but are deployable in extreme events or mass casualty situations beyond business hours. In regions where Victim Services are not available, Victim Specialists become crucial in bridging the gap for support for OPP investigations specifically. Victim Specialists are embedded within designated OPP detachments (police stations) throughout the province and are mandated to support any investigation whereby a victim indicates they may have additional needs or accommodations. The Victim Specialist Program is also mandated to support investigations that fall under the direction of the Major Case Management Manual which includes homicide investigations. There are specialist Victim Specialists in certain areas including human trafficking and serious fraud. In specific circumstances, Victim Specialists are deployable across the province and may provide assistance if one is not embedded in the office managing the investigation.

Victim Specialists are not part of the investigation, and only provide information and updates at the direction of the Major Case Manager or lead detective. Before interacting with victims or families of homicide victims, Victim Specialists coordinate with the Major Case Manager or lead detective to establish communication points,

information to be provided and obtained and to facilitate meetings. If a VLO has been assigned, the Victim Specialist will coordinate with the VLO and the Major Case Manager or lead detective to perform the VLO function, allowing the VLO to be redeployed to other investigative duties. Upon request, Victim Specialists can act as VLOs and provide a commitment to this function for a longer duration. This can reduce the frustration of a 'revolving door' of contacts with police officers who frequently change work locations. Their distinction from police officers can help break down barriers during engagement. The Victim Specialist role can also extend to fatal and serious traffic incident investigations.

Victim Specialists support victims in understanding and navigating investigative and legal processes, reducing the frontline officers' workload, and enhancing investigative quality. Discussions with experienced Major Case Managers and homicide detectives emphasised that assigning a dedicated VLO or Victim Specialist early in the investigation is crucial. This is due to their significant impact on the investigation's direction and the well-being of the families of homicide victims, police, and staff.

A Victim Needs Assessment (VNA) is an internal tool that has been developed for officers responding to incidents. The VNA is not an offer of services, it is a mechanism that empowers victims to express their individual short and long term needs to front line officers through a set of questions. It focuses on communication, safety, and cultural considerations, ensuring a victim-centred approach. If certain answers are provided, the VNA activates internal investigative assistance through Victim Specialists. The Victim Specialist will make referrals to Victim Services if available in the region and ensure a soft transition to VWAP mandated incidents once charges have been laid. Victim Specialists work in partnership with Victim Services and VWAP to ensure a victim-centred approach. This supports investigative excellence in the OPP by understanding individual needs and building trust, which fosters a holistic wrap-around approach to ensuring a victim's needs are met through every phase of the criminal justice process. The difference between victim programs is outlined below:

| VICTIM SERVICES (COMMUNITY-BASED) | VICTIM SPECIALIST PROGRAM (POLICE/INVESTIGATION BASED) | VWAP (COURT-BASED) |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Assist with counselling. ➤ Assist with funding applications/assistance. ➤ Assist with safety planning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Liaison between investigators/OPP and victims/families of homicide victims. ➤ Ensures engagement with community/court-based supports. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Charges must be laid to engage. ➤ Liaison for the victim/family of homicide victim to Crown Prosecutors. ➤ Provide court support. |

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR THE WA POLICE FORCE

- Incorporating a police-based Victim Specialist Program would significantly change the current investigation framework of the WA Police Force as civilian Victim Specialists could replace the FLO role in specific circumstances.
- FLO roles could still be required as Victim Specialists are not utilised for every investigation, there must be specific criteria for deployment.

- This model has proven successful in the OPP detachments (police stations) where it has been implemented and has shown to reduce frontline officers' workload and enhance investigative quality. This model warrants further exploration as to how it could benefit multiple areas within the WA Police Force.
- If this model was implemented, dedicated management and civilian recruitment would be required as it would fall under the direct management of the WA Police Force.
- This model still utilises community-based Victim Support services (external to the police), and engagement with them would be crucial for its implementation.
- Victim Specialists would be civilians with appropriate qualifications.

11. CANADA, BRITISH COLUMBIA, SURREY

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) E-Division Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) is a specialised unit in British Columbia. IHIT is the largest homicide unit in Canada, responsible for investigating homicides, suspicious deaths, and high-risk missing persons where foul play is suspected. IHIT is comprised of 115 employees including 80 police officers. Since its formation in 2003, IHIT has led over one thousand homicide investigations (Integrated Homicide Investigation Team 2023).



VICTIM SERVICE MANAGER

Victim Services are embedded in detachments (police stations) and provide a 24/7 response. The local Victim Services are civilians who provide on-scene attendance to homicides. In 2018 a review explored embedding a Victim Service worker within IHIT, leading to a successful one-year pilot program with a Family Liaison Victim Services Manager (VSM). The VSM provides a clear distinction between investigators and Victim Services and has been permanently integrated since. The VSM does not provide a 24/7 response.

IHIT does not have a dedicated FLO role; the lead detective maintains contact with the families of homicide victims. The VSM attends weekly meetings with team supervisors where investigation briefings and updates are provided to senior management. The VSM takes on support for high risk or complex needs cases and will obtain a briefing from investigators on any file they are working on. As the VSM works closely with the investigation team, they can provide updates to the family, alleviating the workload of the lead detective. The VSM is also a conduit to the investigation team if the local Victim Service worker needs information or has questions from the family if they are managing the case. If the local Victim Service worker is not available, the VSM can attend family meetings with detectives to provide immediate support. The VSM provides court support, attends family meetings, and is involved in corporate development and issues pertaining to government.

The VSM role requires a bachelor's degree in social sciences and five years of experience in supporting family members and witnesses, including collaboration within the justice system. The VSM's civilian status offers stability and consistency for families throughout the investigative process, unlike police officers who frequently

change work locations. Families of homicide victims can at times be more receptive to a civilian, but at the same time feel secure in having a support contact from within the same office as the investigation team. The VSM provides valuable guidance to detectives and serves as a familiar point of contact for families dealing with sensitive topics.

IHIT provides a comprehensive booklet outlining available services and the investigation process to families of homicide victims. British Columbia has VictimLINK which is a 24/7 support line offering emotional support and assistance for recovery, aiming to prevent further victimisation (British Columbia Government 2023). The VSM works closely with a homicide support group that offers an eight-week program focused on grief and trauma. The VSM provides an induction to all new IHIT detectives.

VICTIM COURT SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Victim Court Support Program works closely with Crown Counsel, justice personnel, and other Victim Service providers to deliver coordinated support to victims, witnesses, and their families through the judicial process. This program supplements existing services from local police and Victim Service programs. Post sentencing Corrections Canada's Victim Advocates keep the family of homicide victims informed about updates such as releases, parole, and prisoner movements.

HOW THIS COULD WORK FOR THE WA POLICE FORCE

- The implementation of a VSM within the Homicide Squad has similarities to the successful model currently in the WA Police Force's Multi-Agency Investigation and Support Teams (MIST) for the Child Abuse Squad. This approach involves having a civilian specialist positioned within the MIST offices to provide immediate support and referrals. Investigative updates are provided by the lead detective in child abuse investigations. A difference would be the VSM would actively participate in the investigation team, joining briefings and sharing information with families.
 - While a FLO remains necessary for engaging with families, the VSM could assist with some aspects. They could collaborate with existing Victim Support Services and take a more hands-on approach in cases with higher or complex needs.
- Access to 24/7 victim support services external to the WA Police Force in addition to a VSM, would assist with immediate crisis support for families of homicide victims and alleviate some challenges faced by FLOs.
- Training remains crucial for detectives to understand available support services.
- Establishing a structured homicide support group external to the WA Police Force would be beneficial.

12. CONCLUSION

I was awarded my Winston Churchill Fellowship in 2019 and was set to travel in the first part of 2020. I had considered many things that could become a challenge and impact my travel plans; I did not consider a world-wide pandemic to be one of them. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed my travel, but at the same time provided me with an opportunity to enhance my learning events for the Homicide Squad and build stronger connections with key organisations. During the delay, I witnessed professional progress in my intended destinations develop and I was able to expand my network and make new contacts. The limitations of this report are that I have not spoken with every police force that utilises the FLO role. I have spoken with a number of police forces and support services in the locations that I travelled, and obtained an overview that has provided an evidence-based foundation for my recommendations. There is always value and additional learnings that could be gained from other police forces that utilise the FLO role.

FLOs play a pivotal role in the investigation process, and foster confidence and trust through their trauma-informed approach. They provide consistent and sensitive guidance to families of homicide victims, and ensure support is provided by support services throughout the investigation process. Ensuring the FLO accurately records all information provided to and obtained from the family of homicide victims is essential. The WA Police Force can enhance the FLO role for homicide investigations by building on their current investigation framework. Specialised training for the FLO role, including an application process, and creating Family Liaison Coordinators (FLC) is a priority for this to succeed. To manage and implement these enhancements, a State Family Liaison Resource Coordinator is needed. Utilising these models in conjunction with a Casualty Bureau, would place the WA Police Force in a strong position to provide an effective scalable response for mass fatality incidents. Integrating a Victim Management Chief or similar into the WA Police Force's Incident Command Structure for critical incidents would ensure dedicated oversight, management, and resource allocation.

This approach, complemented by tailored support models, would benefit from a 24/7 victim support response capability. Specialised homicide support is vital, recognising the unique needs of impacted families. Funding, potentially through a victim's surcharge, could enhance these initiatives, benefiting families of homicide victims and the community. In speaking with different support services, the significant difference was having support roles embedded within the police agency vs externally; both saying their model was more beneficial for victims. Embedding support services within the WA Police Force Homicide Squad deserves further exploration for its impact on victim assistance and investigative support. These models have proven to be successful in a number of locations that I travelled to. A hybrid approach utilising the FLO model from the UK and incorporating a 24/7 victim support response capability, either embedded with the Homicide Squad or operating externally, would prove advantageous and beneficial to families of homicide victims.

The FLO is not always the initial point of contact for families of homicide victims. Best practice involves conducting death notifications separately and creating a comprehensive engagement plan before deploying the most suited FLO. Being a FLO is voluntary and in addition to their usual day to day role as a police officer. It is important that part of the welfare management includes not conducting this role for consecutive investigations for a prolonged period. This emphasises the need for sufficient FLOs to be trained. Superficially, a FLO may seem like a practical resource that could be deployed into every police investigation. It is important to understand the objectives of the role and why this is not the case. This does not negate the need for all police officers to adopt a victim-centred approach. Empathetic engagement with families of homicide victims and prompt referral to support services are vital as it is important to remember that police officers are not counsellors.

Incorporating and applying diverse learnings from other countries is crucial for supporting families of homicide victims and FLOs. Collaborative partnerships between the WA Police Force and support services are essential to ensure continual high performance. Establishing a framework to facilitate consistent training and evaluation, are vital for effective use of the FLO role.

A PROACTIVE POLICE FORCE SHOULD LEARN FROM OTHERS, AND NOT WAIT FOR A REVIEW OF THEIR OWN PERFORMANCE TO IMPLEMENT CHANGE.

13. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

FLO ROLE AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The FLO models utilised by the Metropolitan Police Service and Police Scotland in the United Kingdom (UK) stood out as the most robust, well tested, and scalable. These are ideally suited for implementation within the existing homicide investigation framework of the WA Police Force Homicide Squad. Implementing these models would additionally offer scalability and support the deployment requirements for mass fatality incidents in line with a WA Police Force function to manage and coordinate emergencies. Moving in this direction would ensure the people of the WA Police Force can efficiently and effectively perform at the high level that is expected by the community.

The following key recommendations are proposed, and are drawn from international insights and expertise:

1. FLO Role Enhancement:

- Develop a specialised training course for FLOs mirroring the models of the Metropolitan Police Service and Police Scotland in the UK.
- Training to include a minimum one-week course in line with policy, legislation, and Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) training guidelines.
- Establish an application process for the FLO role.
- Establish and implement new Family Liaison Coordinator (FLC) roles in line with these above models to oversee the management, deployment, and ongoing welfare support of FLOs. Additionally, this would put the WA Police Force in a strong position to provide an effective scalable response for homicides and mass fatality incidents.

2. State Family Liaison Resource Coordinator:

- Create a centralised full-time position for a State Family Liaison Resource Coordinator at the Major Crime Division that oversees the Homicide Squad. This position would take on functions similar to the National Family Liaison Advisor (National Crime Agency, UK) Family Liaison Disaster Management Team (Metropolitan Police Service) and National Family Liaison Coordinator (Police Scotland) including:
 - Manage the application and recruitment process for FLO and FLC roles.
 - Improve existing resources and documentation currently relied upon by the FLO. This will include a comprehensive brochure to be provided to families of homicide victims outlining the FLO role.
 - Develop and deliver contemporary training for FLO and FLC roles.
 - Oversee continual professional development for FLO and FLC roles, including biannual group development.
 - Maintain a central repository of all FLO deployments.
 - Oversee the drafting and implementation of policy and guidelines.
 - Foster and develop continued positive partnerships with support services and external stakeholders.
 - The State Family Liaison Resource Coordinator would form part of the management of FLCs and FLOs and provide support to the Senior Investigating Officer and/or the Senior Identification Manager in the event of a mass fatality or disaster victim identification incident.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY OF POINTS 1. AND 2. IS RECOMMENDED AS FOLLOWS:

- **Short term:** Focus on directing specific training and implementation towards FLOs and FLCs within the Homicide Squad.
- **Long term:** Once sufficient FLOs and FLCs are trained within the Homicide Squad, expand training availability to other business areas of the WA Police Force to create state-wide resource availability and assist with a scalable response.

3. Establish a Casualty Bureau

- Establish a Casualty Bureau structure to manage and coordinate resources in the event of a mass fatality or disaster victim identification incident where significant FLO resources are required.
- Conduct further inquiries into the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System (HOLMES) case management system that is currently used by Casualty Bureau in the UK.
- Establish training for Casualty Bureau personnel.

VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICES

These warrant further discussion and consideration with agencies external to the WA Police Force:

- Introduce a dedicated 24/7 victim service response specifically dedicated to homicide investigations. This immediate crisis support would provide a real time assistance service to families of homicide victims, witnesses and support the FLO role.
- Establish a homicide support group for families of homicide victims.
- Establish a specialised support and grief service for families of homicide victims and eyewitnesses to homicide, in addition to general victim support services already provided.
- Enhance post-sentencing support to include specific counselling.
- Implement a Family Justice Centre style model to assist with access to multiple services tailored to the needs of families of homicide victims.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Specialised civilian victim support workers who are external to the investigation process and available 24/7. This consideration is drawn from the successful model of Victim Services York, Ontario Canada.
- Inclusion of specialised civilian victim support workers to be positioned within the Homicide Squad. This consideration is drawn from the successful models used within:
 - Jefferson County, Colorado USA
 - Metropolitan Police Department Homicide Branch, Washington DC USA
 - Fairfax County Police Department Homicide Squad, Fairfax Virginia USA
 - Ontario Provincial Police, Canada
 - Royal Canadian Mounted Police Integrated Homicide Investigation Team, Canada.

Continuous dialogue and exploration of these recommendations and models are crucial for effective adaptation within the WA Police Force. These proposed enhancements could serve as a foundation for broader implementation across various other business areas within the WA Police Force and support services for all victims of crime. The aim is to significantly enhance operational successes beyond the Homicide Squad in Western Australia to all policing jurisdictions in Australia.

14. DISSEMINATION AVENUES

Since my return, I have had meetings and discussions with:

- WA Police Force Major Crime Division and Homicide Squad
- WA Police Force Commissioner's Office
- WA Police Force Academy – Detective Training School
- The Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime for Western Australia
- Victim Support Service for Western Australia
- Victim-Offender Mediation Unit for Western Australia

I will provide my final report and recommendations to the above in addition to law enforcement within Australia and internationally.

15. ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------------------|--|
| ANZPAA | Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency |
| CBI | Colorado Bureau of Investigation |
| Code of Practice | Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales |
| COPFS | Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service |
| COVA | Colorado Organisation for Victim Assistance |
| CSP | Connecticut State Police |
| DA | District Attorney |
| FLC | Family Liaison Coordinator |
| FLDMT | Family Liaison Disaster Management Team |
| FLO | Family Liaison Officer |
| FLSU | Family Liaison Specialist Unit |
| HOLMES | Home Office Large Major Enquiry System |
| Homicide Squad | WA Police Force Homicide Squad |
| IHIT | Integrated Homicide Investigation Team |
| IOPC | Independent Office for Police Conduct |
| MPS | Metropolitan Police Service |
| MIPP | Major Incident Public Reporting Site |
| MIT | Major Investigation Team |
| MPD | Metropolitan Police Washington DC |
| NPCC | National Police Chiefs' Council |
| OPP | Ontario Provincial Police |
| OVS | Office of Victim Services |
| PS | Police Scotland |

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| RCMP | Royal Canadian Mounted Police |
| SFBC | Scottish Families Bereaved by Crime |
| SIM | Senior Identification Manager |
| SIO | Senior Investigating Officer |
| The Office | The Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime |
| TPS | Toronto Police Service |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| USA | United States of America |
| VIA | Victim Information and Advice Officer |
| Victims of Crime Act | The Victims of Crime Act 1994 |
| VINE | Victim Information and Notification Everyday notification system |
| VLO | Victim Liaison Officer |
| VNA | Victim Needs Assessment tool |
| VOI | Victim Outreach Incorporated |
| VRA | Colorado Victim Rights Act |
| VSHS | Victim Support Homicide Service |
| VSM | Victim Service Manager |
| VSU | Victim Services York |
| VWAP | Victim/Witness Assistance Program |
| VWU | Victim Witness Unit |
| WA Police Force | Western Australia Police Force |

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