

COMMUNICARE BREATHING SPACE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The history of Communicare Breathing Space

In 2003, Communicare Breathing Space commenced operations as the first residential family and domestic violence men's behaviour change program in the southern hemisphere as an alternative to removing women and children from their family home.

Communicare Breathing Space provides specialist intervention to men who have been abusive in their intimate partner and family relationships.

Our therapeutic community provides perpetrators of family and domestic violence with up to six months of accommodation while they undertake an intensive therapeutic program including educational group work, individual counselling and case management.

What is an intensive therapeutic community program?

A therapeutic community aims to provide a safe and supportive environment where behaviour change can occur. The community itself, is seen as the main locus of change, providing rich and ever-present opportunities for formal and informal learning. The model also facilitates practicing new ways of relating and in living in a complex shared environment. Addressing family and domestic violence within this environment allows the community to explore and challenge the values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate violence against women. Within this context, the community supports the psychological and emotional wellbeing of individuals as well as their continual personal growth.

How does the Communicare Breathing Space program work?

Communicare Breathing Space is underpinned by ten guiding principles.

1. **Safety** – of women and children.
2. **Perpetrator Accountability** – emphasising men's accountability for their abusive choices and actions.
3. **Systems Response** – ensuring women and children are empowered to feel confident that they will be believed, responded to, supported and protected when reporting family and domestic violence.
4. **Responsibility** – providing opportunities that enable perpetrators to take responsibility for their violence, change their violent supportive attitudes and address factors that may be amplifying their risk of violence.
5. **Respect and Equity** – working to increase understanding and awareness of respect and equality for the victim, children, others and self.
6. **Prevention and Early Intervention** – increasing community awareness around family and domestic violence and building capacity to be effective advocates for change.
7. **Collaboration** – engaging with other providers and working together to monitor and intervene effectively to end violence.
8. **Evidence-Based** – ensuring interventions are evidence-based and informed, and consider individual, community and life circumstances.
9. **Culture and Diversity** – accepting residents from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and ensuring our program is flexible and responsive to residents from diverse populations to meet their needs.
10. **Innovation** – integrating a range of theories and best practice to maximise outcomes for men's behavior change.

The program is divided into two stages – the core program and the transitional program. The core program comprises the initial three months of engagement with an intensive series of formal and informal supports that focus on risk assessment and monitoring, case management, group work, individual counselling, life skill development, and enabling opportunities for behaviour change through the therapeutic community approach. The program builds personal responsibility through ensuring men contribute toward the appropriate functioning of the community.

The transitional program is open to all residents that complete the core program and who have demonstrated a consistent commitment to behavior change. Residents are provided with transitional accommodation where they maintain engagement in therapeutic maintenance groups, case management support and a targeted plan to reintegrate the residents into employment and longer-term accommodation.

Who does the Communicare Breathing Space program support?

Communicare Breathing Space is available to all men who have been abusive in their intimate partner or family relationships and are ready and willing to make long-term behavioural changes. To be eligible, potential clients need to demonstrate a strong motivation and commitment to behavior change in relation to family and domestic violence. Some indicators of strong motivation and commitment include displaying notions of responsibility and ownership of past behaviours and dedication to non-violent futures.

The program does not support men whose primary area of need is not specifically related to family and domestic violence. Exclusion criteria also includes sex offenders, offences against children, significant mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse and generalised violence and crime.

What are the objectives of Communicare Breathing Space?

All family and domestic violence services have a primary focus on maximising the safety of women and children. Communicare Breathing Space works to achieve this through:

1. Building accountability with men for their behaviour and the choices they have made.
2. Providing a program that encourages behaviour change and learning and assists men's capacity to take responsibility for their violence, anger and abuse.
3. Enabling men to learn different strategies to use as an alternative to violence.
4. Building empathy for the impacts of abuse on family members.
5. Providing a support and referral service to family members.

Where is Communicare Breathing Space located?

Communicare Breathing Space is located in Calista and Maylands, Western Australia.

What has been the impact of Communicare Breathing Space to the community?

Communicare Breathing Space works to assist women and children to remain safely in the family home, encouraging men to make positive changes in their lives while engaging in the program. The program aims to assist women and children to maintain their connection with their community, school, employment and provide stability for their daily routines.

Communicare also works to encourage men to move away from choosing violence or abuse in their intimate relationships. Since 2003 Communicare Breathing Space has accommodated and supported over 800 men.

How can Communicare Breathing Space be accessed?

Men can access Communicare Breathing Space via self-referrals, referrals by a community sector organisation or through the justice system. Referrals can be made online or over the phone. All men accepted into and participating in the program join voluntarily.

What is the Communicare Breathing Space assessment process for acceptance into the program?

A complex and thorough initial assessment is conducted with all clients prior to acceptance into the program and aims to measure suitability, risk and safety (of partners and ex-partners, Communicare employees, other clients already participating in the program and the community), motivation to change and willingness to engage.



A wide range of information is utilised to conduct these assessments including:

1. The recording of relationship history,
2. Documenting past accounts of domestic violence, establishing the pattern of abuse,
3. Assessing general offending history,
4. Recognising alcohol and other drug use,
5. Identifying mental health issues,
6. Ascertaining cognitive ability,
7. Understanding motivation and insight and;
8. Detailed interviews with other supporting agencies including the Government of Western Australia Department of Communities and Department of Justice, alcohol and other drug specialist services, mental health professionals and other agencies providing support to the applicant.

The safety of women and children is given the highest priority and Communicare acknowledges that victims are often best placed to assess their risk and inform safety strategies. The provision of partner or ex-partner details is also a requirement when seeking to enter the program as it allows the program to facilitate partner contact and women's advocacy as well as ensure applicants are accepted into the most suitable facility geographically.

What are the obligations of Communicare Breathing Space clients whilst participating in the program?

Upon acceptance into the program, all clients are required to sign a contract acknowledging their obligations as a participant. These include an agreement to:

1. A commitment to non-violence on all levels including emotional and psychological,
2. Active participation in the therapeutic community,
3. An awareness that partners, ex-partners and other affected family members will be contacted to provide support and necessary referrals for family safety,
4. Abstinence from alcohol and illicit drugs including conformity to undergoing random urinalysis and drug swipe tests,
5. Un-notified room searches,
6. Negotiated leave of all absences from the premises,
7. Adherence to the Criminal Code and;
8. Having no visitors on the premises.

What support is offered to Communicare Breathing Space clients post their completion of the program?

Clients who successfully complete the core Communicare Breathing Space program are able to reside in the program's transitional units in Calista as part of the Transitional Program. The Transitional Program enables a step-down approach to support and provides clients a housing alternative while they reintegrate back into the community, re-engage with employment and/or education whilst seeking longer-term accommodation.

Communicare Breathing Space works within a holistic systems response in WA which includes specialist support services such as community counselling who we connect clients with, so they can continue to be supported along their long-term behavior change journey post their completion of the program and leaving the facility.

As Communicare Breathing Space is staffed 24/7, telephone support is always available to former clients if required.

What support is offered to Communicare Breathing Space clients who are unable to complete the program?

Although all measures are taken to avoid exiting a client prior to completion, from time to time this may occur. In this instance, Communicare Breathing Space provides short-term accommodation away from the facility to ensure clients are not at risk of homelessness. Continued support is also provided to clients by ensuring they are referred to appropriate specialist support services in the community to address their barriers to continuing with the program. Communicare Breathing Space has an exclusion period of up to 6 months for clients who have been exited prior to completion. They may be accepted to rejoin the program if all criteria are met as per an initial assessment; measuring suitability, risk and safety, motivation to change and willingness to engage.

What safety planning does Communicare Breathing Space undertake at the facility and for its clients?

Risk management is a priority with all Communicare programs.

Communicare Breathing Space is staffed 24/7 with specific processes for when clients leave the premises including:

- The development of written safety plans for each client, when permissions have been granted for a leave of absence from the facility for more than two hours. These safety plans inform our teams of where a client is intending to go and the expected time of return and there is an expectation of a phone notification due to any delays.
- Verbal negotiations for requests to leave the facility for two hours or less including the advisement of their intended location and expected time of absence. Permissions for such requests are negotiated on a case-by-case basis based on necessary need.
- All clients meeting a curfew; 7:00pm Monday to Saturday and 6:00pm on Sunday evenings.

Communicare Breathing Space is an alcohol and other drugs free facility with strong links with drug and alcohol specialist services to support clients to remain abstinent whilst in the program. Other community partners in the sector also provide specialist support services where appropriate.

Communicare Breathing Space has also developed strong working relations with the WA Police in the localities in which it operates.

How does Communicare Breathing Space manage critical incidents?

Communicare is committed to ensuring everyone's safety and has a duty of care to take reasonable care for the health and wellbeing of our people, our clients and the communities in which we work. In the case of an emergency '000' is contacted to gain assistance from emergency services which can include local law enforcement. Communicare Breathing Space operates an on-call system so that Communicare Breathing Space employees have access to a senior staff member for immediate advice at all times. Additionally, Communicare utilises a centralised incident management system which automatically routes incident details to a relevant Senior Executive so immediate action can take place. The system also generates detailed reporting so trends can be analysed and continuous improvement can be identified.

How does Communicare Breathing Space manage complaints and grievances?

Communicare is committed to providing high quality services and meeting the needs of our clients. We value feedback including compliments and complaints. Communicare provides practical mechanisms for any stakeholders to provide feedback including via email and telephone. Communicare has robust processes in place to ensure all complaints and grievances are addressed, investigated fairly, documented accurately and resolved in a timely manner.

As a first point of action we encourage stakeholders to communicate their concerns with Program Coordinators. If a satisfactory outcome cannot be mutually reached, the next step is to discuss the matter at a Director level.

– Ends –

FACT FILE

Communicare was established in 1977 and has developed into a dynamic not-for-profit organisation.

Our aspiration is to create strong, safe and inclusive communities with the purpose of inspiring and empowering people to live a life of their choice.

Our philosophy is to provide hope and opportunity for people and, over the years, we have distinguished ourselves as a provider and innovator of services as well as an advocate to enhance social and economic inclusion.

Our two pillars of core business – community inclusion and community safety – form the foundations of our diverse service portfolio of Children's, Family & Settlement, Education, Employment & Training and Family Violence & Justice services.

For more information, please visit communicare.org.au.

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