



**SIR ZELMAN
COWEN CENTRE**



GOOD BEGINNINGS

Pre-marriage mentoring resources for
Muslim couples

Three Year Evaluation - August 2022



**SIR ZELMAN
COWEN CENTRE**





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Abbreviations

CoP	Community of Practice
CALD	Culturally And Linguistically Diverse
DSS	Department of Social Services
MCR	Multiple Choice Response
P&E	Prepare Enrich Australia
SZCC	Sir Zelman Cowen Centre
VAWC	Violence Against Women and Children

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1. Introduction and Stakeholder Engagement

1.1 Evaluation Purpose

The key objectives of this evaluation are to:

- assess the impact of the program from the perspective of the Pilot Marriage Mentors and couples who have taken the course;
- collect learnings from the program development process; and
- support the evaluation of the Community Grants Program as a whole.

The evaluation follows OurWatch’s monitoring and evaluation approach as outlined in *Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring*.

The scope of the evaluation is to:

- monitor program implementation outcomes;
- collect data to inform program development;
- collect data to measure program impact; and
- prepare two evaluation reports (interim and three year) to support Our Watch’s evaluation of the Community Grants Program as a whole.

1.2 Stakeholders

1.2.1 Stakeholder Assessment and Engagement Plan

Stakeholder Name	Stakeholder Category	Interest or Perspective	Role in the Evaluation
Sir Zelman Cowen Centre	Primary	Program owners	Planning team, collecting data, interpreting findings
Benevolence Australia	Secondary	Program partners	Receiving results
Pilot Marriage Mentors	Tertiary	Program Participants	Evaluation participants, receiving results
Advisory Board	Tertiary	Evaluation participants	Receiving results
Our Watch	Primary	Evaluation reviewer	Receiving results, interpreting findings
Department of Social Services	Primary	Program funder	Receiving results

1.3 Cultural Competence

This ‘Three Year’ evaluation is based on the Pre and Post Pilot data from Marriage Mentors who have completed the program. This evaluation was scheduled to be a ‘Final’ evaluation; however the program was re-funded for an additional year. As such, this evaluation will be used to inform the continued iterative development of the Good Beginnings program.

As will become evident in the discussion sections, the funding extension is invaluable. It allows for the continuation of true co-design through the continued iterative development of the program materials post initial pilot. This strengthens the program as it has been trialled and tested with feedback now being used to update materials and methods. This solidifies both the program’s evolution and devolution using a

strengths-based community centred approach. Without this extension, the program would have had a hasty hand over which would have overwhelmed Benevolence Australia (Benevolence) as the second cohort of mentors was set to conclude at the time of program conclusion. This would have meant SZCC's resources were focused on the final evaluation and material handover, rather than the future proofing of program materials and processes which the extension has allowed for. Benevolence were not in an ideal position to take full carriage of the program as they have limited experience with iterative design and application of M&E. This would have seen the program stall, or continue without the updates required to ensure its legitimacy in the community. These processes of future proofing have taken priority with the extension of funding and are well underway.

Real, measurable short-term impact will also be easier to track, as we know that impact and change do not occur overnight. Short-term progress from the Pilot and Second cohort will be trackable over the extension period. It is the SZCC's recommendation that longer term funding is secured for this program to allow for further iterative community led development and mid-term impact tracking.

This 'Three Year' evaluation continues to be informed by Our Watch's 'Counting on Change' framework for evaluation by addressing essential actions and ensuring that responses and approaches are culturally relevant to Victoria's diverse Muslim community. Post Pilot data will be mapped against the OurWatch counting on change framework and compared to Pre Pilot assumptions. This analysis will then be used to inform the continued delivery of the program, the iterative design of materials, and the devolution process to partner organisation, Benevolence.

Culturally appropriate perspectives, best practice faith-based perspectives and the 'Change the Story' framework have been successfully incorporated to create a holistic approach. This holistic approach ensures integration of each practice through the 'Change the Story' framework. This holistic approach has been made possible through a continuous communication plan in each stage of development with key stakeholders who can inform each area including; Good Beginnings advisory committee, partner organisation Benevolence, Prepare Enrich Australia, and Our Watch via a Community of Practice (CoP).

1.4 Key Stakeholder Consultation and Input by Development Phase

Year / Development Phase					
Research and Consultation		Design and Implementation		Evaluation, Future Planning and Devolution	
Key Stakeholder	Consultation Overview	Key Stakeholder	Consultation Overview	Key Stakeholder	Consultation Overview
Advisory Committee	Input at each level of development including program name and key topics in training	Advisory Committee	Input to key topics and their delivery for Mentors and couples. Consultation on design and layout	Benevolence Australia	Program partner on iterative development of program.
Our Watch	Input to how primary prevention framework (Change the Story) applies to program.	Benevolence Australia	Program partner proofing and input to all materials developed. Delivery of program in partnership with SZCC.	Our Watch	Advice on iterative evaluation and feedback collation through CoP.
DSS	Program development	Prepare Enrich	Adaptation of P&E existing resources		

	reporting	Australia	and delivery of training to culturally respond to the needs of a Muslim Cohort		
		Our Watch	Input to how primary prevention framework (Change the Story) applies to program through specific modules		

2. Description of Interim Evaluation

The Good Beginnings interim evaluation looked at the iterative design and development of the Good Beginnings program, from consultation to resource development. This development process relied on extensive consultation throughout 2020 and 2021 with Victoria’s diverse Muslim community.

These consultations looked at:

- the marriage guidance currently available in Victoria for Muslim couples;
- key information and skills Muslim couples would want pre-marriage counselling resources to cover; and
- the most convenient/appropriate way to deliver pre-marriage counselling and resources to couples.

In general, consultations concluded that peak bodies representing Victoria’s Muslim communities have long been interested in and supportive of developing substantive pre-marital counselling for Muslim couples.

Consultations summarily thought the course should be;

- based in existing evidence-based approaches,
- able to address the intergenerational gap between parents and the experiences/expectations of their adult children, and
- provide a culturally appropriate context in which to discuss the meaning of respectful and equal relationships.

For the full interim evaluation see (Appendix A)

2.1 Stage of Development Covered in the Interim Evaluation

Good Beginnings was initially staged into three phases:

2020 - Research and Consultation

- Research & adapt existing best practice faith based pre-marriage counselling resources and approaches.
- Consult with Muslim communities on information to include in the pre-marriage counselling resources and training package.
- Draft resource approach with Muslim communities.

2021 - Design and Implementation

- Create pre-marriage counselling resources and training package for Marriage Mentors.
- Conduct workshops for selected Marriage Mentors in the use of the pre-marriage counselling resources, and
- Trial the resources in pre-marriage counselling sessions provided by Marriage Mentors who participated in the training program.

2022 – Evaluation, Future Planning and Devolution

- Evaluate and revise the train the trainer program and the pre-marriage counselling resources via feedback from Marriage Mentors and couples.
- Handover resources and program ownership to the Muslim community through Benevolence, and
- Support Benevolence and Muslim community leaders in promoting the pre-marriage counselling resources to Muslim communities in Victoria and nationally.

In May 2022 Good Beginnings was re-funded for an additional year, with a focus on further delivery through recruitment and training of Marriage Mentors.

2.2 Continued Development of the Good Beginnings Program

At the time of writing (July 2022) Good Beginnings is in the Evaluation, Future Planning and Devolution stage of Development.

As the program has secured a fourth year of funding from the Department of Social Services (DSS), this three-year evaluation report will not have definitive conclusions. Instead, this report will focus on the outcomes of the Pilot Marriage Mentors.

In the fourth year of funding the SZCC Good Beginnings team will continue to deliver and evaluate iterations of the program in partnership with Benevolence across Victoria and, hopefully, New South Wales. With the continued funding of the program the team have added a fourth Development Phase to the program as below.

2022-2023 Program Extension, Continuing Evaluation, Future Planning and Devolution

- Evaluate and revise the train the trainer program and the pre-marriage counselling resources via feedback from Marriage Mentors and couples.
- Iteratively inform the continued development of the program through the training of two to three new cohorts, two in Victoria and one (hopefully) interstate.
- Evaluate the programs extension with Benevolence and other program partners.
- Handover resources and program ownership to the Muslim community through Benevolence, and
- Support Benevolence and other program partners in promoting the pre-marriage counselling resources to Muslim communities in Victoria and nationally.

This additional phase has been added to the program Logic Model.

2.3 Logic Model

Just-in-Time: Premarital Primary Prevention Training Package for Muslim Communities							
Program Logic							
	Constant Inputs	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short & Medium Impacts	Long-term Outcomes	Overall Goal
Year One		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing research & resources on primary prevention initiatives in faith-based communities. Existing faith-based resources for pre-marital counselling. Human ethics approval. Young Victoria Muslim men & women. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Review of existing resources & literature on family violence primary prevention through faith-based relationships counselling. Consultation with young Muslim men & women. Consultations with Advisory Committee on proposed content & structure of pre-marital counselling resources. Develop & draft Islamic informed primary prevention pre-marital counselling resources. Create training program for religious leaders & marriage celebrants using the resources. Recruit 4 to 6 religious leaders & marriage celebrants to participate in pilot program. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Participatory consultation process with faith-based leaders, family violence experts & young Muslim couples. Review of existing resources & consultation report. Collation of pre-marital counselling resources. Design training program for religious leaders & marriage celebrants to use resources. Recruitment of 4 to 6 religious leaders & marriage celebrants for pilot program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness raised among Victoria's diverse Muslim (target) communities of the project. General understanding of faith-based pre-marital counselling and key outcomes realised within target communities. Support generated for the program among target communities. Family violence agencies & primary prevention institutions gain knowledge to support Muslim communities in preventing family violence. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced prevalence of family violence among Muslim couples. Greater awareness among Victoria's Muslim communities of the drivers of family violence. Increased access among Victoria's diverse Muslim communities to faith-based efforts to prevent family violence. Improved understanding among the wider Australian community of how faith-based settings can prevent family violence. 	Foster respectful & equitable relationships grounded in Islamic teachings to prevent family violence & foster healthy families among Victoria's diverse Muslim communities.
Year Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project managers SZCC & Benevolence. Advisory Committee of Faith-based leaders, community leaders & family violence experts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 to 6 religious & marriage celebrants from two Muslim communities. Pilot pre-marital counselling resources. Training program facilities. Evaluation tools (surveys etc.) for pilot program. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver training program for religious leaders & marriage celebrants using the premarital resources. Delivery of counselling sessions by participating religious leaders & marriage celebrants over a 9-month period. Delivery of feedback sessions with religious leaders & marriage celebrants. Collect data for evaluation (survey, interviews etc.) Analyse data & evaluate program. Develop project plan for roll out of program to other communities in the third year. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Completed training program for religious leaders & marriage celebrants using the premarital resources. Resources used by young Muslim couples during counselling sessions over a 9-month period. Feedback data from participating religious leaders & young Muslim couples. Evaluation report on pilot program. Project plan for third (final) year of the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Couples in the program report a strong understanding of how to foster a respectful & equitable marriage & improved knowledge of family violence drivers. Religious leaders & marriage celebrants in the program report strong understanding of family violence drivers & increase in ability to use pre-marital counselling resources tailored for target community. Members of the wider Muslim community report awareness of the program & of pre-marital counselling as a way to foster supportive faith-based marriages. 		
Year Three		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot pre-marital counselling resources. Training program facilities. Venues & event logistics for promotion of program. Interstate networks with other Muslim community organisations. Project handover notes & resources. Marketing collateral for program promotion. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Training package & resources (online & hardcopy) revised from pilot evaluation data. Promotion of program & resources to mosques & community organisations. Promotion of program interstate via Benevolence's networks & Advisory Committee. Handover of project management materials to Benevolence from SZCC. Develop Final Report to Department of Social Services. New knowledge of primary prevention benefits in premarital counselling outlined, sustainability options for the model beyond 2022 explored. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Revised set of pre-marital counselling resources for Muslim couples about to marry. Series of events across regional & metropolitan mosques & community organisations publicising the program & resources. A short promotional video prepared about the project to aid in promotion among partner organisations & stakeholders involved in the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in couples interested in joining the program through Benevolence. Community & religious leaders from other programs interested in undertaking the training & using the resources. Greater awareness among family violence prevention service providers of successful primary prevention strategies in Muslim communities. Couples who participated in the pilot program reporting that they use the guidance provided, creating a supportive & respectful marriage. 		

Year Four		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to pilot pre-marital mentoring resources and training • Evaluation tools • Interstate networks with other Muslim community organisations. • Project handover notes & resources. • Marketing collateral for program promotion. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete three year evaluation and use findings to develop fourth year of program. 2. Training package and resources (online and hardcopy) revised from pilot evaluation data received from program participants. 3. Continued promotion of the program through social media, word of mouth and continued print media relationships. Previous Marriage Mentors will also promote program and resources to organisations and communities nationally. 4. Deliver an additional cohort in Victoria and train a culturally and religiously appropriate Prepare and Enrich trainer 5. Ownership of resources and training program taken on by Benevolence. 6. Submit Final Report to Department of Social Services, outlining new knowledge on benefits of primary prevention in premarital counselling and exploring sustainability options for the model beyond 2023. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revised resources developed with Benevolence and endorsed by BOIV or ANIC 2. Revised set of pre-marital counselling resources for Muslim couples about to marry. 3. Promotional videos, posters and articles prepared to promote program further to other organisations, potential Marriage Mentors and couples who are about to get married. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in couples interested in joining the program through Benevolence. • Community & religious leaders from different parts of the community interested in undertaking the training & using the resources. • Greater awareness among family violence prevention service providers of successful primary prevention strategies in Muslim communities. • Couples who participated in the pilot program reporting that they use the guidance provided, creating a supportive & respectful marriage. 		
<p>Broader Contextual Factors</p> <p>Social or cultural norms not specific to faith communities but which maybe held around gender roles & women's leadership & decision-making in faith settings.</p> <p>Barriers to divorce in some faith settings.</p> <p>Willingness of young couples to participate in the program.</p> <p>Willingness of religious leaders to participate in the program.</p> <p>Willingness of communities to use the resources.</p> <p>Resources & capacity to take up the resources among other Muslim community organisations.</p> <p>Funding for program sustainability beyond the third year.</p> <p>Impact of COVID-19 on marriage & religious services during the program's implementation & development period.</p>							

3. Evaluation Design

This three-year evaluation is a post pilot evaluation of the qualitative data collection to date. The purpose of this evaluation is to:

- assess the extent to which the interim evaluation findings were applied to the program's materials; and
- inform the continued iterative development of the post-pilot program to maximise benefit to future cohorts during the fourth year of funding and into program devolution.

3.1 How Evaluation Findings will be used

Evaluation findings will be used to:

- inform the continued development of the Good Beginnings training program;
- inform any redesign in the devolution process of Good Beginnings to Benevolence; and
- provide program process and impact information to DSS, Good Beginnings Advisory Committee, SZCC and Benevolence.

To achieve this the evaluation needs to capture pilot Marriage Mentors'

- knowledge, access to resources before training,
- attitudes and beliefs before their training, and
- what, if any, change there was as a result of the training.

This information will inform the development of the program and provide a baseline for data comparison and the iterative delivery of the program during the fourth year of funding.

3.2 Data Collection Methods and Management

The three-year evaluation focuses on the following data collection methods and management. For a comprehensive list of pre-pilot delivery data collection see the interim evaluation in (Appendix A)

Activity	Program year & phase	Indicative date	Target group	Purpose
MCR and short answer surveys & semi-structured interviews	Year two, phase three	August 2021	Marriage Mentors participating in the pilot program	<p>Pilot program participants will be interviewed prior to commencing the pilot program.</p> <p>Pre-pilot program survey and interviews will aim to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how participants understand respectful relationships, gender roles and the drivers of family violence, and • what the participants expect from the pilot program.
MCR and short answer surveys	Year two, (phase three)	Jan to June 2022	Marriage Mentors participating in the pilot program	<p>Post-pilot Marriage Mentor training program surveys will aim to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how (if at all) participants understanding has changed around respectful relationships, gender roles and the drivers of family violence, • participants perspectives on the pertinence and relevance of the pilot resources to their needs, and • participants' perspectives on the pertinence and relevance of the training program to their needs.
MCR and short answer surveys	Year two, (phase three)	Jan to June 2022	Couples taken through the program	<p>Post-pilot program couple surveys will aim to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what couples felt was useful in the program, • where participants would like to have more focus, • any additional resources that should be included for couples, • participants perspectives on the pertinence and relevance of the pilot resources to their needs, and • participants' perspectives on the pertinence and relevance of the training program to their needs.
Semi-structured Interviews	MOVED TO YEAR FOUR	Jan to June 2023	Religious leaders and experts in multicultural family violence prevention and community leaders from Victoria's Muslim communities.	<p>Feedback on the resources will be sought via interviews with key community leaders.</p> <p>These interviews will aim to identify any additional changes to improve the relevance and pertinence of the resources to Australia's diverse Muslim communities</p>



3.3 Indicators and Standards

Indicators of success will be:

1. The number of participants who complete the surveys (both Marriage Mentor and Couples).
2. The quality of engagement by participating Marriage Mentors in the pilot training.
3. The proportion of participants demonstrating a high-level of understanding of respectful relationship principles after participating in pre-marriage counselling with the Good Beginnings resources.
4. The take-up of the resources by religious and community leaders in the program's fourth year.
5. The MCR and short answer survey assessment from couples regarding the benefit of using the resources.

These indicators will be measured via:

- the interviews and surveys during and following the pilot program,
- continuing qualitative feedback from Marriage Mentors as they deliver the resources, and
- interviews conducted during the program's fourth year.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data collection

We conducted:

- 12 interviews with Marriage Mentor applicants, 11 of which undertook the course in the pilot cohort,
- One survey for Marriage Mentors pre-program (10 respondents, 8 complete)
- One survey with Marriage Mentors post-program (9 responses, 8 complete), and
- One survey for couples who have undertaken the training with a Marriage Mentor (two respondents, one complete)

Background

The pilot cohort was originally planned for face-to-face sessions in late 2021. These dates had to be postponed due to continued restrictions and lockdowns in the state of Victoria.

The postponed dates were re-scheduled for face-to-face sessions in early 2022. Again, these dates were compromised due to the Omicron outbreak in Victoria. To mitigate further delay to delivery of the pilot training, the decision was made jointly with SZCC and Benevolence to deliver the pilot cohort training wholly online. As a result of this, the course delivery structure changed from five face to face sessions to six online shorter sessions. The decision to run shorter sessions online was made with the understanding that many participants would be spending much of their working day online. Shorter sessions would create an environment where participants were able to stay present and mitigate zoom fatigue.

Original		Revised	
Date	Action / Sessions	Date	Action / Sessions
		Monday 24 th January 2022	Participants receive their P&E login details and instructions for online self-guided
Saturday 30 th October 2021	P&E Session 1 (Full day face to face)	Tuesday 1 st February 2022	P&E Session 1 (3 hours online)
Sunday 31 st October 2021	P&E Session 2 (Full day face to face)	Tuesday 8 th February 2022	P&E Session 2 (3 hours online)
Wednesday 3 rd November 2021	Good Beginnings Session 1 (3 hours face to face)	Wednesday 16 th February 2022	Good Beginnings Session 1 (3 hours online)
Wednesday 10 th November 2021	Good Beginnings Session 2 (3 hours face to face)	Wednesday 23 rd February 2022	Good Beginnings Session 2 (3 hours online)
Wednesday 17 th November 2021	Good Beginnings Session 3 (3 hours face to face)	Tuesday 1 st March 2022	P&E drop in Session (3 hours online)
		Wednesday 2 nd March 2022	Good Beginnings drop in Session

Selection Criteria

Potential Marriage Mentors were asked to undergo an application process to ensure participants were offered the same fair opportunity to join the course. To be considered, applicants had to fit set selection criteria. This selection criteria included having a background or relevant experience in social work, counselling, religious leadership, as a marriage celebrant, or similar. This was consistently identified in the community consultation as crucial for the program's success. For a full breakdown of the selection criteria see the Marriage Mentor position description (Appendix B)

4.1 Pre-Program Interviews with Marriage Mentors

As part of the application process, potential Marriage Mentors had to complete an interview with the Good Beginnings Program team. Each interview was structured and recorded. The audio was transcribed and de-identified. This evaluation only uses the interviews of those who;

1. completed the interview process, and,
2. were able to participate in the pilot program.

Relationship

When asked how they would describe a respectful relationship, respondents (n=11) were very consistent and detailed in their descriptions. Key themes included communication (n=4), conflict resolution (n=4) and mutual respect that upholds each other's rights (n=8).

'...it's about respecting the autonomy of each individual in that relationship, and giving them enough space to grow independently, but also grow together as a couple moving forward. Islamically honouring their rights as an individual, but also their rights towards their family, their rights towards their [religion], their rights towards their own body, and their own need to get that need met as well.'

There were some instances where interviewees identified working with people who have conflicting understandings of what a respectful relationship could be, which was attributed to cultural and intergenerational norms (n=6). This includes the ways that people see families interacting and carrying those cultural specific norms when migrating and passing them down through each generation with a conflict occurring in the Australian context.

'[they] might sort of just have these unconscious beliefs that are carried out into their relationship they're not aware of.... cultural expectations that they have around, what a husband does, what a wife does.'

'...relationships... [can] never, ever be a textbook thing, never. It can never be something where you just open up a book and there's the answer. You're dealing with people's different personality traits, different tolerance levels as well, with some. You're dealing with all sorts of cultural matters, different customs and all sorts of stuff that would come into play.'

Other conflicts were related to couples not focusing beyond the wedding day (n=8). This includes the common theme of getting caught up in the excitement that comes with a wedding and not actually thinking about what their lives would be like together.

'I don't think people think about these [what makes a relationship work] a lot before they get married.'



'a lot of the time people don't sit with what's really coming up for them or themselves for that matter, let alone with their partners to really kind of appreciate, and understand what it makes or what it takes rather to make a marriage work.'

The consistency and depth of response, as well as alignment to issues identified in the community consultation period, can be attributed to the selection criteria for Marriage Mentors, in that they had to have some background in similar work.

Gender

When asked about conflicting ideas of gender roles that they have had to work with, most participants identified familial examples related to culture as the driving factor for these conflicting ideas (n=8).

'the common one with our cultural background can where women's position would be just cleaning, cooking and looking after the kids, and there's not much more than that... Sometimes it's very subtle.'

'The understanding of this gender role is vastly can be different between the people based on the culture background, country of origin... the perception is pretty much influenced by culture than religion.'

Participants identified different ways of working with couples to address these conflicting ideas, each bringing their own personal perspective, culture and practice into the responses. It was encouraging to see the breadth of response address many of the topics incorporated in Good Beginnings. This includes using the teachings of the Prophet (saw) and Islamic theory to dispel cultural misconceptions about gender roles (n=7) and when possible separating culture and religion (n=9)

'...it's definitely hard [to separate culture from gender norms], especially when you've got people who are migrants, who are from overseas, and their understanding of it is still quite entrenched in their homelands'

'...there needs to be a distinction between, sometimes they [clients] try to bring in religion to twist their arm or cultures to twist their arm. And sometimes you really got to be able to distinguish it quite clearly for them.'

'The religion is there not to dictate their life, not to make it hard, but rather to make it easy, we have different practices. We have different cultures, we have different understandings. So I think religion is playing that role of reconciling between the cultures.'

Program

Participants were invited at the end of each interview to nominate the 'most important' topic to include in the Good Beginnings program. Overall most people identified communication and conflict resolution through communication as the most important (n=7).

Surprisingly several of the Marriage Mentors raised intimacy as being equally important as other factors (n=3). This was something that our community consultations had identified. However, the writing process had seen the intimacy section reduced to a section of the Prophetic Model topic rather than a stand-alone topic due to concerns of cultural conflict. Due to time constraints we could not expand on this section, however we did compile some additional resources for the Mentors and will explore a fuller version of this topic during the iterative design process.

General

All Marriage Mentor interviewees had a strong grasp on what family violence is, and were able to suggest referral strategies should they identify it in a potential couple. It was rewarding to see the consistency of response following through from the community consultations to the Marriage Mentor applicants. This would not have been possible without the extended community consultation period which really shaped how we approached recruiting Marriage Mentors.

4.2 Pre-Program Marriage Mentor Survey

Ten Marriage Mentors participated in the pre-program Marriage Mentor Survey, however only eight provided complete responses. The complete responses are analysed below.

Background

Survey respondents self-identified their roles to fit within the following guidance-based roles:

- Counselling services
- School teacher
- Community support
- Mental health support
- Psychotherapist
- Clinical psychologist
- Parenting
- Family cohesion assistance
- Religious and faith support

Marriage

When asked what it takes to make a respectful marriage, participants largely (n=6) acknowledged that empathy, compassion, patience and communication were the dominant factors in maintaining respect for your partner.

'A respectful marriage is built on healthy boundaries, mutual trust, open communication and understanding of each other's differences. It's about maintaining balance of autonomy and interdependency - as well as a willingness to learn and honor (sic) each other's rights in Islam.'

When asked what the most important thing is for creating a long-lasting and happy marriage, responses overwhelmingly (n=7) included respect, of both each other and themselves. Other reoccurring themes included (n=6), empathy, compassion and shared values. Treating each other as equals and willingness to improve and reflect on ones issues was also identified by several respondents (n=5).

'Relationships need and benefit most from increased understanding (introspection of the self, and the other) ...'

When asked what can be done within the community to create more respectful marriages all (n=8) participants identified some form of education, for individuals, couples, young people, groups and men as crucial.

'We speak a lot about what goes wrong but need more about how to go about starting right'

Discussion

Defining the Marriage Mentor position description to ensure that applicants had formal experience working in social work, counselling, psychology or related areas meant that participants had an elevation beyond lay understanding of what causes common issues in marriage, and how they can be addressed.



This is evident in the answers. This pre-requisite of existing experience was identified during community consultations as an important step to work with subjects that can still be considered taboo. See Appendix B for the full Marriage Mentor position description with criteria (Appendix B)

It is evident that in these interviews the same themes from the community consultation period are reappearing. This includes the idea that earlier education is needed to confront taboos and myths.

Gender Roles

When asked if there are clearly defined gender roles for males and females in marriage in Islam, 50% (n=4) participants responded "Yes", with the consensus across these responses that the husband acts as the "protector, caregiver and provider", and the wife as the "keeper of the home". However, each respondent emphasised mutual understanding and negotiation of roles and responsibilities were ultimately up to the couple.

'Things such as chores, budgeting, child related commitments and parenting roles are largely based on negotiations and agreements between the couple.'

25% (n=2) participants responded with "No" (n=2), elaborating that couples must assist and teach one another. The final 25% (n=2) of participants selected 'other', elaborating that gender roles are societally determined and mutually agreed on by the couple themselves.

'Gender roles are often determined by social values and norms.'

'...in Islam each person has a responsibility to the other and needs to fulfill the role.'

When asked their opinion on the role of a male in a marriage, 100% of respondents (n=8) indicated that the role of the husband is to protect (physically), provide (financially), and to support his wife's rights.

'Men are the "qawammoun" of women. Protectors, caregivers, providers of women. It is his god given responsibility to honour and respect all women.'

'A man's role in marriage is primarily to be the caretaker of his spouse, to tend to her emotional, physical and financial needs. However ... this role is not fixed and it does not imply that a man's only role is to be the 'breadwinner' of the home. It is much more fluid and flexible.'

When asked their opinion of the role of a female in a marriage, 100% of all those who responded (n=8) had similar themes of nurture, tending to the families' emotional and physical needs. There was also a general emphasis on the wife being her husband's equal, supporting the family in much the same way, including financially, as decided upon by the family unit.

'... the wife's role is to be her husband's equal partner, supporter, and helper in life and in their spiritual journey together.'

'A woman's role in marriage is very similar to that of a husband...'

When asked if there are clearly defined roles of males and females within their families of origin, 100% of all those who responded (n=8) indicated that there was a general division of roles based on men being

the primary income earners and women taking care of the children and home. However, generally respondents indicated that roles and responsibilities became more defined over the years together and that this was based on a mutual respect for one another.

'Women run the household and do most of the domestic work, men do most of the paid work. This is because that is the norm modelled in our families of origin and the society we live in.'

Discussion

The responses provided to gender specific questions highlight the intercultural and intergenerational gaps that were identified in various stages of community consultation. While there was unity in response, it is interesting to see the difference in responses to the general question "Are there clearly defined roles for males and females in marriage in Islam?" which produced response along the line of 'to some extent' and then the clarification of those roles when asked directly "In your opinion what is the role of a male/ female in a marriage?". When asked directly participants seem to lay the roles out more clearly, although there is certainly room allowed for each couple to define their roles.

It is also interesting to note the emergence of 'upholding rights' as a responsibility for each spouse. This is particularly interesting because we had not incorporated the core concept that Islam is not a rights-based religion, rather it is a responsibility based religion (responsibility to Allah, family, society) with the expectation that if you meet your responsibilities others will meet yours.

Family Violence

When asked what the most common cause of family violence in the community is, the responses were in-depth and varied. Some common themes included misuse of power/authority or controlling behaviours, misinformed gender attitudes or adherence to strictly patriarchal world view, and a lack of compassion and empathy. Two (n=2) respondents did not have a clear answer but did recognise that there can be many factors involved.

'Casual acceptance of disrespect of women as inferior. Strong adherence to specific gender roles. Intolerance of men being emotionally vulnerable.'

When asked where they would refer an individual who needed support for a family violence issue, 90% (n=7) noted various support organisations, such as, women's refuge shelters, safe steps, 1800 Respect, Orange Door, White Ribbon Foundation, Berry Street, or family services. Based on the severity of the situation, several (n=2) responses indicated they would refer the individual to the police. Several (n=3) responses added that a spiritual help can and should be sought.

'I would go to someone in the community who could advice (sic) me on where to seek help for the individual i.e. benevolence.'

Discussion

Having selection criteria for Marriage Mentors to ensure there was an elevated understanding of themes that the program seeks to address has provided rich and valuable feedback in these family violence questions. This is evidenced in the specific organisations listed and the consideration of different routes, such as family, faith, organisational and departmental interventions.

Good Beginnings – Program Specific

When asked to describe their understanding of the Good Beginnings Program, respondents indicated that they think the course emphasises creating happier, healthier and more respectful relationships, using the

Prophetic model of marriage. There was also indication to an evidence-based, yet holistic approach to the course delivery.

'Good Beginnings as the name reveals - is about creating healthier beginnings for those in the early phase of their relationship. In many ways, this course is about early intervention as it helps to combat future issues such as relationship breakdown, divorce, marital dissatisfaction & intimate partner violence.'

When asked what they hope to learn in the Good Beginnings pilot, 100% of respondents (n=7) indicated that they hoped to gain experience to better support their existing and aspirational roles, both professionally and within the community. There was also enthusiasm for potential networking with other community members and gaining a broader understanding of how to integrate Islam into this kind of work. One (n=1) respondent expressed enthusiasm at learning the Prepare Enrich program.

'I hope to get more acquainted with the PREPARE/ENRICH material and strengthen links with other health professionals/leaders within the Muslim network.'

Discussion

The varied responses to respondents' understanding of the program can be interpreted as a reflection of their own ideas for practical application post-program, or as an opportunity to refine the program description provided.

It is interesting to see networking not feature heavily in responses to what participants hope to gain as we have had lay feedback that this is one of the most valuable parts of the program, including the intra networking that has breached previous cultural barriers.

4.3 Post Program Marriage Mentor Survey

Nine Marriage Mentors participated in the post-program Good Beginnings Marriage Mentor Survey, however only eight provided complete responses.

Marriage

When asked what the most important value for a pre-marital couple is to establish a respectful marriage, participants largely (n=6) acknowledged that empathy, respect and communication were the most important values of a respectful marriage.

Other responses were to invest in the foundations of the relationship (n=1), understand what healthy relationships look like and recognising toxic relationship dynamics (n=1).

'respect, accommodating each other, good communication skill, being honest, and able to forgive and seek forgiveness.'

When asked what the most important thing is for creating a long-lasting and respectful marriage, responses overwhelmingly said that communication (n=4) is the most important factor. Other common themes were compassion, compromise, honesty, healthy boundaries, mutual respect and understanding as well as commitment to growth and self-awareness (n=4).

Discussion

It is interesting to note that none of the respondents incorporated Islam into their response. Islam and the Prophetic (saw) model of marriage were heavily mentioned in the pre-survey marriage specific questions. This could demonstrate a deeper understanding of the holistic approach that Good Beginnings employs.

Family Violence

When asked what the most common cause of family violence in the community is, responses varied with some common themes including: ignorance, lack of communication skills, patriarchal gender norms, cultural differences, miscommunication, pre-existing trauma and misinformed gender attitudes, and a lack empathy. Notably half (n=4) of respondents identified poor communication skills as the most common cause of family violence.

When asked where they would refer an individual who needed support for a family violence issue, 100% of all those who responded (n=8) noted various support organisations and specialist family violence services, such as: safe steps, AMWCHR, 1800RESPECT, orange door, InTouch etc. Based on the severity of the situation, several (n=2) responses indicated they would refer the individual to the police. One (n=1) respondent said they would check their Good Beginnings handbook to find appropriate services.

Discussion

It is heartening to note that all respondents could identify causal factors for violence within the community, in comparison to the pre-survey where two (n=2) respondents could not clearly identify the causes of family violence for their communities.

Good Beginnings – Program Specific

When asked about whether they provide counselling to couples in their current roles most of the participants said yes (n=6). Of the participants that said they don't provide couple counselling at the moment, all of them (n=3) said that after taking the Good Beginnings Pilot course, they plan to provide counselling to pre-marital couples.

Participants were asked to identify what they believed the most important topic covered in Good Beginnings was with the following responses: communication (n=3), the Prophetic model / incorporation of Islamic teachings (n=3), conflict management & resolution (n=2), and specific Prepare & Enrich assessments (n=2).

When asked if there was anything that should be included in the training program that was not included in the pilot, participants suggested; more focus on cultural behaviours and beliefs about gender roles using the Quran and Prophetic (saw) model (n=2), covering content on compromise in couples (n=1), more time to navigate the Good beginnings website (n=1), more time to practice counselling and applying knowledge (n=1) and adding a positive parenting topic (n=1).

It was also recommended that the training be face to face instead of online (n=1). This feedback was consistent throughout the training, however due to the Omicron breakout in Victoria in early 2022 it was not possible at that time.

Participants were also asked if there was anything that should not be included in future iterations of the program, the participants that responded (n=7) said that everything was relevant and nothing should be removed. The remaining participant did not respond to this question. This can be interpreted as meaning that nothing should be removed. Some suggestions were made around time spent on topics that reinforced previous comments.

Participants also commented that they would like more time to discuss implementation of the program with couples in both 1:1 and group settings (n=2). Overwhelmingly feedback has been positive.

'The presenters were very good and knowledgeable in the field, questions were answered quickly and with examples. Even though the training was conducted online, as an attendee I felt that there was a good flow.'

Discussion

It is interesting to see the diversity in value to individual participants. This could be attributed to their specific roles professionally and within the community. It is also interesting to see the desire for further expansion of the program, including specific requests for additional resources and materials. It should be noted that there is potential to over provide resources, as the content is already heavily referenced and filled with external additional resources.

The comments around cultural implications of gender roles should also be approached with caution. This was a reoccurring theme throughout the training and tended to de-rail the conversation, specifically, these conversations tended to delve into cultural understandings of specific religious scripture which is outside of this program's capacity. As a result, more specific outlines about what the program can advise on and achieve are to be established and incorporated into the introduction of each cohort. This will occur with the iterative design process and be applied in the third cohort.

4.4 Post Good Beginnings Couples Survey

At the time of writing there were only four (n=4) complete response to the couple's feedback survey. The intention of this survey is to capture what is useful, what could be improved and what couples valued most in the Good Beginnings course with this Marriage Mentors. It also allows for some feedback on their Marriage Mentor and collects general data about how they found out about the course.

As more couples go through the Good Beginnings course and respond to the survey an addendum will be added to this report with an analysis and discussion of responses.

4.5 Interpretation

The interpretation of the three-year evaluation has been drawn from the qualitative data analysed and collated by the SZCC team. This data has then been mapped onto Good Beginnings program delivery with the pilot cohort and the OurWatch Counting on change framework.

Framework elements	Summary	Our Project
1. An explanatory model of violence	Demonstrates that gender inequality sets the context for violence against women, and that gender inequality is maintained and perpetuated by structures that organise and reinforce unequal distribution of economic, social and political power and resources between women and men, as well as social norms that prescribe roles and expectations -often unequal between men and women.	<p>The interviews and surveys provide a rich source of data on the cultural and religious specificities to gender inequality and demonstrate that a strong understanding of how gender inequality sets the context for violence against women exists within current community practitioners.</p> <p>This is further evidenced by the first cohort's receptivity to the specific topics that address the gendered drivers of violence including the identification of room for <i>'elaboration regarding specific cultural beliefs about gender roles and identities and Quranic & prophetic proof to break them down and change mindsets'</i>.</p> <p>That we were able deeply embed a multifaceted approach</p>

		<p>to addressing gender inequality throughout the program can be credited to the extension of community consultations and the early recognition of value in embedding approaches in Islam, Australian law and psychological theory.</p>
<p>2. Key actions to prevent violence</p>	<p>Outlines five essential actions and five supporting actions</p> <p>Essential actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Challenge condoning of violence against women 2. Promote women's independence and decision making in public life and relationships 3. Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles 4. Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys 5. Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using specifically Islamic resources in challenging the condoning of violence against women created an opportunity for conversations that sit outside of the 'known' approaches. This was especially evident as the cohort explored the Topic 1 – The Prophetic Model of Marriage and Topic Five – Conflict Management and Resolution. This is also reflected in the post survey when identifying the most important topics as <i>'Conflict management The prophetic model to dispute commonly health misconceptions regarding gender roles etc'</i>. 2. Using specifically Islamic resources in promoting women's independence meant we were connecting with our cohort on a deeper level than if we had used a specifically Australian legal system approach. This was especially noticeable in discussions around Topic Seven – Being Yourself in a Couple. <p>By grounding women's independence in the teachings of the Prophet and the independent lives of his wives we opened the traditionally prescriptive language of rights to a cultural interpretation that many of the cohort had not considered previously. Many trainees also added stories, especially around Topic 8 – Financial Management, and shared their approaches to addressing women's independence in the most culturally appropriate way during training.</p> <p>Many of these personal reflections involved the shift that happens inter-generationally and as a result of migration, with several of the first cohort referencing a Qur'anic verse which we had not included in the resources - Qur'an chapter 4:59, "O ye who have believed, obey Allah and obey His Messenger and the people of authority amongst you.". The interpretation given by religious leaders in the first cohort was that 'people of authority amongst you' means adherence to the laws of the place that you reside. This is actively being used in the community to subvert 'cultural' reasoning of repressing women's rights and is something that we will add to future editions of the program.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. From the initial interviews it was evident that fostering positive personal identities and using that to challenge gender stereotypes and roles was something that many of

		<p>the Marriage Mentors had deeply thought on. <i>'You have to understand what it means to live with a spouse and what they deserve and what their rights are.'</i></p> <p>This was carried into training sessions as well with conversations about duties to uphold the rights of the spouse proving rich and powerful. This was reinforced through Topic 2 – Knowing Your Strengths as a Couple and Topic Seven – Being Yourself in a Couple.</p> <p>4. Strengthening positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men is deeply embedded in both the content of the program for couples and the teaching of each session. This was deeply considered from a cultural perspective with male and female facilitators assigned to train Marriage Mentors, an equal split of Male and Female mentors sought for the roles available and a learning environment that seamlessly orchestrated equality. This started from our first session with each session having one of the Marriage Mentors lead the opening prayer, rotating between men and women. These subtly embedded teaching techniques were complimented by the above mentioned overt techniques.</p> <p>It is also heartening to note that this was a main factor for improving gender relations noted in the pre survey and interview process <i>'from an Islamic perspective ... Islam has not distinguished between the man and the woman Islamically, emphasizing the fact that they both have rights and duties. They both are equal in the sight of God. They both deserve the best...'</i></p> <p>5. Good Beginnings was lauded by the first cohort participants as an opportunity to normalise gender equality in public and private life, and promote that normalisation. Participation and feedback before, during and after the first cohort has been overwhelmingly positive with applications and requests for course delivery from interstate and overseas. The eagerness across community demonstrates the readiness of the wider diverse Muslim population to shake the misconceptions that Islam does not embrace gender equality. This will surely grow with the program as we teach the next cohorts and prepare for devolution to the community.</p>
	<p>Supporting actions to address reinforcing factors</p> <p>6. Challenge normalisation of</p>	<p>6. Using direct teachings from the Prophet to challenge the normalisation of violence as an expression of masculinity was well received by the cohort because of their existing knowledge in the sector. Quotes from the</p>

	<p>violence as an expression of masculinity</p> <p>7. Prevent exposure to violence and support those affected</p> <p>8. Address intersections between social norms relating to alcohol and gender</p> <p>9. Reduce backlash by engaging men and boys in gender equality, building relationship skills and social connections</p> <p>10. Promote broader social equality and address structural discrimination and disadvantage</p>	<p>Prophet and Quran were linked with de-escalation techniques to create a holistic approach to challenging the normalisation of violence.</p> <p>In Topic 4 – Stress there are practical applications of Islamic teachings ‘Nothing placed on the scale is heavier than good character’ which then leads into Topic 5 – Conflict Management and Resolution, building methods with Islamic reflections to move through stress and conflict in order to prevent escalation to violence. ‘The strong is not the one who overcomes the people. But, he is the one who controls himself while in anger’.</p> <p>This approach resonated with the Marriage Mentors, with feedback reflecting the importance of a religious approach to condemning violence as an expression of masculinity as well as implementing practical tools to de-escalate issues that can be taught to couples.</p> <p>7. As Good Beginnings is a primary prevention program there is limited scope to prevent exposure to violence and support those affected, however the Topic 1 – The Prophetic Model of Marriage, includes in some detail different options and ways that Marriage Mentors can refer couples on. There is also a detailed discussion in the fourth session that looks at the gendered drivers of family violence and a religious reflection on unacceptable behaviours.</p> <p>8. Alcohol is haram (forbidden) within the Muslim religion, however within the further resources there are ways to access assistance with various forms of abuse. There was also a robust conversation around this topic in the training sessions. It was of great benefit that the pre-requisites for joining the program were already having worked in this space as this was one conversation where much intra learning occurred.</p> <p>9. The Good Beginnings writing process worked hard to reduce backlash by engaging men in gender equality conversations from the outset. We built a relationship with the Board of Imams Victoria who endorsed the program in its entirety. This approach naturally built into program delivery, with male trainers and Marriage Mentors actively participating, building intra-relationships, adding to the relationship skills discussed from a specifically Islamic male perspective and actively advocating for further conversation to strengthen social connections between men to counter the narrative that gender equity work does</p>
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		<p>not benefit them.</p> <p>10. Good Beginnings addresses social equality by working to fill an identified gap for young Muslim couples about to wed. Existing resources have been designed and tailored to the Jewish and Christian faiths however, there has never been a pre-marital course grounded in Islamic teachings. This was enthusiastically accepted by participants, who loaned their own perspective to our pilot cohort and will no doubt serve to enrich further cohorts.</p>
3. Approach setting and techniques for prevention	Specific practical evidence-based strategies in different settings e.g. faith-based contexts	As above.
4. Prevention infrastructure	Promotes a collaborative national approach to support cross sectoral practice and sustainable change	Good Beginnings has been enthusiastically received in Victoria and beyond. Many national and international contacts have reached out to us asking when the program will be available to them. This demonstrates both the need for an Islamic specific approach to pre-marriage primary prevention, and the drive from many diverse Muslim groups to generate meaningful and sustainable change for future generations.
5. Stakeholder roles and responsibilities	Different stakeholders and institutions have different spheres of influence and opportunities that need to be capitalised on to promote change	Working with Benevolence, a first cohort that spans nine individual cultural backgrounds and spans over 50 years in age difference and a diversity of facilitators has helped us to both continue accessing the power spectrum within the Muslim community and to access influential institutions that exist across the community. The enthusiasm from across this broad spectrum is humbling.

4.6 Discussion

It is vital to recognise the generosity of spirit and language that we have been gifted by the first cohort of Marriage Mentors. In addition to the initial survey and interview the pilot cohort:

- attended 100% of the sessions required;
- enthusiastically participated in all sessions;
- shared and encouraged each other outside of sessions using the WhatsApp group and emails; and
- reached out to the Good Beginnings project team with feedback and suggestions as the program unfolded.

These relationships continue post-delivery as we see Marriage Mentors taking on couples and sharing with each other via a Face Book group.

We were especially blessed to have some wonderful male community leaders, religious leaders and young men involved in the pilot cohort and are forever indebted to their generosity of conversation. While women in the community do a lot of the ground work, it is passionate men who are opening doors and elevating women's voices to legitimise the conversation from a religious perspective.

5. Evaluation Management

5.1 Evaluation Team

This Three year evaluation has been prepared by Annie Wohlgehausen and Selcan Kurnali of the Sir Zelman Cowen Centre, with valuable input and feedback from Saraa Sabaagh of Benevolence.

5.2 Roles and Responsibilities of the Evaluation Team Members

Individual	Title or Role	Responsibilities
Annie Wohlgehausen	Project Officer	Three Year Evaluation Preparation
Selcan Kurnali	Project Officer	Three Year Evaluation Preparation – Assistance
Aayushi Patel	Research Assistant	Research Assistant
Jessi Valenta	Research Assistant	Research Assistant

5.3 Data Analysis Management and Interpretation

To ensure the security of any collected data, all data will be de-identified and stored securely according to VU data storage policies.

5.3.1 Data Analysis Plan

Analysis to Be Performed	Data to Be Analysed	Person(s) Responsible	Due Date	Status
Pre-program - Focus Groups data	Key themes	Annie Wohlgehausen	2020-21	Completed
Pre-program - Survey data	Key themes	Annie Wohlgehausen	2020-23	Ongoing with funding extension
Pre-program - Interview data	Key themes	Annie Wohlgehausen	2020-23	
Post-program - Marriage Mentor survey	Key Learnings	Annie Wohlgehausen	2021-23	Pending
Post-program - Benevolence devolution interview	Key Learnings	Annie Wohlgehausen	2023	

5.4 Wrapping Up

Next steps:

- It is hoped that at least three more cohorts will move through the training before the funding period expires. These cohorts will undergo the same processes, and the subsequent data will be analysed in the same manner as this report.
- Post program data will be de-identified and analysed. In this process the assumptions made based on Post program data, which have been used to inform program development, will be mapped against the OurWatch counting on change framework and compared to Pre Pilot assumptions. This analysis will then be used to inform the devolution of the program to Benevolence.
- This three year report will be expanded and resubmitted in a final format to include all available future cohorts in line with the funding extension.

Shukran – Thank You

It takes a village to build a program and Good Beginnings is no exception.

The Good Beginnings Project team are eternally grateful to the Department of Social Services for recognising the value in our work. We eagerly look forward to continuing the learning process with future cohorts.

Good Beginnings success is hugely attributed to our wonderful Marriage Mentors. Our continual thanks to all our Marriage Mentors, your feedback and enthusiasm for Good Beginnings has shaped the program.

With special thanks to

Our Advisory Board

Tasneem Chopra OAM for lending your voice to the couple's website

Sister Saara Sabbagh, Benevolence Australia

Brother Ramzi Elsayed

The team at Sir Zelman Cowen Centre, especially Selcan Kurnali who has driven the re-imagining of Good Beginnings delivery

Board of Imams Victoria

Hannah Moon and the team at Electric Street

Ben Weinstein for capturing all our most important moments

Mandi Smith for all your Prepare Enrich guidance



Appendices

Appendix A: Interim Evaluation



Appendix A Interim
Evaluation.pdf

Appendix B: Marriage Mentor Position Description



Appendix B
Marriage Mentor Po

Appendix C: Interview Questions



Appendix C
Interview Questions



**SIR ZELMAN
COWEN CENTRE**



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COWEN CENTRE**

