

22 December 2025

Submission to the Queensland Child Safety Commission of Inquiry

Submitted by:

Chris Boyle

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1. Purpose of Submission

This submission is made in response to evidence before the Queensland Child Safety Commission of Inquiry concerning:

- The removal of children in circumstances involving domestic and family violence (DFV)
- The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in statutory child protection
- The limited availability of practical, preventative safety options for families prior to removal
- Systemic reliance on statutory intervention where functional safety alternatives exist but are not utilised

It contends that many child removals occur not because children cannot be kept safe with their families, but because the system has failed to operationalise **functional safety** - particularly where a protective parent and family network are present.

2. Author Background and Expertise

I am a social worker with 30 years' experience. I worked within Queensland's statutory child protection system for 16 years, including more than 10 years as a Senior Practitioner responsible for guiding frontline practitioners, Team Leaders and Managers on decisions relating to child safety, risk assessment, intervention thresholds and removal.

In this role, I reviewed and supported thousands of decisions involving domestic and family violence, cumulative harm, parental capacity and immediate safety planning. I understand how risk is assessed in practice, how decision-making pressure operates, and how removal is often driven not by intent, but by the absence of viable, immediate safety alternatives.

In 2012, I was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study international child protection systems, with a focus on family preservation and prevention of unnecessary removals. This research examined approaches across the United States, United Kingdom and Scandinavia.

A consistent conclusion emerged across all jurisdictions:

The most durable and effective safety system for a child is their family and community - not the statutory system.

This led to a central insight that underpins this submission and our work at StandbyU Foundation:

Safety must move from the form to the function.

Safety is not achieved through plans, assessments and compliance processes alone. It is achieved through real-world connection, awareness and timely support around a child and their protective parent.

This insight became the genesis of our StandbyU Shield solution.

I now sit on the Churchill Trust Queensland Selection Committee, contributing to the assessment of future Fellows and ongoing system innovation. My submission is informed by this professional experience, international research, and more than seven years of national implementation of effective community-based safety solutions.

3. Domestic and Family Violence as a Driver of Child Removal

Evidence before the Commission confirms that domestic and family violence is one of the primary drivers of child protection intervention.

In practice, DFV frequently results in removal decisions where:

- The protective parent is not the source of harm
- Risk arises from context, isolation or lack of supports
- Immediate, practical safety mechanisms are unavailable

In these circumstances, DFV functions as a proxy for parental risk, rather than a trigger for strengthened support.

4. Over-Representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain significantly over-represented in Queensland's child protection system, including in investigations, substantiations and out-of-home care.

Despite longstanding policy commitments to cultural safety and family preservation, outcomes for ATSI children continue to reflect:

- Higher rates of statutory intervention
- Lower rates of reunification
- Longer periods spent in care

This over-representation must be understood within the context of historical removals, intergenerational trauma, structural disadvantage, and risk-averse system responses in the absence of culturally safe, community-led safety options.

5. The Systemic Dilemma for Mothers Experiencing DFV

A recurring theme in evidence before the Commission is the impossible position faced by mothers experiencing domestic and family violence:

- Remaining in the home exposes children to ongoing assessed risk
- Leaving often results in homelessness, heightened violence risk, and loss of informal supports

- Crisis accommodation frequently cannot accept mothers with children
- In the absence of viable safety alternatives, child removal becomes the default response

This is not a failure of individual practitioners. It is a structural failure to provide functional safety options.

6. Functional Safety as a Practice Framework – Preventing Removal Through Connection

It is critical for the Commission to understand that StandbyU is not a technology product, nor is the Shield a standalone device. The StandbyU Shield is one component within a broader, evidence-informed practice framework designed to operationalise safety in real-world contexts.

The StandbyU model is grounded in a clear and practical premise: families and communities are the first responders to issues, long before police or statutory systems respond to incidents.

Where issues are identified early and addressed before they escalate into incidents, and where family and community supports are actively mobilised to assist protective parents, children can be kept safe in their homes. In such circumstances, the need for removal is significantly reduced or avoided.

6.1 Relational Safety Mapping

Safety begins with a structured process of identifying and strengthening the *actual* support networks around a child and protective parent. This includes:

- Immediate and extended family members
- Friends, neighbours and trusted adults
- Cultural and kinship supports
- Community leaders and local services

This process deliberately shifts safety planning away from individualised responsibility and professional surveillance, and toward shared responsibility and collective action around the child.

6.2 Co-Designed Connection and Safety Planning

StandbyU practitioners work alongside families and, where appropriate, alongside caseworkers, to develop practical, scenario-based safety plans that focus on:

- Early warning signs and emerging risk
- Specific escalation thresholds
- Clearly defined roles for each supporter
- Cultural context, family dynamics and lived experience

Unlike static or compliance-driven safety plans, this approach focuses on what actually happens when risk begins to emerge, rather than what is documented after the fact.

6.3 Activation and Real-Time Support

The StandbyU Shield operationalises the safety plan by connecting it to real people in real time and well before danger arrives. It enables:

- Early intervention before escalation
- Coordinated response by trusted supporters
- De-escalation and disruption of risk without defaulting to police involvement

- Escalation to emergency services or third parties (such as Elders) only when genuinely required

Importantly, this restores agency to protective parents, allowing them to seek support early without fear that asking for help will automatically trigger statutory intervention or removal.

6.4 Ongoing Practice Support and Capability Building

StandbyU does not simply deploy devices. The framework includes:

- Training and coaching for frontline practitioners
- Practice reflection and case consultation
- Support for culturally safe engagement
- Ongoing monitoring, feedback and evaluation

Practitioners consistently report that this framework:

- Improves confidence in safety decision-making
- Reduces reliance on removal as a risk management tool
- Enables earlier, more proportionate responses to emerging risk

6.5 Relevance to the Commission's Considerations

This framework directly addresses a systemic issue repeatedly identified through evidence before the Inquiry - the gap between documented safety planning and lived safety.

By moving safety from the form to the function, the StandbyU framework:

- Translates policy intent into operational practice
- Provides a viable alternative to removal
- Strengthens families rather than isolating them
- Supports cultural connection and family preservation
- Reduces escalation and statutory re-entry

The Shield is therefore an enabler of practice and connection, not the intervention itself.

For the purposes of this Inquiry, the significance of the StandbyU framework is not that it introduces a new device, but that it demonstrates how functional safety can be embedded at scale, using existing relationships, communities and practice settings.

7. National Embedding Through Community, Corporate and Philanthropic Support

Over the past seven years, the StandbyU Shield has been embedded across communities throughout Australia, supported by a combination of:

- Corporate partners, including Commonwealth Bank, Westpac, Optus and AustralianSuper
- Philanthropic partners and community foundations
- Local service providers, First Nations organisations, police and community clubs

This model has enabled the deployment of thousands of Shields nationally, including in regional, rural and remote communities with high rates of DFV and child protection involvement.

The Shield is not a pilot concept. It is a proven, scalable, community-embedded safety mechanism, already trusted and funded by some of Australia's largest institutions.

8. Queensland Evidence and Early Engagement

StandbyU has actively sought to engage Queensland Child Safety and senior government leadership for more than seven years.

As early as 2019, StandbyU provided a formal brief to the Director-General outlining the Shield as a diversionary safety mechanism to:

- Preserve families
- Prevent entry into out-of-home care
- Support reunification

The StandbyU practice framework has been independently tested through a **Commonwealth Government-funded trial (2019–2020)** under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. The 12-month trial involved deployment of **100 StandbyU Shields** with women and families experiencing low to high-risk domestic and family violence.

The trial provides relevant evidence for the Commission's consideration of prevention, family preservation, and alternatives to removal.

Key findings demonstrate that when safety is operationalised through **early identification, real-time support, and mobilisation of family and community networks**:

- **93% of participants reported increased feelings of safety**, including reduced fear and anxiety
- Participants reported improved emotional wellbeing, confidence, and stability
- Families experienced increased freedom and normality, including children engaging more safely in everyday activities
- **Family and community were successfully mobilised as first responders**, with more than **400 trusted supporters activated**
- **Escalation to police was rare**, with **only one participant requiring police assistance** during the trial period
- Caseworkers reported improved engagement with families, more meaningful safety planning, and reduced reliance on crisis or compliance-based responses

These findings are significant for child safety practice. They demonstrate that **functional safety frameworks can manage risk without escalation to crisis responses or statutory intervention**, particularly where a protective parent is present.

The trial evidence supports the following proposition relevant to this Inquiry:

Where issues are identified early and addressed before they escalate into incidents, and where family and community supports are actively mobilised to assist protective parents, children can be kept safe in their homes. In such circumstances, the need for removal is significantly reduced or avoided.

This evidence aligns directly with the Inquiry's focus on prevention, family preservation, and reducing unnecessary removals, and demonstrates that **functional safety frameworks can deliver these outcomes at scale**.

Despite this evidence, repeated proposals and demonstrated alignment with policy objectives, the model has not been embedded or operationalised within Queensland Child Safety frameworks.

9. Economic Cost–Benefit Analysis

A critical issue for the Commission is cost-effectiveness.

Evidence provided to Queensland Government demonstrates that:

- **The cost of providing a StandbyU Shield and associated support for up to 12 months is approximately equivalent to the average cost of a single night of out-of-home care (\$1350.00)**

By contrast, OOHC placements frequently extend for months or years, with compounding human, social and economic costs.

The economic implication is clear:

Early, functional safety interventions can prevent far greater downstream costs while achieving better outcomes for children and families.

10. Practitioner and Caseworker Evidence

Frontline practitioner feedback consistently confirms the operational value of the Shield.

Caseworkers reported that it:

- Provided an immediate and tangible safety mechanism
- Enabled more meaningful, real-world safety planning
- Reduced escalation and crisis responses
- Created shared responsibility and accountability
- Reduced practitioner anxiety by offering an alternative to removal

Practitioners described the Shield as:

“One of the most effective tools I’ve used.”
“A game changer.”

This feedback demonstrates that functional safety mechanisms support better professional decision-making, not just better family outcomes.

11. Alignment with Commission of Inquiry Themes

This submission aligns directly with the Inquiry’s focus on:

- Reducing unnecessary removals
- Improving DFV responses
- Addressing ATSI over-representation
- Strengthening family preservation
- Moving from compliance-based safety to functional safety

12. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Commission consider:

1. Formal recognition of functional, non-statutory safety mechanisms as valid alternatives to removal
2. Mandatory consideration of practical safety options prior to removal where a protective parent is present
3. Funded support and partnership to embed community-embedded safety models in high-removal, regional and rural regions
4. Clear referral pathways between Child Safety and prevention-focused organisations
5. Evaluation frameworks measuring reductions in removals, safety outcomes and cultural connection

13. Conclusion

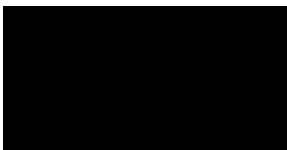
The evidence before this Commission demonstrates that Queensland's child protection system too often responds to domestic and family violence by removing children, not because it is the best option, but because it is the only option operationalised within current practice settings.

Functional, community-embedded safety mechanisms already exist. They are funded, trusted and working across Australia.

The question for this Inquiry is not whether alternatives are possible, but why they have not been adopted.

By shifting safety from the form to the function, Queensland can reduce unnecessary removals, support protective parents, and keep children safe, connected and supported.

Thank you for your attention.



Chris Boyle
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StandbyU Foundation



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StandbyU Shield Connected Community Case Study – June 2023



Desert Blue Connect (DBC) is a health and wellness service located in Geraldton, WA. It is the northern most city in Western Australia and has large population of Aboriginal families, many residing in rural and remote locations. Providing services for these communities is a challenge, with Aboriginal people in Geraldton facing poorer health outcomes than non-Aboriginal people in Geraldton.

DBC had been engaged with the Cindy* (30) for several years and was provided a StandbyU Shield in November 2022. At this time, Cindy user was seven months pregnant with her fifth child, who was at risk of being taken into care at birth due to ongoing concerns regarding family and domestic violence (FDV). Cindy's four other children were removed from her care in 2019 due to their exposure to FDV.

Cindy was in a new relationship that was considered very high risk and unsafe. There had been many incidents reported through the Family Domestic Violence Response Team at Geraldton Police and the Department of Communities (Child Protection) identified their concerns for the unborn child. Cindy was currently involved with Child Protection as she worked towards reunification with her other children. This process was not progressing due to the complexity of the situation and Cindy's unwillingness to engage with the Department due to mistrust of system responses and her children being taken.

DBC engaged with Cindy and was able to establish a trusting professional relationship. DBC identified key areas of support, providing her with a clear pathway forward. Cindy had identified to DBC that she had felt she had no control over anything in her life previously and felt that her life was dictated to her by government agencies. DBC worked intensely with Cindy and implemented strategies to assist her in maintaining a sense of safety. DBC advocated to have more culturally appropriate and safe services involved, as an Aboriginal woman, Cindy identified a difficult history with system supports.

DBC was able to identify that the StandbyU Shield could assist Cindy to keep her and her children safe. Previously, she would contact police when she felt unsafe, which ultimately had an adverse effect, as police regularly attended Cindy's home and shared this information with the Department of Communities. This fear of her children being removed impacted on her willingness to engage with services, authorities or call police for help.

When providing the Shield to Cindy, it was discussed that the idea behind its use is to act before things escalate so that family and friends can assist to defuse, disrupt, and de-escalate a situation before it becomes volatile. Cindy willingly accepted the offer of the StandbyU Shield and it became part of her everyday life and safety. Cindy carried this on her person within her home and out in community. The Department of Communities were supportive of DBC providing the Shield to Cindy and were encouraged that this would benefit her and her family to keep herself and her newborn daughter safe.

Over the days that followed, Cindy was in the position where she felt unsafe and at risk. She activated the Shield and her family responded appropriately to intervene and address the issue before it became an incident. This eliminated the need for police involvement and further repercussions.

Follow up from DBC with Cindy identified that she felt a sense of control over her life which she had not felt in the past. Cindy stated that she was able to activate the Shield without the fear of her baby being taken from her.

Outcomes

Cindy continues to carry the Shield on her person daily and her daughter, now seven months old, remains in her care. User's reunification process with her four older children is progressing. DBC views the StandbyU Shield as a key part of a holistic safety plan that has empowered Cindy to be active in reunification, enabling her to seek stable accommodation, healthier relationships, achieve some financial stability and engage in trauma counselling. Cindy and her family have identified that her trajectory has been permanently altered with the inclusion of the Shield in her life.

*De-identified names



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MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE STANDBYU SHIELD GOVERNMENT TRIAL

November 2020



BACKGROUND

In 2019, StandbyU Foundation received a grant from the Commonwealth Government Department of Social Services to trial 100 digital safety watches (referred to as StandbyU Shields) with women experiencing high to low risk family and domestic violence. The trial forms part of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children and took place over 12 months.

The StandbyU Shield creates a secret and secure way for people at risk to stay connected to their friends, family, case workers and police. A simple click of a button on the smartwatch activates an alert, allowing the chosen support network to listen in, locate the person at risk and organise help, whilst also recording what's taking place, so that it can be used as evidence against the perpetrator.

MAJOR FINDINGS

01. The StandbyU Shield increased the family's safety
02. Emotional wellbeing and mental health improved
03. Women and children were able to enjoy more freedom
04. Support services were more collaborative and effective
05. Recorded evidence increased confidence to speak up
06. Perpetrator behaviour was exposed and changed
07. Connection between people in the community increased
08. 400 community bystanders became first responders
09. Wearable technology enabled a safe, timely response
10. Only 1 out of 100 participants required police assistance



01.

THE STANDBYU SHIELD INCREASED THE FAMILY'S SAFETY

Safety is both physical and psychological. Feeling unsafe can be as damaging to our long-term health as being physically harmed by someone, and so it is important that solutions address both issues.

As a case worker on the trial explained, "For lots of them, they actually have achieved physical safety but they don't feel safe and it can sometimes take years and years for that feeling of safety to catch up with actual safety."

93% of participants agreed having the safety watch significantly increased their safety.

By putting control in their hands, it enabled women to feel less anxious about the unseen threat of abuse - and finally feel safe.



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It makes me feel safer and less anxious, because I know that if I press the button then somebody can hear what is happening or can see where my last location is, so I feel less anxious because I know that somebody will send help.

”



02.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH IMPROVED

Building a support network around the person in need helped them not only feel safer, but also more connected to people who care, creating new or strengthened positive relationships.

Feeling believed, safe and supported gave them increased peace of mind, helped them feel less isolated and created confidence to share their experiences with the people in their support group.

"My family has come in like a strong support for me. Now they understand what we have gone through... I feel emotionally safer."



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Having the StandbyU Shield has given me lots more strength... It gives me a little bit more strength to say I am safe, I am leaving, I am getting out of here.

”



03.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN WERE ABLE TO ENJOY MORE FREEDOM

The wearable and hidden nature of the safety device and women's confidence in the timeliness of the response to an alert meant they had increased confidence to participate in the community.

For some women this meant letting their children play outside again, whilst others were able to do simple activities like grocery shopping or attend social events in the community.

"It just gives me my freedom back to freely choose what I want to do, where I want to go."

This freedom and autonomy is a key part of long-term recovery from abuse, social participation and personal wellbeing.



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My 8-year-old has learnt to swim,
ride a bike, she [is] not scared,
[and is] eating food now... she is
happier... It has given us more
freedom, and it has given us
more safety out.

”



04. SUPPORT SERVICES WERE MORE COLLABORATIVE AND EFFECTIVE

The process of helping people reach out to friends and family, share their worries and ask for support, also changed the relationship between the case worker and person in need. They reported a more collaborative experience and increase in engagement from the impacted families.

"When family or women are given something which they can hold and use instantly, it actually makes people feel listened to."

There was also greater collaboration reported with other support services, as the planning process revolved more fully around the impacted family and StandbyU Shield.



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DV impacts the whole family and that's why I believe it makes real sense within a family support services. That is, the perspectives of all family members are considered, their needs and worries, goals and hopes and dreams are considered. That's really unique within a family support space not just DV space.

”



05. RECORDED EVIDENCE INCREASED CONFIDENCE TO SPEAK UP

Domestic abuse is often hidden, with a key tactic of the perpetrator being an apparently calm and charming public face. This can leave the person being abused feeling concerned that they won't be believed if they do reach out for help.

"He even said to me in the past [when] I am going to call the police, he says 'go ahead and no one will listen to you, they are not going to believe you'."

With the smart watch's discreet recording function, women and children reported feeling more confident to share their experiences with others. It also gave them the evidence to take further legal action if they chose to pursue it.



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I think it is a very good idea because from my experience of DV, a lot of the time women believe if they have the evidence of recording what happens to them then they know they will be believed.

”



06. PERPETRATOR BEHAVIOUR WAS EXPOSED AND CHANGED

The trial also found that the ability to record and expose the abuser's behaviour caused them to reconsider their actions and helped prevent escalations.

"He was really hurting him... And once [he] realised that I had pushed that button, he pretty well stopped what he was doing."

When the abuse is hidden in nature, exposure to the social group can be enough to stop the behaviour, whilst in some cases, the intervention to de-escalate the situation was actually 'covert' with the first responder calling or turning up in a timely way.



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He can't behave the way he has been before. He is going to have to find different ways to manage his own behaviour.

”



07.

CONNECTION BETWEEN PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY INCREASED

The feeling of social isolation often remains long after the person at risk has 'escaped' the abuser. By creating a secure and safe way for others to support them, women felt more confident to connect, and share their story with, friends and family.

“It helped connect with people. I have met the neighbours, they are lovely people and they are hopefully coming for Christmas as well.”

This feeling of connection within the community is important for long-term mental health and recovery, as well as safety.



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I definitely feel that it has made us all closer because it has made us talk about [it] and work out what is going to happen.

”



08.

400 COMMUNITY BYSTANDERS BECAME FIRST RESPONDERS

The strength of the solution lies in the commitment - the promise - the support network makes to the person at risk to be there for them when they need it. To ensure safety, responders received training on how to provide the assistance needed, whether it be reassurance, intervention or escalation to emergency services.

“For her, it is her personal safety, and for me that peace of mind that I know she could contact me if she needs.”

The solution empowered friends and family to provide practical help, knowing that they and their loved one would be safe.



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My mum hears and she just comes in. She turns up and you know it stops him. As soon as somebody else turns up he can't keep going on doing what he has been doing, because there is a witness.

”



09.

WEARABLE TECHNOLOGY ENABLED A SAFE, TIMELY RESPONSE

Technology has received a lot of negative attention as an aide for abuse, enabling perpetrators to track and intimidate their victims.

The StandbyU Shield is different. It creates a secure network that the abuser cannot access, shielding the individual and their supporters from harm and giving them a safe way to stay in touch.

"They were really concerned especially with this impending move of my ex-partner and now it is like 'you have got a watch dog on your wrist and we can be there within minutes'."



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The watch has a normal look.
My ex-partner thinks it is a
Fitbit type, he did not pay any
attention, he's got something
similar and thinks I have got
one of those.

”



10. ONLY 1 OUT OF 100 PARTICIPANTS REQUIRED POLICE ASSISTANCE

It is hard to predict how an abusive person will act, which is why it is important those at risk can connect with people who can help. The trial showed that this does not always need to be the police. Friends and family can de-escalate many situations, and provide reassurance.

"Having the watch means I can just press the alarm and other people can get in contact with the police for me, so this is very reassuring. I feel a lot more secure having the watch now."

By making friends and family first responders, emergency services are freed up to look after more serious community issues, responding only when they are needed and can make a real difference.

ABOUT STANDBYU FOUNDATION

The StandbyU Foundation is a charity with a simple mission: to embrace the power of human connections to build a better, safer world for everyone.

The charity works with people impacted by domestic abuse and has connected over 5,000 people so far, changing the lives of 550 families across Australia.

Chris Boyle set up the Foundation in 2018 after working as a social worker in the child protection and family support sector for over 25 years. His experience within the sector inspired him to find a better, more connected way to support people in need.



“

The Solution is the Family Institution and they just need the tools, plan and permission to act, which is what our charity provides through our StandbyU Shield.

”

The StandbyU Shield



The StandbyU Shield is more than a personal safety alarm. It's been designed to connect you to your support network, wherever you are, 24 hours a day.

We understand the impacts of abuse or violence, whether you're still in that relationship or if you've left. The Shield gives you a simple and secure way to connect to your chosen responders by simply pressing a button.

How it Works



Step 1

When you're feeling worried or need help, press the SOS button on either your Shield Pendant or Watch.

Step 2

The device will call your responders with live audio from the device and its GPS location.



Step 3

You responders can talk to each other in a virtual conference room and assess the audio from the device.

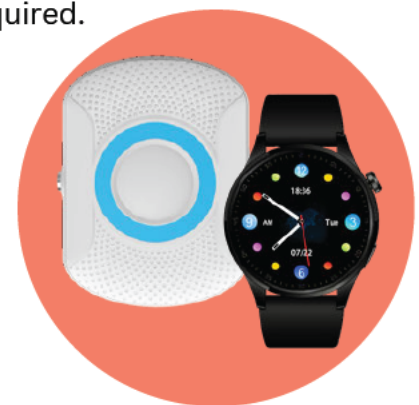
Step 4

Your support network will activate your safety plan, which may include calling or visiting you or contacting emergency services to attend.



Features and Benefits

- Choice of Watch or Pendant device.
- Lightweight and easy to use SOS button.
- One way audio for safety.
- Safety Plan created with you for your individual situation and safety concerns.
- Choose up to 5 people for your support network of responders.
- Enables you to get support when you're worried - before a situation becomes an emergency.
- Option for in-call escalation to emergency services by your responders.
- Realtime GPS location updates sent from the device every 5 minutes.
- 4G mobile network connectivity.
- No setup required.



Contact Us

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