



**Royal Commission**  
into Family Violence

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF KELLIE NAREEN NAGLE**

I, Kellie Nareen Nagle, Policy Adviser, of Level 12, 60 Collins Street, Melbourne in the State of Victoria, say as follows:

- 1 I am authorised by the Municipal Association of Victoria to make this statement on its behalf.
- 2 I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.
- 3 The Municipal Association of Victoria (**MAV**) made a submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. I refer to and adopt that submission. Attached to this statement and marked **KN-1** is a copy of MAV's submission dated May 2015.

**Municipal Association of Victoria**

- 4 MAV is the peak body for Victoria's 79 councils. MAV was formed in 1879 and was later incorporated pursuant to the *Municipal Association Act 1907 (Vic)* (**Act**). The Act defines MAV's purpose, sets out how it operates and empowers its members to make rules to further clarify its role and processes.
- 5 MAV is governed by the State Council, which is made up of nominated representatives from each member council. That body meets at least twice a year and determines the broad strategic direction of MAV. MAV also has a Board which is elected every two years. The Board comprises 12 councillors, each of whom are elected by their respective regions, and a President. The President of the Board is elected by all members.
- 6 MAV's role is to advocate for local government interests and promote the role of local government, build the capacity of councils, facilitate effective networks and initiate policy development and advice. MAV also offers its member councils legal advice, insurance, governance support, CEO performance appraisal, recruitment advice and acts as a procurement agent.

## Background and qualifications

- 7 Prior to my current role with MAV, I worked for many years on public housing estates and in the homelessness sector. Over a fifteen year period I worked as a housing information and referral worker, as well as performed a number of community development project roles working directly with public housing residents. This included managing a community information and drop-in centre on a high-rise estate from 2002 to 2007, which included working closely with the Neighbourhood Renewal Program during this time.
- 8 In approximately February 2007, I started working for Darebin City Council in the role of Family Violence Project Co-ordinator. This role was funded through Helen McPherson Smith Trust for a two year period from 2007 to 2009, to explore the role of local government in the service system reform process and local prevention activities. As part of this project I developed the Northern Region Family Violence Help Cards, distributing 60,000 Help Cards for men (a first for Australia) and 60,000 Help Cards for women, funded through contributions from all seven northern Councils and 13 community agencies. I also led the process for re-establishing local family violence networks that had waned in the period following the introduction of reforms to the service system (in 2006). Partnerships involved in the project were extensive and positioned Darebin City Council as a key player in building collaborative relationships across Melbourne's north to prevent violence against women.
- 9 Also in 2007, VicHealth provided funding to 29 projects across Victoria with the aim of supporting initiatives to engage a range of community groups, organisations and partnerships to undertake activities that aimed to prevent violence against women. Darebin City Council was among a number of councils that received a grant of \$30,000 through this program to work with the Darebin Interfaith Council. I assisted with this capacity building project, working with faith leaders to develop a shared declaration against family violence. In 2008, VicHealth funded five of the 29 projects for a further three years, and Darebin City Council was again successful with our submission. This scaled-up project, launched on White Ribbon Day 2008, extended the catchment of working with faith communities across the Northern Region. It aimed to build faith leaders' understanding of family violence, and their capacity to engage in primary prevention through promoting norms of gender equality and non-violence.
- 10 In 2009 I put forward a budget bid to the Darebin City Council to fund a new initiative for a part time, twelve month Preventing Violence Against Women Officer

position. This new initiative was approved and the role involved engaging diverse areas of council and building capacity for prevention of violence against women activity to be undertaken. The position was re-funded in subsequent years and became the first council in Victoria (and possibly Australia) to fund a permanent full time Preventing Violence Against Women Officer position in 2014. I managed this newly created role from its inception in 2009 until I left Darebin City Council in October 2011.

- 11 In May 2009, Darebin City Council was successful in applying for capacity building partnership grant as part of a pilot program run by VicHealth in partnership with Darebin City Council. I began working in this role with councils across Victoria to develop initiatives to prevent violence against women, including developing resources, training programs and networking opportunities. This project involved a high-level steering committee, including representation from MAV. As part of the project, a statewide local government and community leaders preventing violence against women conference was held in 2010. It was at this event the State Government announced two years funding for a preventing violence against women role at MAV.

#### **Current role**

- 12 This led to the establishment of my current position of Policy Adviser, Preventing Violence Against Women at MAV in 2011. I commenced working in this role in October 2011. This role has been funded by successive state governments since 2011.
- 13 This role sits within the Social Policy team. I report to Clare Hargreaves, Manager, Social Policy of MAV. Clare's role is funded directly by MAV. Every other role in the Social Policy team is funded on an ad hoc basis through grants from varying state government departments. My role is currently funded by the Department of Justice and Regulation from 2014 to 2016, who stepped in when funding from the then Office of Women's Affairs ended in June 2014.
- 14 In this role, I work within MAV and with local councils towards the prevention of violence against women and promotion of gender equity more broadly.
- 15 My role is to support councils and the work they do in their communities by disseminating resources and tools and providing forums for discussion and networking. I seek to engage councils by helping them access the best information and adapt models that have been successful elsewhere, as well as take action across diverse program areas and through their civic leadership roles.

- 16 I have an Associate Diploma in Social Science, Community Development from Swinburne University of Technology.

### **MAV initiatives**

- 17 When I commenced as the MAV Policy Adviser for Preventing Violence Against Women in 2011, it was still somewhat unclear among the local government sector as to what role local government could play in preventing violence against women. Since that time, I think it has become well-accepted that local government can play a huge role in this space and make a significant contribution.
- 18 I think the change in thinking was partly due to timing; in 2002, Christine Nixon created the State-Wide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence (**State-Wide Steering Committee**). The Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence was introduced in 2004. In 2005, the State-Wide Steering Committee report, 'Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria' was published. The VicHealth 'Preventing Violence Before it Occurs' framework and background paper was released at the end of 2007. As a result of these, and other initiatives, by the time I commenced in this role in 2011, the issue of family violence was starting to become forefront of the public consciousness.
- 19 MAV applied my expertise to working with the councillors to educate them on the prevalence and devastating impacts of violence against women, including family violence. In 2012, MAV released a Prevention of Violence Against Women Leadership Statement, which committed MAV to take action and support the promotion of gender equity and development of violence prevention strategies and initiatives. The MAV President is championing this work and is a White Ribbon Ambassador. Now attached to this statement and marked **KN-2** is a copy of the Prevention of Violence Against Women Leadership Statement.
- 20 In 2013, MAV received some funding from VicHealth which allowed us to produce a booklet titled, 'Prevention of Violence Against Women: Leading change in the Victorian local government sector'. Now attached to this statement and marked **KN-3** is a copy of the 'Prevention of Violence Against Women: Leading change in the Victorian local government sector' booklet.
- 21 MAV has also introduced a series of 12 preventing violence against women information sheets to assist councils with their work in this area. This series of information sheets continues to be expanded to include diverse areas of council business. Now attached to this statement and marked **KN-4** is a copy of the MAV information sheets.

- 22 The education of our councillors, through resources such as these, was significant in creating change and increasing the focus on family violence issues. I found that bringing councillors face to face with the evidence and statistics, in a concrete way, was really powerful in demonstrating how family violence lines up with health risks in their own municipality, and how working to prevent family violence should be core business of council. The councillors, overall, began to understand that not only is it the right thing to do, but it makes good business sense in that it directly benefits the health outcomes and benefits the communities of their respective municipalities. To my view, a dollar invested in gender equity and preventing violence against women is a dollar invested in health, children, nutrition, employment – the list goes on.

### **Role of local government in preventing violence against women**

- 23 Local government has an extremely important role to play in preventing family violence. Councils are on the frontline of whole-of-life service delivery – from maternal and child health through to aged care. It is also responsible for designing the community's public buildings and spaces. This allows the local government sector to show leadership for behavioural change in attitudes towards women and makes the role of councils vital in preventing violence against women.
- 24 This manifests in several ways. First, through a council's own policies and actions as an employer. Another way is through how it provides services to its municipality. A third is through sending a message to the community. Local government has such extensive reach in the community that it is uniquely positioned to address issues such as family violence in a whole range of ways.

### ***Policies as an employer***

- 25 Local government is a significant employer, with approximately 42,500 employees across 79 councils in Victoria. Councils therefore have a significant role to play in ensuring they support their employees experiencing family violence and deal appropriately with family violence issues in their workplaces.
- 26 Victorian councils are leading the world in terms of family violence leave policies in the workplace. Surf Coast Shire was the first organisation in the world in 2010 to introduce a family violence leave clause into their Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (**EBA**) providing for 20 days' special leave each year to deal with family violence related issues. As of September 2014, at least 60 of the 79 Victorian councils have family violence leave provisions included in their EBAs.

- 27 Another council has introduced Family Violence Contact Officers. These are employees specifically trained by the council in family violence issues who are intended to act as a contact point for anyone in the workplace experience family violence. A Family Violence Contact Officer will let the employee know about the family violence policy, their leave entitlements and external supports available. With the employee's permission, a Contact Officer will confidentially arrange for appropriate support and development of a safety plan with the local family violence specialist service. With permission, a Contact Officer can act as a conduit between the employee and their manager. If the employee does not want their Manager aware, the Contact Officer will advise the Manager of Human Resources so that appropriate leave and any other appropriate steps are taken.
- 28 One aspect of my role is to encourage conversation about family violence. Initiatives such as the Family Violence Contact Officers are useful not just in and of themselves but also because they encourage employees to talk about the issues and in that way indirectly assist with raising awareness about the issue.

***Provision of services to its municipality***

- 29 As I stated above, councils provide a vast array of services and programs to the community, including, for example; immunisations, public libraries, street lighting, community centres, arts and cultural programs, employment and training programs, recreation facilities, animal management, festivals and events and aged care services.
- 30 Through the provision of services, councils can play a role in the identification of family violence in the first instance. It can then offer support to people affected by family violence.
- 31 A tragic example of how local government can assist in preventing family violence across the entire spectrum of its services occurred several years ago, in around 2011. This incident involved a Local Laws officer in one of the municipalities.
- 32 One of the aspects of a Local Laws officer's role is to seize or remove dogs, in particular circumstances. In this example, two Local Laws officers attended at a household to seize a dog who had been involved in an attack. The woman who lived at the house, who was six months pregnant at the time, became distraught and begged them not to take the dog, saying that her husband would blame her if he returned home and the dog was not there. The officers took the dog anyway, because that was their job and were required to do so. When the woman's

husband returned home, he beat her so badly that she lost the baby and was required to spend several months in hospital.

- 33 We know that there is a strong correlation between animal abuse and family violence. Given their job in responding to issues associated with animals, Local Laws officers might be the first people to notice signs that family violence is occurring. In this example, had the Local Laws officer been aware at the time of the prevalence and seriousness of family violence and the issues associated with it, including the increased risk pregnancy can play, they would have acted differently.
- 34 The council has subsequently implemented a simple change to the operating procedure whereby if this sort of issue arises, the Local Laws officer will ask the woman when her partner is going to get home. The officer will return when her partner is home and remove the dog then, so the woman cannot be blamed for the dog having been taken away.
- 35 I now work with Regional Family Violence Integration Coordinators to facilitate access for Local Laws officers to undertake Identifying Family Violence training through the Common Risk Assessment Framework (**CRAF**) so that they can identify risk factors associated with family violence and respond consistently and appropriately to people experiencing family violence.
- 36 Increasingly, councils are putting provisions in their Animal Management Plans mechanisms to accommodate pets when women have to leave their home to go to women's refuges.
- 37 The local government universal service accessed by all Victorian families is the Maternal and Child Health service provided by councils or organisations contracted by councils. Under legislation, councils are required to follow-up all birth notifications. The service is accessed by all families with children aged from birth to six years old and includes child health monitoring, maternal health and wellbeing, early identification of health and development concerns, nursing intervention and referral when indicated, health promotion and education and parenting support.
- 38 Like Local Laws officers, the Maternal and Child Health nurses (**MCH Nurses**) are all trained in risk assessment through the CRAF, so that they can identify risk factors and respond consistently and appropriately. When they have appointments with new mothers, the nurses are required to ask particular questions in an attempt to ascertain whether the woman is at any risk of family violence. If a

woman discloses to a nurse that she is experiencing family violence or is at risk of experiencing family violence, the procedure is for the MCH Nurse, in accordance with the *MCH Service Practice Guidelines*, to make a referral to an appropriate family violence agency or develop a safety plan in consultation with the mother. However, access and availability of appropriate family violence services to support families is limited and varies depending on the location. Data is collected for Department of Education and Training on the number of referrals and the number of safety plans completed.

- 39 MAV is working with councils on developing another service in respect of libraries. Libraries provide a safe place for women and children to spend time in when they cannot be at home because of a violent family member. They also offer safe computers for people affected by family violence to use. Libraries could be a place where family violence could be identified at the early stages and assistance offered. MAV is currently producing an information sheet to support library staff to implement a range of strategies. Examples of action include using computer screen-savers and posters to communicate messages of equality and respect; promoting children's picture books that challenge gender stereotypes; producing bookmarks with local family violence service information to be distributed with all library books for the United Nations' 16 Days of Action Against Gender-based Violence campaign; and displaying 1800 RESPECT stickers or other anti-violence slogans on the back of the bathroom doors.
- 40 Another important area of work is in the realm of emergency management. Evidence shows that the incidence of family violence increases post-disaster. Men are more likely to die in floods and bushfires than women and men strongly influence family decisions to stay and defend homes during bushfires, sometimes with tragic results. To positively affect such outcomes, the influence of gender roles and differences must be understood and addressed. MAV has developed a gender and emergency management strategy which aims to reduce the negative consequences of gender-blind practices. Our strategy will help councils improve their understanding of gender differences and incorporate gender considerations into their emergency management policy, planning, decision making and service delivery. As a first step we have developed a gender and emergency management fact sheet designed to raise awareness of how gender and emergency management interact. This fact sheet also provides practical advice to help councils make a positive difference. One council who has worked with MAV in this area over the past twelve months has recently developed and adopted a Preventing Violence Against Women and Emergency Management Action Plan



2015-16 for their municipality – a first for local government in Victoria, and possibly Australia.

- 41 MAV is working with councils to implement services like those discussed above. We then use these examples as a discussion point with other councils and can point to existing models and explain how they work and assist other councils to implement the same or a similar service within their municipality.

***Sending a message to the community***

- 42 When councils are aware of gender equity principles and family violence issues in terms of how they operate internally and how they provide their services, this becomes outwardly influential as well. In addition to carrying out its services within the community in particular ways, councils have the opportunity to encourage and create change within the community through civic leadership. Particular policies or regulations can be imposed which influence broader community practices.
- 43 For example, several years ago the Moreland City Council conducted a review of its sporting grounds and found that the grounds were being utilised by men and boys 92% of the time. As part of a strategy to encourage the participation of certain groups in sports activities in its community, particularly amongst women and girls, the council implemented a policy titled, 'Allocation and Use of Sporting Facilities, Grounds and Pavilions Policy', which essentially imposed a requirement that the sporting clubs who used council grounds had to take steps to increase, among other things, women's and girls' use of the grounds. The policy states that from October 2013, leasing and allocation of council facilities would only occur with clubs that support junior sides and registered sport association development programs and/or girls' and women's sides and/or registered sport association development programs. Now attached to this statement and marked **KN-5** is a copy of the Allocation and Use of Sporting Facilities, Grounds and Pavilions Policy.
- 44 Since October 2013, the Moreland City Council has denied access to one sporting club as a result of its failure to adhere to the policy. The use of the grounds by women and girls increased in the first year after the introduction of the policy from 8% to 15% participation.

**Evidence based philosophy**

- 45 As has been demonstrated throughout the above paragraphs, my philosophy in respect of preventing family violence based on research and evidence is that the

best way to do so is through addressing gender inequality. I believe that family violence cannot be addressed in isolation, but rather, must be targeted through gender equity strategies, to ultimately result in gender equality. This will, as a consequence, lead to a reduction in incidents of family violence.

- 46 I find that trying to encourage councils to address family violence specifically can be more limiting than encouraging councils to consider its decisions through a gender lens and to consider gender equity more broadly. I think that the idea of gender inequality is well known. Women experience it relentlessly and everyone can see gender inequality all around them if they look. So my approach is, in addition to dealing directly with questions of family violence, to try to frame the issues in terms of gender equity. I make it clear to councils that I am not asking the council to implement a range of specialist family violence services but rather, to ensure that they consider the perspective and needs of women and girls, men and boys in making their decisions. In this way, they can lead by example in their own particular sphere of influence through equitable decision-making processes
- 47 An example of a council applying a gender lens to its decision making is when a council is considering its transport strategy. Applying the gender lens, it is a relevant consideration that women use public and private transport differently from men. I would encourage the relevant committee to seek the input of women in creating the transport strategy. Another example occurred recently when a Councillor member of the MAV Arts and Culture Committee outlined the procurement by their council of a new series of public art. I asked them what proportion of the pieces were from women artists. They had not considered the gender question in relation to their choices of art, but through discussion, they realised that even these types of decisions become an important way of exhibiting civic leadership and ensuring women's voices and expression have the opportunity to be seen and heard.
- 48 I see my role as primarily assisting councils to apply a gender equity lens to the work they do and to the provision of all of the services and programs they offer, to ensure that gender equity is considered and equity issues addressed across the board. In this way, I hope that local government will play a significant role in addressing family violence.

### **The importance of leadership**

- 49 In my experience, the most important aspect in creating cultural change is leadership. While it is absolutely essential to have the support from the bottom up,

I find that the standout councils in this area are definitely there because of their leadership.

- 50 Ultimately, I think that there will be good people everywhere who will be the willing foot soldiers in creating change. What makes a difference is having someone higher up the hierarchy endorse the change. In the case of MAV, having our own President champion this cause has made a huge difference.

### **Necessary changes**

- 51 I think councils are doing a great job of starting to apply to gender lens to their decisions, the provision of services, and their role modelling within the community. There are also now a number of specific family violence programs in place. I have no doubt that this will impact on the prevention of violence against women.
- 52 However, the approach across councils is currently ad hoc and inconsistent. Some councils are doing a huge amount of work in this space whereas others are doing very little. It would be invaluable if a Preventing Violence Against Women position existed in every single council in Victoria, with a role at MAV to co-ordinate and act as a liaison for the councils. It would make a huge difference in continuing and improving on the work we are doing.
- 53 It would also be extremely valuable to have access to consistent funding. At the moment, my role is only funded until mid-2016. After that, it is not clear whether the position will exist. This limits, in some ways, the work that I am able to do. I am conscious of commencing projects that may not be able to be completed. It also limits MAV's capacity to evaluate programs.

### **Ongoing role for local government**

- 54 Moving forward, I am really excited about the role of local government in preventing violence against women. There are so many aspects of community life that local government can and does have an impact on. As I always say to my colleagues – I think local government can change the world.



.....  
Kellie Nareen Nagle

Dated: 28 July 2015