

Rotary Club of Maryborough Victoria



Submission to the Royal Commission
into Family Violence Victoria

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Maryborough Rotary's family violence intervention

The Rotary Club of Maryborough is located in the Central Goldfields region of Victoria (population 12,500). It is an organisation committed to addressing community issues and demonstrates its leadership by leveraging its social and business networks to partner with relevant organisations to achieve positive outcomes for the people of its district.

Central Goldfields benefits from strong agricultural industries and a developing tourism sector. Nonetheless, it suffers from disadvantage in economic resources, health, education and jobs.

Victoria Police reports on family violence indicate the region is over represented in the state. This, combined with anecdotal information that incidents may be severely under reported, has been of great concern. Being officially identified as having one of the highest rates of family violence in the state and tagged at the lowest end of the socio-economic scale, has also been highly confronting for Maryborough.

As community and business leaders, Maryborough Rotary is determined to help turn the tide by putting strategies in place to revive the liveability and wellbeing of its town.

SAFE social change program developed

In 2014, Maryborough Rotary developed a blueprint for action called SAFE - an acronym for support, advice, facilitation and early intervention, with the objective of Rotary becoming advocates and ambassadors for spiriting social change within its town and surrounding district.

The model presented a collaborative approach based on the premise that everyone has a responsibility to act and a role to play in addressing family violence. SAFE would provide an umbrella to coordinate community messaging and work with the district's support services and partner organisation networks. Central to the social change model was its communications and marketing strategy.

A high profile campaign was launched in June 2014, heralded by its call to action: Speak Up! #SayNO2familyviolence.

Consultation with government, non-government agencies and the local community, revealed there was a general reluctance to openly discuss family violence.

The key was to get the issue out from behind closed doors and encourage people to talk about their experiences as victims, family, friends and neighbours - as well as offenders - who were also targeted so as to encourage them to seek appropriate help.

In structural terms, SAFE's key functions are:

- Support in the form of information, education and delivery of specified projects.
- Advice especially with regard to communications and raising awareness about family violence.
- Facilitation involving the bridging of stakeholders and assisting comprehension of strategies and priorities.
- Early intervention by identifying and encouraging proactive, collaborative community-based strategies for addressing trigger points leading to family violence.

This model has provided a clear focus on the interventions required for mitigating the issues.

It has also served to encourage community leaders including politicians, public servants, business people, emergency responders, teachers, religious and sporting groups, as well as families and individuals, to voice their intent to take a public stand against family violence.

One year into the SAFE project, the latest statistics for the region indicate an increase in family violence incidents reported to Victoria Police.

Importantly, SAFE has provided a platform for launching targeted communications designed to improve awareness and understanding of family violence, and has created linkages to agencies where help can be found.

It has obtained national media exposure and interest from far afield as India and Rotary is now receiving many enquiries from people interested in adopting the model in their own communities.

And in January 2015, Rotary received the Central Goldfields Shire Australia Day Community Award for its #SayNO2familyviolence campaign.

The amalgam between Maryborough actively taking a public stand against family violence and the national media spotlight on the SAFE model, has negated the notion that the issue is best kept firmly behind closed doors.

Rotary believes this progress is due to its broad representation in the business and community sectors and its ability to interpret family violence from a number of different perspectives, the main points of difference being that:

- SAFE is embedded in its community - fundamental to solving issues at local levels.
- SAFE targeting is aimed at prevention and responses for victims and perpetrators.
- SAFE is owned, operated and funded by Maryborough Rotary.

Maryborough Rotary believes its SAFE social change communication and education project has the potential to help other communities. The Rotary network will enable a collaborative, inclusive approach, to facilitate the sharing of experiences gleaned from the initial phase of the project. The organisation will continue to develop the model to ensure it is pollinated with worthwhile intervention actions. Ever mindful that effective communication around family violence will be a key success factor in addressing the issue, it will also continue to steer localised innovative messaging and SAFE marketing strategies.

Impediments in addressing family violence

Maryborough Rotary has identified several barriers to overcome in its bid to address the issue, ie:

- Concerns from front line providers that, as a consequence of elevated awareness about family violence, they will not be able to meet the increased demand on their services - potentially an issue of over promising and under delivering.
- There remains a lack of confidence in the justice system by many. This contributes to people deciding not to opt in for assistance.
- There are some agencies solely focused on gender issues, female participation and engagement. Family violence is not gender specific and disenfranchising and discouraging male participation in addressing the issue, either by design or funding priorities, will severely limit success in dealing with the problem. While men are clearly and predominantly perpetrators of family violence, they are also key to the remedy.

Recommendations

- That resources are provided to enable the community to improve its understanding of the extent of family violence and its consequent problems, both from a social and economic perspective within specific communities.
- That governments actively support and value local campaigns designed to address social issues and fully utilise local advocates for progressive and positive change.
- That governments recognise the extent of the diversity of victims and perpetrators and target their interventions accordingly.
- That governments and agencies dealing with family violence look at cohesive strategies for addressing the causes of family violence, as much as treating the fall-out. A whole-of-issue analysis would include key triggers such as drug and alcohol abuse, culture, gender, financial pressures and other factors.

1. THE ROTARY CLUB OF MARYBOROUGH VICTORIA

The Rotary Club of Maryborough Victoria (Maryborough Rotary) was established in 1952 and is part of the International Rotary network which comprises some 34,000 clubs and 1.2 million members worldwide. This includes 1400 clubs throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

Service to the community is a leading value. Rotarians believe their diverse viewpoint and approach to challenges, gives them distinct advantages in obtaining credible and worthwhile results for the communities they serve. Their multidisciplinary perspective to problem solving provides the leadership and expertise to deal with social issues and effect outcomes for positive, sustainable change.

Maryborough Rotary is led by its President, Graeme Rogan, along with a nine person Executive. The club is supported by a membership of 48. Its District Governor is Geoff James.

The organisation's business plan has a number of flagship projects currently in train. These include: Aqua Box (water purification for disaster areas) the Lift program (leadership instruction for young leaders) and Project Uplift (a Pacific Nation resources project for the disadvantaged),

There is a growing focus by Maryborough Rotary to contribute to the wellbeing and safety of its community as reflected in their 2012-15 vision statement:

'We would like to be a place where all citizens have community pride and positive self-image; where people are fully employed, there is no vandalism or teenage suicide and little crime; where people are better educated with more local students in the top 10 percent of the state; where gambling has decreased and people have better incomes; where there are no child protection issues or unwanted pregnancies, and where we are regarded as an innovative community, no longer at the bottom of the socio-economic scale.'

2. ABOUT MARYBOROUGH

Maryborough is located in Victoria's Central Goldfields district (estimated population 12,500). Its closest regional cities are Bendigo to the North East and Ballarat to the South East. The smaller communities of Bealiba, Carisbrook, Dunolly, Majorca, Talbot and Bowenvale-Timor make up the outlying districts.

Maryborough is the main business centre. It is famous for its heritage architecture and takes pride in its sporting facilities, agricultural industries and a developing tourism sector.

However, despite improving infrastructure and social improvements, it has one of the state's highest unemployment rates of 11 percent which is around twice the state average of 6.7 per cent ⁽¹⁾ while the socio-economic indexes which look at disadvantage, economic resources, education and occupation, have consistently rated Maryborough among the lowest in the state ⁽²⁾.

1: ComSec State of the States Report January 2015. 2: Source: Australian Government report Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) released March 28, 2013 and Victorian Government 2010 report on Socio-economic index of Advantage/Disadvantage.

3. FAMILY VIOLENCE WITHIN THE REGION

Data from Victoria Police Family Incident Reports (2013-14) indicates that the Central Goldfields district is among the state's leading catchments for family violence offences and is second highest for officially reported incidents.

Given there was sufficient anecdotal information from agencies dealing with family violence that these offences may be significantly under reported, has presented an alarming window into the social degeneration occurring within the district.

4. MARYBOROUGH ROTARY'S INTERVENTION

In 2013, prompted by increasing reports of family violence in the region, Maryborough Rotary was moved into action, based on the premise that remedying the issue was the responsibility of everyone in the community who could help.

Among its first tasks was to link and consult with government and non-government agencies, to become informed about the issues and determine what Maryborough Rotary could do.

It found a significant barrier to successfully tackling family violence was reluctance, and often fear within the community to openly discuss the issue. The broad cross section of rationale for 'silence' as anecdotally collated included:

- Not wanting to make the situation worse.
- A 'what happens in the family, stays in the family' attitude.
- 'It's none of my business' response.
- Concerns about stigmatising the town socially and economically.
- Despair in the system: 'it will come to nothing, just more grief for me'.

There was sufficient information to indicate that for some people, talking about the issue was regarded as taboo. Others, although recognising that family violence was unacceptable and wanted it dealt with, nonetheless preferred the issue not to be overly exposed within their district.

These revelations provided a call to action by Maryborough Rotary. The organisation strongly believed that the lack of open conversation was a key causal factor for the problem remaining prevalent and largely untreated.

As Maryborough Rotary is an organisation which believes in leading by example, one of its first steps was to make a public statement in the form of a White Ribbon oath, pledging to take a stand against family violence and to become strong advocates for its eradication. That experience seeded the motivation to put words into action.

5. THE SAFE PROJECT

At first, Maryborough Rotary believed it could best target its response by solely contributing resources to those agencies actually tackling the issue of family violence. However, Rotary was concerned about the lack of open conversation about it within the general community. Also, while agencies were doing an excellent job in attempting to address the issue, they often had a natural bias to particular stakeholders and targeted their operations accordingly.

Rotary identified a key point of difference in its capabilities and flexibility as an apolitical, non-service provider, made it well placed to take an independent and open approach. It believed its strength lay in its ability to liaise with a diverse set of stakeholders and communicate with all levels of government and community, and that this asset should be leveraged. As a result, it partnered with a consultancy experienced in social change strategy and developed a concept for a social change program.

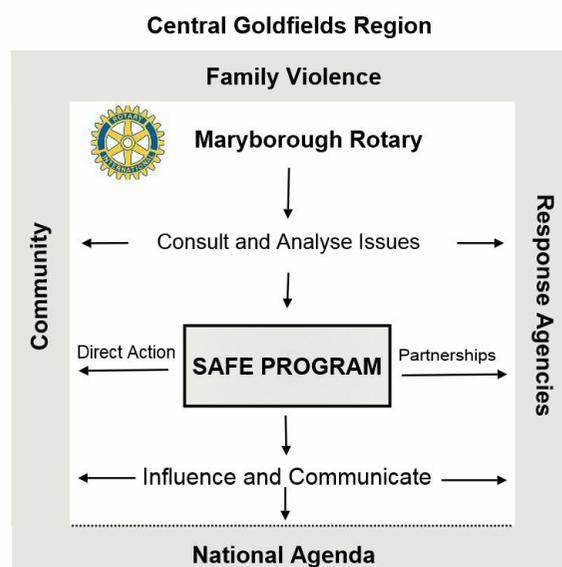
From this, Maryborough Rotary could coordinate its community messaging, as well as provide both a rallying cry and an umbrella for a range of measures sponsored by Maryborough Rotary to assist with reducing family violence and its fall out. This concept resulted in the development of the SAFE model aimed at bringing together the work of the family violence network and supporting the work of its partner organisations.

In structural terms SAFE's key functions are:

- Support (via information, education and delivery of specified projects).
- Advice (provision of expert advice, especially regarding marketing / communications).
- Facilitation (bridging stakeholders and assisting comprehension of strategy and priorities).
- Early intervention (encouraging a proactive, collaborative community-based response).

The SAFE model has provided a clear focus on identifying opportunities for community-based interventions to mitigate family violence. Importantly, it also provides a platform for launching targeted communications designed to provide awareness of the issues and linkages to appropriate agencies where help to deal with the problem can be found.

FIGURE 6.1: SAFE Operational Structure



The SAFE Program currently supports family violence by mitigating its consequences through a number of initiatives.

In practice it works by generating an understanding of the issues leading to family violence from consultation with the community and agencies usually responding to events. Once issues are analysed interventions are developed to mitigate the causes of family violence.

These interventions are either delivered to the community directly via Maryborough Rotary, or supported through community partnerships.

Maryborough Rotary has taken a public stand on family violence and uses its profile to influence positive change to policy and community behaviours by communicating targeted messaging through the media and other innovative channels.

Maryborough Rotary has predicated its response based on five guiding principles:

- Community influencers (such as Rotary) need to lead by example.
- A need to change attitudes and behaviours.
- Responses should be targeted at victims *and* perpetrators.
- Everyone has a responsibility to act to help address family violence.
- Messaging must be targeted to reach males as well as females.

The SAFE model was launched in Maryborough in June 2014 with a high profile communications campaign heralded by the slogan, **Speak Up! #SayNO2familyviolence**. The initiative provided a platform for community leaders including politicians, public servants, business people, emergency responders, teachers, religious and sporting groups, along with the general community, to take a very public stand against family violence.

The SAFE initiative attracted national, state and local media exposure (see Annexe 'A'). Attention was received from as far afield as India. As a result, there is now strong interest from a range of counterparties to contribute to the SAFE model, as well as adopting it for use in other communities.

The amalgam between Maryborough actively taking a public stand against family violence and consequent national media interest, finally put to rest the notion expressed by many, that the issue should be firmly kept behind closed doors.

Maryborough's initiative, along with the efforts of many others, means the necessary conversation is now alive, and has been further buoyed by other recent developments from governments including the establishment of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence and the appointment of family violence victims' advocate, Rosie Batty, as Australian of the Year 2015.

In summary SAFE is:

- A social change project aimed at helping to reduce family violence through the provision of Support, Advice, Facilitation and Early intervention strategies.
- Uses communication as a key tool to influence changes in attitudes and behaviour relating to family violence, by encouraging open and constructive communication and action.
- Works with other groups with the aim of building a cohesive, inclusive approach to tackling family violence.

In its first year of implementation SAFE is now a developing hub for a diversity of programs and activities. An overview is provided at the Annexe 'B'.

6. SAFE PROJECT'S FUTURE STRATEGY

Since the launch of its SAFE program and #SayNO2familyviolence campaign, Maryborough Rotary has rolled out a range of social change and education programs involving workplaces, sporting groups, schools and the general community, with the aim of getting people talking and taking positive action.

Maryborough Rotary believes its early success is due to its organisation having a broad church of representation with the business and community sectors and is, therefore, able to approach family violence from a number of different perspectives. The main points of difference are that:

- SAFE is embedded in its community - fundamental to solving issues at local levels.
- SAFE's targeting is aimed at prevention and responses for victims *and* perpetrators.
- SAFE is owned, operated and funded by Maryborough Rotary.

Although SAFE is still a fledgling project, early indications are that it is taking effect. A more structured business strategy is now planned to appropriately resource and fund future operations.

Maryborough Rotary believes that the SAFE social change communication and education project has the potential to help other communities with similar social issues. The Rotary network will enable a collaborative, inclusive approach and facilitate the sharing of experiences gleaned through the initial phase of the project.

The model will be further developed to ensure it is pollinated with worthwhile intervention programs. Ever mindful that effective communication around family violence will be a key success factor in dealing with the issue, it will also continue to steer localised innovative messaging and marketing strategies.

In recognising that all of its projects should be performance based it is intended to develop metrics to assist with that evaluation.

7. IMPEDIMENTS IN ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Maryborough Rotary's recent experience in dealing with the family violence issue has meant it has consulted a number of front line government and non-government agencies. The organisation has also fielded a large number of media requests for information and has provided on-the-ground insights to better inform public debate.

From that exposure, Maryborough Rotary believes there are several barriers to overcome in seeking to address the issue. This includes:

- Concerns from front line service providers that by creating awareness about family violence and encouraging participation that these providers may not be able to meet demand. Potentially a question of over promising and under delivering.
- There remains a lack of confidence in the justice system by many who are affected by family violence. This lack of trust contributes to people deciding against opting in for assistance.
- There are some agencies solely focused on female participation and engagement. Family violence is not gender specific and disenfranchising or discouraging male inclusion, either by design or funding strategies, will limit the success in dealing with the problem. While men are clearly and predominantly the perpetrators of family violence, they must therefore also be part of solving the problem.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That resources are provided to enable the community to improve its understanding of the extent of family violence and its related problems, both from a social and economic perspective, within specific communities.
2. That governments appropriately support and value local campaigns designed to address social issues and fully utilise local advocates for change.
3. That governments recognise the extent of diversity of victims and perpetrators of family violence and target interventions accordingly.
4. That governments and agencies dealing with family violence look at cohesive strategies for addressing the causes of family violence as much as treating the fall-out. A whole of issue analysis would include key triggers such as drug and alcohol abuse, culture, gender, financial pressures and other factors.

ANNEXE 'A'
SAFE MEDIA EXAMPLES

SAFE MEDIA EXAMPLES

The Safe launch, in June 2014 attracted national media coverage.

Examples depicted are courtesy of ABC Radio National and Fairfax Media: *Bendigo Advertiser* and *The Age*.



ANNEXE 'B'
SAFE PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Project	Overview	Rotary's role
Rotary Vocational Service Pride of Workmanship Awards: Family Violence Prevention and Management Scholarship.	Vocational scholarships to benchmark best practice in family violence projects operating in overseas communities.	Funding of overseas travel.
Speak Up! #SayNO2familyviolence communications campaign.	Maryborough Rotary's call to action and a prompt to encourage victims / perpetrators to get help. The hashtag is designed as a key message and a communication tool. Other marketing materials also convey messages to the broader community.	Funding of promotional materials, launch and communications agency; supported by provision of advice and referral from national telephone help lines.
Wallet help cards – information and advice.	Production of wallet cards with information and advice about where to go for help in the Maryborough region.	Funding and dissemination of cards.
<i>What Would You Do?</i> Campaign.	Community information and education via local media.	Via Rotary members' program on community radio, supported by local newspaper and wallet cards.
<i>Let's Drive It Home</i> mobile messaging campaign for #SayNO2familyviolence campaign.	Message campaign with calls to action using local transport company truck signage.	Rotary membership sponsored, eg, Central Victorian Transport is owned by a Rotary member.
Rotary International SAFE Project.	Development of model for adoption by other Rotary Clubs and community organisations in Australia and possibly globally.	Facilitation for promoting the SAFE model to other clubs.
Sporting clubs.	Channeling of SAFE messages to key target groups, ie, young males. Players help reinforce the message by wearing white, 'no violence' arm bands. There is also a 'Say No' trophy round.	Rotary members work directly with football, netball and basketball clubs in the district.
Men's Behavioural Change Program.	Rotary provided funding for a police officer to attend Graduate Certification in Social Science: Male Family Violence course providing Maryborough police with specialised skills for dealing with men involved in family violence.	Funding for training Collaborative publicity with Victoria Police.
Loddon Mallee Women's Health Bystander Project.	On site workplace education and policy development project.	Run through the cooperation of businesses owned by Rotary members where this program has been invited to operate. Media support via Rotary.