



Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria)

Introduction

Moonee Valley City Council (Council) welcomes the establishment of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Moonee Valley is an inner urban municipality, comprised of 15 suburbs between 4 and 13 kilometres of the Melbourne CBD. Moonee Valley includes an estimated population of 118,000 people living in 47,000 households. The municipality includes residents from diverse backgrounds, with almost a quarter of residents from non-English speaking backgrounds. Levels of socio-economic advantage or disadvantage experienced by residents vary significantly across the municipality.

The Victorian Crime Statistics Agency reported a rate of 804 incidents of family violence per 100,000 of population for Moonee Valley in 2014, almost 45% higher than the figure reported for 2010.

Council recognises the seriousness of family violence, and action to address this is embedded in both the policy and operation of Council; from our Council Plan, which includes and objective to build a community where people feel safe in both public and private spaces, to the operations of our family and community services.

There is a vital role and opportunity for local government to address this issue, both locally and in regional partnerships. This includes working collaboratively to support victims and taking strategic action to influence the known determinants of family violence.

We look forward to the recommendations of this enquiry along with opportunities that it will bring to inform and guide the work undertaken in Moonee Valley to reduce violence, support victims and make our community safer.

Response to Royal Commission

The Moonee Valley City Council submission addresses the following questions identified in the Royal Commission Issues Paper released 31 March 2015:

Q1 Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?

Q4. If you or your organisation have been involved in observing or assessing programs, campaigns or initiatives of this kind, we are interested in your conclusions about their effectiveness in reducing and preventing family violence

Q5. If you or your organisation have been involved in programs, campaigns or initiatives about family violence for the general community, tell us what these involved and how they have been evaluated.

Q6. What circumstances, conditions, situations or events, within relationships, families, institutions and whole communities, are associated with the occurrence or persistence of family violence?

Q7. What circumstances and conditions are associated with the reduced occurrence of family violence?

Q1. Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?

In addition to the goals that have been identified on page 2 of the Issues paper, a goal that is implied, but not explicit, is to encourage community based interventions that address this issue. This goal could be achieved by building the capacity of the community to take leadership in the prevention of family violence.

While family violence plays out in community settings it's also true that solutions and opportunities for action can be community based and driven. Council holds the view that, as in many health and wellbeing issues, a community development approach can be key to a long term and sustained change in family violence.

Moonee Valley City Council has resourced targeted family violence programs. One of these, **360 Turn Around**, utilises a community development approach to the issue of family violence in the predominantly CALD communities within the Flemington Housing Estate.

What is known about this environment is that some community members have an embedded reluctance to turn to Police or authorities to deal with issues like family violence. However, in many instances family violence incidents in these settings will be brought to the attention of community leaders.

The role of local community leaders at Flemington presents an opportunity where a community development approach might occur. Building leadership capacity and strengthening the knowledge and support can improve the consistency and quality of advice provided and steer victims and perpetrators into other programs of support and behaviour change. Working with CALD community leaders as important supports and advocates can instil change at community level and build trust to work with Police and local authorities over time.

With an identified role for community, backed with the capacity building and knowledge that will empower and activate local leadership, behaviour change and support, our neighbourhoods can be environments for sustained change.

Recommendation

Council recommends that the Commission adds a goal to increase the role that the community can take in addressing family violence. Recognising the community as an important partner in responding to this issue and identifying community development based programs that equip and empower people to be active in local solutions is an area of opportunity for the Commission.

Q4. If you or your organisation have been involved in observing or assessing programs, campaigns or initiatives of this kind, we are interested in your conclusions about their effectiveness in reducing and preventing family violence

Q5. If you or your organisation have been involved in programs, campaigns or initiatives about family violence for the general community, tell us what these involved and how they have been evaluated.

Council participates in a number of programs and partnerships and undertakes a range of actions to raise awareness and oppose family violence. A selection of these are identified in **Appendix 1** *list of Council activities and partnerships to prevent violence against women*.

A key activity led by Council is the **360 Turn Around** Project. This is a family violence project undertaken in the Flemington Housing Estate and specifically targeted at the area's CALD community with particular focus on Horn of Africa/East African communities. This project provides insight to the complexities and necessary strategies required to address family violence in newly arrived and CALD communities. The project's objectives include

- Delivering a culturally appropriate project with tailored elements for men, women and young people
- Opening up conversations about a sensitive issue and increasing local knowledge about both the issue and support services
- Providing gender equity training for residents
- Identifying and supporting community leadership and community based activity
- Steering and oversight by a group that includes Council, plus representatives from Department of Health & Human Services, Victoria Police, and local health and legal service
- Robust evaluation

The project has highlighted the complexity of tackling sensitive issues in CALD communities, the need to build trust and to work with well-respected and connected individuals who are active in their communities and who indicate a specific interest in the subject matter. The project uses a community development approach, thus vitally involving people in projects that play out in their own community.

Building and maintaining community engagement is central to the delivery of the program, as is the need for project funding to be longer term (minimum 3-4 years) to facilitate the process and monitor impacts.

An independent evaluation of 360 Turn Around is currently being finalised and due for completion in mid-June 2015 (evaluation framework provided at **Appendix 2**). Council will supply the 360 Turn Around Evaluation Report for the consideration of the Commission when it becomes available and facilitate connection between the Commission and the Community Engagement Workers involved in the project if requested.

Recommendation

Council recommends that the Commission notes the need for long term investment in programs to facilitate genuine community engagement and a community development approach to this complex issue.

Q6. What circumstances, conditions, situations or events, within relationships, families, institutions and whole communities, are associated with the occurrence or persistence of family violence?

Council is a committed partner to the Western Region Preventing Violence Together Partnership (PVT) Partnership. That partnership initiated the four-year *United* project, led by

Women's Health West, supported by Department of Justice funding and focused on primary prevention. Council is aware that PVT has made a separate submission to the Commission and we endorse the propositions made in that submission.

Council commits to the principle that primary prevention of family violence emanates from gender equity and works within our municipality and region to promote gender equity to address determinants of violence.

Our preventing violence work in CALD communities confirms that it is very important that the interventions to address incidences of family violence in these communities are culturally sensitive, and seen as reflective of gender inequity and that it is not explained by, or attributed to, cultural origins.

Recommendation: From local projects we have learned what can work in CALD community locations, and also what can be counterproductive or even exacerbating for the issue of family violence. Council strongly recommends that the Commission's messages are carefully constructed for all audiences and are culturally appropriate.

Although they live in a generally safe, first-world community, Victorians are accustomed to the regular occurrence of emergency and disaster. It is alarming and notable that family violence is seen to escalate in the aftermath of emergency, personal stress and disaster and frequently increases not just in communities affected by disaster but also within those deployed to demanding, stressful roles in emergency response and recovery.

Local Governments in Victoria have a significant role in emergency recovery, driven both by legal mandate and by their genuine concern for local community wellbeing. Resources and training have been provided to prepare for that eventuality and local government stands at the ready. However, because family violence is unpredictable and frequently concealed, municipal authorities will feel less prepared to identify and address family violence consequent to disaster and emergencies even though the risk and likelihood will be heightened at such times.

There are several agencies involved in emergency response that have currently identified a priority to build community resilience in order to offset the consequences and aftermath of emergency and disaster. Both Red Cross and SES have appointed Community Resilience Officers charged with the role of nurturing the growth of resilience. Local governments also see resilience as a useful framework for building community safety. These current programs to build resilience could provide both partners and useable insertion points for strengthening community against family violence in emergency and disaster settings.

Recommendation: Council recognises that communities under stress can be an incubator for family violence escalation and recommends that the Commission develop, strategies and provisions to negate this violence flash point. We further encourage the Commission to see Councils' emergency recovery role as an opportunity to insert and leverage programs which can support communities to build resilience.

Q7. What circumstances and conditions are associated with the reduced occurrence of family violence?

A key learning in family violence programs is that the issue is prevalent in all sectors of Victorian society. On a global scale those nations which exhibit the lowest levels of family violence are also those with the greatest gender equity. In identifying the factors that prevent violence to women, the World Health Organization identifies *“the importance of challenging social norms that support male authority and control over women and sanction or condone violence against women; reducing levels of childhood exposures to violence; reforming discriminatory family law; strengthening women’s economic and legal rights; and eliminating gender inequalities in access to formal wage employment and secondary education”* (WHO: Executive Summary – Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women, 3013)

It is equally notable that in those nations these gender equity outcomes have been identified and pursued through effective strategies that aggressively reset gender structures, illustrated by interventions in Scandinavian countries to redefine corporate leadership structures, impose gender employment quotas, and redefine parenting frameworks and to reset work/gender stereotypes.

Local government was identified within the Preventing Violence Together partnership as having a critical role in creating and supporting environments that enable the community to achieve optimal health and wellbeing: as a level of government; a workplace and a provider of community services.

Positive change to current levels of family violence will be built upon an understanding of the key underpinning role of gender equity.

Recommendation: Council requests the Commission builds upon the lessons learnt from the challenges and successes of the Preventing Violence Together partnership to create strategies that promote women in leadership. We further recommend that the Commission specifically identifies the importance of gender equity in the primary prevention of violence and advocates for programs that build can support and promote respectful relationships and a culture of non-violence.

Appendix 1 - list of Council activities and partnerships to prevent violence against women

| Activity | Description | Partners/Other Agencies |
|--|---|---|
| Moonee Valley Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-17 | Prevention of violence identified as a key strategy in the plan that is legislated to outline actions to prevent or minimise public health dangers as well as enable people living in the municipality to achieve maximum health and wellbeing. | Whole of Council approach |
| Community Safety Program | Identifies a priority to reduce the incidence and severity of intentional and unintentional injury and specifies the Prevention of Violence to Women as an Annual Action Plan item | Whole of Council approach |
| Preventing Violence Together (PVT) and the "United" Project | Council is a partner in PVT and, consequently, in "United" PVT - Working with other partner agencies to coordinate efforts to address violence to women, to work on collaborative activities, and to promote sources of support. United - a primary prevention project that focuses on Gender Equity | Women's Health West PVT Partnership |
| Turn Around 360 Project | Violence education and prevention program jointly funded by Council and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) | Project Funding from Council and DHHS |
| Safe From Harm | Council is a partner in this project, conducted by the Moonee Valley Legal Service – The project is a sustainable multi agency family violence partnership for the local area that will reduce barriers for women experiencing or at risk of violence living in the Ascot Vale and Flemington housing estates | Led by Wingate Community Centre and Moonee Valley Legal service |
| Municipal Association of Victoria - PVAW Network | Violence Prevention and resource sharing network coordinated by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) | MAV |
| White Ribbon | Global Campaign promoting Male Action to oppose Violence to Women MVCC recognises White Ribbon with a range of activity across November, including staging a White Ribbon Breakfast | Whole of Council approach |
| 16 Days of Activism | Local promotion of an International campaign held each year from November 25th, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, to December 10th, the International Day of Human Rights. Involved a web-based photo campaign featuring Council leaders and staff holding signs displaying messages opposing violence to women | Whole of Council approach |
| EBA - Domestic Violence Leave | An incorporated item in the staff enterprise bargain agreement that creates Leave entitlement for staff dealing with situations of Domestic Violence | Whole of Council approach |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| "You the Man" | An Australian version of the successful American theatrical approach to Violence to Women. "You the Man" advocates male action to address and respond to Violence to Women. MVCC participated in the development of the Australian version including drafting of support resources for hosting organisations MVCC participated in the piloting of the program. | Deakin University |
| Men Supporting Men Network | Participation in a new group convened by VicHealth to enable Men working in the Prevention of Violence to Women to discuss issues and offer mutual support. | VicHealth No to Violence |
| Family Violence Help Cards | Domestic Violence Help Cards (one each for Women and for Men) funded by council for distribution across Moonee Valley in council premises, Flemington Community Centre, Police Stations and the Essendon Citizens Advice Bureau | PVT Alliance & Women's Health West |
| Integrated Family Services | Council is a partner in the Western Melbourne Child and Family Services Alliance (The Alliance). Family Violence has been identified as one of the top three issues facing at risk children and families in our municipality. This is consistent across the 5 local government areas within The Alliance. They include Melbourne, Moonee Valley, (as family service providers) and Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay and Wyndham (as non-voting members). Family Services has a focus on earlier intervention for all families where there are risk factors and provides in-home assessment, case management and skill development programs to children and families. The child's best interests are at the centre of all decision making processes. | The Western Melbourne Child and Family Services Alliance. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptcare Family Services • Caroline Chisholm Society • Catholic Care • cohealth • Melbourne City Council • Moonee Valley City Council • Anglicare Victoria • Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency • Mackillop Family Services • ISIS Primary Care |
| Early Intervention Services | A Council-funded early intervention Family Support Service designed to make services and support more accessible to children, families and carers in Moonee Valley. The program targets Family Violence by decreasing social isolation and improving community connectedness for affected individuals. | Whole of Council Approach |
| Empowering Parents Forum | Local forum organised with Eddie Gallagher (a family therapist and psychologist with over 40 years' experience working with families and is one of Australia's foremost experts on violence towards parents). Forum provided parent education on how to regain control of an out of control teenager' at the Civic Centre, 9 Kellaway Avenue, Moonee Ponds on Wednesday, 20 May from 7pm-9pm. | Whole of Council Approach |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Program | Local program designed to assist children and adolescents to manage violent, inappropriate and destructive behaviours in healthy and constructive ways. | Whole of Council Approach Renegade Mixed Martial Arts |
|------------------------------------|---|--|

Appendix 2 – Turn around 360 project evaluation framework



