



SUBMISSION TO THE VICTORIA ROYAL COMMISSION INTO PREVENTION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc. A 0004857F ABN 55 584 949 677



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Patron: Mrs Elizabeth Chernov

Introduction

The Country Women's Association of Victoria (CWA of Vic) has been advocating for changes to prevent family violence and supporting women and children in communities across Victoria since the 1970s. The CWA of Victoria is an Association of women whose key purpose is: *To improve conditions by community service more especially as they affect the welfare of women and children.* We have over 6000 member in rural and metro areas and 329 branches in all regions of Victoria. We are a key organisation representing women across all ages including adolescents and older women.

Service system responses for family violence are important and in this the CWA of Vic believes it is essential to engage community members in the prevention of family violence. Community members are on the forefront of the fight against family violence and most victims first reach out to family, friends, or neighbours for help and the CWA of Vic have a strong base of community activities, leaders and projects to respond. The CWA of Victoria believes that there is a role for community based groups such as CWA of Vic to educate and support their own communities to develop and implement community-based family violence prevention programs that begin within their communities.

The CWA of Vic through our branches and members currently supports the prevention of family violence through : (1) raising awareness of family violence and changing norms; (2) connecting their own local community members to services; (3) changing social and community conditions through support for women and children in place based responses that are real; (4) building networks of leaders within the community; and (5) making services and institutions accountable to community needs through sitting on Boards, supporting local initiatives and fund raising for the service system.

(6) Assisting women and children in their community through funding and practical approaches including obscuring women and children who are escaping family violence, providing material goods and supporting families to recover in the community.

Addressing the questions

The CWA of Vic has chosen to address a limited number of questions.

Question Two-

As an association hearing and representing women across Victoria we do not believe that the reforms and developments have effectively changed the incidence of Family Violence occurring at the local level. And that is where the shift has to happen—and where it has to be sustained over time. The key social changes in the community need to involve local residents at every step of the process, from identifying the problem and spreading the word to developing interventions and implementing strategies for change. The CWA of Vic recognizes the sense of ownership that grows when community members are involved in solving problems.

Question Four-

Across Victoria the CWA of Vic members are consistently involved in a voluntary capacity in programs, campaigns or initiatives addressing family violence for the general community including community based videos, supporting individuals and in one community protecting and shielding families escaping Family Violence

Question Six

The establishment of nationally consistent system for monitoring the prevalence of family violence is required to be established. Prevalence should be examined and reported on by geographical location and population group to allow for more accurate targeting of programs and services.

Question Seven

The CWA of Vic considers that child abuse, family violence, blame the victim attitudes and community violence are interrelated problems. It recognizes the connection between violence and other social problems such as poverty, housing stress, substance abuse, and mental and physical health issues. We believe that a whole of government approach in solving these issues is required so as not to dismiss or diminish the importance of one issue over another.

Are there any key correlations to the increase in Family Violence? E.g. *Increases in housing costs rental and purchase, rapid increase in LGA rates, cost of living increases.*

The CWA of Vic also supports a position in regard to the negative deviancies to the images and perceptions of women, the lack of leadership for young women and the inequalities that exist in workforces for women. We currently support access to leadership programs, distribution and support for improved opportunities for women, and initiatives that educate and inform women in regard to rights and opportunities. These include funded programs plus scholarships.

Question Twenty-one

The Royal Commission will be considering both short term and longer term responses to family violence. Tell us about the changes which you think could produce the greatest impact in the short and longer term.

Longer term approaches

In line with the Country Women's Association of Australia (CWAA) we firstly encourage that there is the development of a program of **regionally** focused public awareness and educative campaigns around family violence, targeted at various regional and rural community sectors, to include:

- hosting a series of public forums advocating for greater discussions of family violence in its various forms including emotional, psychological and financial violence and its potential harms to women and children;
- coordinating a suite of preventative campaigns in conjunction with local government, regional police and other key stakeholders about family violence developed and delivered to men and organisations where men gather in regional, rural and remote areas;
- promoting awareness of the support programs and services available to people in rural and remote areas (this might include the development of an online 'find a service near you' referral tool); and
- Working with Department of Education to develop school based education programs around gender, relationships, family and 'safe spaces' to discuss violence and abuse.

Further to these we support and encourage:

1. That both Commonwealth and State government resources be allocated in Family Violence 'hot spots'. This should include a heightened police and social worker presence linked to community, culturally appropriate crisis accommodation, and short- and long-term social housing options.
2. That there be training for the rural health workforce, including Aboriginal Health Workers, in:
 - a. better identifying possible presentations, signs and symptoms of family violence; relation to the barriers facing survivors of family violence;
 - b. Responding to suspected cases and disclosure of family violence; providing referral to support services; documenting abuse; and addressing the safety issues of victims.

Creating permanence in prevention of family violence

The CWA of Vic believes that the key approaches to permanence in preventing family violence are:

1. Raising awareness of the problem of family violence and establishing social norms that make violence unacceptable through established networks and current funded system i.e. DVIRC.
2. Connections between community, community members and to all relevant services.
3. Changing social and community conditions that contribute to violence.
4. Building networks of leaders within a community.
5. Making services and institutions accountable to community needs and review the funding model to ensure that we are funding strategies that work not just a service system.

To achieve permanent prevention of Family violence we need to build on the current work that CWA members and branches are currently doing in their communities in the prevention of family violence and they are.

- Close the gap between social service providers and the communities they serve and to help communities view family violence as a community issue not a service response issue
- Develop community based housing responses
- **Support CWA of Vic to implement a framework of community based social change through support, education, information and that connects the community to the supports available in the local/regional service systems.** The examples of the experience that CWA of Vic has been involved in and used this approach are:
 - The Ophelia project a fitness program for the aging evaluated through the Deakin University.
 - Mental Health
 - Disaster responses

This model may appear simplistic however we know from previous activities that using a state-wide approach by our members and branches works in addressing local issues and social change especially when linked/related to the services system. The key success factor is that CWA of Vic has coverage across all of rural and metro Victoria. This approach addresses the community's need for stability, health, well-being, and justice.

Goals

The goals of the project include building the capacity of family, friends, and neighbours to prevent domestic violence, utilise social media, develop discussion groups within community to generate conversation, support and problem solving of the issues, and work with groups of community residents to change community norms that support domestic violence.

Proposed key strategies/activities

1. Develop forums/ workplace strategies for young people to engage in discussion on topics such as healthy relationships, rape, dating violence, oppression, and community organizing.
2. Implement regional approaches to build leaders-CWA of Vic sees this as a way of developing grassroots leaders with skills and vision and builds opportunities for long-term cultural transformation. These approaches could include
 - critical discussion, and
 - creative projects using social media featuring messages designed to interrupt social norms that contribute to violence
3. Increase community awareness and build links to the service system.
4. The CWA of Vic will develop supporting material to support education such as tip sheets on how to talk to someone who may be living with domestic violence
5. Planned community **events that combine arts and crafts, children's activities, food, music and fun with building community** awareness about family violence and what a community can do to prevent and respond to it.
6. Create evaluation partnership with a local university.

Strengths and challenges of awareness raising and social change:

It helps the community, of which the CWA of Vic is seen as a key part of, understand how and why family violence happens and how it affects the community. It creates a local and involved voice for establishing new norms about family violence and how it can be prevented. It brings the dialogue about violence in the home, into public consciousness. It addresses the denial and isolation that often surround family violence. Family violence is perceived in our communities as a private matter, one that communities and families are reluctant to talk about. Evidence is indicative that families who feel safe and have an opportunity to speak about violence are not reluctant to do so. Raising awareness allows people to think and to act in solving the problem, and to own the issue as one they can do something about.

Conclusion

The CWA of Vic believes that to achieve permanent changes in the community a project involving community at all local levels is necessary. It also needs to involve the service system including the DV, police, court and health services to work together and inclusive of the community to support families and protecting children and the community. Families will be safer when communities are involved. There will be a requirement for dedicated planning, time commitment and resources to engage in a community-based project to address and prevent family violence, but the potential outcomes should be impressive. We know our communities and when the solutions come from within a community, the changes that result are long-term and truly reflect a community's resources, culture, needs and goals.

Request to meet:

The CWA of Victoria request to meet with the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria to further discuss the considerations of developing a community based framework for education, support and social change in regard to preventing family violence

The Country Women's Association of Victoria.

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