

# Royal Commission into Family Violence

## City of Casey submission

### Introduction

The City of Casey welcomes the opportunity to address the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Family Violence is a significant and serious public health and human rights issue. It can occur in all types of relationships, however, predominantly impacts the health and safety of women and children. Currently in Australia, 1 in 3 women will experience physical violence and 1 in 5 will experience sexual assault within their lifetime with 1 being killed by their partner or former partner each week. Children are also victims of family violence by witnessing or being subjected to violence in their homes.

It is a serious, prevalent but also preventable public health issue. In order to respond, reduce and eliminate family violence there needs a coordinated and long term commitment of resourcing to address the causes of violence, and a system that supports victims and holds perpetrators to account.

### The City of Casey background

The City of Casey covers the outer south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne and is one of the fastest growing and increasingly culturally diverse regions in Australia, with approximately 281,000 residents. It has the most residents of any municipality in Victoria with a projected population of 459,000 at 2036. Growth is largely driven by young families who have chosen Casey because it offers lower cost housing than inner Melbourne areas. Many families have high mortgages and average incomes, making them vulnerable to increasing interest rates and other living costs.

Currently, the City of Casey has the highest reports of family violence within Victoria with 3,840 reports to Police from January – December 2014; with an increase of 287 incidents from the January - December 2013 period.

The City of Casey has made significant contributions to addressing the issue through response, early intervention and primary prevention strategies.

### The role of Local Government in family violence

Local Government plays an important role in leading the efforts in preventing, identifying and responding to family violence. Due to its strong and existing relationships with the local community from birth through to aged care, it is in the unique position to prevent violence by influencing the attitudes, behaviours and social norms of a large section of the community, as well as identifying and responding to victims of family violence. However, the role of Local Government is often underestimated by other levels of Government and the family violence service sector.

## City of Casey Question responses

### Question One

#### Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?

In relation to the goals that were highlighted in the issues paper, the City of Casey's recommendations are as follows.

- ***Foster a violence free society***

The Royal Commission could consider extending this goal to include the recognition that in order to foster a violence-free society, we need to address the gender inequality that exists between men and women by promoting gender equity. Gender equality must be embraced as a basic human right for all in order to eradicate violence.

- ***Increase awareness of the extent and effects of family violence***

The Royal Commission could extend this goal to increase awareness in the community of the causes of violence, and how these causes can create an environment for violence to occur. The causes of gender inequality, traditional gender stereotypes and violence supportive attitudes are crucial societal issues that need to be addressed and highlighted in this goal.

There also needs to be an increased awareness of the long term effects on children's physical, emotional and developmental wellbeing as a result of being exposed to the constant trauma that Family Violence brings. Long term impacts include the inability of children to develop normal relationships, developmental delay and long term health impacts, especially associated with physical abuse.

- ***Build respectful family relationships***

The Royal Commission needs to extend this goal to acknowledge the power imbalances that exist between men and women in many areas of life, not just familial. These can occur in a workplace, faith setting, sporting club etc. Unequal power relationships between men and women are the main cause of family violence. We need to create equity between men and women to address this power imbalance.

#### **Recommendations:**

Therefore it is recommended that the Royal Commission goals are expanded to include:

- » Foster a gender equitable, violence free society
- » Increase awareness of the causes, extent and effects of family violence on women and children
- » Build respectful and equal relationships between men and women

### Question Two and Three

**The Royal Commission wants to hear about the extent to which recent reforms and developments have improved responses to family violence, and where they need to be expanded or altered.**

**Which of the reforms to the family violence system introduced in the last ten years do you consider most effective? Why? How could they be improved?**

The City of Casey acknowledges the significant reforms made at a State and Federal level to address the high levels of family violence in the community, and the impact of these reforms on improved responses to family violence.

These include:

***Leave provisions for women experiencing family violence and family friendly policies.***

Many organisations including the City of Casey are now providing family violence leave provisions of up to 20 days for those affected by violence to receive support and assistance. In addition, many organisations are also offering a variety of flexible work arrangements which enable more women to participate in the workforce, and also provide opportunities for men to take paternity leave and/or time off to take care of their children. Employers need to continue to be innovative in supporting and providing various options for employees which address equity issues.

***Public Education and Media Campaigns to change community attitudes***

The various State, Federal and other media campaigns such as White Ribbon have been important in increasing awareness of the issue and addressing social norms and attitudes, as well as broadening the understanding of what constitutes violence.

***Key Priority for Victoria Police***

There has been significant reform within the Victorian Police Force with family violence identified as one of their key priority areas. The Police Commissioner making strong statements regarding the issue, officers with an increased understanding and more powers for intervention, and the establishment of dedicated Family Violence Police Units with experienced staff has resulted in increased confidence and partnerships.

***Development of key frameworks and policy directions***

The development of key frameworks and policy directions at State and Federal level has provided direction, evidence and research to progress the work. These include:

- » VicHealth's Framework for the Prevention of Violence against Women
- » Federal Government National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children
- » Our Watch – Foundation for the Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children

***State and Federal Governments funding specific family violence programs***

Government funding has given the issue profile within the community and funded organisations. It demonstrates government commitment to addressing the issue and gives confidence to the community that the issue is being taken seriously. Family Violence is now on the public agenda. However, it is important that primary prevention and direct service delivery funding is separate to ensure that there is no perception of the areas competing for funds, as they are both essential in addressing the issue.

***Community Initiative Funds (CIF)***

The Indigenous Family Violence Strategy Community Initiative Fund aims to assist indigenous communities to prevent, reduce and respond to family violence. This has assisted in the development of local initiatives.

***Men's Behaviour Change Programs***

The establishment of men's behaviour change programs have played an important role in changing some men's behaviour to keep women safe. There is a need for more men's behaviour change programs throughout Victoria, and to ensure that the men who are referred to them via court order attend.

## **Recommendations**

The City of Casey recommends the following:

- » Fund ongoing primary prevention programs that address the causes of violence with local government as a key partner or lead agency
- » Whole of government approach at a State level to integrate family violence early intervention into local service delivery such as early childhood services (i.e. MCH, kindergartens and schools) and Home and Community Care (HACC)
- » Fund state campaigns to raise community awareness and challenge social norms

## **Question Four**

**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.**

Local Government is in a unique position of having enormous reach, influence and access to their local communities through the various services and functions provided. City of Casey works closely with individuals, families, community organisations, local businesses, sporting clubs and faith communities, and impacts the community via planning, facilities and infrastructure provisions, as well as promoting key messages that influence community attitudes. This puts local government in the position to be able to provide a whole of community response, from identifying those at risk of violence to addressing the broader determinants of violence.

The City of Casey has identified family violence as a key priority for the community which has resulted in some innovative work which is highlighted below:

### **Primary Prevention:**

The City of Casey was the first amongst a small number of Councils to begin to address the issue of Preventing Violence Against Women from 2004. The issue was identified and prioritised for action by the (former) Safer Casey Partnership – a strategic partnership of Council to address safety issues within the municipality. Since this time, a number of initiatives have progressed to prevent violence against women.

### **CHALLENGE Family Violence Project, Funded by the Department of Justice. 2013-2015**

Partnership between the City of Casey, Cardinia Shire, City of Greater Dandenong and MonashHealth. One component of the model focuses on equipping and supporting influential male community leaders to prevent violence against women by promoting respect, non-violence, gender equity and challenging sexism, male privilege and aggressive masculinity within their spheres of influence.

The other component of the model focuses on faith leaders. A resource was developed to enable faith leaders to have discussions about family violence prevention within their faith communities and to effectively identify and challenge systems, structures, attitudes and beliefs that can contribute to family violence. This project is being externally evaluated.

### **Promoting Peace in Families Project: Funded by the Federal Attorney-General's Department 2007-2009**

Provides a model for faith communities to be actively involved in the prevention of violence against women. The model includes sermons, studies, policies and training to equip faith leaders to address the issue within the faith setting. The project was externally evaluated.

**City of Casey Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017**

Family Violence is an action area within the plan under the Key Priority action area: "A Safe Community".

**Human Resources: Family Violence Special Leave Provision and Flexible work arrangements**

Enables employees to apply for up to 20 days of special leave within a 12 month period for medical requirements, legal proceedings and other activities related to issues of family violence. Other entitlements are available to staff to access flexible work arrangements such as purchasing additional leave.

**Casey Men's Action Team**

Consists of men in leadership positions within Council that provide education and support within the organisation to implement strategies to raise awareness and prevent violence against women.

**International Women's Day and White Ribbon Day**

These annual events for Council staff provide an opportunity to take the White Ribbon oath, increase awareness of the issue of family violence, and acknowledge the achievements of women.

**White Ribbon Ambassadors**

Male leaders are encouraged to apply to become White Ribbon Ambassadors in order to develop male leadership in the organisation around Family Violence Prevention. Male leaders challenge other men to evaluate their attitudes and behaviours toward women.

**Applied Gender analysis training**

Training is provided to Council staff to increase knowledge and skills to apply a gender lens over services, policies and programs.

**Early Intervention:**

**Local Laws: early intervention model**

Local Laws was the first local government within Australia to respond to the link between family violence and animal abuse. A ground breaking model was developed which included:

- » training for local laws officers to understand family violence and identify risk
- » established referral pathways
- » partnerships developed with the local Police Family Violence Unit
- » policies and standard operating procedures updated to respond to the issue
- » supporting housing of animals at risk during periods of family relocation following family violence incidents

This model has been presented to over 200 local laws officers across the State and won an LGPro Award for Excellence in 2014.

**Maternal and Child Health Service: prevention, identification and response**

The Maternal Child Health Service identify women who are at risk or are currently experiencing family violence. All staff are required to ask at their initial contact with the family, or when it is deemed appropriate to do so, whether there are any concerns in regards to Family Violence. If this is identified as an issue, the staff member will complete a Safety Plan with the family members involved, and refer on to appropriate services such as the Enhanced Maternal and Child Service or other Family Violence agencies.

All families receive a copy of the Family Violence Resource Card at their first contact visit which is then placed in the child's 'green book'. This card contains information of what is family violence, the types of family violence and where the person can receive help.

The Maternal and Child Health Service is also in a unique position in that they are mandated by law, following the receipt of a Birth Notification to Council, to follow up all babies born to families that live within the municipality. All families are informed of the service either through hospitals, midwives, clinics or refugee and asylum seeker clinics, often resulting in easy access to families.

The Maternal and Child Health framework also requires staff to ask 4 specific questions in relation to family violence at every Key Age and Stage appointment.

#### ***Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service***

The Enhanced Maternal and Child Health (EMCH) program within Casey consists of a multidisciplinary, bi-lingual team of staff, many of whom have extensive experience working with families experiencing Family Violence. At the initial assessment with the family, the EMCH Assessment Template includes a question for both parents on past or current issues with family violence. If this is identified as a concern, this issue might be a goal that is worked on with the assistance of the EMCH staff, or support and advice is offered along with a referral to an external Family Violence agency.

The EMCH have an advocacy role and have developed strong working partnerships with local family violence agencies including the Police.

#### ***Kangoo Bambadin indigenous family violence action group***

This action group operates across the Southern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. It aims to create and develop positive relationships between the community, local organisations and government agencies to assist in the reduction of all forms of family violence impacting on indigenous communities.

#### ***Koori Family Violence Police protocols***

The development of these protocols has resulted in an improved response from police when contacted for assistance in relation to any family violence incident. The aim is an improved, holistic response to all parties including victims, children and perpetrators.

#### ***Question Five***

***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.***

#### ***Cultural change programs in Sporting Codes***

Programs such as the AFL's Respect and Responsibility Program and Taking the Tackle assist in challenging sexist attitudes and behaviours towards women, and increase women's participation in sport. These initiatives then impact on local sporting clubs to change their practices and culture.

#### ***Social Marketing campaigns***

The majority of social marketing campaigns have been focused on saying no to family violence, and information on services and supports. There is a need for further campaigns with a focus on primary prevention.

#### ***Men's leadership programs***

Men are beginning to have a role in violence prevention, working alongside women to advocate for social change and promote gender equity. This work includes men's action teams, becoming White Ribbon Ambassadors and attending White Ribbon events. These types of programs can be effective as men have a role to play in violence prevention, however significant development work is required that outlines the roles and responsibilities of men so that these types of programs don't have a negative impact or cause further harm to women.

### **Question Six**

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

The City of Casey supports the evidence and research from VicHealth that identifies the underlying causes of men's violence against women, which are:

- » Unequal power relations between men and women (male dominance, privilege and entitlement)
- » Adherence to rigid gender stereotypes
- » Broader cultures of violence

The current system is based on patriarchal structures that need to be challenged and changed. Many issues contribute to violence but are not the cause such as housing stress, financial hardship, disability, mental health, lack of social support, alcohol availability, gambling and cultural norms.

While gendered family violence is a significant concern, many services across the organisation are also seeing a variety of family violence situations such as:

**Matriarchal Family Violence:** where a woman in the family can demonstrate any number of violent acts against the mother of the baby/child/partner. This is being witnessed and responded to by staff in the Maternal and Child Health Service.

Youth Services staff are seeing a rise in young people being violent towards a parent or both parents, predominately in single parent homes. The parent uses control and has power over the children, the children see this as the norm and as they grow older they then become physically and emotionally abusive in order to turn that power around so that they are controlling of the parent.

### **Question Seven**

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

In order to eradicate family violence there needs to be a long term, consistent and coordinated approach to addressing the above causes. Until women have equal standing, respect, participation and opportunities within the workforce, faith communities, sporting clubs, education etc, violence will continue.

Women who are experiencing violence or are at risk of violence require the support of early intervention and family violence services.

### **Question Eight**

***Tell us about any gaps or deficiencies in current responses to family violence, including legal responses. Tell us about what improvements you would make to overcome these gaps and deficiencies, or otherwise improve current responses.***

A stronger partnership needs to be developed between Local Government Services and Victorian Police to allow for sharing of information in regards to Family Violence, and improved methods of working together to best support the needs of the family.

For young people under 15 years of age where Family Violence is an issue, a report to DHHS may be undertaken and if a young person is older than 18 years there are adult services that can be accessed to support them through Family Violence situations. However, young people between 16 and 18 years have few options for support. Child Protection will often not get involved and the adult services cannot or will not provide a service.

### **Recommendations**

The City of Casey recommends the following:

- » Services focused on young people between 16 and 18 years
- » Increase the capacity of the current services to target them to service young people between 16 and 18 years
- » Parents as Victims – there are more programs available that address this issue, perhaps parenting programs need to focus on developing healthy relationships that address the issues of power and control to prevent unhealthy violent relationships developing

### **Question Nine**

*Does insufficient integration and co-ordination between the various bodies who come into contact with people affected by family violence hinder the assessment of risk, or the effectiveness of (early intervention, crisis and ongoing) support provided, to people affected by family violence? If so, please provide examples.*

Local Government community services such as Maternal and Child Health, Early Childhood Services, Youth Services and Home and Community Care, who work directly with individuals and families at risk or experiencing violence, are an essential part of the family violence response system. However, this role is not fully recognised and utilised.

The impact of insufficient integration and coordination is women feel overwhelmed and struggle to navigate the system further adding to making them unsafe. This includes lack of ability for services to data share.

### **Question Ten**

*What practical changes might improve integration and co-ordination? What barriers to integration and co-ordination exist?*

There is a need to establish closer working relationships between local government community services, Victoria Police and the family violence service system. There is a gap in sharing information between services to identify individuals and families at risk of family violence, however this presents potential privacy issues.

### **Question Seventeen**

*Are there specific cultural, social, economic, geographical or other factors in particular groups and communities in Victoria which tend to make family violence more likely to occur, or to exacerbate its effects? If so, what are they?*

Family Violence is predominately a gendered issue and the overwhelming numbers of victims of violence are women, with men as the perpetrators. The City of Casey acknowledges that all women can experience Family Violence regardless of cultural, social, economic and geographical factors. However, the above factors can prevent women from receiving the appropriate support and services they require.



### Question Twenty

*Are there any other suggestions you would like to make to improve policies, programs and services which currently seek to carry out the goals set out above?*

### Recommendations

The City of Casey recommends the following:

» **Increased funding for Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Services in local government to support early intervention**

» **Improved understanding of family violence and its causes**

There needs to be an increased understanding in the family violence sector and broader community of gender inequality and its link to violence.

» **Increased emphasis on Primary Prevention of Family Violence**

- Addressing gender stereotypes and inequality through early years services such as Maternal and Child Health and Kindergarten services, and using programs such as Baby Makes 3.
- Recurrent funding for primary prevention aimed at local government. This additional funding should not be taken out of direct service delivery.

» **Implement Gender Analysis Frameworks**

State Government to undertake gender analysis of all funded services and programs to identify gender inequity.

» **Dedicated Regional Family Violence Prevention Officer**

A dedicated role modelled on the existing Regional Family Violence Integration Coordinator focused on primary prevention would result in improved coordination of effort across each region.

### 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.*

In order to see significant change in the incidence of family violence there needs to be a greater focus on primary prevention that addresses gender inequity. This can be achieved through developing partnerships across a wide range of sectors with funding to support innovative best practice models.

In the short term there are opportunities to improve the integration and coordination of services that work with at risk individuals and families.

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