



**Health and Wellbeing Action Group
and
Benalla Family Violence Prevention Network**
Proud supporters of White Ribbon Day

Response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

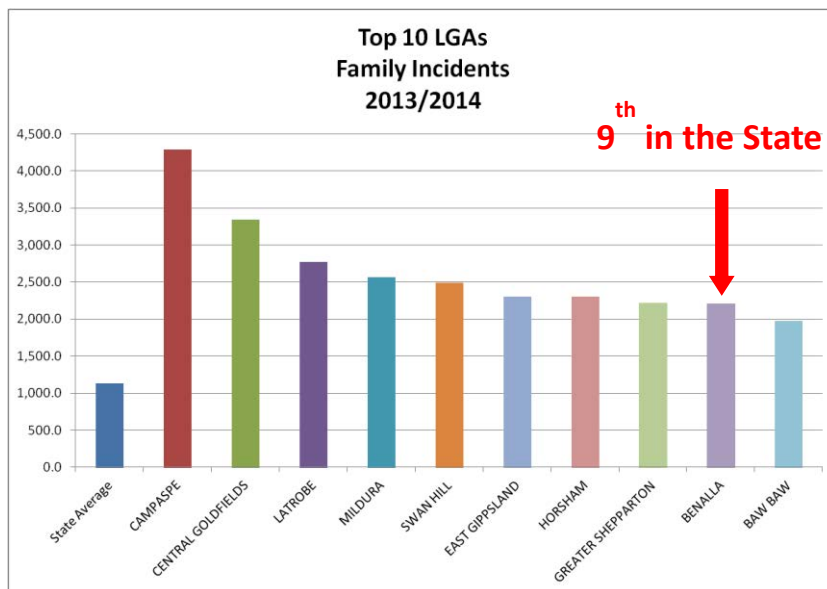
Introduction

The Benalla Health and Wellbeing Action Group (H&WB) was formed in 2010 and is committed to reducing Family Violence in Benalla. To provide a strong focus on Family Violence prevention, the H&WB Action group established the Benalla Family Violence Prevention Network (BFVPN) which functions as sub-committee of the Benalla H&WB Action Group.

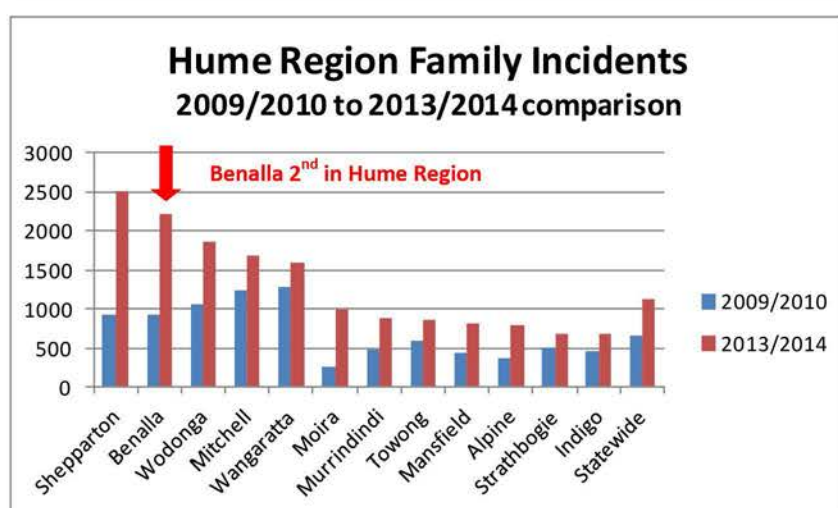
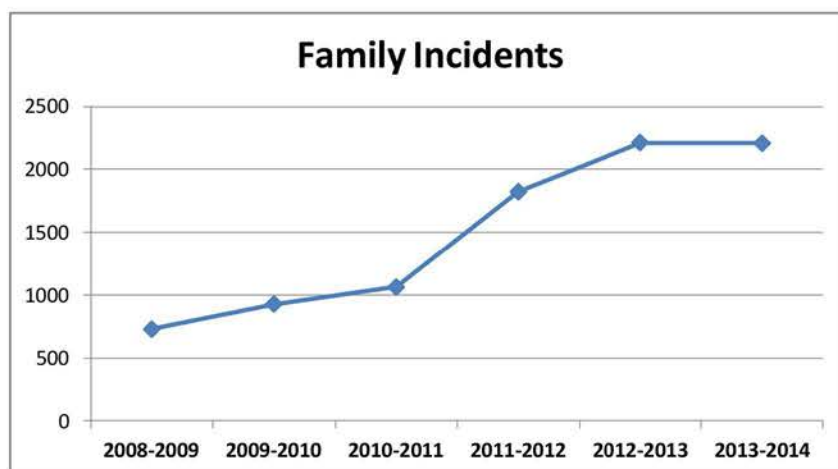
Membership of BFVPN includes community members and a collection of 20 agencies that provide health, welfare and community services to the Benalla Rural City. This list of agencies involved in BFVPN is shown in Section 2 (Page 6). These include 42 individuals attending/supporting the goals of the network.

Local Context

Below is the current Family Violence statistics in our community. The significant uplift in reports from 2010 coincided with the strong community action and education plan that the BFVPN (led by Benalla Health and Benalla Rural City) initiated. These are detailed in Section 2.



Per 100k population comparison



In our response to the Royal Commission we want to highlight that at the local level we have been pro-active in our response to Family Violence and have worked hard to gain strong community support. We would hope that our example would help other communities to be able to take similar action in their own local context. Leadership, collaborative approaches, community engagement and strong policing all make a difference.

Section 1 - Key Messages

These follow the themes and principles that the BFVPN have discovered in its journey working with the local community in preventing family violence.

Section 2 - What the BFVPN has achieved in the past 5 years.

We believe that our journey, whilst not unique, will provide the Royal Commission (and other communities) some insight into what can be achieved through a collaborative and whole of community approach.

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Section 1

Key messages

Community Messages and Community Response

These are the messages that we have been consistently voicing in our local community.

1. Family Violence affects every community – including Benalla.
2. Family Violence affects every social demographic – including your family and your neighbourhood.
3. Family Violence requires a community led response – we all have a responsibility to take action.
4. Early reporting of Family Violence Incidents is essential to break the cycle before it becomes further entrenched behaviour.
5. Constant education for the community as to the extent of the damage and reach of the problem.
6. Constant encouragement that *we can make a difference*.
7. Challenges to men in our community: (see notes below).
 - a. To take leadership on this issue.
 - b. Challenge the behaviour and attitude of men.

Empowerment of Women and Children

8. Message to survivors:
 - a. that your story is believed and validated;
 - b. that your community supports you;
 - c. that the local Police *will* take action;
 - d. that you can live a safe life;
9. Education to survivors of where to go and what to do, to seek assistance and support.
10. Education to schools, businesses and community groups of their role in supporting survivors through the process of reporting Family Violence.

Challenges around societal values

11. Currently children grow up in a crowded *confused values* environment. Society needs to review the values that it embraces and condones and affirm and provide *clarity* to families raising boys and men of *correct values*.

Key messages

More research is needed around what is the most effective strategy for the development and education of family values that will result in the next generation of young men not growing up and perpetrating violence.

Challenges to Men

In Benalla we have persistently been speaking about these themes.

12. Family Violence is unacceptable in all its forms.
13. Men are the primary perpetrators of Family Violence in general and specifically Family Violence involving serious injury and murder.
14. Men must take leadership and responsibility for Family Violence in our community.
15. Men must call out other men who are perpetrating Family Violence and no longer be silent in the face of Family Violence in their families, sporting clubs, community groups and work place.
16. Men must understand and reflect on the deep seated values and male myths that underpin Family Violence. (Rigid gender stereotypes; Male privilege (Power and Control))

Power of Role Models

17. Good men must act as role models and mentors for young men growing up who have absent or “poor examples” as fathers.

Key messages

Government should fund Male Mentoring program in each Local Government area that works with schools and community groups to identify at risk young boys and men with no appropriate male role model in their family unit.

Challenges to Government

18. Prevention strategies will take 5 to 10 years to see an effect and therefore should have a bi-partisan approach outside of the four year election cycle.
19. Prevention strategies require resourcing of *local communities* to deliver an ongoing family violence prevention message and strategy over a number of years.
20. One size fits all approaches should be avoided, instead a suite of primary prevention interventions should be made available to local communities to tailor to the unique needs and demographics of their local community.
21. Local partnerships (e.g. BFVPN) need to be resourced to provide leadership and ongoing support during this process.
22. Changes to legislation making breaches of Intervention Orders an indictable offence under the Crimes Act.

Key messages

There is no quick fix to the prevention of family violence in our community. However, the right plan financed for the long term and supported by grass roots community campaigns and ownership will work.

Serious service gaps exist in Benalla

1. The lack of tertiary Family Violence support services based in Benalla.

Currently services are delivered from the Centre Against Violence office in Wangaratta as an outreach service:

Recommendations

Considering the high levels of FV in Benalla, a dedicated office at Benalla would be the most effective model.

This would be enhanced by being attached to Benalla Health and work in partnership with the services already co-located within the Ray Sweeney Centre at Benalla Health:

- *Generalist Counselling (Benalla Health) and*
- *Mental Health Services (Albury Wodonga Health)*
- *Alcohol and Drug Counselling (Gateway Health)*
- *Family Liaison Services (Benalla Rural City)*

2. Additional funding to local Community Health services to provide support child counselling

Currently, Benalla Health – Community Health provides a Generalist Counselling service to the local community. A disproportionately large number of clients are children who require support for behavioural difficulties resulting from exposure to family violence in the home.

Recommendations

Additional resources including a Psychologist would enhance this service and provide improved support to children experiencing trauma.

3. The lack of Early Intervention programs for men at risk of entrenched FV behaviours.

Currently a Men's Behavioural Change program is being offered to Benalla residents by Gateway Health. This program is primarily targeted at *tertiary / forensic* clients who have already come under Police / Court attention and have a current Intervention Order. This program is delivered as an outreach program from Gateway Health, Wangaratta with limited transport options.

Police should be in a position to not only recommend but enforce both parties involved in Family Violence to attend specific programming.

What is also needed is an early intervention program for men who have been identified at the beginning of the FV cycle before Police/Courts are involved. Clients would self refer into the program or be referred by other support agencies, community groups or Police.

Recommendations

Provide additional funding to support the delivery of an early intervention program for men at risk of becoming entrenched perpetrators of Family Violence delivered from within the local services at Benalla Health.

4. **BSafe remains unfunded by State and Federal Governments.**

This award winning safety program for women who have escaped violent relationships requires *permanent* ongoing funding from either State or Federal Government and should be available to all women in all communities across the State.

Recommendations

State Government provide recurrent funding for this program as a permanent intervention strategy to support victims of Family Violence.

Section 2 - Example of a collaborative / community Led approach

Purpose of BFVPN

1. Raise awareness about family violence and its impacts on individuals, families and communities in the Benalla Rural City.
2. Provide current information to the community about support services for:
 - Children, women, men and young people who are affected by family violence.
 - Perpetrators seeking support to change violent behaviour.
 - Indigenous and diverse groups (CALD, disability, GLBT).
3. Improve outcomes for the community in relation to family violence prevention.

BFVPN Membership

Membership of BFVPN includes community members and a collection of 20 agencies that provide health, welfare and community services to the Benalla Rural City. This list of agencies involved in BFVPN is shown below and includes 42 individuals attending/supporting the goals of the network.

- Community members
- Benalla Health
- Benalla P-12 College
- Benalla Rural City
- Centre Against Violence
- Central Hume Primary Care Partnership
- CPSG Benalla
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Gateway Health
- GoTAFE (Benalla)
- Hume Medicare Local
- Benalla Lions Club
- Mental Illness Fellowship
- Mind Australia
- NESAY
- Rural Housing Network
- Salvation Army
- St Vincent de Paul
- Tomorrow Today Foundation
- Victoria Police (Benalla)
- Women's Health Goulburn North East

Key messages

It takes leadership to achieve cultural change. This doesn't happen by accident. It requires committed individuals as the key to driving cultural change in our community.

What we have achieved

The BFVPN commenced a strong community action campaign in Benalla from 2010 (see examples later in this report). The initial effect of this approach was the substantial increase in the number of Family Incidents reported to Police supported by strong action by Benalla Police to both respond to those reports and meticulously record all incidents reported to Police.

How did we achieve it?

In 2009/2010 the number of FV Incidents reported to the Police was below a 1000 per annum (per 100k population). Police indicated that there was a serious level of *under reporting* by the local community and the *true* figure was unknown. A consistent campaign lifted the number of reports to 2214 (per 100k population).

Initially Benalla Health, Benalla Rural City and Benalla Police worked on a grass roots campaign to raise awareness of the issue in the local community. These messages were about:

- Empowering and encouraging women to report incidents of FV.
- Holding men accountable for their behaviour.
- Encouraging men to become part of the campaign and show leadership.
- Encouraging the whole community to take action *and report FV Incidents when they first occur.*

Discussions with local Police confirm that we have reached the *statistical norm* for the shire and the positive messages and strong actions we have taken have contributed to this reduction. The 2015/2015 figures will provide further evidence of whether this downward trend will in fact continue.

Key messages

It takes a community to change a community. This needs to be done town by town, community by community, LGA x LGA focus.

What we did

Our community campaign has been made up of multiple layers and a variety of interventions:

Community Education

Increase community knowledge and awareness about family violence	This will use a number of community education events and strategies throughout the year. These will include presentations at existing community groups. Action Team approaches. Support and education for local organizations signed up for the Benalla White Ribbon Day Supporters Program to enable them to take their own community action.
Respectful Relationships	Training in schools, sporting clubs and community groups around Respectful Relationships. Program materials used will vary depending on the target audience.
Role Models	Support the development of good men as role models for young boys and men growing up to counter the current culture of “power and culture” and gender inequality that currently exists.

Community Action

White Ribbon Day “Benalla March Against Violence”	 <p>white ribbon day March Against Violence 11.30 am Tuesday 25th November 2014 Starting @ the Mural, Benalla</p> <p>Free lunch and coffee</p> <p>Guest Speaker Luke Morgan Coach Benalla Saints</p> <p>Contact Neil Stott 5761 4500 for more information</p>	Utilising the high profile of the White Ribbon Foundation and White Ribbon Day on 25 th November to hold annual marches in the local community. This is supported by a series of lead up events in the local schools and businesses in the community.
Benalla White Ribbon Day Supporters Program	 <p>Benalla White Ribbon Day Supporter</p>	Leveraging off the national campaign provided by White Ribbon, this is a grass roots supporter network where agencies / community groups <i>sign up</i> to be a supporter. Signed up members are encouraged to display messages about Family Violence prevention; provide education to their members about the causes and types of Family Violence; Provide a safe and supportive environment where victims can report incidents of FV; support public events like White Ribbon Day; Utilise the materials of “Courageous Conversations” to encourage changes in policy and internal attitudes to Rigid gender stereotypes; Male privilege (Power and Control). Current members include: Benalla P-12; Benalla FCJ College; Benalla Ensign; Benalla Health; Benalla Rural City; Benalla Soroptimists; Benalla Saints Football Netball Club; Benalla All Blacks Football Netball Club; Department of Health and Human Services (Goulburn Murray);

Take a Stand



Following the lead of the Chief Commission, Premier and CEO of the AFL, Benalla held its own “Take a Stand” campaign and will continue to hold similar events in the future.

Strengthening Families

Rock and Water	This program teaches participants basic self defence skills and assertive communication skills. Participants are encouraged to link the physical activity to their emotions and thoughts. There is constant reflection on how our body/mind feels and how the activity can be used in the ‘real world’.
Parent and Child Mother Goose	This program encourages parent-child bonding. The program targets the parents and allows parents to share the joy of songs, rhymes and stories with their child. Material is chosen to assist families in soothing children, establishing behavioural routines and teaching specific language concepts
Parents Early Education Partnership (PEEP)	PEEP is broken up into 2 sections. The first section involves parents and children together in play, rhymes, songs and reading. The children are then taken into a separate room with child carers while a parent education session is offered.
Real Men Make Great Dads	This program is facilitated by males for men. The 8 sessions allow participants to understanding their child as they grow; discuss their relationship with their child; learn how to deal with behavioural issues; and improve communication with their child.
Bringing up Great Kids	This 6 week group parenting program encourages parents to reflect on their role as a parent and teaches the use of mindfulness to parent in a calmer manner.

Organisational Change

Gender Equity and Respect	Utilising the material from the Hume Region Preventing Violence against Women and Children plan, Courageous Conversations, we are encouraging local businesses and organisations to support gender equity and respect within their organisational structure.
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Key messages

One size fits all approaches should be avoided, instead a suite of primary prevention interventions should be made available to local communities to tailor to the unique needs and demographics of their local community.

Are we there yet?

The result of this lengthy campaign was that the 2013/2014 Family Violence Incidents levels have (in statistical terms) eased back from the previous year (2012/2013). We believe that we have reached the *statistical top* of FV Incident reports and as a result of the strong work of the Police and the community, these reports dropped.

Across 79 LGAs Benalla is currently at number 9 of FV Incidents (but a reduction from number 4 in the previous year). Across the Hume Region, Benalla is number 2, just behind Shepparton and well above the State-wide average.

Should our current awareness campaign cease, we would expect the number of FV Incidents to increase. However, if we continue our grass roots campaign over the next 5 to 10 years, we would expect our overall numbers to decrease.