

As a Multifaith Network, our organisation has been organizing events for the past eight years around the White Ribbon Day to raise awareness about family violence to people of different faiths.

In 2008, the first White Ribbon Day was held on 25 November at Casey Council Chambers. It was a lunch for ladies only. Members of Parliament, Casey Council, VMC Commissioner and other guests from VMC attended along with many cultural and religious groups.

<http://berwicknews.starcommunity.com.au/news/2008-07-18/the-faithful-get-together/>

In 2009, another ladies only event was held at Uniting church, Hampton Park on 27 November. 120 people including Narre Warren South P12 college students attended. (Article: 10 December 2009 Berwick News)

In 2010, a ladies only luncheon was held in Rooms 7, 8 and 9 on 25 November and attended by 80 guests, including Jenny Semple, CEO of SMRC. The event was hosted by a guest speaker, and round table discussions were held, including musical items. (Article: 9 December 2010: Berwick News)

<http://berwicknews.starcommunity.com.au/news/2010-12-09/fighting-violence/>

In 2011, a ladies only luncheon was held at Akoonah Park on 17 November 2011. Guest speaker: Maha Sukkar, a policewoman who wears the hijab and deals with family violence first-hand. Casey Choir provided entertainment. Politicians and Mayor of Casey attended, along with Nossal High School students. (Articles: 23 November 2011, Pakenham Gazette and Berwick Star 8 December 2011)

<http://berwicknews.starcommunity.com.au/news/2011-12-08/cake-cash-for-uni-career-judy-wardale-and-city-of-casey-councillor-shar-balmes-at-the-white-ribbon-day-lunch-74098picture-stewart-chambers/>

In 2012, a ladies event was held on 22 November at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Students from Nossal High and Muslim students from Minaret College attended. The program "Keeping it Together" was presented by Sirini, and Anj Barker is now the Ambassador of the program. Catering was provided by "M & Ms" (Muslims and Mormons).

In 2013, a three-course dinner was organized at the Casey Council Chambers from 6:30 to 8:30pm on 25 November for men and women. Guest speaker and entertainment was organized.

In 2014, Casey Multifaith Network collaborated with the Challenge Family Violence Project to host a Preventing Family Violence Forum on 20th November from 6:30 to 8:30pm at the Casey Council Chambers. The event was attended by 120 guests including members of Parliament, Casey Councillors and community members.

<http://berwicknews.starcommunity.com.au/news/2014-11-05/right-behind-the-white-ribbon/>

In February 2015, members of the Casey Multifaith Network were invited to take part in making a stance against Family Violence.

http://journalnews.starcommunity.com.au/stories/2015-03-02/united-stand-against-violence/attachment/multifaith_134571_01-jpg/

Although our events are well attended and well received, we have assessed that our events are failing to make the impact in the area. There may be several issues contributing to this assessment:

1. Our events are open to the wider public, however, with limited resources and limited access within faith communities, we find that our effort in holding such events have limited impact and the message does not reach the wider target audience. It is observed that more often than not, it is the same people who are part of the audience every year and the effect of whether the message goes anywhere beyond the walls of the venue is impossible to measure.
2. Another important factor why the Network is hesitant to address the issue of family violence hands on is because of the lack of expertise in tackling the issue if cases of family violence are identified. The Network has the limited resources to raise awareness, but no resources for helping the victims once they are identified.
3. The Network is also hesitant to be identified as the go-to resource for members of faith communities for similar reasons: lack of resources, lack of expertise, not an identified objective of the network, etc. We can refer people on to others more qualified service providers. Even then, sometimes if someone reveals something to us, they are not always keen to repeat their story to yet another person before getting some actual assistance. (It is hard enough for them to raise it the first time).
4. We have felt that faith communities often do not want to be associated with issues related to family violence for fear of stigma or other such apprehensions. We have often found that faith communities want to brush such issues as family violence under the carpet and either do not want to deal with the problems, or want to hide them. It has come to our attention that people within faith communities are still struggling with the dilemma whether to report a case of family violence within the household of a fellow faith-member, without realizing that family violence is a crime and needs to be reported like any other crime. Perhaps these cases are not reported because of the consequences that ensue i.e. what will be the role of the community in supporting the family once police are involved, who will house the family members, who will bear the financial stress, etc.
5. With limited resources and funding, the Network is unable or limited in securing outstanding speakers, suitable venues, resourceful materials for handouts, follow-up surveys, etc. The Network understands its scope in reaching out to faith community leaders and to facilitate conversations around family violence, however, the efforts are hindered due to lack of funding.
6. The Network has attempted to work in conjunction with other organisations, but found it extremely difficult as the objectives of other organisations may be different than that of our network, and hence the desired outcomes maybe different. The focus of our Network is very specific and deals with the issue of family violence from the faith angle.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Government can identify the resourcefulness and the utility of interfaith and multifaith networks around Victoria as a tool in engaging faith communities in the conversation around family violence, as these networks already have an established status within the faith arena and can get their message proliferated quickly and easily.

- a. One such avenue is through the Faith Communities Council of Victoria (FCCV) which is a peak body of interfaith networks in Victoria. The FCCV is already making leaps and strides in breaking barriers and working towards social cohesion. A bigger funding and providing more resources to FCCV is one way to make use of this well-established resource to proliferate the message and continue the dialogue around family violence in faith communities. More information regarding the FCCV can be found at <http://faithvictoria.org.au>
2. The government can highlight the positive messages taken from different faith communities which can promote the message of respect and elevating the status of a woman in society.
3. The government can continue to sponsor resources and innovative programs that work directly in fighting violence against women. Eg: the Dandenong Casey and Cardinia council areas recently jointly worked on a resource to provide to faith communities (of any faith tradition) to assist the leadership teach their faith communities how tragic and how widespread violence against women is. That resource is currently in the 'trial' stage.
4. A peak body that supervises and links up all resources available to deal with family violence would be an excellent resource for the entire State of Victoria.

We wish the Royal Commission into Family Violence the very best to come up with useful recommendations to tackle this abhorrent crime that is spreading in our society like wildfire.

Signed,

Casey Multi-Faith Network

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