

City of Port Phillip: Submission to the Royal Commission in to Family Violence



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Family violence is currently a strategic area of focus for the City of Port Phillip and one in which Council is collaborating with other local governments and community organisations across Victoria to consolidate and extend. Council has committed resources towards identifying and implementing a range of interventions that aim to build the capacity of the organisation and community to prevent and respond to violence against women. The City of Port Phillip endorses and is guided by the Vic Health framework for the prevention of violence against women (Vic Health, 2007). In doing so, Council acknowledges the key determinants of violence against women as being unequal and disrespectful relationships between men and women, rigid gender roles between men and women and the prevalence of gender inequality across all layers of society (individual and relationship, community and organisations and societal). The result is a systemic problem that requires a range of systemic solutions. For this reason, The City of Port Phillip is actively engaged with the Prevention of Violence Against Women (PVAW) sector as a means of delivering actions that prevent violence before it occurs.

RECOMMENDED PRIORITY AREAS OF FOCUS IN THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A holistic and systemic response

It is important to explore and extend definitions of accountability and responsibility for addressing and preventing family violence to include a whole of community approach. This would more strongly recognise the role that individuals, families, government, business, education and faith communities can play in preventing violence against women and children. The important work that Vic Health have done details a systemic approach that recognises the ecological dimensions of family violence and provides an ecological context for action and change (VicHealth 2007).

Community Education

City of Port Phillip recommends that the Royal Commission explicitly explore the extent to which community attitudes about family violence and gender equity influence social values and cultural norms. VicHealth's important longitudinal research in to this area has done much to raise awareness of the link between cultural attitudes and violent behaviours (VicHealth 2013). Whilst the findings revealed that there were still areas where improvements need to be made, it did reveal that some attitudes have changed for the better over time. For this reason, the focus on primary prevention of violence against women must remain a high priority for the sector. It is likely that programs delivered across the community that focus on addressing violence before it occurs and adopt principles of gender equity will, given time and resources, lead to positive shifts in behaviour and attitudes. Further community awareness is needed to bring this research in to the mainstream

City of Port Phillip: Submission to the Royal Commission in to Family Violence



arena to influence community understanding of the key determinants of family violence.

An expansion of VicHealth's capacity to influence the sector through research, advocacy, evaluation, funding and capacity building will add value to efforts to address family violence across the community.

Respectful relationship education programs that are delivered, predominantly in secondary schools, are also an important development contributing towards preventing family violence (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009). These programs successfully introduce concepts around gender that challenge existing rigid gender stereotypes that create inequity and violence supportive attitudes and behaviours. This approach works systemically to prevent family violence through creating cultures that are based on principles of equity and respect. Further extension of this work in both the early childhood and primary school settings is needed to ensure that these important messages are being embedded from an early age and in all phases of development. It would be beneficial for this to be incorporated in to government policy and curriculum development across all education settings.

Campaigns that promote bystander approaches also encourage communities to challenge violence supportive attitudes and behaviours and create social conditions that, over time will shift responses from "why does she stay" to "why does he continue to use violence?" (VicHealth, 2011). It is these circumstances that provide an optimal setting to reduce the occurrence of family violence.

Communities that promote messages of gender equality and a zero tolerance to family violence provide optimal settings for the reduction of family violence. Public education campaigns that challenge myths about family violence and identify the gendered nature of violence create settings that directly challenge the causes and secrecy surrounding family violence, bring it out in to the open and give it recognition as a human rights issue.

Service Coordination and capacity building of the PVAW sector

The Municipal Association of Victoria is a valuable resource to local government that provides much needed coordination and capacity building opportunities that strengthen local governments' ability to become key contributors to the family violence prevention sector. This work needs to continue and be extended in order to ensure that PVAW initiatives become a central component of local government's core business.

The strong sense of collaboration across organisations and communities working in the PVAW space would be strengthened by a more coordinated and strategic response across the sector. This is especially evident in the Respectful Relationship Education realm where resources to coordinate the delivery of these programs across both primary and secondary schools are limited. The Domestic

City of Port Phillip: Submission to the Royal Commission in to Family Violence



Violence Resource Centre play a central role in capacity building in this area however has limited resources to extend their work further. This limits their potential to create, promote and engage a wide range of education settings to deliver Respectful Relationship Education programs based on the application of solid, evidenced based practice models.

The establishment of an integrated family violence system has been a positive step forward in providing better response outcomes for families, particularly high risk families where multiple breaches of intervention orders have occurred. Existing models such as specialised family violence teams through the Victorian police (i.e. task force Alexis) need to be replicated across Victoria. Also, Specialist Family Violence Services attached to the Victorian Magistrates Court need to be replicated across a broad range of sites in order to increase access to family violence specific supports throughout the judicial process.

The ethos of the integrated family violence model needs to also extend in to the prevention space to formally acknowledge the important work being undertaken by the PVAW sector. Continuing to resource peak bodies such as VicHealth, The Municipal Association of Victoria, Domestic Violence Resource Centre, Women's Health Victoria, Domestic Violence Victoria and Our Watch to continue their advocacy, networking and coordination roles in the prevention space will do much to create positive and sustainable change for the future.

The City of Port Phillip: A Local Government Response

The City of Port Phillip acknowledges the importance of local government in responding and preventing family violence and has undertaken the following activities as part of its campaign to address family violence

- White ribbon day video: Rallying staff and councillors across the organisation to take the White Ribbon Day Oath and raise awareness of the links between gender inequality and violence against women
- Bouncing Back booklet : A resource developed in conjunction with Hanover Children's Specialist Support Services that provides information to caregivers that will assist them to support children who have experienced family violence
- Family violence leave clause included in the City of Port Phillip Enterprise Bargaining Agreement
- City of Port Phillip Family violence commitment statement (to be actioned)
- Respectful relationship program developed for the primary school sector
- Common Risk Assessment Framework training to be delivered to Council staff (Child, Youth and Family Services, Aged Care, Local Laws and Animal Management)

City of Port Phillip: Submission to the Royal Commission in to Family Violence



- Gender Equity Forum: Changing Cultures, Changing lives: A forum delivered in collaboration with a number of local community support services that promotes the links between gender inequality and family violence

The City of Port Phillip will continue to address family violence in the following areas:

- Encourage the uptake of prevention and early intervention initiatives across relevant Council business areas
- Increase awareness of the links between gender equity and family violence both within Council and the community
- Continue to develop an organisational culture that upholds principles of gender equity and respectful relationships between men and women
- Continue to advocate for improvements to the family violence sector
- Continue to participate in an integrated family violence sector through relevant networks and collaborations

Evaluation

The City of Port Phillip acknowledges the complexities of evaluating initiatives that seek to prevent family violence before it occurs. It recognises that cultural change requires time, cannot be quantified and involves a participatory action based model that enables the community to demonstrate outcomes through shifts in behaviour and attitudes over a set period of time.

It is with this in mind that the City of Port Phillip will develop it's evaluation framework in assessing the effectiveness of strategies that seek to prevent violence against women. The City of Port Phillip will evaluate its work through identifying best practice research models (largely directed by Vic Health and the Municipal Association of Victoria) as well as working closely with partners across the sectors who are working with similar models and methodologies towards the same aim.

City of Port Phillip: Submission to the Royal Commission in to Family Violence



References

VicHealth (2007) Preventing Violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria

VicHealth (2011) Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing violence against women

VicHealth (2013) Australians' attitudes to violence against women

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2009) Respectful Relationships
Education: Violence prevention and respectful relationship education in Victorian secondary schools