

About Macedon

Macedon is an electorate of small towns and communities to the east and west of the Calder Freeway, from Gisborne in the South, to Elphinstone and Sutton Grange in the North, Daylesford to the West and Romsey and Lancefield in the East.

It is home to small and micro business owners, farmers, tradespeople, health and education workers, tree changers and Melbourne commuters, retirees and pensioners, young families, and artists.

Pockets of the electorate are significantly economically and socially disadvantaged and lack of access to local employment and transport only compounds that disadvantage. Other parts of the electorate are experiencing growth as Melbourne families look beyond the urban fringe for more affordable housing and a change in lifestyle while services and community infrastructure struggle to keep pace with growth.

I was elected in November 2014 and my submission is based on observations, conversations and issues raised with me during 2014 when I was campaigning and in 2015 as the elected representative.

Gender Inequality

While my submission focuses on the lack of services and the need for safer environments for women I hope the Royal Commission will address enduring gender inequality in Victoria as the root cause of family violence.

While women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions, in both the public and private sectors, while women still earn less than men and economic independence remains a struggle, while women's achievements in sport, the arts and business are given scant recognition, and in some instances ridiculed, some men continue to believe that women are to be treated as prizes or possessions rather than fully realised human beings.

This is evidenced in the everyday sexism women experience through to the vicious online trolling of women in the public eye and of course the scourge of family violence - behind closed doors in a place where every woman deserves to be safe - her home.

Family Violence in Macedon

In March 2014 following a 22.3 % rise in crime in the Macedon Ranges Police Service Area (PSA), Inspector Ryan Irwin noted the increase was related to a spike in family violence.

In seeking to explain the increase in family violence Inspector Irwin observed:

“Financial circumstances are not great out there, with the closure of car manufacturers hanging over many people and the Qantas layoff, which could potentially (have an) impact (on) people in the Macedon Ranges.”¹

Significant fires in January 2014 may also have taken their toll with international research indicating ‘that violence against women increases after large-scale disasters, which can include floods, droughts and fires – phenomena not uncommon in rural areas’².

Responding to most recent crime data for the Macedon Ranges PSA Inspector Irwin noted.

‘For the first time in many months, we have observed a reduction in the number of family violence-related assaults occurring in our area. A lot of work has been done with our partner agencies to encourage reporting of these incidents as well as enhancing our response and the level of support we provide to victims. Our Family Violence team has concentrated on high risk, repeat offenders in this category and they have generated some very positive results that have seen many high risk offenders incarcerated.’³

Support Services in Macedon

As a member of the Macedon Ranges Safety Committee I endorse the Committee’s submission that notes:

‘The emotional, physical and economical effects of family violence in the short and long term are indisputable. Yet for many of the women and children living in

¹ Barry Kennedy, ‘Family violence on the rise’ Macedon Ranges Leader, 4 March 2014

² Amanda George and Bridget Harris, Landscapes of Violence: Women surviving family violence in regional and rural Victoria, Deakin University, 2014, p61

³ My Place, Postcode 3444, Macedon Ranges at www.vicpolicenews.com.au

the Macedon Ranges, access to support services is at best limited and for some unreachable.

Women experiencing family violence in the small, rural communities in the Macedon Ranges shire face additional barriers to accessing the assistance they require. These include geographic and social isolation; challenges with maintaining anonymity and privacy in a small community; continued close proximity to their abusers and constantly visible to and monitored by their abusers; no medium to long term crisis accommodation; and less access to support and health services than is available in metropolitan areas.

The Macedon Ranges Shire has pockets of entrenched social, economic and transport disadvantage. This results in limited private resources for women to travel long distances to access services or to remove themselves and their children from existing social networks and to re-establish themselves in another location. Access to services is further compounded with limited public transport and expensive private transport options, especially in the east of the shire.”⁴

Housing

No emergency housing, no women’s refuge and limited public and social housing and a tight and expensive private rental market mean women and children have limited options when seeking safety.

Many women who experience family violence become homeless as a result of leaving their violent partners.

Lack of housing options affects perpetrators too as insecure housing can impede behaviour change and other programs focussed on supporting men develop appropriate and respectful behaviours, dealing with alcohol and drug issues or unemployment – all of which may contribute to violent behaviours.

Overwhelmingly however it is the women forced to flee. Why should the victims of family violence be subject to the upheaval and uncertainty of leaving their homes? In small regional communities women experience shame, disruption to work and schooling and social isolation as a result of escaping family violence.

⁴ Macedon Ranges Safety Committee submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence (Victoria)

I strongly support the principles underpinning the *Safe at Home*⁵ project, which is based on the idea that the person using violence should be removed from the home, making it safe for the woman to remain.

A range of actions and tactics can be used to keep women and children safe and should be further developed and implemented

Kyneton Courthouse

Kyneton Courthouse was built in 1856-1857. The courthouse is on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR No. H1472) and is historically significant as the earliest surviving Victorian courthouse since the separation of Victoria from NSW in 18512.

Despite a number of alterations, the public area of the courthouse has not been upgraded since it was first built. There is no undercover waiting area. People have to wait under the trees or in their cars. The building does not meet the current needs of the court.

The lack of amenity and safety has been raised with me consistently and has been the subject of media interest.

The Macedon Ranges Local Safety Committee has recognised the public safety issue at the Kyneton Courthouse and is working to “ensure the development of a safe space for women” on site.

The Royal Commission may wish to consider how fit for purpose some of our courts are given the increase in family violence incidents coming to court. Again I refer the Commission to George and Harris whose report canvasses the issues concerning the court setting and its impact on women’s ability to access justice.

⁵ www.safeathome.org.au