

City of Ballarat Submission

Royal Commission into Family Violence

May 2015

Council's approach to the prevention of violence against women is predicated on the following

- The use of sound evidence provided by peak bodies, like VicHealth;
- Recognition that violence against women is gendered;
- Acknowledgement that gender equity plays a significant role in eliminating violence against women; and
- Understanding of the important role that notable reforms and policy shifts have made over the past ten years in responding to allegations of gendered violence by Victoria Police

City of Ballarat and Violence Prevention

Like many Councils, the City of Ballarat Council has been proactive in supporting the prevention of violence against women. Areas of action are divided into the following three themes: demonstrating leadership, supporting partnerships and workplace arrangements. These have been expanded on below.

1. Demonstrating Leadership

Council has demonstrated community leadership with this issue through its consistent support for measures that raise awareness of the problem and solutions that support safe and healthy communities.

Council has implemented numerous actions that continue to build momentum for a community conversation that challenges men's violence against women. These include:

- **City of Ballarat Community Safety Strategic Plan**
The City of Ballarat Community Safety Strategic Plan 2014-2017 identifies the Prevention of Violence against Women as one of five Community Safety Leadership Opportunities. These priorities were identified by community and key stakeholders following an analysis of available evidence, assessment of key strengths and capacities and opportunities for influence.
- **City of Ballarat Community Charter for the Prevention of Violence against Women**
In March 2012 Council endorsed the 'City of Ballarat Community Charter for the Prevention of Violence against Women'. The Charter aims to highlight the need for a community approach to prevention, gather support for action that reduces violence against women and inspire people to act at an individual and community level to eliminate the attitudes that support violence.

Approximately 3000 residents have signed 'The Charter' since its launch in October 2012. The Charter has not been formerly evaluated, however its exposure to the community in a wide variety of settings (including education, business and community) has allowed for a community conversation and greater understanding of the extent of violence against women.

- **White Ribbon Day**
 Since 2006 Council has held an annual event to raise awareness about White Ribbon Day which coincides with the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Since 2006 three Councillors and five council officers have been inducted as local white ribbon day ambassadors. This show of support and leadership by male Councillors and staff has contributed to the growing momentum within the Ballarat community to discuss and condemn violence against women.
- **The 'Right@home' program**
 The City of Ballarat is participating in the right@home program, a nationwide nurse home visiting randomised controlled trial designed to promote family wellbeing and child development. Each family in the intervention group will be visited by a specially trained maternal and child health nurse from pregnancy until their child turns two and supported to access the range of services they need. The program will conclude and evaluations become available in mid-2016.
- **Council's Community Safety Awards**
 Council's annual 'Community Safety Awards' recognise and celebrate individuals and projects who contribute to community safety, categories include 'Family violence prevention'.
- **Baby Makes 3**
 Council is currently exploring opportunities to implement a 'Baby Makes 3' program to be available for first time parents. Baby Makes 3 is a VicHealth evaluated violence prevention program that supports first time parents to build equal and respectful relationship, a key determinant in preventing violence.

2. Supporting Partnerships

Preventing violence requires a community wide approach. Council has been successful in attracting widespread support and partnership from across the community. Organisations such as Victoria Police, Ballarat Leadership Western Region, Federation University, Women's Health Grampians, Ballarat Child and Family Services, The Courier newspaper, the Ballarat White Ribbon Day Committee and numerous others have worked together to promote gender equity and respectful relationships between all people in our community. Some specific examples of effective collaboration include:

- **Council's Community Safety Advisory Committee**
 The Community Safety Strategic Plan developed by Council's Community Safety Advisory Committee identifies the Prevention of Violence against Women as one of five Community Safety Leadership Opportunities. These priorities were identified by community and key stakeholders following an analysis of available evidence, assessment of key strengths and

capacities and opportunities for influence. The Committee brings together a cross section of people from a variety of organisations and backgrounds, all of whom have a key responsibility or role in ensuring Ballarat and its communities remain safe.

- **Central Highlands Crime Prevention Reference Group**

Council also plays a key regional role in crime prevention and community safety through its participation in the Central Highlands Crime Prevention Reference Group. The Reference Group, established in 2011 is auspiced by the Grampians Region Department of Justice and includes all Councils within the region along with State Government and Non-Government organisations. The prevention of violence against women is a priority area for this group.

- **Council's Community Impact Grants**

As part of Council's support, Community Impact Grants have been provided to local community organisations with \$30,090 of grant funding for eight preventing violence based projects since November 2011. The funding has enabled a range of community events, awareness raising campaigns and training sessions to be delivered throughout the community.

- **Community Charter for the Prevention of Violence Against Women Reference Group**

The implementation of the Charter is directed by this reference group made up of community members representing health, business, education, community groups, and trade union and welfare organisations.

- **Act@Work**

Council has been an active partner and supporter of Women's Health Grampians workplace violence prevention project. Funded by the Department of Justice, the project has assisted numerous workplaces, within the Ballarat LGA and beyond to build awareness and capacity to prevent violence against women.

- **Municipal Association of Victoria -PVAW Network**

This network is an important source of information sharing and inspiring practice across the local government, health and community sectors.

3. Workplace Arrangements

As a major employer within the community, Council is also aware of its corporate responsibility to support staff and volunteers if they experience family violence. The following actions are some examples of this commitment.

- **EBA Family Violence Clause**

The City of Ballarat's support for Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) No. 6 2013 (clause 31 - Family Violence) has contributed in creating a workplace environment that demonstrates why Australia has been recognised by the United Nations as a world leader in domestic violence workplace protections. To assist with the implementation of the Family violence clause, Council management participated in *Keeping Families Safe* training in 2014. The training aims to assist management with the identification and the support of Council staff who experience family violence.

- **Women's Leadership Program**

Other Council actions that support fair and flexible arrangements including gender equity are the City of Ballarat Open Women's Leadership Program. This program has been developed by Council Officers for Officers and aims to provide women within the organisation the opportunity to develop and improve leadership skills. It aims to encourage women to further their careers, support stronger

internal leadership and advance the representation of women in decision making roles within Council.

- **Council Policy**

Council policies that promote a safe and inclusive work environment include the following:

- HR01 - Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity;
- HR03 - Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment;
- HR05 - Bullying Prevention;
- HR11 - Flexible Working and Family Friendly;
- HR21 - Employee Assistance Program; and
- OHS008 - Occupational Violence and Aggression.

Evaluation

No formal evaluations have been conducted on the various projects and actions described above. Council takes the position that a long term reduction in family violence will come about through sustained role modelling of respectful and equitable relationships, via its community messages, through its workforce arrangements and by providing evidence based programs that support gender equity, reduce exposure to violence and/or increasing access to resources and support systems.

Recommendations

Council's recommendations to the Royal Commission into Family Violence are as follows:

1. To strengthen support for prevention based approaches to family violence;
2. Support the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) to provide leadership to local governments across Victoria to implement a wide variety of actions that support respectful, inclusive and equitable workplaces, neighbourhoods and communities.
3. Resource local agencies and organisation who deliver preventative approaches to violence prevention.