



20 May 2015

Royal Commission into Family Violence
PO Box 535
Flinders Lane
Victoria 8009

Dear Sir / Madam

Re: Maroondah City Council Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

Maroondah City Council welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The purpose of this submission is to outline Council's response to the problems of family violence impacting on our municipality/region. This has taken the form of some local solutions which are helping to change attitudes and behaviours.

Council acknowledges that the Royal Commission's work is hugely important, particularly as more attention needs to be brought to the issue of family violence. For too long family violence has impacted detrimentally on the lives of many Victorians and further progress is needed to reduce the incidences of family violence.

Local Government, with its local community grounding, is well placed to provide a leadership role to influence community attitudes and actions. It is a key player in helping to prevent family violence before it occurs. Due to the broad range of services provided by Councils, there are many opportunities to make a positive impact.

By way of background, the outer east of Melbourne, which includes the municipalities of Maroondah, Knox and Yarra Ranges, experiences higher levels of family violence than the east of Melbourne generally.

This was a prompt for the Preventing Violence Against Women in our Community (PVAWC) initiative, a three and a half year project (September 2011 to December 2014) funded by the Victorian State Government.

Maroondah Council believes that many of the activities and learnings from this initiative will be of interest to the Royal Commission. This is in part due to the transferability of some activities into other organisational settings (eg businesses, community organisations, educational institutions).

The PVAWC project was a partnership between Maroondah, Knox and Yarra Ranges Councils and was a primary prevention project that worked to prevent violence against women before it occurs. Accordingly project initiatives were not targeted at women experiencing violence or men who perpetrate violence. Instead, the focus of the project was to contribute to building communities, organisations, and cultures where violence against women does not occur due to women and men being equally valued, respected, heard and included.

The key approach to delivering the PVAWC project was to work internally within the three Councils to build their capacity to consider gender across policy, programs, infrastructure and services. The premise of this approach was that any changes to core Council business would in turn lead to impact in the community due to the influence local government can have over the social, economic, built and natural environments.

The key strategies employed to engage the three Councils in promoting gender equity to prevent violence against women included:

- Working with key teams
- Building leadership support
- Promoting the project and the need to address violence against women
- Supporting those showing an interest in and commitment to the issue
- Influencing Council plans and policy
- Stimulating interest in and normalising conversations around gender equality
- Education and awareness raising around the causes of violence against women.

Through this project a number of successes were achieved as outlined in **Appendix A**.

The key challenges associated with the PVAWC project related to maintaining a focus on the primary prevention of violence against women and the need to promote gender equity. This was within a context of continuing to include preventing violence against women as a priority within Council when there are other competing demands and issues that also require attention and resources.

Council is now on the journey of embedding changes in practice into core Council business so that actions aimed at preventing violence against women are thoroughly integrated and sustained.

The key learnings from the project for Council are as follows:

- It is important to normalise conversations around gender equity within Council so that employees feel comfortable and supported to explore the issue more.
- Significant time needs to be invested into building trust, nurturing relationships, capitalising on opportunities and developing employees knowledge and support
- When raising the profile of preventing violence against women as an issue, it is critical to be prepared to respond to disclosures of violence and sexism from employees and community members.
- There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to preventing violence against women in local government. Any approach needs to be tailored to the specific Council and take into account their leadership structure, culture, strategic emphasises and planning processes.
- There is much value in collaborating with surrounding Councils using a regional approach to tackle issues of family violence. The project was an impetus for increased collaboration, information sharing and relationship building.

Of note, in late 2014 the Australian Government's, Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), commenced an evaluation of the PVAWC project so as to assess its operation and effectiveness. Clearly the findings of this evaluation will be of benefit to policy makers.

On a related but separate note to the PVAWC project, funding was received in 2014 from State Government for the "Preventing and Responding to Family Violence within the Maternal Child and Health Context project". This is a partnership project led by the Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC), Eastern Domestic Violence Service (EDVOS), Yarra Ranges Council and Maroondah City Council.

The project aims to prevent and respond to family violence within the maternal and child health context by improving the responses of maternal and child health, legal and support services in a coordinated and integrated manner, with a focus on mothers engaging with Maternal Child and Health services. The grant will run over a three year period. A lawyer has been appointed to work within select Maternal and Child Health Centres on a rotational basis across the Cities of Maroondah and Yarra Ranges. Following 12 months of project planning, nurses have completed training and the program is set to commence in May 2015

Elder abuse is an issue that is linked to some family violence incidences. Melbourne's eastern region has the second highest number of elder abuse cases referred to Seniors Rights Victoria (ie approximately 80 per year and increasing). This is a clear concern to Council and hence significant activities have been pursued in response.

For example, Council participates in World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), an internationally recognised day that aims to shine a light on the problem of physical, emotional, and financial abuse of older people.

In 2015, in order to raise awareness of Elder Abuse, Council, through our Aged and Disability Services team, will be coordinating the following activities:

- Distributing 1,000 purple WEAAD ribbons to raise awareness throughout the community. Ribbons have been provided to local residents, community groups and numerous support services including Victoria Police, the Migrant information Centre, Eastern Health, Wesley, EACH Social and Community Health and Calvary Community Care. Proceeds are directed to the Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) who assist people affected by abuse.
- Hosting morning teas with all clients at Council's Social Inclusion and Wellbeing Centre (Kerrabee) for the week to discuss Elder Abuse and how to seek help
- Partnering with local GP clinics who will display and promote WEAAD posters and brochures in their waiting rooms. For our most isolated and often most vulnerable residents their only contact outside of their family is their GP.
- Articles in the Healthy Ageing Network's Chatterbox newsletter, the Maroondah Police Seniors Register newsletter, HACC communications delivered to volunteers and consumers.
- Presentation at Volunteers team meetings
- Internal Council promotion of the day

Of relevance, the ECLC 'Elder Abuse in the Community: Raising Awareness and Response project' (Federal Government funded) is helping to build on existing networks in Melbourne's eastern region to raise awareness of elder abuse in the community and improve agency responses with a focus on utilising the expertise and knowledge of health and community agencies.

Councils Aged and Disability Services Team is part of the Eastern Elder Abuse Network (EEAN). This is a network of professionals working with older people across the eastern metropolitan region, convened by ECLC's Elder Abuse Prevention Co-ordinator. Membership is free, and meetings are held bi-monthly. There are currently almost 100 members from a wide range of agencies, local governments, Victoria Police, law firms and hospitals.

The Elder Abuse Case Conferencing Site (EACCS) is a facility available to members of EEAN. It allows de-identified cases to be immediately circulated amongst members for advice, referral, support or information in cases where elder abuse is known or suspected. EEAN members are provided with a confidential log-in and password and the site can then be accessed whenever necessary.

An Elder Abuse Toolkit is available for anyone who is working with older at-risk people. Council also has Elder Abuse Prevention Guidelines for staff in Aged and Disability Services for identification and guidance of response in terms of Elder Abuse. In addition, Council also coordinates the Maroondah Police Seniors Register which supports many seniors who are at risk, vulnerable and susceptible to family violence.

Council is active in the children's sphere as family violence sadly also impacts on the whole family, including children. Council knows from research into trauma that even young babies will pick up on an atmosphere of conflict and violence. Supporting families is hence so important. Council's Children's Services team support programs such as 'Baby Makes Three'. This is a primary prevention program that seeks to prevent violence before it occurs, by promoting equal and respectful relationships between men and women during the transition to parenthood. First time parents are a key target group for primary prevention activity. The transition to parenthood represents a 'window period' during which it is possible to engage and work with both men and women when traditional notions of parenthood are exerting a powerful influence on how they approach and negotiate their parenting roles.

Council has had a big focus on supporting playgroups for parents to provide learning and help. Recent consultation for Council's Children's Plan identified that many younger parents are seeking connection with other families and children. This represents a desire to be part of a community as often young mothers, in particular, can experience isolation. Without these supports in place, incidences of family violence would likely be higher.

Council's Children's Services Team also has a big focus on education with respect to gender equality. This helps children's health practitioners to help identify and understand any biases they may have, and how these may be passed onto children. In this regard, training was successfully provided in 2014 to all Maroondah educators.

Although not a direct Council program, and not run in Maroondah, Council supports the work of a Federally funded program for early childhood entitled: 'KidsMatter Early Childhood'. This is a national mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative specifically developed for early childhood education care services. It recognises that parents, carers, families, early childhood educators and health professionals have significant influence on the lives of Australian children during an important developmental period.

Maroondah City Council is a strong supporter of the invaluable work of Women's Health East (WHE). WHE is a regional women's health promotion agency working across the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. It works with stakeholders to build the capacity of services and programs in the region to ensure they optimally address issues affecting women. In 2013, Maroondah was one of seven Councils, eight community health services and women's services across the eastern region that united to work together for 4 years under the banner of 'Together for Equality and Respect: A Strategy to Prevent Violence against Women in Melbourne's East 2013-2017'. This was supported at a launch by the Mayors and Councillors from participating councils.

Through Council's Maroondah Disability Advisory Committee, issues relating to people with a disability experiencing disproportionately higher incidences of family violence are canvassed. In response, Council supports a range of community service organisations that provide support for this target group.

In summary grant funding from State Government provides an important impetus for Council and partners to undertake more activity within the family violence preventative space. Accordingly there is value in the provision of additional financial support from State / Federal Government to assist with further efforts in the primary prevention sector. Local Government is well placed to ensure activities can be developed across the community to continue and expand the work of preventing family violence.

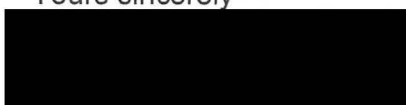
We leave the Commission with the following quote from Maroondah Mayor, Cr Tony Dib:

"As the Mayor of the City of Maroondah, I represent a Council that takes the matter of family violence as one of the utmost importance. Given that we are an area characterised by unacceptably high incidences of family violence, it was incumbent on our organisation to take a stand on the issue. In response we have taken many opportunities to publicly raise the profile of the impacts of family violence. Our support for White Ribbon and the 'Maroondah Pledge' (securing signatures from many local people) are examples in this regard. Together with my fellow Councillors, we will continue to promote gender equity, educate our community and represent the interests of those impacted by family violence."

In summary, Council again expresses its gratitude to the Royal Commission for the opportunity to make this submission and makes the following recommendations:

1. That the Commission consider the findings and recommendations made by the Australian Institute of Criminology in the evaluation of the Preventing Violence Against Women in our Community program.
2. That funding is provided to resource State and regional partnerships and actions plans - such as the Municipal Association of Victoria Preventing Violence Against Women Network and the Women's Health East Together for Equality and Respect Strategy.
3. That the Commission strengthens ongoing financial investment in primary prevention programs, particularly those coordinated through local government, that redress the determinants of violence.

Yours sincerely



Steve Kozlowski
Chief Executive Officer

Appendix A - Preventing Violence against Women in Our Community (PVAWC) initiative – Maroondah Project Successes

Leadership Commitment

- The Mayor and Councillors have provided their strong public support and backing for PVAWC initiatives. This has taken the form of speaking at events (eg White Ribbon), media statements, incorporation into key Council policies and general community awareness raising.
- Council's senior management and key staff were fundamental in driving and supporting project activity and awareness of preventing violence against women in Maroondah.
- Delivery of an Outer East Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) Senior Leadership Preventing Violence against Women Engagement session that was well attended by Maroondah senior management.

Public Stance

- Formal commitment to support an eastern region approach to preventing violence against women by making a public commitment to the Women's Health East (WHE) Together for Equality and Respect Strategy (Women's Health East is a regional women's health promotion agency working across the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. It works with stakeholders to build the capacity of services and programs in the region to ensure they optimally address issues affecting women).
- Launch of the Maroondah Pledge to: raise awareness in the community of violence against women, gain community support to take action and publically signal Council's commitment to addressing the issue. The Pledge received over 1000 signatures from community supporters.

Professional Development

- Delivery of 'Gender Matters' training provided to Council Human Resources and Children's Services employees in partnership with WHE.
- Outer East Identifying Family Violence training provided to Council's Local Laws team. This assisted Local Laws staff to be help identify the signs of family violence and directing people to support where necessary.
- Delivery of an Outer East Preventing Violence against Women in Leisure Services training session for staff employed in Council's Leisure Services and Major Leisure facilities (eg recreation centres, golf courses).

Team Action

- A cross section of Council Teams were engaged in the project (eg Community Planning and Development, Youth Services, Leisure Services, Maroondah Leisure, Children's Services, Aged and Disability Services Operations and Infrastructure, Local Laws and Communications and Marketing).
- Council's Leisure Services and Major Leisure Teams participated in a site visit to Moreland City Council Sport and Recreation Facilities to investigate examples of infrastructure that has been retrofitted to better accommodate the needs of women and girls.

- Leadership of the 'A Gender Lens for Leisure' project that produced a suite of recommendations on how Council's Leisure Services and Major Leisure Teams could work to promote greater participation, inclusion and respect of women and girls in sport and recreation activities.
- Council's Local Laws Officers and School Crossing Supervisors wore the White Ribbons during November (coinciding with White Ribbon Day acknowledgement)
- Promotion of the Maroondah Pledge by the Business and Development team at an event hosted by Jane Caro.
- Formation of a Council Leisure Services Team Gender Equity Working Group to promote inclusion and respect of women and girls in recreation.
- Council's Children's Services Team contributed to the project by inviting Scott Holmes, Y Respect Gender Project, to speak about Preventing Violence Against Women at their team meeting.

Awareness Raising

- Establishment of a Council White Ribbon Working Group with broad representation from across Council. Chaired by the CEO (also took on the role of White Ribbon Ambassador), activities led by the group included:
 - Commitment banner for employees to sign at the three Council sites
 - Coordination of a White Ribbon event for employees from all sites at Ringwood Golf (Council owned and managed facility) followed by a march to giant White Ribbon on high profile location alongside the Eastlink motorway.
 - Production of a White Ribbon Video
- The PVAW Program Manager at VicHealth, delivered a presentation as the key note speaker at the Maroondah International Women's Day breakfast in March 2012 that was attended by 200 people.
- Establishment of the Maroondah White Ribbon Cup as Maroondah's annual premium golfing event.
- Giant White Ribbon banner erected on the Eastlink/Ringwood Golf site with high public profile and tweeted by Triple M Radio.
- White Ribbons made available to community members at the 11 Council sites.
- Participation in a 2013 Victoria Police-led event in Eastland that featured then Chief Commissioner Ken Lay and a 'flash-mob' which included Maroondah Council employees.
- Screenings of the film Girl Rising to approximately 30 Council employees and 150 community members.
- Development of a "Run Maroondah" fun-run event aimed at raising awareness of violence against women
- Acknowledgement of International Women's Day through a project that shared facts about gender equity.
- In 2013, an exhibition at the Maroondah Art Gallery brought together a range of works that considered gender based violence. Launched by then Maroondah Mayor, Cr Nora Lamont, the exhibition, 'Dark Nights', involved an installation of works contemplating the on-going impact of childhood abuse, the losses, the grief as well as the frailties that result in unsound homes and parenting.

Integration into Policy and Plans

- Inclusion of preventing Violence against women as a key direction within the Maroondah Community Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017.
- Inclusion of an updated Family Violence Clause in the EBA that: provides extended leave entitlements for employees experiencing family violence, expands the definition of 'family member' and provides scope for employees to report through trained contact officers within Council.