

Family violence—primary prevention: a community involvement approach

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Family violence has become a major issue of concern for many communities around the world and is recognised as constituting a violation of human rights. Family violence can have devastating consequences on individuals, families, and the communities in which they live. It is now recognised as a significant social problem within Australian society. In Victoria, there is a 10 year plan to prevent violence against women and children (2010-2020). This plan was devised due to; the human rights imperative; impact on women's and health; impact on children and young people and the impact on the economy.

There has been an increasing emphasis internationally on strengthening a justice response to family violence. In addition to its punitive effect, the criminal justice system has a preventative effect by acting as a potential deterrent to men who use violence. However, in the application of this approach it was increasingly apparent that an effective family violence system would not be achieved through a justice response alone.

In 2002 the Victorian government developed an integrated model of response and prevention of family violence, which includes a justice and a community involvement response, it is termed 'whole government and community response'. This is a model which provides funding, training and resources to particular levels of the community e.g. people who use health care. It does not reach the community where people live and interact on a social level or for example a sports club level.

The community in which people live is an important place to have a conversation about primary prevention of family violence.

This project works with the Victorian Country Women's Association and the Monbulk community to:

- provide education to community members about family violence
- engage the community in a discussion about family violence
- invite community members and local family violence providers to give suggestions on the needs of the community regarding family violence
- develop recommendations for family violence prevention strategies

- develop recommendations to build resilience in the community.

The project started in January 2014 and has the support of the local services and community members. It is still continuing and making 'real' changes for individuals and families. These changes are clearly documented. One outcome is a DVD against family violence made by and including local members.

This community involvement model is transferable to other communities, particularly rural communities.