



Submission to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence

By: Go Goldfields Alliance & Go Goldfields Family Violence Action Group

Overview of Go Goldfields

Go Goldfields is an innovative alliance of organisations within the Central Goldfields Shire, created to deliver locally relevant responses to social issues that are too complex and too long-term for previous solutions.

Underpinned by a focus on prevention and early intervention, Go Goldfields involves families to deliver better outcomes for children, youth and families.

Go Goldfields is about how we work together to deliver locally relevant solutions to social issues affecting children, youth and families.

Our Vision

Our community aspiring, achieving and living a full life

Our Beliefs

We believe our work with children, youth and families is about:

- Working together to challenge and change the existing systems to build socially and economically independent citizens;
- Helping people think deeply and differently to improve the lives of children, youth and families;
- Maximising the benefits of working together;
- Being a part of our community for the long-term;
- Challenging ourselves and learning dynamically from our work;
- Being accountable to each other and our community;
- Involving our community in creating solutions.

Ultimately, the results we seek are for ourselves, because we live, work, play and raise children in the very communities we seek to improve.

Our Desired Community Outcomes

We work together to achieve our desired community outcomes with:

- Children and families
- Language and Literacy
- Parenting
- Youth
- Workforce Development

Go Goldfields, through the Family Violence Action Group has developed the Central Goldfields Family Violence Strategy has four key areas, all incorporating building on strength and addressing issues, these being:

- Prevention
- Early Intervention/Detection
- Tertiary Response
- Capacity Building

The intention was to develop a strategy that was both practicable and a 'stretch' for organisations re prevention, early intervention and tertiary intervention relating to family violence.

Key Principles

The Go Goldfields Alliance and Family Violence Action Group are committed to the following key principles developed by the specialist family violence response agency in our region (Centre for Non-Violence). These principles must form the backbone of any response to family violence in our communities:

- Violence and abuse is a breach of an individual's human rights - we all have a right to live free from violence.
- Violence is unacceptable in any culture or community.
- Violence occurs within a power and control context
- Family violence is a gendered issue – that is, most victims are women and their children, and most perpetrators are men.
- We work from an understanding of oppression in all its forms and the intersections between these multiple oppressions and disadvantage.
- Responsibility for ending violence rests not only with perpetrators who use violence, but also with the whole community.
- The choice to use violence is generally supported by social systems and structures.
- Violence is preventable.
- The prevention of violence must challenge the rigid gender norms and stereotypes that are supportive of violence enabling behaviours.

The Go Goldfields Alliance and Go Goldfields Family Violence Action Group also endorse the recommendations contained in the submission from the Central Goldfields Shire Council to the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the submission from the Loddon Campaspe Integrated Family Violence Services Consortium.

Key issues affecting our community

1. Leadership & Social Policy Framework

Early government policy around women's safety, ending violence against women etc., were strong, however over recent years there has been a diminution and watering down of those clear statements of intent. However, this is not to say there is no focus, just that there has been no reaffirming of commitment to integrated services approach (and how this is defined) since the rollout of the Integrated Family Violence Strategy some years ago.

Recommendation:

- (i) A strong policy framework needs to be reiterated/developed around:
 - clear principles that inform the Victorian Government's response to family violence – commitment to safety, rights, justice - including detail as outlined in our Key Principles section above;
 - prevention framework articulated or reaffirmed (Vic Health)

- commitment to co-ordination, integration and collaboration and best practice approaches in providing safety for women and children and accountability for men who use violence towards family members
- Funding models developed to support clear actions and outcomes in relation to the above with funding levels based on realistic assessment of demand and costs to deliver services.

2. System gaps, responses and integration

(a) Women and children experiencing family violence

We acknowledge the significant improvement in responding to women and children experiencing family violence since the adoption of the Integrated Family Violence Strategy (approx 2005). Since that time, considerable system improvements and responses have been achieved in police responses, improved legislative response and protection, increased investment in front line services, and the development and understanding of the importance of integrated system responses. However, there is a long way to go to ensuring consistent, safety led responses to women and children experiencing family violence.

There do remain significant issues and concerns with current responses, specifically, women unable to access support when and where they need it.

Increased awareness, improved system and police responses have resulted in record numbers of women seeking support, whether through increased police attendances, referrals from other support services (child protection, family services, drug and alcohol) or self referrals. Presently, our specialist regional family violence support agency is located in Bendigo, with outreach support provided to Maryborough. Our regional community legal centre is also located in Bendigo who provide outreach support as well. Even though we have a local family violence liaison officer located with Victoria Police in Maryborough, the specialist family violence response team and family violence advisor are also located in Bendigo.

Whilst very good telephone support is available to women, we must not underestimate the impact of timely, face to face support to women, who can build a relationship and trust with community workers enabling appropriate risk and safety assessments to be undertaken, safety planning taking place and response and recovery programs put in place.

We acknowledge that resources will always be stretched, however, current funding models do not provide adequate resourcing for our regional services to extend to a full-time presence in our community.

After hours support is also limited to women across the region. Again, telephone based support is the only response to women in locations outside of Bendigo. Whilst this may be appropriate in some cases, there are many women who require additional and face to face support after hours.

There are a lack of appropriate and dignified crisis accommodation options in our region, and the over reliance on motels and sub-standard options such as caravan parks are inappropriate and often unsafe.

Response to children experiencing family violence is also limited, with virtually no support available to those children.

Recommendations:

- (i) Funding be made available to our specialist response services (family violence, community legal centre, additional police specialisation, child protection, family services) to provide a full-time multi-agency presence in Maryborough. This would ensure:

- 24 hour specialist regional response and face to face support where required to respond to crisis and immediate safety issues for women and their children
 - seamless referral for additional business hours support (legal, court support, recovery and support programs)
 - increased capacity for the system to respond holistically and in concert with each other's efforts – prioritising the safety of women and their children
- (ii) Increased safe, crisis housing responses – including crisis housing and women's refuges - be available to specialist agencies and housing and homelessness agencies across the region.
- (iii) Increased resources (taxi vouchers) to fund transport (business and after hours) of women to Bendigo or other parts of region/state be provided.
- (iv) Increased resources for specialist counselling programs (individual and group) for women and children in Maryborough – part of recommendation (i) above.

(b) Men who use violence towards family members

We acknowledge the improvements at a statewide level since 2005 in responding to men who use violence towards family members. 2005 saw the first formal funding of men's behaviour change programs across the state, and also saw the introduction of a local men's behaviour change program providing responses to the Loddon Campaspe region.

There are limited responses to men who use violence across the state, with an over reliance on "civil" responses such as women or police taking out intervention orders against men who use violence.

Funded services for men who use violence are extremely limited in our region – our regional men's behaviour change program is based in Bendigo making access difficult for some men. There is also a lack of qualified facilitators of men's programs.

Further, inconsistent system responses (and messages) to men who use violence towards family members often lead to the system acting in a punitive way towards women and holding them responsible for his use of violence (ie., child protection etc.).

Recommendations:

- (i) Funding is urgently required to expand the number of places in our existing men's behaviour change program and men's case management program across our region.
- (ii) Funding models should provide for capacity – where there is demand – to deliver men's behaviour change – and related - programs in Maryborough.
- (iii) Funding should be provided – where either there is not sufficient demand for a dedicated program in Maryborough, or other access barriers exist, to fund transport options for men to attend groups in Bendigo or Ballarat.
- (iv) Workforce development strategies are required to increase the number of trained men's behaviour change facilitators across the region (and state). This may require assistance to meet course fees (\$4,000 approx.) and related costs (backfill, travel, accommodation, placement costs).
- (v) Additional training – and an ongoing funded and localised training plan - in the Comprehensive Risk Assessment Framework and dynamics of family violence to staff working in family violence and related services (child protection, family services, drug and alcohol, health, mental health etc).

(c) Adolescents who use violence towards family members

There are increasing numbers of police attendances at homes where adolescents are using violence towards family members. Options for support and response to this target group are extremely limited in the state with no options available in our region.

Recommendation:

- (i) Funding be provided for rollout of adolescent family violence in the home programs across the State, with specific availability in key points in our region including Maryborough. These programs should be provided by specialist providers who are well trained in the dynamics of family violence and safety led service provision.

(d) Integration, co-ordination and collaboration

Formal integration, co-ordination and collaboration efforts in responding to family violence have been in development since the rollout of the Integrated Family Violence Strategy in 2005.

We are hampered by insufficient resources and capacity in these efforts, with all system players not only involved in additional activities to promote integration and co-ordination, but without any extra capacity to do so, or clear statements/frameworks as to what is expected regarding integration and co-ordination. We do acknowledge the resources attached to the Regional Integration Co-ordinators and the newly established RAMPS, however, system players also require capacity to increase their meaningful engagement. Partnership development requires time and effort and a commitment to engage collaboratively to ensure the best possible outcomes for our community.

Recommendation:

- (i) Funding and capacity be provided to identified system players to resource collaboration efforts.
- (ii)

3. Primary Prevention

Primary prevention efforts in preventing family violence have been piecemeal and not well funded, nor, have there been resources to engage the local community fully. Primary prevention is more than just awareness, however, it must be clearly understood that increased awareness (through prevention or awareness raising) leads to increased demand for services.

Primary prevention must clearly identify that violence against women, including family violence, is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality.

Primary prevention is the responsibility of everyone in our community – at all levels, and efforts should be made to confirm and resource expectations from government and the community more broadly.

Local best practice initiatives have delivered excellent results, but funding for these valuable projects remains a problem. Local communities are also clear they want capacity to engage in prevention efforts, with significant effort put in at our local level by service clubs.

Violence prevention efforts need to engage community action and involvement over a long term approach.

Recommendations:

- (i) A clear violence prevention framework is articulated (or at the very least VicHealth framework reaffirmed) that outlines key activities across whole of society – ie.,

- awareness days, respectful relationships, youth engagement, sporting club responses, bystander training etc.
- (ii) Local communities – via the Family Violence Advisory Committee – have access to local violence prevention funds for implementation of agreed projects in their communities. For example, Maryborough will be able to access a core set of funds to support its efforts.
 - (iii) Existing best practice approaches be funded for full development in our region including Maryborough Rotary and Zonta club projects; Solving The Jigsaw; bystander programs (Take A Stand).
 - (iv) Local government be directly funded to co-ordinate and work in partnership with violence prevention projects in their community.
 - (v) Violence prevention, intervention and respectful relationship education be integrated into the Victorian school curriculum. The program should be based on a whole-school approach, operating across curriculum, teaching and learning, school policy and practices, school culture, ethos and environment and the relationships between school, home and the community, as recommended in the Department of Early Education Department report Respectful Relationships Education (2009) [<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/health/respectfulrel.pdf>].

Signed:

Sharon Fraser
General Manager
Go Goldfields Alliance

Margaret Augerinos
Chair
Go Goldfields Family Violence Action Group