

CITY OF CASEY – Partnership project with
Cardinia-Casey Community Health Service and the
Casey Pastors Network 2007 – 2009 Promoting Peace
in Families (Family Violence Prevention)

PROMOTING PEACE IN FAMILIES is an innovative partnership between the City of Casey, the Cardinia-Casey Community Health Service and the Casey Pastors Network, funded by the Federal Attorney General's National Community Crime Prevention Program, and a 2009 Australian Crime & Violence Prevention Award winner.

The project educated senior ministry leaders to identify, respond to and prevent family violence. The methodology used a Health Promotion framework and settings approach to improve early intervention and service system response; education and behavior change; community strengthening; policy and structural change.

Key strategies were to build capacity of leaders to intervene effectively with both victims and perpetrators, to educate congregations and the broader community about unacceptable behaviors and attitudes, and to promote healthy relationships.

Unanticipated outcomes included faith leaders offering a formal apology to the community for previous inadequacies in responding to the problem of violence against women, and a significant numbers of perpetrators calling for support to change.

Key learnings included:

RAISING AWARENESS

Discussing the prevalence and extent of family violence increased ownership and commitment to the project.

We also found there was little knowledge of the manifestations of family violence other than physical, so it was beneficial in helping leaders identify family violence to know that abuse occurs in a range of ways.

RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS

Although complex and confronting, the gendered nature of violence needed to be discussed, and extensive evidence provided. It was important for leaders to understand the cultural context of violence supporting behaviours being accepted by both genders in our society and that men are the predominant perpetrators. Backlash when raising this should be anticipated and leaders prepared for it, with suggested ways to respond. Therefore it was important to develop strong peer support amongst leaders so they can share ideas on ways to best challenge behaviours, attitudes and debrief.

The concept of the matter being a public one, not private, helped leaders feel justified in intervening.

PREPARING LEADERS FOR DETECTING AND RESPONDING TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

Building the capacity of leaders built their confidence to respond.

A number of key messages/concepts were identified as significant:

- Safety - women and children's safety is paramount
- If you identify it, confront it
- When family violence is identified, do a safety plan - it is important to raise this potential with victims
- Believe the victim

PREPARING LEADERS TO CHALLENGE CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Faith based issues such as separation, divorce, forgiveness and reconciliation, and male headship need to be supported by specific forums where well respected faith leaders with an understanding of family violence present new ways of thinking over traditional mind sets.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Leaders and the general community were taught strategies to approach and open up discussion on this otherwise uncomfortable topic. This includes group discussions about assertive, sensitive and safe ways to address situations, and allow role practice sessions. Discussion groups also targeted adolescents and children.

ENCOURAGING PUBLIC OPPOSITION TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN.

Faith leaders were recognised to have a strong influence on behaviour within their communities and thus have a vital role in primary prevention.

Non-violent men were encouraged by leaders to publicly oppose violence against women including men speaking out in their workplaces, neighbourhoods etc against sexist, and hostile attitudes towards women.

Non-violent men were also encouraged to discuss and role model respectful relationship behaviour. Men also saw the need for male discussion groups to develop for this to occur.

DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY AND STRUCTURES

Adoption of sound policies and operational procedures within the faith setting supports intervention and provides a sustainable structure. This was developed in collaboration, and tested and refined.

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EVALUATE EFFECTIVENESS

We built in evaluative indicators up front so we could see what worked well.

Leaders developed the things they wanted to measure that were important to them.

This enabled us to refine the pilot first year stage into a good practise model and test it in ongoing years.

SUSTAINABILITY AND PARTNERSHIP

Equal consideration was given on the development and support of the partnership as to the project delivery and what needed to be put in place that could exist after the funding ceased.

Access to accredited training was the key to capacity building.

PROMOTING RESPECTFUL STRUCTURES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Faith communities wanted to go beyond addressing family violence intervention and look at building protective factors and work on building individual relationships to be more respectful.

Initially this is the point they wanted to start from, however we felt they needed to understand the issue fully at first, and be able to respond before being able to fully understand what prevention might look like.

An outcome was that faith communities that were more 'communal' with one another were evaluated as better at supporting both victims and challenging behaviors. This outcome was communicated to faith communities for future consideration.

We're off and running...

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