

Reclaim Our Voice

October 2009 Evaluation Report



Reclaim the Night

Celebrating women and our right to live free from violence.



Zena Women's Services



Thanks

The many women who participated in the choir
Everyone who attended the event
The women who made lanterns
Belinda McArdle
Lisa Singline
Sue Hindle
Andrea Dawes
Reclaim the Night Collective
Zena Women's Services
Wholewoman Barwon South West Regional Women's Health
City of Greater Geelong
Barwon Health Regional Women's Health Resource Service
VicHealth Preventing Violence against Women Senior Project Officer

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**“Tonight I sang for my Mum
who was a victim of
Domestic violence. I am
totally impressed with the
‘Reclaim our Voice’ and
Reclaim the Night.”**

Background

Reclaim the Night Collective Geelong is a women's community group focusing on issues of family violence and sexual assault that impact on the lives of women and children. The goal of the group is to create awareness within the community around these social issues and to engage and empower women's action in the process of creating solutions.

Zena Women's Services works with women and children from a feminist perspective to support and promote their rights to live free from violence and abuse. The organisation provides support, information, resources and referral to address women's and children's experiences of domestic violence.

Barwon Health's Women's Health Resource Worker is part of the Barwon South Western Regional Women's Health Service, a women's health promotion service operating across this diverse rural/regional geographical area of southwest Victoria. Resource workers partner with health, community, arts, education and local government sector organisations to deliver improved outcomes for women's health and wellbeing. The primary two aims of the service are to increase access to health services and community resources for women from marginalised population groups, and to advocate for consideration within health and social policy and planning, of the issues that impact on women's health and wellbeing.

All three base their work within a feminist framework, including a solid analysis of patriarchal structures and their impact on both society and the lives of women, a focus on equity, specifically in relation to gender but also in terms of other forms of disadvantage women may experience and recognizing the importance of both women's voice and the many diverse experiences of women. Further Reclaim the night Collective, Zena Women's Services and the Women's Health Resource Worker share a keen interest in the prevention of violence against women especially through community based, women centered initiatives.

These shared ideas and values together with the fact that two Zena board members and a Zena worker are also members of the Reclaim the Night Collective enabled a successful partnership between the three entities in organising and running the "Reclaim Our Voice" Reclaim the Night 2009 event.

The idea of the project was to form a women's community choir to learn the women's anthem "Love and Justice". The women's anthem written by Kavisha Mazella and commissioned by the Women's Trust had been performed the previous year at Federation Square in Melbourne to mark the centenary of women being able to vote. Both the women's Health Resource Worker at the time and members of the Reclaim the Night Collective had taken an interest in the process and final performance of this anthem. A copy of the women's anthem kit was obtained from the Victorian Women's Trust. The group then decided to apply for funding (a councilor's community grant and a Wholewoman grant) to engage community choir director Belinda McArdle to teach and conduct the choir. A number of choir rehearsals were then organized and the opportunity advertised through emails, flyers and word of mouth. The choir rehearsals took place at the Geelong West Town Hall and the final performance and event at GPAC, the council steps and the Courthouse Youth Arts Centre. The event included speakers at each location, extra entertainment provided by various choir members and food.

Why Address Violence Against Women?

Research has shown that violence against women is a common problem. The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey suggests that 57% of women have experienced sexual or physical violence perpetrated by a man in their lifetime (Mouzos and Makkai 2004). The 2005 Personal Safety Survey finding indicated that 29% of women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and 17% have experienced sexual assault. This survey also found that 16% of women had experienced violence from a previous or current partner in their lifetime (ABS 2005). These figures, while concerning do not give us a full picture of the extent of violence against women, as the surveys listed only ask about physical or sexual violence and therefore fail to account for other types of violence such as emotional, social and financial abuse.

Further to this, Vichealth has identified intimate partner violence as the largest contributor to death, disease and disability for Victorian women aged 15 – 44 (Vichealth 2004).

Perhaps most alarming are the results of a recent nationwide study on community attitudes towards violence against women. This survey found that 22% of respondents believe that intimate partner violence is perpetrated equally by men and women. A comparison to a 1995 survey found that 13% more people held this belief in 2009 as compared to those surveyed in 1995 (Vichealth 2009).

Why Use The Arts?

Reclaim the Night Collective have been increasing their use of arts based initiatives within preventative and awareness raising work for the past five years. The collective has found that arts based projects attract participation from a diverse range of women and prove appealing to those that attend events. Over the years there has had much positive feedback both from women directly involved in the creation of arts projects and audiences who attend events and observe the completed pieces (examples of this feedback are contained in previous evaluation reports).

Literature around the use of arts in promoting mental health and wellbeing details a number of positive effects using the arts within mental health promotion can have. These include self esteem, social connectedness and education (McQueen-Thomson, Ziguras, 2002). Further the use of arts can help people to process emotional responses to lived experiences, enable people to share their individual experiences of difficulty and pain, lift the mood of groups, create optimism, give visibility and voice to marginalised people, provide a sense of purpose, help people connect through shared interests, and allow for the creation and expression of stories and narratives (Mulligan, Humphrey, James etc al, 2006).

VicHealth Framework

For Prevention of Violence Against Women

The Reclaim Our Voice events were intended to take action around the VicHealth Prevention of Violence Against Women key themes for action of: Promoting Non Violent Norms/ Reducing the Effects of Previous Exposure to Violence and Improving Access to resources and systems of support.

The events aimed to do this by:

- Raising awareness of violence against women
- Presenting a strong clear message that violence against women is unacceptable
- Providing an opportunity to engage in an arts based health message
- Providing information through speeches, display material and on an information table
- Providing an opportunity for women to connect and socialise with other women in a fun, supportive environment

Contributing Factors Addressed

- Social Isolation
- Attitudes and social norms pertaining to violence against women
- Beliefs and practices relating to gender roles and identities
- Collective efficacy

Population Groups

Choir – Women

Event – Women and men (friends and family of choir members, patrons at GPAC, Reclaim the Night supporters).

Preventative actions undertaken

- Direct participation (through 4 choir rehearsals and 3 performances)
- Communications and social marketing (through media releases, radio, flyers, agency cross promotion of events by Women's Health Resource Worker and others, and Internet communications including facebook site).
- Community strengthening (rehearsals and public event).

Settings

Community, Health, Arts

Objectives

- ★ To raise community awareness of gender violence
- ★ To give Geelong women an avenue to speak out on these issues (gender violence) within the community
- ★ To utilise the arts to create greater social connection between women in Geelong
- ★ To create greater awareness of the historical struggle previous women have encountered that has allowed women of today the rights we currently enjoy
- ★ To place the struggle for women's rights to be safe centrally within the broader struggle for women's rights



Process Reflections

This years event was the 20th Reclaim the Night event to be held in Geelong. The collective consider that this has been the most successful event the current group has run (from approximately five years of events).

Planning for the events occurred mainly through the Reclaim the Night Collective with the others involved providing support as needed. Zena Women's Services auspiced two grants received from City of Greater Geelong and Wholewoman.

Four choir sessions were held organised by Reclaim the Night Collective and facilitated by Belinda McArdle. A number of groups and individuals also made lanterns to be used in a lantern lighting ceremony at the council steps. Meanwhile the event was planned and organised by Reclaim the Night Collective.

There were two main options considered for the final performance – Geelong Performing Arts Centre and Westfield. Westfield declined the offer of having the choir perform at the shopping centre and the group negotiated with GPAC to have the final performance there.

Some component of walk or march was also discussed but the costs for traffic management were prohibitive and thus the group decided not to pursue this.

Another important part of the lead up to the event was the making of lanterns for a lantern lighting ceremony to be held at the council steps. The lantern lighting ceremony was intended to symbolically mark Reclaim the Night through remembering present and past victim/ survivors of violence and acknowledging the strength of both survivors of violence and women in general. The collective investigated a number of options before deciding on plastic cups decorated with tissue paper. These cups contained a battery operated tea light candle to be lit during the ceremony. The main issues experienced in relation to the lanterns were the cost of the tea lights (at around \$1 each) and the relative ineffectiveness of these when they were lit due to daylight savings meaning it was still quite light outside.

**Intimate Partner Violence is
the biggest contributor to
death disability and illness for
Victorian Women aged 15-44
(VicHealth 2004).**

The Power of Song

(Reflections from the Choir Director)

Charles Darwin has argued that speech evolved from song. 90% of the anatomy of the throat is redundant outside of the arena of singing.¹ Ergo, humans are built to sing and it is probable that singing is a more innate form of self expression than speech.

The Reclaim the Night Collective engaged me, Belinda McArdle, to activate a choir of voices to sing the anthem 'Love and Justice' by Kavisha Mazzella. Qualitative data was collected to testify to the importance and success of this initiative.

As the choir leader, already engaged in a popular singing community, I was witness to the reactions of several 'would be participants.' Some felt uncomfortable about the 'Reclaim the Night' message. Their sense of the movement was one of 'protest', of 'marching', of 'fight.' These same women, by my direct observation, connected with the group due to the inclusion of singing, they stayed for each rehearsal, performed with the collective, and bore witness to the messages.

My direct observation was that many women experienced solidarity against violence in a positive way. My direct observation was that these women feared being militant and felt comfortable, if not empowered, through singing a message that they may have felt uncomfortable 'speaking' or 'marching.' I have worked in the community for seven years as a singing facilitator. I talk with these women weekly, some of them are my best friends and one of them is my mother. What I know as a result of that experience is that many of the women would not have marched had they not been engaged through singing and as a result of their experience they were proud to march.

So often in community projects the process is as important as the outcome. So it was with the Reclaim Your Voice project. As this document has discussed, although the initiative was co-ordinated through the RTN collective, many of the singers were drawn from an existing community of singers. This is exciting for RTN – it allowed for new women to engage with the message.

These women were excited. Although each Sunday rehearsal brought 20 absences, 20 new people and a seeming lack of continuity I had the unique role of hearing 20 'explanations of absence' per week that represented the value the women placed on the activity. It represented the respect the women felt for the activity. It represented the very pleasant symptom of 'belonging' for a time and to feeling accountable.

In Melbourne 400 singers performed Love And Justice. In Geelong we convened 100. This is a very impressive statistic given the pure numbers of comparison between Melbourne and Geelong. A crude summary of the choir survey respondents is

- This activity empowered women
- This activity educated women
- This activity excited women.

Overwhelmingly, the choir respondents respected the organisation and leadership of this project and felt worthwhile as participants.

¹ Hawkes J, "The Biological Imperative", Community Music Victoria www.cmv.customer.net.au

As a community singing facilitator, an activist and long time Board Member of Community Music Victoria I can confidently argue for the effective administration of public monies in this project by the Reclaim the Night Collective.

Further investment into the Geelong Reclaim the Night Collective will see a deepening of confidence by women in their individual and community voice. The plan for 2010 to develop an original piece will harness creativity, inspire confidence and empower through action. Acabellas is proud of their association with Reclaim the Night Collective and their foresight to embrace the fundamentals of singing to speak the message of strength.

“Reclaim the Night was a great healing process for me as a victim of violence myself it was really powerful to sing my blues away... For the first time ever I felt strong and I reclaimed my night and I am a little less afraid of the dark night...”

Evaluation Process

This evaluation was informed through two feedback sheets, the choir feedback sheet (used to answer questions about the choir – appendix 1) and the event survey (used to answer questions about the event and attendees – appendix 2). The choir feedback sheet consisted of one main question and a large lined space. The intention of this was for choir participants to be given the space to write about their experiences of the choir and what they got out of it. The emphasis was on women's voice and obtaining narratives of women's experiences. This form was given to choir participants at the last rehearsal. It must be noted that not all choir members were present at every rehearsal thus some choir participants may not have had the opportunity to complete the feedback form. There were around 70 choir participants and 36 of these completed evaluation forms. The event survey consisted of a number of general sentence starters with blank spaces below them (I liked... I learnt...etc). While this form was intended to be a little more directed than the choir feedback sheet, the group also wanted to ensure that people could have a voice and provide personal feedback around their experiences. The idea was to encourage people to write about the things they thought were important while providing feedback on certain aspects of the event. This survey was handed to event attendees shortly after reaching the final performance and celebration venue. As an incentive those who filled out surveys were given a ticket for a raffle to win a block of chocolate. Approximately 300 people were at the event with 54 filling out the survey. 41 of those who filled out the survey were female, 11 were male and 2 were unidentified gender. It must be noted that as the survey was available to anyone at the event it is evident through the feedback that a number of those whom participated in the choir also filled out the event survey. This evaluation has been further informed in part by observations and reflections of members of the organising group.

The evaluation uses predominantly qualitative data in an attempt to capture experiences of the process and event. Some quantitative data has been included to provide an indication of the number of responses that fitted into particular themes. Where quantitative data has been used it indicates number of responses or number of people as indicated. Where number of responses is indicated this does not necessarily reflect the number of people, as one person could have made two separate responses (ie: I liked... and I learnt...) fitting the particular theme.



Were The Objectives Met?

Raising community awareness on issues of gender violence

How many people attended the event?

Around 300 people attended the choir performances. This is quite an improvement on recent years, in particular last year's event where there was only 70 people in attendance. In particular there was a notable increase in males at the event. While no data is available on the exact number of males present, through visual observations it could be estimated that around $\frac{1}{4}$ of attendees were male. The event attracted a wide and diverse range of people and a good mix of ages. It was also observed that many event attendees were people who had not necessarily attended previous events.

The increase in attendance, increased male participation and significant involvement from people who had not necessarily attended previous events is likely to be due to the formation and use of a women's choir as the main focus for the 2009 event. The choir participants (many whom were attracted to the choir through various singing groups) invited (and promoted the event to) friends and family who would ordinarily not have been within the reach of Reclaim the Night promotion. Many of these friends and family members probably attended the event due to their personal connections with choir members.

Did event attendees identify/feel their awareness of the issue was raised?

36 respondents specifically identified a greater awareness around gender violence

7 men

28 women

1 unidentified gender

While 28 people didn't specifically mention a greater awareness of gender violence within their evaluations, the majority of these (15) still identified that they had learnt something from their involvement in the event. For an outline of these learning's please refer to the "I learnt" section of this document (page 21). The comments around learning's about violence can be divided into four main themes: direct awareness about violence, issues and statistics, acknowledgement of the event as awareness raising/prevention of violence, learning's about action around violence/ how to take action and inspiration for action.

Direct awareness about violence, issues and statistics

Comments that fit this theme included those that acknowledged learning/ heightened awareness of violence including statistics, prevalence, severity of violence, types of violence and who it affects.

16 responses fitted into this category.

Examples included:

[After tonight I will...]

Be more aware of violence against women and children. (female)

[be] more aware of others plights and not just my own. (female)

[I learnt..]

about problems facing women in community that isn't as obvious to men (male respondent).

some shocking stats about violence. (female)

Acknowledgement of the event as awareness raising/prevention of violence

7 comments

[I liked] *the concept of combating violence against women in a meaningful way. (female)*

[I learnt] *that all people can unite to help us all heal from violence. (female)*

This has been a wonderful night helping to make all aware of violence and how we can come together to prevent it through education. (female)

Learning's about action around violence/ how to take action

15 comments

These included comments that suggested learning's about action on violence, how to participate in action, the need/importance of action and knowledge about Reclaim the Night.

[I learnt]

we all need to support each other and spread these messages to change behaviour (abusive). (female)

much of the origins of Reclaim the Night. (female)

more about the challenges to reduce violence against women. (male)

about the need for public recognition in terms of women's liberation in the cultural context. (male)

Inspiration for Action

13 respondents (ie: 13 people)

7 female

6 male

Comments in this category were all filled out in the “After tonight I will section.” These comments revolved around taking action on violence and gender inequity by caring, talking to others about these issues, supporting reclaim the night and getting involved in other related activities.

[After tonight I will...]

Attempt to get involved in gender equality activities in and around Geelong. (male)

tell people about what I heard and learnt to let people become more aware. (female)

tell others about how and why to respect women. (male)

learn more about how I can support this cause. (female)



To give Geelong women an avenue to speak out on these issues within the community

Did choir participants feel they had the opportunity to speak out about violence and gender inequity?

Only 7 of the 36 choir participants that responded to the choir evaluation identified the song/event focus' on violence and gender inequity as things they gained/enjoyed about the choir experience.

A number of other participants wrote about sisterhood and feelings of both women's and personal strength and power.

There are many factors that could have influenced this, a number of which are listed here. Firstly the Reclaim the Night group wanted to really capture women's voices and experiences in the choir evaluation form and thus asked only one question of choir participants – "What have you personally gained/ enjoyed from being involved in the women's choir. Thus many participant responses were focused around enjoyment of the singing and social connection rather than the content/focus of the song. Secondly it cannot be assumed that all choir participants particularly wanted to speak out about these issues through participation in the choir. The evaluation sheets and way the choir was promoted (largely through other singing groups) may suggest that a number of women attended the choir simply to sing and/or to be with other women while doing so. Finally there was not a strong focus on talking about violence against women/ gender inequity at any of the practices. While the purpose of the song and some information about Reclaim the Night and the collective was explained at the first session, only brief discussion occurred in later sessions. A number of those who ended up in the final choir were not present for the first practice and thus may have missed a significant proportion of this background information.

Did the event speak out against violence?

The event clearly spoke out about violence through the following:

- The parading of a "No Violence Against Women and Children" banner through the street (Appendix 3a).
- The holding of this banner at the front of the choir during the choir performances (Appendix 3b).
- The speaker from VicHealth at GPAC talking about violence against women as a social problem with far reaching impacts and the role all people and communities can play in addressing this. (Appendix 5a).
- The lantern lighting ceremony and accompanying speech by the Women's Health Resource Worker highlighting the strength of victim/survivors, women and communities (Appendix 5b).
- The displaying of both a second banner and the information "bannerbugs" about family violence and sexual assault as the main stage backdrop for the Courthouse event (Appendix 3c).
- The information table at the event (Appendix 3d).

To utilise the arts to create greater social connection between women in Geelong

Did choir participants identify the process as involving social connection?

23 of the 36 women who completed the choir feedback sheet identified that one of the things they had personally gained/ enjoyed from their involvement in the choir was the social connection. The various participants identified social connection in a myriad of ways, illustrating the diversity of women in the group. Participants wrote about unity, coming together, networking, camaraderie, power, working together, community, friendship (new and old), sharing, caring, meeting, mingling, chatting, strength, acceptance, welcome, sisterhood, diversity and connection. The majority of participant comments around social connectedness focused on being with other women.

Violence has punctuated my life. It has separated me from people I love and care for, made me feel alone and insignificant in spite of my strength and knowledge.

Singing with this group of women has allowed me to reconnect with people in a way that has not required me to explain what happened. Its allowed any awkwardness to be about getting the notes right, and let me giggle about that.

A wonderful feeling of community with a wonderful group of women.

It was a chance to meet new friends and catch up with old.

Working together to achieve a goal has been such a rewarding experience – meeting so many other women and sharing the journey as we mastered the task.

I have enjoyed the diversity of women involved, so many different types and backgrounds, and the sense of shared achievement...I have met new friends from the town to which I will be moving shortly. I have a renewed sense of solidarity with other women, and they are such a source of inspiration.

The amazing atmosphere of acceptance, welcome/friendship and a sense of women who are genuinely celebrating women...Women sharing their voice and listening to the voice of others.

It has been a wonderful experience of sisterhood. The diversity and group of women coming together has given me a sense of unity and community... The friendliness and openness of the group leaders and choir leader have made it an inspiring and exciting event.



To create greater awareness of the historical struggle previous women have encountered that has allowed women of today the rights we currently enjoy

Did choir participants gain any awareness of the historical struggles of women through the rehearsal sessions?

While a number of participants alluded to awareness about the song meaning and a sense of pride/ strength in singing it, none of the comments particularly spoke about gaining awareness around the historical struggle of women. Again a number of factors may have influenced this. Firstly the choir feedback form only asked what participants personally gained/enjoyed about the choir and did not specifically ask about any awareness around these issues or even learning in general. Further women's historical struggles and rights were not something that was heavily focused on throughout the rehearsals, and the main source of information about these issues was contained in the song lyrics themselves.

Did event attendees learn anything about women's historical struggles for human rights?

Twelve event attendee feedback forms indicated learning around women's struggles for human rights (11 women, 1 man). The majority of these responses focused on learning's about Reclaim the night and its historical background. Other comments identified the song as informative and recognised the need for greater recognition of women's liberation.

[I liked...] the choir – informative

[I learnt...]

more about Reclaim the Night

about the historical evolution of Reclaim the night



To place the struggle for women's rights to be safe centrally within the broader struggle for women's rights

How was the struggle for women's rights to be safe connected to the broader struggle for women's rights through the 2009 Reclaim the Night events?

Worldwide the Reclaim the Night movement has a strong and proud history as a legitimate and meaningful form of women's activism, aiming to create safer and more equitable communities for women and children. While Reclaim the Night has traditionally focused on violence against women and women's right to be safe, organisers around the world are generally both aware of and involved with the broader struggle for women's rights. Collective members within Geelong are no exception to this and are very aware of the strong links between gender inequity and violence.

The women's anthem commissioned by the Victorian Women's Trust and written by Kavisha Mazella was designed to celebrate the centenary of women being able to vote in Victoria. It highlights the struggles women have faced for this basic human right (Appendix 4).

Through the use of the women's anthem as the basis for an annual Reclaim the Night event the groups aim was to demonstrate that women's rights to safety fit within the broader context of women's rights. The words to the song reflect the broader struggle for women's rights while the banner the choir held reading "No Violence Against Women and Children" showed the particular focus on women's safety as a part of women's broader rights.

By providing a positive focus for women's voices to be channelled through song the collective was able to engage a much broader cross section of the community in a preventative message that was able to be heard and understood more powerfully than previous events which largely involved those who were already engaged.



Unintended Outcomes

The information in this section has been taken from participant evaluation forms from the event. It reflects the likes, learning's and impacts of the event identified by participants that did not specifically relate to the identified objectives.

Things Event participants said they liked...

- **Watching/listening to the choir/singing**
18 participants (a number emphasised the outside performance)
- **Singing (participating in) process**
9 participants
- **Social interaction/sense of community**
9 participants
- **Music**
6 participants
- **Song (and meaning)**
6 participants
- **Atmosphere/ energy of the event**
5 participants
- **Whole event**
5 participants
- **Speakers**
3 participants
- **Support of and involvement in the cause**
3 participants
- **Joy**
3 participants
- **Sing along opportunity**
2 participants
- **Arrangement of the song**
2 participants
- **Food**
2 participants
- **Belindas Teaching**
2 participants

- **Organisation**
1 participant
- **Enthusiasm**
1 participant
- **Inclusiveness**
1 participant

- **Miscellaneous comments**

seeing my mum sing and how confident she looked

the commitment to women and family

the music and the pleasure that all the choir members got. It was fantastic and inspiring

being part of an amazing experience

the evening was interesting



Impact of the event on those attending

After tonight I will...

- **Sing/ continue to sing/ sing more**
10 participants
- **Come back next year/ follow future activities**
5 participants
- **Women**
3 participant

Continue to treat women with respect

Continue to love women

Cherish women and relationships even more

- **Join the group (group not specified)**
1 participant
- **Miscellaneous**

Walk my path as it was

Go home and have a really long sleep

Yell more

Remember the spirit of the women involved

Continue the journey

Go to any future events done by Belinda McArdle

Tell [my mother] that I know she is [powerful]! Every chance I get



I learnt...

- **About singing**
6 participants
- **About unity/ community connection and the role groups such as the choir play in supporting healthy communities**
5 participants
- **Event organisation logistics**
1 participant
- **Participation**
1 participant
- **Supporting others**
1 participant
- **About connecting with other women**
1 participant
- **About recognising the power in others ie family members**
1 participant
- **About my personal journey**
1 participant



Choir Participant Feedback

Themes identified from the Woman's Choir Participant feedback

What have you personally gained/enjoyed from being involved in the woman's choir?

1. Singing and particularly singing as part of large group.
2. Bringing together a group of woman "from all over". This connected with themes of sisterhood, diversity, woman's strengths, like mindedness
3. Singing a song with such meaningful lines. This connected with other comments about the power of women's voices, the importance of finding a voice, coming together for a democratic process.
4. Connected to the actual purpose of RTN were some comments relating to "raising awareness of issues of violence against women for both self and others". A connected comment was "a great way to be part of a strength movement without having to disclose a history or tell a story" also being "less afraid".
5. Additional benefits that comments indicated:
 - Meeting new people
 - Gaining confidence
 - Relaxation and stress release of singing
 - Being part of a community
 - Feeling part of a much greater potential and purpose.
 - Non Political
 - The expertise and passion of Belinda
 - Well organised
 - Welcoming and friendly.
6. Some comments reflected that some participants were there for the singing and the RTN message was not a priority for them. Others reflected how such a model could work for other good causes.

Participant suggestions for Future Events

Event Attendees

Music/Choir (10)

Suggestions focused around having a choir again, having more songs and having a musical performance.

Venue (7)

2 respondents suggested more seating.

5 respondents suggested bigger venues with a number of venues being specified – Skilled Stadium, Market Square or Bay City Plaza and a park outside.

Advertising/ more people (6)

Participants suggested better advertising and more people to attend the event.

Whole event (5)

Respondents suggested the event be held again and that the group keep working hard.

Microphones/ Sound (4)

Comments focusing predominantly on louder microphones. One comment suggested better sound system.

Activities/ participation (3)

Comments expressed a desire for more activities in which audience could participate.

Inclusion in choir (2)

Comments suggested respondents would like to have been part of the choir

Solo Acts (2)

When the first entertainer sang (A Theresa) every one raced for food and she could be hardly heard. Perhaps food first then entertainment. She was very good

That you make people listen when the solo acts are singing, they are just as important as the groups act. Introduce the properly and get peoples attention.

Food (2)

Requests for cakes and slices for dessert or instead of pizza.

Men (2)

One comment around inspiring more men to come along and another asking that men talk about their needs.

March (2)

Suggestions of a longer march and walking around the city while singing.

Speakers (1)

More speakers Give example, case studies how kiddies (children) helped

Other suggestions

Story telling library of people are books

Would like a local radio station play it, or have a live performance at the microphone

Increasing involvement of community groups football/netball clubs etc youth groups, schools – secondary particularly

Expanding the emphasis to include safety in the streets for everyone!

Choir Participant Suggestions

Suggestions that came out of the choir participant feedback forms :

- Repeating and commissioning a special piece of music to the theme.
- March/ Walk
- Advertise better
- More singing
- Geelong Woman's Choir for Peace
- Child minding
- Singing to raise money for RTN
- Involving younger people



Other Comments

The majority of comments written in the “Other comments” section focused on praise of the event, statements about having enjoyed the event, appreciation (especially thank you) and commendation/ encouragement of the organisers (RTN group and choir director).

Further suggestions (written in the other comments section):

I would like to have the T Shirts dated as I have attended “reclaim’ every year somewhere and I like a visual reminder.

My daughter suggested we sing the song in schools for their social justice content of the curriculum.

I would really like to march and don’t worry about permission Ask people for help with that maybe if we had a street festival even for ½ hour in Little Malop street. Not that much traffic and some parts closed off to traffic.

? website, could be very simple but still effective including a recruitment tool.

Miscellaneous statements

Need more men that don’t abuse partners to attend! Music always good way to do this!

events like this should have more or higher profile

What an empowering event. My 3 year old grandson (who doesn’t like singing) said “You sang very well Nanny.”



Reflections on the Event

From the feedback received those who attended enjoyed the event. Feedback was all of a positive and constructive nature. The music, singing and atmosphere of the event appear to have been highlights for many attendees. Many attendees gained learning's around violence against women and a number identified that they had been inspired to take action around this issue.

One participant highlighted a significant gap in the event planning.

[I learnt...] seeing the banners about family violence triggered my PTSD and I don't now what to do about that – its confronting and hard to participate at times.

This comment highlights the importance of being mindful that survivors and current victims of violence are likely to be present at any event that involves women due to the prevalence of violence against women. In being mindful of these women it would have been good for organisers to publicly acknowledge this and inform people of what they could do if the events triggered any issues for them. Given that there was the provision of an information table and a number of qualified social and welfare workers on the Reclaim the Night Collective the simple way to address this issue would have been to alert people to the information table and designate a number of professionals who could be approached for support.

[I learnt...] “that violence against women continues to be a blight on our communities and it needs every individuals to stand up for justice and equality.”

Reflections For Planning Future Events

This year was the first year that Reclaim the Night Collective chose to work with a well-established community arts medium (community singing). Further the collective chose to work with a well-known and very capable choir director whom was already leading several choirs around the region. As discussed earlier it is likely that the large number and diversity of people attending the event can be attributed to these factors.

Although the choir was female only men and boys were welcome to attend the performances and final event. This was clearly advertised on all promotional material.

The increase in male attendance built on a decision made within the last few years to involve men in Reclaim the Night. This decision recognised the importance of engaging men and boys as men are more likely to both hold attitudes that are supportive of violence, and follow gender stereotypes that may encourage or support the perpetration of violence. Further the group acknowledges that to effectively tackle violence against women men need to both be informed about these issues and play an active part in changing our society (Vichealth 2006). The 2009 event saw a large increase in male attendance. Evaluation forms completed by males were very positive and supportive, a number included comments about having learnt about violence against women, enjoying the event and wanting to play a part in gender equity.

This year saw a large increase in the number of evaluation forms completed. After reflecting on a previous event a decision was made to offer incentives (in the form of a raffle ticket with the raffle prizes being blocks of chocolate) for filling out evaluation forms. Group members handed out evaluation sheets rather than leaving them on tables and the importance of filling out of sheets was verbally emphasised.



Learning's

- ★ **Community Arts (in particular singing) are a great way to reach a large and diverse group of people**
- ★ **Developing relationships with mainstream artists and arts venues (as suggested in the Vichealth framework for prevention of violence – multiple settings) can lead to a very successful event**
- ★ **Use of a well-connected, respected and talented facilitator is likely to be an important part of a successful community arts based event.**
- ★ **Using the Arts to convey serious social messages can inspire attendees to share their learning's with others and take action in the larger community**
- ★ **Event attendees don't necessarily need to be attracted to an event by its main focus in order to gain learning's about it**
- ★ **Building on other initiatives through the use of resources that are already developed can provide added momentum and inspiration to social action events**
- ★ **Women only activities continue to have great merit, provide a stable platform for social connection and are appreciated by women**
- ★ **Feminist social action is still very relevant and has great capacity to engage both women and men around gender equity issues**
- ★ **Thinking about evaluation right from the start and linking original aims more closely to activities and evaluation strategies would enhance the impact of the groups endeavours.**
- ★ **It is advisable to formalise arrangements (preferably in writing) regarding venues and facilities to be used for events to ensure there are no misunderstandings.**

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2.

Reclaim Our Voice Reclaim the Night 2009

Please fill out this survey to assist us with future events. Your input is much appreciated.

Please circle: female Male

I liked...

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.....
.....

I learnt...

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After tonight I will...

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For future events I would suggest...

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Other comments...

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3.

3a



3b



3c



3d



4. Women's anthem performed by choir

Love and Justice

Kavisha Mazella

1. The moon is hidden in the sky
The firelight is dying
In the dark, slum and street
Men, women, children crying
No work today means no pay
And no pay means we're starving
Mother I'm with child again
I feel like I am dying

2. A pen, a pen your weapon be
My fine courageous women
Let's sign our names a thousand times
For freedom that's hard winning
No more let fear and anger rule
With heavy handed violence
The moon is shining in the sky
As we break the silence

164

LOVE AND JUSTICE

CH. Love and justice be my flag
I'll live my truth what e're will be
I swear that I cannot rest
Till there's equality
Love and justice be my flag
I'll live my truth whatever comes
So many rivers to cross
Til our journey's done

3. All who toil the weary earth
See beyond your measure
Women are real gold
For all of us to treasure
No more let fear and anger rule
With heavy handed violence
The moon is shining in the sky
As we break the silence

MID. Daughter, sister, mother, wife
When you rise so shall others
Happiness will fall upon
Son, father, husband, brother
In home and in the market place
Town and countryside
Let our laughter spread its wealth
It's surely our birthright!

4. Oh I had the strangest dream
It came one starry midnight
Men and women all joined hands
In peace and loving friendship
All broken hearts were mended
All broken bodies healed
River, mountain, rocks rejoiced
The bells of freedom pealed!

5.
5a

RECLAIM OUR VOICE EVENT
GPAC Performance of Love Justice and Equality
30th October 2009
Reclaim the Night Speech
Liz Murphy

Preventing Violence Against Women – Creating Safer Communities for all

Tonight we join with women right around the globe who on this night every year come together to raise their voices like lanterns to shine a light on the need to create safer communities for our women and children.

The beautiful voices of the choir here tonight have been brought together by the tireless efforts of the women of the Reclaim the Night Collective and our singing leader Belinda McCardle to sing us into awareness and mark the significance of the last Friday in October, which is recognised around the globe, as a night of women’s activism to raise awareness about the still urgent need to create safer communities for all women and children.

Tonight’s performance of “Love Justice and Equality” creates a powerful link between the women of our Geelong Regional Choir to the women of Victoria 100 years ago who worked tirelessly to gain the right for women to vote in Victoria. By raising their voices tonight women are again engaged in a proud tradition of women’s activism to remind us as a community that there is still much work to be done to create a more equitable, safe and healthy society for all women and children.

The words of the anthem remind us that the journey of women’s struggle for the basic civil right to vote in Victoria was an urgent necessity in a time when women’s lives and the very lives of their children were threatened by their lack of voice on basic human rights.

It is a great source of celebration that we can look back on this achievement and mark how far we have come. Because of that proud tradition of feminist action we have the luxury of finding it unbelievable that there could have been a time when women did not have this basic right to vote.

In Victoria and indeed world wide, violence against women requires the urgent attention of governments, business and communities alike to deal with its damaging social, health and economic effects.

The landmark report published by VicHealth in 2004 identified that intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44. This startling evidence powerfully highlighted the immense toll that VIOLENCE has on women in our communities.

VIOLENCE MAKES WOMEN SICK. I know that this is stating the obvious but when we actually take the time to reflect on both the incidence and prevalence of violence against women and how widespread the link to depression, anxiety, suicide, tobacco and alcohol use

we can see that there is an urgent need to address this issue and how profoundly it affects us all.

The 2006 Personal Safety Survey tells us that Australian women report that one in five women have experienced sexual assault and nearly one in six women have experienced violence by a current or previous partner in their lifetime.. (Personal safety Survey ABS 2006).

The most common location for physical assaults to occur for women is in the home.

Each year in Australia at least 60 women and 20 children will die as a result of family violence

Women with disabilities experience higher rates of intimate partner violence than other women and those with cognitive disabilities are particularly vulnerable.

Despite representing just over 2% of the total Australian population Indigenous women accounted for 15% of homicide victims in Australia in 2003.

Young women are at greater risk of violence than older women. Over 30. % of young women in Year 10 and 26. % of those in Year 12 have experienced unwanted sex (Smith et al 2003).

Many of you will be aware of the rape of two young women by members of the Montmorency Football Club, reported in the media earlier this week. One of the young women has pressed charges, the other too fearful of the personal impact of pursuing her rights through the legal system has opted to act as a witness. This incident highlights the urgent need for change in our homes, legal system, sporting arena and our broader communities. To quote from the Age newspaper two days ago.

“We’ve heard of too many sexual assaults of this nature recently, football players in large groups, pack mentality reigns and suddenly young women are fair game.

It’s not that footballers are more likely to be violent towards women, it is the environment and the prevailing culture that matters most... Evidence tells us that when men and women work or play together, where mutual respect and equal participation are in balance, attitudes and behaviour improve. Ultimately we see a reduction in violence against women – including fewer incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence.....

Violence against women takes place in all walks of life. The events reported earlier this week reflects a male culture that needs attention. The Age noted that “Culture change takes time and requires men in the community to also take a lead.”

In difficult times like these its easy to walk away from the problem but that is not the future we want for ourselves, our, sisters, Mothers and children, brothers, husbands and Fathers.

Both the Victorian and Federal Government are currently developing action plans to create safer communities for women. They have acknowledged the urgency and the impact that violence against women has on us.

VicHealth is currently working to pilot and build the evidence base around promising practice that can contribute to safer communities for women.

Whether or not we can turn Australia's families, sporting clubs, schools, media, workplaces and political arenas into safer, more respectful places for women depends on how committed we all are to become educated, be willing to engage and to challenge the current behaviours of those we find unacceptable, to challenge our own attitudes and beliefs. By promoting and enacting safer communities for women and children we will in turn ensure healthier, more connected, respectful and safe communities for us all.

I would like to once again thank the women who have gathered to share their beautiful voices and message tonight and to honour the incredible work of women who have come before us and those who will follow on. May the work continue so that we can one day in the not too distant future look back on this time of violence and lack of safety for women as a shameful part of our past from a position of much greater safety, strength and wellbeing for all.

5b

Speech for Lantern Lighting Ceremony

Jess Boccia

Women's Health Resource Worker

Barwon Health

Before I start I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we meet on. The Wuthorong people. Hello and thank you for being part of this very special and significant ceremony. As you have heard earlier, tonight we are lighting lanterns to mark Reclaim the Night, a worldwide social action event to raise awareness about violence against women. This is the 20th year that a Reclaim the night event has been held in Geelong, making it Geelong's longest running social action event.

Reclaim the night began in Rome in 1976 where around 10,000 women and children marched in protest of increasing numbers of rapes. Over its 33 years it has been expanded to more broadly address violence against women and children, in particular family violence and sexual assault.

Tonight we join in solidarity, with many other women and children across Australia to send the clear message that violence of any form are not acceptable. Worldwide Reclaim the Night events occur in many countries at different times of the year.

The lanterns have been made especially for this year's event by many women and children from the Geelong region. The lighting of these lanterns symbolises a number of different things:

Remembrance: of the many women and children who are victims of violence throughout Australia and the world.

Strength: both of the many women and children who have survived through sexual assault and family violence, and of women in general.

Solidarity: the power of women standing together as they have over many years to create social change.

Sisterhood: the amazing relationships between women as mothers, daughters, sisters and friends. While women's relationships have often been written out of history they truly withstand the test of time in our hearts and minds.

Hope: that together we can change things and create a brighter future for women and children. We look forward to further advances in women's rights and envision a world where there is true equality for all.

Once again I would like to say thank you to everyone who has attended these events tonight. To the women and children many of whom come every year rain, hail or shine (and I can assure you it has been more of the former) thank you for your continuing participation and be assured that it is your presence that makes Reclaim the Night a successful event. To the men who have come along (some of whom also have attended for a number of years) thanks for your support and understanding of this important issue and please remember to always speak out about violence against women as your voices can be an integral part of creating a violence free society.

We hope you will enjoy the rest of the night and that if it is your first time at a Reclaim the Night event we will see you again in years to come, it is only through community involvement that we are able to spread the message that violence against women and children in any form is unacceptable.

Thank you.

Reclaim Our Voice



**Geelong Premier Performance
of the women's anthem "Love
and Justice"**

Performed by a large choir of local
women.

7pm for 7.15pm start
Geelong Performing Arts Centre
Little Malop Street

Followed by...

**Reclaim Our Voice: A
Celebration of Women**

8.30pm Courthouse Youth Arts Centre
Live music and free pizza provided
Includes an encore performance of
"Love and Justice."

Friday 30th October

**Free Events
All women,
children and
men welcome**

For more info:
Phone: Nancy 52416601
Email: rtngeelong@gmail.com

Reclaim the Night
Celebrating women and our right to live free from
violence.



Zena Collective Inc

