



The Euroa Milo cricket team won an Australia Day award for its support of Strathbogies initiatives to prevent violence against women, including wearing white ribbons.

White ribbons, every day

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CAN BE A TOUGH SUBJECT FOR COUNCILS TO ADDRESS BUT IN THE TIGHT KNIT COMMUNITY OF STRATHBOGIE SHIRE COUNCIL, COUNCILLORS AND STAFF ARE OVERCOMING ANONYMITY CHALLENGES THROUGH UNRIVALLED PASSION ABOUT PREVENTION.

Strathbogies, along with Banyule City Council, was chosen as a pilot council under the VicHealth funded Local Government Preventing Violence against Women project, which aims to build capacity and transfer knowledge across the sector.

Over the past 12 months Strathbogies has actively promoted the White Ribbon campaign by selling ribbons all year round. It has also provided education sessions for all staff, hosted a short course for preventing violence against women and engaged local sporting and community groups to say 'no to violence'.

Deputy Mayor Cr Colleen Furlanetto said it was important for Strathbogies's small population of 10,000 residents to receive adequate domestic violence information.

"Our community has limited health care and access to services so it is very important to us as a council that

those with domestic violence issues are supported," she said.

"In addition, we are a small rural council where everyone knows everyone, highlighting issues of anonymity.

"In rural areas, if you do speak up it is probably about someone you work with, socialise with or are connected to through your children."

Strathbogies started with a slowly-slowly approach to build awareness.

"We started by selling white ribbons and wristbands and while doing this found big gaps in our health service provision that highlighted the need to find a solution," Cr Furlanetto said.

The next step was to embed issues around preventing violence against women in council plans.

"Having it recognised in our Council Plan, Municipal Health Plan and as a priority in our Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2010-2014 for the first time acknowledges the issue formally,

and enables us to start driving change around respect," Cr Furlanetto said.

A senior cricket side and junior Milo team were forthcoming in wearing white ribbons and continue to assist by engaging in discussions around preventing violence against women.

Adequate information for people to collect on their own time schedule is also important and council's travelling road show is used to disseminate pamphlets along with selling white ribbons.

"The sporting clubs have also been helping by displaying information around the club and we make sure there is information on hand at Maternal and Child Health services right through to the high school," Cr Furlanetto said.

Last year, a two day short course coordinated by VicHealth ran in Strathbogies for sexual assault social workers, nurses, police, children's advocates against violence, and other professionals or interested people.

The course provided practical knowledge and built skills among participants in how to stop violence against women before it starts.

“This group of people may never have crossed paths with this networking opportunity and they continue to support each other,” Cr Furlanetto said.

After a long year, council’s awareness building efforts culminated at a concert held after the Great Victorian Bike Ride in December.

“During and post the bike ride event, we had a team of people in branded t-shirts wandering through the crowd selling white ribbons and talking about the issue,” Cr Furlanetto said.

“It was interesting to watch. No one felt pressure, or was intimidated; there was just this real sense of pride with people wanting a ribbon, t-shirt, or tattoo.”

In August last year, Strathbogie was among a number of councils that presented at the Local Government and Community Leaders Preventing Violence Against Women Conference held at the MCG.

VicHealth Senior Project Officer Liz Murphy said with over 300 attendees, the conference was the largest gathering of local government representatives and community leaders ever held in Australia around the issue of preventing violence against women.

“The conference was a great success, providing an opportunity for councils to showcase their work and learn from one another,” she said.

Strathbogie was chosen as a pilot council because of their enthusiasm and willingness to take on leadership in this field and as a rural council we wanted to learn about what the unique challenges and strengths would be for rural councils undertaking prevention work across Victoria.

“We had a project requirement to work with two councils and felt that with Banyule as a metropolitan council already establishing itself as a leader it would be good to choose a site that was just beginning to explore prevention activity,” Ms Murphy said.

“We hope to be able share the innovative strategies and wisdom that develops from these two sites to help guide other councils in developing effective prevention approaches.

“Many councils have done an excellent job at creating White Ribbon action teams, however this project is encouraging a much broader, cross council approach including embedding gender equity principles into council plans and

Hume shouts

More than 200 Hume employees pulled on a black t-shirt – which simply stated the word no, formed a human no and made a loud stance on the issue of violence against women during White Ribbon Day last November.

The Hume Says No movement was coordinated by council’s White Ribbon Action team, which includes 16 male staff and is led by Director City Infrastructure Steve Crawley.

Strong support from council colleagues was partly attributed to an emotionally charged internal marketing campaign that fuelled interest from within.

Daily email messages were sent to all staff in the week leading up to the event, which carried a personal message from an action team member that started with, “I will be at the Global Learning Centre on Thursday 25 November for White Ribbon Day because ...”

The blanks were filled by the team member’s personal affiliation to White Ribbon Day, which is the annual culmination of work undertaken by the nation-wide White Ribbon Campaign to stop violence against women.

Mr Crawley said each message was different, and some quite moving.

“One message talked about having two daughters and not wanting them to grow up in a world where high statistics of violence against women existed, and another was about someone who had been directly affected by family violence,” he said.

On the day, a council manager told of her personal experience with family violence, a move that took enormous courage.

“It took a lot of strength to talk about something she had never spoken about before, and there was a lot of emotion,” Mr Crawley said.

A community barbecue was held and attendees called ‘No’ in unison as part of the largest shout-out to stop the incidence of violence against women.

2010 was the first year Hume had actively taken part in White Ribbon Day and a strategy is already being developed for this year.

“Hume has the second highest incidence of family violence in the state, with an estimated 10 percent of all family violence cases occurring in this municipality” Mr Crawley said.

“Sadly, with those statistics, council must act.”

Part of the 2011 strategy will be a broader social marketing campaign targeting local businesses with a large male workforce. ■



The Hume White Ribbon Action team led 200 council staff to say no to violence against women during last November’s White Ribbon Day.

strategies and empowers councils to become community leaders in preventing violence against women.”

From the project, a leadership network has been established made up of interested council officers, which meets quarterly at the MAV. Regular e-bulletins are sent to the growing database and a website has been developed to share best practice examples, resources and planning tools

“One of the greatest and most exciting challenges is managing the desire and willingness of councils wishing to embrace the endless list of possibilities for primary prevention work,” Ms Murphy said.

“That is part of the reason resource and knowledge sharing is a key component to this project.

“A good resources section is available on the website which can be used to connect councils with each other and be used by staff so we are not reinventing the wheel within the sector.”

The statewide local government coordination role will be taken up progressively by the MAV from April with funding provided through the Department of Human Services. ■

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