Local Government Preventing Violence Against Women Projects

**Strengthening Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities by Preventing Violence Against Women**

**Ballarat City Council**

**Project Process:**

The project design parameters and evaluation plan were developed by Council in consultation with the project partner and stakeholders. Once the project began, a project team and steering group were established to further guide the design and implementation of the project.

The project had a wide reach into the local CALD communities as the steering group comprised a diverse range of CALD and non CALD community representatives including representatives from Victoria Police, State and Local Government, health, family violence sector and faith groups.

The project worker brought to the project an established and wide range of connections with the Ballarat CALD and non CALD community. This allowed the project workshop participants the opportunity to have exposure to a wide range of community activities and groups.

Council contributed staff time as well as $10,000 to the project, with MAV providing $23 900.

Women’s Health Grampians were a vital component of the project, they employed the project worker, provided support and guidance regarding project delivery and expertise regarding violence prevention.

**Project achievements and successes:**

In addition to achieving the projects objectives as outlined above the following was also achieved:

**1. Safety, agency and empowerment for participants**

This project has had a considerable impact on the safety of the female participants. The provision of information and support options has made a real difference for many participants. Examples include:

* Two women reported domestic violence during this project and involved Police and Family Violence agency support to have their husbands removed from their homes.
* One woman requested information on where to get more legal advice regarding her husband leaving the country to avoid court hearings and child support responsibilities.
* Another woman acted in her workplace to report a superior who had been bullying her for more than three years. This matter has now been resolved. She is very proud she took this step.
* There was a very high level of support and friendship within the group. Women found it empowering to be with other women who were going through very similar challenges, and they helped each other to be strong, assertive and optimistic about the future.

**2. Community engagement with CALD communities**

The project worker had a very high level of cultural competency and sensitivity that allowed for a wide range of intersections between diverse ethnic and community groups.

Melbourne-based spoken word performer, Abe Nouk (an Australian South Sudanese man) the co facilitator of the “A Man Is…” workshop said “I feel that this workshop was confronting for the boys (but also a good challenge, especially when discussing respectful relationships). The way they all contributed… both the boys and men …was nothing short of sublime. In the nicest manner, I envy the boys because I wished someone cared enough to make the effort of equipping me with ideas for respectful relationship (the community is lucky to have you put together this workshop, the outcomes of which will go a long way)”.

3. Innovative project design

As indicated in the ‘Change the Story Framework’ direct participation programs like this project allow men and women to build knowledge and skills for equal respectful nonviolent relationships and improve connections to social networks and institutions.

This project used an innovative design to increase engagement and participation and offers participants the opportunity to take on new identities of ‘DIYer’ and ‘artist’ which at the beginning of the project they thought they couldn’t do. This had profound impacts on the participant’s self-perceptions.

**4. Achievements for the community**

There was considerable community interest in the project from its beginning, thus a wide range of motivated stakeholders were represented at the project steering group.

There have been mutual benefits for the partners in this project. Organisations were keen to be involved so that they could be more responsive to CALD communities, and other organisations were keen to be more involved to support PVAW work.

**5. Achievements for Council**

As well as being pleased with the achievements identified above, this project has raised awareness across Council that it has a responsibility to be proactive about the safety of all residents including the CALD communities. The project has been appreciated by those in Council’s Cultural diversity team as the project was initiated outside of that team. This project has allowed for collaboration across teams.

**Project challenges and issues:**

This project was very ambitious in its scope and it was anticipated that the timeframe for the project would create some problems.

The work shop for men and boys was confined to one day and meant that the participants were not able to build rapport and explore the issues in depth. The men themselves wanted to know ‘where to from here?’

Organising childcare had challenges. Childcare was booked for two children, approximately 100 metres from the workshop venue (and the budget would have covered that cost), but the two women decided that they were very uncomfortable with leaving their children with someone else, as they had never used childcare services before. It was decided that both women needed to participate in this programme and we would make allowances for them to have their children there (only two).

Due to time and resource constraints, workshop participants were not given the opportunity to create community social media messaging and progress PVAW awareness with their communities. The initial design of the project was to take the insights and learnings of the workshop participants and turn them into social media messaging. While this was not able to be achieved, the private Facebook page created for the women’s group has enabled the group to share and explore issues of gender stereotyping and VAW further

**Advice for other councils:**

**Employing the project worker**

A project worker with project co-ordination skills, cultural competency and PVAW knowledge will have better chances of success. Ensure they have enough time for a process that is fluid, collaborative and empowering. If doing group work, ensure they utilise best practice group facilitation skills.

Use interpreters when necessary, ensure that they are professionally trained and accredited to ensure that interpreters are performing their role ethically and effectively.

**Identify opportunities to be innovative, collaborative and empowering**

The project allowed participants the opportunity to socialise, develop a range of skills, and learn about topics such as gender stereotyping and gender equality in an engaging way. The project needed to be attractive from the outset, offer unique elements and opportunities.

The project allowed for skill and knowledge development in a range of areas including DIY and artist skill development and expression as well as exposure and contact to a diverse range of community members.

Working more collaboratively can allow people to draw on each other’s expertise, client bases and resources to create “more with less”. Working more collaboratively can increase attendance and avoid clashes with other events. Consideration also needs to be given to the fact that different communities need different approaches.

**Innovation example:** In a previous role, the project worker had observed that very few people from migrant and refugee backgrounds visit the Art Gallery of Ballarat. By holding an International Women’s Day celebration, organising a tour and art class at the Gallery, project participants could use this public space, view and discuss artworks based on gender equality and stereotypes, meet staff and hopefully encourage future visits to the gallery. When a participant from Rwanda was asked why she had never been to the gallery before, she replied “it looks like it is for rich white people – not for people like me”. The Art Gallery of Ballarat is keen to continue to partner on future projects.

**Identify gaps** This project addressed a gap that the project worker had observed in previous settlement, advocacy and multicultural youth work. Often migrant women are left at home caring for younger children while their children and partners are engaged in a range of activities each day. As one woman stated, “I am happy coming here because all other days I am alone”.

A participant said, “we don’t always want to be doing projects and activities that are just for refugees or migrants, we also want to be mixing with the rest of the community”. To feel a true sense of belonging, there needs to be opportunities created for all sectors of the community to come together, and this is potentially a way for more doors of opportunity to open.