

Partners in Prevention Network Meeting

Monday 16th March 2009, Ross House

This network meeting featured an information sharing session and a discussion of education policy in relation to sexuality education and violence prevention. Guest speakers were Lara Fergus from Office of Women's Policy and Steven O'Connor from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Information sharing

- DEECD/VicHealth Scoping project report is near completion but we are still waiting on news of its release
- NASASV national framework for sexual violence prevention education is also yet to be released
- Kiri has joined the reference committee for the Modern Media Messages project at Women's Health in the North
- Discussion of Wayne Carey
 - Despite news to the contrary, Wayne Carey is not a White Ribbon Day ambassador and is unlikely to be invited to become one in the foreseeable future.
 - Although Mr Carey showed some interest in Phil Cleary's work and had a private conversation with him, there has been no indication that he has taken responsibility for his past behavior.
 - WRD responded to the recent spate of media attention but very little of what they had to say made it into print. This led to a discussion of media in general and how we might have more impact in future.
 - The Grampians Family Violence Network has produced a domestic violence media kit available for download at:
<http://www.cafs.org.au/?id=familyviolencepreven>
- Discussion of Chris Brown and Rihanna
 - Chris Brown and Rihanna are US pop stars who are in a relationship, on 8 February 2009 Chris Brown beat Rihanna up and she spent the evening in hospital.
 - There has been substantial coverage of this event in the US media, with many young people responding on 'blogs'. Much of the focus has been on why Rihanna has chosen to stay with Chris Brown and their decision to record a duet together.
 - We discussed how this situation might provide opportunities for discussion in a classroom setting. Why are people putting attention on Rihanna instead of asking 'Why did Chris Brown do that to her?' The fact that Chris Brown apologized and proposed marriage to her could be used to illustrate the cycle of violence.

Intimate Partner Violence Prevention/ Sexuality Education in Education Policy

Lara Fergus, Office of Women's Policy

Lara spoke about the State Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women. The aim of the plan is to create a sustainable system for supporting primary prevention work on the ground and get ownership from all areas of government for preventing violence against women.

The plan will draw heavily on VicHealth's 'Framework to guide the primary prevention of violence against women' as it has been ratified by the five family violence ministers (the Minister for Women's Affairs, the Attorney General, the Minister for Community Services, the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Police).

Lara is in the process of putting together 5 working groups focused on particular settings – education, workplaces, community and local government, sports and media and popular culture. These groups will draw members from government, nongovernment and academic sectors with the aim of refining and prioritizing actions and contributing to the development of a precise and specific evidence base for each of the 5 settings.

The suggestion was made that PiP could provide feedback on the plan across the 5 settings from our perspective as workers with young people.

A question was asked about whether the national plan on violence against women and their children will have any primary prevention content. Apparently there are 6 areas within the national plan and two of these relate to prevention.

Minister Maxine Morand is keen to launch the prevention plan in November to coincide with White Ribbon Day and the 16 days of action. The plan will cover the next ten years.

Those interested in contributing to the plan can get in touch with Lara at the Office of Women's Policy, 9208 3365, lara.fergus@dpcd.vic.gov.au

Steven O'Connor, Department of Education and Early Childhood

Steven is a senior policy officer within the Student Wellbeing and Health Support Division. His main concern is sexuality education, considered in terms of young people's whole experience, not just 'birds and bees' or biology.

Came to DEECD with strong intervention focus has since crossed the floor to health promotion/education perspective. Began focus on sexuality education with release of Catching On resource – which had previously been kicking around the department for 8 or 9 years – wanted to develop infrastructure to support change. Delivered training alongside the resource and then looked at structural responses – what would sexuality education look like from 'whole of school' perspective?

Sexuality education in schools is 'ad hoc' because schools often confuse sex education curriculum with sexuality education. Classes are delivered by 'well being' staff in response to a particular incident rather than as an educational priority within the school.

Capacity building – leaving school with the ability to do this work is preferable to maintaining their dependence on external organisations, who take their expertise away with them. In this area it's as much about comfort as it is about knowledge, teachers need

to know they are supported from above.

Sexuality education is compulsory for all state schools. It sits in the health/phys ed domain of VELs (Victorian Essential Learning Standards) but is most effectively delivered across the curriculum and linked to personal development domain and a 'whole of school' approach.

Schools give all sorts of names to it; sexuality education is the policy title. VELs is the closest thing we have to legislation on school curriculum and sexuality education is enshrined.

What teachers want is learning and teaching tools, not whole of school approaches. Our message should be "This is something schools have to do, something they are supposed to do and we are here to help you comply." It's not a moral obligation, it's not a bonus, it's essential. If schools raise concerns about 'crowded curriculum' then they need to audit their curriculum to ensure that it complies with VELs. VELs was intended to clear up the issue of 'crowded curriculum.'

The Victorian Government Schools reference guide has a Health Education chapter with a section on sexuality education, emphasizing that it is compulsory.

NB There is no big stick or fine for schools that aren't compliant.

Overall aim is inclusive, comprehensive sexuality education.

The existing hurdles for Steven are pre-service training for teachers and the lack of ownership from school leaders.

If you would like more information or a copy of the *Catching On Everywhere* program development resource you can contact Steven on 9637 3674 or email occonnor.steven.p@edumail.vic.gov.au