

Prevention spotlight:

The transformative power that is Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice (CoP) provide a unique opportunity for professionals to come together to share their expertise and resources, and to troubleshoot challenges in a safe and expert-led environment. Building a robust and connected prevention of violence sector has been at the heart of DVRCV's CoP pilot program³ over the past two years. Here we unpack the process participants underwent and learn why CoP is an important workforce strategy.

What are communities of practice and why are they important?

According to leading innovators in this space, a community of practice refers to a 'group of people who share a concern, set of problems, or passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.'⁴ Within the prevention of violence against women and family violence workforce, practitioners come from such diverse organisations, dispersed locations and varied settings that it often results in feelings of isolation that inhibits their ability to work effectively. Because of this isolated nature of their work, CoP brings practitioners together in a safe setting that encourages collaboration, strengthens evidence-based practice and develops a consistent approach. All of which builds a more unified, cohesive and professional support system.

How does DVRCV's Communities of Practice work?

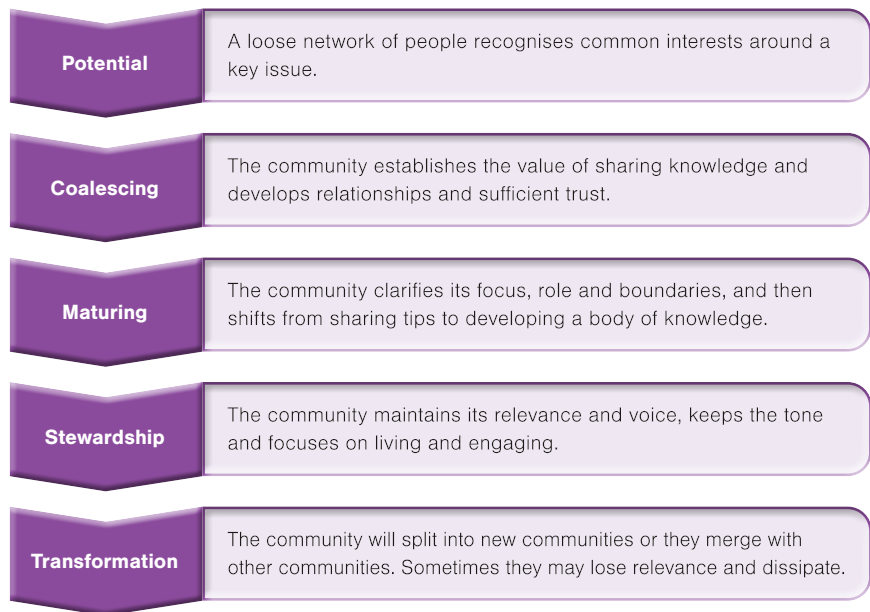
Each of DVRCV's CoP series consisted of five workshops over a six-month period. DVRCV modelled their pilot program on the five developmental stages of a typical CoP as outlined in Figure One below.⁵

DVRCV's CoP sessions focussed primarily on the 'coalescing phase'. The nature of the sessions meant it took a few meetings to move through this phase because participants needed time to build the trust and feel safe in expressing the fears and challenges they face in their work. This required emotional management by a facilitator skilled in guiding participants through their discomfort and vulnerability as they shared and engaged in challenging (and potentially confronting) conversations. By interrogating their own and one another's



Shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change.

Brene Brown



prejudices, values and assumptions about gender and privilege, discomfort and vulnerability naturally arose in the group discussions. One of the strategies employed in this process was in-depth, reflective exercises in which participants unpacked their fears of being wrong or judged, and then considered how these emotions restricted their own development and work. To support participants overcome any shame, the CoP focused largely on building self-awareness and emotion management

skills in a professional context. These skills and capabilities could then be taken back to their work settings and communities. Like the ripples in a pond, these emotion management capabilities then have the potential to impact and influence the people around them.

Facilitation and the importance of emotion management

Skilled and knowledgeable facilitation is vital in supporting participants to develop

3 Each CoP consisted of five sessions. The CoPs were funded through the *Partners in Prevention* and *Free from Violence – Workforce Capability Building* projects. In total, six series of CoPs were delivered with three co-delivered in partnership with Our Watch.

4 Wenger, E, McDermott, R and Snyder, W (2002) *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A guide to managing knowledge*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston.

5 ibid

