

THE PROJECTS

SECTION

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Working with Women

This section looks at projects that work specifically with women. Many of these projects work with women who are survivors, and use an empowerment approach to actively engage women in sharing their stories, their experiences and knowledge about family violence.

These projects work with women 'where they are at'. They are designed to enable the participation of women whose lives may be in turmoil whilst escaping a violent partner. Against sometimes overwhelming obstacles, these women are keen to contribute to a community understanding of the impacts of and solutions to family violence.

Many of these projects have become powerful and lasting visual statements of the fear, strength and courage of those who have lived with family violence. They are invaluable tools for raising awareness and have a unique power to communicate the reality of family violence.

Victorious Quilt Connection

(Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne, 2001)

*case study***KEY INFO**

The Victorious Quilt Connection was a community education project undertaken by the Eastern Family Violence Network (FVN). The project involved women survivors of family violence from around the region, both in the creation and implementation of the project. Through a series of workshops, women contributed quilt squares to what finally became five quilts, based on their experiences and what they wanted to say to people in the community about family violence.

BACKGROUND

The Victorious Quilt Connection was inspired by the Clothesline Project (see p. 39), which uses the stories and artworks of women and children who have survived family violence to raise community awareness. The project itself was devised and run by the Networker with an organising group of family violence survivors and Janene Evans, a Community Development student on placement. The name 'Victorious' came about from a discussion about the terms 'victim' and 'survivor' and women's dissatisfaction with both. They wanted to express that they had moved beyond mere survival to be powerful and triumphant.

AIM

The project was designed to raise awareness of family violence and women's experiences of it. The quilt was designed to provide a permanent resource for community education and awareness.

PROJECT DETAILS

Four workshops were held around the region for approximately 70 women participants, to decorate calico squares with messages and images about their experiences of violence. Contributors were drawn mostly from domestic violence support groups and women's refuges. The project was designed to maximise women's opportunities for participating. Lunch was provided, as was childcare.

A range of materials allowed women who didn't know how to sew to participate; using everything from fabrics, ribbons, and lace, to fabric fix, crayons and paints. Workshop facilitators stressed that anyone could participate, and there were many people at each workshop. The design wasn't premeditated; women could make what they liked. Barbara Younger says of the project's approach:

We designed around what we had from the women, not the other way around. We wanted to give women free rein to do what they liked, however they liked; this was the process and it was important. Some women were in refuges, others were further down the track and made squares about hope; it was good to have all those different stages on the quilt. Workers did pieces as well, and they enjoyed working alongside the other women.¹¹⁵

Five quilts were created from all the squares and a day's workshop was held to decide on the design of each quilt and an overall design that would unite all of the quilts.

The Community Safety Officer for the City of Maroondah was involved in the project and invited the Minister for Community Services, the Hon. Christine Campbell, to launch the quilts on behalf of the Council. The involvement of the local Council in the project and organising the launch ensured huge interest from adjacent Councils, police and local agencies and the launch was attended by over 180 people. The launch was reported in local newspapers and the quilt has featured in a national quilting magazine.

The quilts were exhibited at Parliament House at the invitation of the Hon. Christine Campbell. They have since been exhibited at various venues around the region.

SOME KEY LESSONS

★ Knowledge of survivors' experiences is essential

An understanding of the complexities of working with survivors was an essential grounding for the project. Working with women who may have only recently left a violent partner, who may be living in temporary accommodation and whose daily lives can be very uncertain, requires particular project strategies to enable their participation.

★ Partnerships and cooperation make for stronger projects and ongoing impact

One of the critical elements of the project's success was the level to which different groups, agencies and sectors of the community were drawn in and the consultative and inclusive process that the project used. A range of women, from survivors to community development students, were drawn into the project's development and management.

A number of stakeholders were actively included in the project, which resulted in a positive response and regard for the project; a well publicised and attended launch; an invitation for the quilt to be displayed at Parliament House; and the active engagement of a range of government organisations with the issue. The Mayor of Knox attended the launch and made a commitment to address the issue of family violence in the City of Knox. The Council subsequently provided funds to the Network, in partnership with local agencies, for a research project on the needs for family violence services in Knox. Victorious Quilt Connection was awarded a Certificate of Merit in the Community Safety and Crime Prevention Awards 2001.

★ An empowerment approach can create extraordinary long-term benefits

At every stage of the project's design and management, women who have experienced family violence were included. Evaluations showed that women '*felt really heard, equal and part of the project, and appreciated the fact they could put what they chose into the project*'.¹¹⁶ Some of the women involved went on to do arts courses. The women survivors involved in organising the project have formed an ongoing group to organise annual community education projects with the Network (such as Freedom Flyers, p. 46). Evaluation comments from participants included:

'I liked the calm and peaceful atmosphere and the fact we could all speak freely. It was nice sewing. It was very fun'.¹¹⁷

'Sense of community. Positive acceptance. Sense of hope. Caring'.¹¹⁸

★ A visual message is powerful

The Eastern FVN has undertaken a number of creative arts projects. Victorious Quilt Connection reinforced their analysis of the educative and preventative value of art in assisting people to listen and respond better to difficult issues. Janene Evans, the Community Development Student who worked on the project said:

The beauty and the colour of the quilts were so eye catching and, with the quilt's positive association with nurturing and wellbeing, were very accessible. In this context, the images about violence against women and children became more confronting.¹¹⁹

★ Time and expertise is required

Quilting skills were very important in bringing together the panels created by women in a cohesive design across the five quilts. Making quilts is also very time-intensive. The project had the voluntary participation of survivors who were also keen quilters.

★ High quality documentation is important

The Eastern FVN employs a professional photographer to record all their projects and artworks. This ensures high quality documentation that can then be reproduced in a range of publications.

RESOURCES

The Quilts are available for loan, and a **project report** is available. Contact the Eastern Family Violence Network through the Victorian FVPN website: www.vfvpn.org.au

Clothesline Project (Victoria, ongoing)

KEY INFO

The Clothesline Project is an international project that was first taken up by a number of Family Violence Prevention Networks (FVPN) in 1999, as part of the Week Without Violence. Survivors and those who have been affected by family violence paint their story on T-shirts and hang them on 'public clotheslines'. The project has been undertaken in a number of regions on an annual basis. The Clothesline Project has also been adapted in a range of ways by Networkers, extending to quilt and banner projects and inspiring other arts projects with survivors of family violence.

BACKGROUND

The Clothesline Project began its life in 1990 in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, USA, where women, inspired by the AIDS Quilt – an international campaign to commemorate and document

case study

those who die from AIDS – came up with the idea of hanging shirts on a clothesline. Carol Chichetto, Chair of the Clothesline Steering Committee in the U.S.A. sees the project as a particular response to women's lives and work: 'Doing the laundry has always been considered women's work, and in the days of close-knit neighbourhoods, women often exchanged information over backyard fences while hanging out their clothes to dry. The concept was simple – let each woman tell her own story, in her own unique way, and hang it out for all to see. It was and is a way of airing society's dirty laundry.'¹²⁰

AIM

The Clothesline Project has been adapted and used by FVPN throughout Victoria to highlight women's stories and publicise domestic violence.

Clothesline Project	(Hume Region, Victoria, 1999)
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In 1999, as part of the Week Without Violence, eleven groups throughout the Hume FVPN participated in the Clothesline Project. Working with a creative arts therapist, groups in Seymour, Shepparton, Yarrawonga, Benalla, Wangaratta, Beechworth and Wodonga participated, including a secondary college 'boys talk' group. The project included women and young people aged 13-60 years. Participants were a mix of survivors, students, those still experiencing abuse, friends, family and health workers, and included people from a diversity of cultural backgrounds including Koori people. Over 90 people attended the regional launch in the gardens in Benalla where all the T-shirts and art work were displayed. Each group then took their own works and displayed them along busy streets in each of the towns. The Clothesline banners in Seymour, which were hung high on a fence in the main street, were torn down and destroyed using ladders and wire cutters three times in one week. Women replaced the banners each time with new ones, including one that said '*We will not be silenced!*' The banners continued to be attacked, and in the end women left them there on the fence in tatters. The Clothesline Project was particularly powerful in these rural areas where there is little visibility of domestic violence, and the project served to raise awareness. The Hume FVPN undertook an evaluation of the project, designing self-evaluation kits and forms for participating groups.¹²¹ The Project was strengthened in the region for 2000, with eight groups of women participating and two professional development programs undertaken.

SOME KEY LESSONS

★ Publicly addressing family violence in rural areas is a major challenge

The repeated destruction of the banners in Seymour highlights some of the very real difficulties in running public campaigns on family violence in small rural towns. Whilst the reaction of project participants in 1999 was to rise to the challenge and remake the banners, Hume FVPN notes that the next year, despite an increase in activities, there was a considerably smaller number of women survivors, workers and agencies choosing to participate in Week Without Violence. One worker had been threatened; there was a sense that involvement would lead to trouble, and that participants would be judged. Hume FVP Networker Kylie Stephens reported:

This is the story of just one town in our region, but it does raise questions about our work practice. In this town, it seems the banner vandals were very successful. In effect, women were threatened not to speak out, for their experiences not to be heard. Many were silenced. This, of course, reflects patterns of family violence. We can see from the comments from workers it goes beyond just the women who have experienced the family violence. Workers too, feel the impact of the dominant rural culture of denial and silence about family violence.¹²²

★ **Creative arts are a valuable form of expression**

The original clothesline concept was expanded in the Hume region and messages and images were also displayed on banners, mobiles, scrolls, and masks. Many workshop participants commented that using creative arts provided them with an opportunity for an alternative form of expression, and a deeper insight into their experiences. The project created a sense of unity across a large and diverse region.

★ **Balancing local initiatives and central direction is a challenge**

A major challenge was balancing the local activities on the ground and the broader campaign aims: undertaking the actual displays and activities, whilst ensuring the campaign message was broadcast on a larger scale.

Clothesline Project	(Northern Metropolitan Melbourne, 1999-2002)
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Seven local FVPNs in the Northern Metropolitan Region undertook the Clothesline Project as part of Week Without Violence 1999. The response to the project was very positive, with 600 women painting T-shirts and over 400 people attending the Clothesline events. There were six publicly displayed Clotheslines throughout the region. The Northern FVP Networker received donations of materials, pegs and rope and provided local Networks with T-shirts for painting, planning and skills sharing, and training on how to run a T-shirt painting workshop. Local councils also became actively involved in supporting the project. The City of Yarra facilitated the involvement of the local Vietnamese community through a T-shirt painting workshop, and Vietnamese women, men and children participated, painting anti-violence messages in their own language. The project continued in 2000, with local workshops and one large central Clothesline display. The Clothesline project was undertaken again in 2002, this time as a focal point for the state-wide launch of the Victorian government's Women's Safety Strategy.

SOME KEY LESSONS

★ **Collaboration and activities across the region created regional identity**

The project created a regional identity and awareness around family violence. People in each local government area got to know each other, and communication and networks were built between each sub-region and across sub-regions.

★ **Big is not always best**

Based on the project's success in 1999, in 2000 the Clothesline project received increased resources and held a single central Clothesline display. This was not necessarily a better way to work, and the 2000 project was not as strongly owned by the local networks. Keeping the project grounded in local networks – using local resources and skills, and holding local workshops and displays – is very important in generating a sense of community engagement and interest in the project.¹²³

★ **Central resources and coordination were critical**

The central coordinating and resourcing role undertaken by the Networker, supported by a small working group, was critical to the success of the project. Local Networks readily embraced the project partly because of the resources and training provided. Project coordinator Libby Eltringham said:

The T-shirt painting workshops calmed workers' fearful pleas of 'but I'm not artistic'. The provision of a Clothesline Kit that included locally tailored posters, brochures, T-shirts, paints, pegs and rope for the Clotheslines alleviated workers' other fears of not having time to do it all.¹²⁴

★ **Balancing local ownership and central coordination is a challenge**

Project coordinator Libby Eltringham reported:

Generating local interest and sense of ownership was vital, but this needed to be balanced with the overall themes and activities of the campaign. So one of the greatest challenges was providing a central coordinating role and resources for a consistent message, whilst continuing to encourage local creativity and initiative around new activities and ideas for community education.¹²⁵

★ **The T-shirts are an ongoing resource**

Each of the local networks in the region has kept the painted T-shirts from their Clothesline Project, and these are used in various displays and for awareness-raising events throughout the year.

★ **Painting and displaying on a Clothesline empowered women**

Workers from a range of services reported that their clients had found the act of painting a T-shirt, and hanging it on a public Clothesline (or having someone else hang it for them) was an empowering experience. Many participants took their T-shirts home. Many others chose to leave their shirts as part of an ongoing public display protesting violence against women and children.

★ **T-shirts captured media attention**

The T-shirts provided a great photo opportunity, and local media response was excellent. In 1999, the Project launches involved many female Members of Parliament.

RESOURCES

For information on the international **Clothesline Project**

w: www.now.or/issues/violence/clothes.html

For a Clothesline Project **activity outline** contact the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre **e:** dvirc@dvirc.org.au

example

A Powerful Journey: Stories of Women Leaving Violent Situations (Hume Region, Victoria, 2004)

Produced by Women's Health Goulbourn North East, *A Powerful Journey: Stories of Women Leaving Violent Situations* is a collection of women's stories from the Hume Region, and is accompanied by a research report, *A Powerful Journey: Women Reflect on What Helped Them Leave*. The project was undertaken with the aims of allowing the voices of survivors to be heard and enabling survivors' knowledge of violence to inform both prevention and intervention work. Fifteen women's stories have been told, in their own words, unedited, including the stories of two Koori women and three women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The women interviewed came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, and age groups from mid-twenties to mid-fifties. The research report drew out a range of issues and findings for analysis. Recommendations coming out of the research included specific directions to friends, family and workers from the women interviewed about what helps women leave; and a diversity of recommendations focusing on education, changing the culture of service provision, and redressing injustice.¹²⁶

Doing this interview is really good for me. Realistically you're one of tens of thousands of women and even if you can be counted in a small way it's a good thing. Domestic violence is the worst silent issue that's out there. They put people with half their heads hanging off

on TV to stop speeding, but this issue is ignored ... A lot of people don't even know what a women's refuge is. They just don't. It's not advertised on TV ... the information needs to be more public. If people think it's crazy to put information in the supermarket, well I think it's offensive to put lollies there! The partner will often be with the woman. Even at Centrelink, often the partner will be there. But how many men who are abusive will want to go shopping with the kids? The supermarket is an ideal place to have information about domestic violence. (Sharona, 2004)¹²⁷

A combination of people helped me leave. Sally – a very close friend I have known all my life – even though she has a family and a busy life, she always had the time to talk and listen. I owe her a great deal. my family, my counsellor and the domestic violence counsellor helped me recover and become the person I am today. (Tina, 2004)¹²⁸

RESOURCES

A Powerful Journey: Stories of Women Leaving Violent Situations and ***A Powerful Journey: Women Reflect on What Helped Them Leave*** are available from Women's Health Goulbourn North East
e: whealth@whealth.com.au w: www.whealth.com.au

example

Spanish Language: Quilt & Booklet on Family Violence

(Southern Metropolitan Melbourne, 2001)

The Southern Metropolitan Family Violence Prevention Network collaborated with Prodele (the Latin American Association of Community Development and Welfare Services) and a diversity of organisations – including the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service, Valerie House and the Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service – to work with women survivors in the Spanish-speaking community on family violence. The first project, in 1997, created a quilt on family violence, which has been displayed at events throughout the Southern region. Coming out of this, in 2001, was a Spanish language family violence resource booklet, developed by Spanish-speaking women, using the quilt as artwork. The booklet contains women's stories about family violence, information on the law, refuges, property, children, and state-wide and local services. The issue of confidentiality was a key one for the women, as participants came from a small Spanish-speaking community and were worried that they would be stigmatised for participating. As a result, all contributors' names were changed. The booklet's strength lies in its creation by Spanish-speaking women. In contrast to a translation, the booklet presents women's own stories and experiences, expressed from their cultural perspective, in their own language. The booklet is used by a number of Spanish-speaking services in the Southern Region and the Eastern Region.¹²⁹

RESOURCES

The **Spanish-language booklet** *Tengo tranquilidad...tengo vida* is available from the Southern Metropolitan Family Violence Prevention Network and DVIRC.
Contact through the Victorian FVPN w: www.vfvpn.org.au

example

Multicultural Domestic Violence Posters Project

(Northern Metropolitan Melbourne, ongoing)

In 1999, as part of the Clothesline Project, the Northern Metropolitan Family Violence Prevention Network held T-shirt painting workshops with a number of local communities. The response from local women was overwhelmingly positive: *'Hundreds of T-shirts were painted and displayed; they were amazing, lots of languages, lots of different ways of looking at domestic violence'*.¹³⁰ Based on this response, the Moreland Domestic Violence Network (MDVN) worked with women from these communities to create posters on family violence from different cultural perspectives.

Using the Clothesline Project images as their core resource, a group of women from each community worked with MDVN and ethno-specific workers to decide what image and message they would like to create for the posters. Posters were created by Indigenous women and Arabic and Turkish speaking women, and have been distributed to schools, children's services, health and legal services. The posters have been very popular and are now distributed around the state. The approach taken by the project has been one of 'organic growth', with new initiatives building on the success and lessons of previous activities. Project workers note a community development process like this can take a long time, and posters have taken between six months and two years to create. The next step is working with Somali women on the Somali language poster. Two forums for Arabic-speaking women have also grown out of the project, with women expressing their desire to meet and talk further about domestic violence. The forums provided childcare, food and entertainment. The first forum was attended by 120 women, and the second forum, focusing specifically on refugee and newly arrived women, was attended by 60 women.

RESOURCES

Posters are available from Coburg-Brunswick Community Legal Centre **tel:** 03 9350 4555.

example

V-day until the Violence Stops & the Vagina Monologues

(International, ongoing)

V-Day, a global movement to end violence against women and girls founded by playwright, performer, and activist Eve Ensler, has captured the imagination of women around the globe. V-Day began with Ensler's play, 'The Vagina Monologues', which was based on interviews with over 200 women about their memories and experiences of sexuality, and *'voices women's deepest feelings and most private thoughts about their female bodies'*.¹³¹ V-Day benefit productions of Ensler's play are staged each year by local groups around the world to benefit grassroots groups dedicated to ending violence against women and girls. In February and March 2004 alone, there were 2,300 V-Day benefit productions of 'The Vagina Monologues' in over 1,100 communities and colleges worldwide, raising an estimated \$5 million for local community anti-violence programs. The V-Day movement has had a huge international

impact as a focus for women's activism around the globe, and activities continue throughout the year. V-Day's campaign strategy includes a very high level media and communication activity; consistently throwing a detailed international 'spotlight' on the situation and activism of women in different countries, cultures and communities.

In Australia

'The Vagina Monologues' have been performed throughout Australia, often featuring well known women, and has proved both popular and accessible, attended by a mixed and mainstream audience. The production style makes it very simple to stage, and is delivered in a 'rehearsed reading' style, with three women performing.

In **Gippsland**, members of 'Eye 2 Eye', the local theatre group, staged a V-Day benefit of 'The Vagina Monologues' for a two night season in 2004, playing to a full house and raising a total of \$2,400 for Gippsland Women's Health and Gippsland CASA. The theatre owner donated the use of the theatre and the services for the season, local services were approached for support, and Gippsland Women's Health provided an information display.

RESOURCES

V-Day Until the Violence Stops **w:** www.vday.org

examples

CREATIVE ART: More Ways of Working with Women

A range of other projects has been undertaken by the Victorian Family Violence Prevention Networks working with women and children survivors in family violence prevention. These include:

Field of Broken Dreams (Hume Region, Victoria, 2001) was a project of the Hume Family Violence Prevention Network in Wangaratta. The project invited survivors to decorate red hearts, which then became a field of 530 red hearts, in the Wangaratta's King George Park.¹³²

Beyond Recovery (Loddon Mallee Region, Victoria, 2003) is a booklet of survivors' art and stories produced by the Loddon Mallee Family Violence Prevention Network. Contributions were sought from clients of the Mallee Domestic Violence Service, and the booklet was distributed throughout the Network to a very positive response.

Nurturing Strength (Southern Metropolitan Melbourne, 2003) was a creative arts project undertaken by the Port Phillip Community Group, part of the Southern Metropolitan Family Violence Prevention Network. The project worked with 10 women survivors to explore their experience of family violence. The women created a collaborative piece of artwork, resulting in a sculptural installation.¹³³

Silent Witness (Loddon Campaspe Region, Victoria, 1997) was coordinated by Bendigo's Emergency Accommodation and Support Enterprise. Silent Witness is a mobile sculpture exhibition designed to incorporate local women's stories. The exhibition features sculpted figures of women who bear messages and stories of local survivors. Silent Witness can be used in indoor and outdoor spaces.

The Bethany Community Support Mosaic (Barwon South West Region, Victoria, 2000) was a weekend mosaic-making project which worked with 20 women and their children who have experienced violence to create a beautiful mosaic. The mosaic is now on permanent display at Bethany Community Support.¹³⁴

Freedom Flyers: Women and Children Speaking out about Family Violence (Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne, 2002) was a kite-decorating project undertaken with women and children survivors, coordinated by the Eastern Family Violence Network. The project involved school holiday workshops, an exhibition and a kite flying day.