

STRONGER TOGETHER

An Adult Community &
Further Education Capacity
and Innovation Fund Project
2018/ 2019

Building partnerships between the
Neighbourhood House/ Learn Local sector
and family violence services to support women
who have experienced family violence into
learning environments.







The Stronger Together project brought together Learn Local Organisations and Neighbourhood Houses with family violence services to develop and strengthen a collaborative framework to support women who have experienced family violence into learning environments.

CONNECTING

The initial phase of the project was to connect with key stakeholders to discuss the project and invite participation. This was achieved through:

- Establishment of a Project Reference Group with representatives from Living & Learning Nillumbik, Lalor Living and Learning Centre, Watsonia Neighbourhood House, Nillumbik Shire Council and Whittlesea Community Connections
- Presenting at Family Violence Networks (Banyule/Nillumbik, Darebin and Yarra)
- Presenting at Neighbourhood House Networks (Banyule, Yarra, Whittlesea and Darebin)
- Focus group with Survive and Thrive women's family violence support group
- Individual meetings with Women's Health in the North (WHIN), Women's Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE) and the Orange Door.

Members of the North East Neighbourhood House Network (NENHN) were surveyed to determine what work was already being done in this area and to identify what the learning and support needs were for organisations.

WORKING TOGETHER

Campaigns

The timing of the project aligned with two major global campaigns: the Week Without Violence (15 to 21 October) and the 16 Days of Activism to End Gender Based Violence (25 November to 10 December). This provided a great opportunity to work with family violence services and the broader community in awareness raising activities.

Neighbourhood Houses in Banyule decided to participate in the Clothesline Project in the Week Without Violence. This involved inviting people to paint messages about family violence or messages of non-violence on T-shirts that are displayed publicly. Staff and volunteers from these neighbourhood houses had completed WHIN Identifying and Responding to Family Violence Training which equipped them to host events and support people who engaged with the project.

Building on the momentum of the Clothesline Project, it was decided to use the 120 painted T-shirts for a public photo event in the 16 Days of Activism. T-shirts were arranged on an oval to form the word NO. People were invited to stand together to say NO to violence against women. The Mayor of Nillumbik and Deputy Mayor of Banyule spoke at this event. Members of the public, family violence services, neighbourhood house staff, volunteers and participants attended.

Living and Learning Nillumbik engaged in the 16 Days of Activism by commissioning an artwork from the Glass Art MakerSpace group. This artwork was unveiled at an exhibition that opened in the 16 Days of Activism campaign.

Participating in these campaigns provided opportunities to be profiled in the council promotional materials for the campaign, gain media coverage and connect with a range of key people. Three short films were produced for these events and can be viewed at

www.nenetwork.org.au/projects/family-violence-project

Forums

Over 40 people attended the two project forums which brought together Neighbourhood Houses and Learn Local Organisations with family violence services. Organisations represented included Victoria Police, the Orange Door, Victims Assistance Program, WIRE, Relationships Australia, Whittlesea Community Connections, Local Governments and Neighbourhood House/ Learn Local Organisations from Banyule, Darebin, Whittlesea and Nillumbik.

The first forum provided a greater understanding of the roles and capacity of each organisation. It followed the principles of partnership brokering which involved scoping the partnership's potential; exploring drivers, expectations and underlying interests; embedding principles of diversity, equity, openness, mutual benefit and courage and assisting partners to reach agreement. A key achievement of the forum was the development of a Collaborative Framework which was shared with agencies at the second forum (see Appendix 1). A recommendation of the forum was that a speed networking event be organised to enable agencies to learn more about each other.

The second forum included a speed networking component and a panel discussion. Participants found the unstructured discussion time invaluable to make strategic connections and pursue conversations relevant to their services. In the panel presentations the CEO of Neighbourhood Houses Victoria shared that they have had discussions with WIRE about developing a micro-credential unit on Recognising and Responding to Family Violence. This was a direct result of a connection made at the first forum. Other panel members were representatives from WIRE, the Orange Door and Olympic Adult Education. They each gave practical ways to share perspectives, knowledge and resources and offered suggestions on how to create opportunities for collaboration.





“It is my fond hope that our daughters and granddaughters will never be subjected to what so many of us go through”
 — Nillumbik Mayor, Karen Egan



BUILDING CAPACITY

This stage of the project involved developing and collating resources and delivering information sessions.

The Orange Door

The Orange Door in Heidelberg is one of the new Support and Safety Hubs that were established as a result of the recommendations in the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Service System Navigator from the Orange Door was a guest presenter at a NENHN member meeting to explain how this new service operates.

WIRE Community Information Sessions

Community Information sessions were held at Neighbourhood Houses in the City of Yarra (Finbar Neighbourhood House and North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House). These one hour sessions were attended by staff, volunteers, committee members and students. These sessions covered drivers of gender based violence, examples of different forms of family violence and how to respond. This format was used in the project as an alternative to the 4 hour WHIN Identifying and Responding to Family Violence training that had already been held twice in 2018 for NENHN and are offered each month by WHIN. The one hour format was more accessible and therefore engaged more people. Further sessions will be held in 2019 at other Neighbourhood Houses across the Network.

Keeping Our Pets Safe in the Context of Family Violence

Victims Assistance Program delivered an information session at Watsonia Neighbourhood House about this project, raising awareness about how family pets are used in family violence and what is being done. This session was attended by a range of specialist family violence services who wouldn't normally engage with a Neighbourhood House or Learn Local organisation.

Website

A dedicated page for the project was added to the North East Neighbourhood House Network website to collate information gathered through the project. The page also has links to all the project films and key documents. The web page has been promoted through the NENHN eNewsletter, Family Violence Networks and through Neighbourhood Houses Victoria.
www.nenetwork.org.au/projects/family-violence-project

Promoting Neighbourhood Houses and Learn Local Organisations

Discussions with the Survive and Thrive focus group and family violence services confirmed the importance of having local opportunities for meeting others and learning. Neighbourhood Houses are highly valued as they are safe and nurturing environments. Features that enhance participation are: low cost or free, availability of childcare, small class sizes, flexible delivery of programs and supportive staff. Neighbourhood Houses offer a

range of entry points for women to engage including: volunteering, attending events, using childcare and children's programs, collecting food from food bank, attending short courses or doing pre-accredited or accredited training.

The project documented two case studies which demonstrated how Neighbourhood Houses support women who have experienced family violence. These case studies can be used in a variety of contexts including presentations to family violence services (see Appendix 2). Examples of pre-accredited programs are on the project webpage. Some are specific to women who have experienced family violence (such as Survive and Thrive) while others are open to a wide range of students, including women who have experienced family violence. A short film on the Introduction to Horticulture program was produced to demonstrate an example of the pre-accredited learning environment and program content.

A common theme that emerged from conversations with family violence services was that they were surprised by the range of programs offered by Neighbourhood Houses and Learn Local Organisations. More work needs to be done to promote the services and opportunities.

Referral Guide

Staff and volunteers working at Neighbourhood Houses and Learn Local Organisations need a handy guide with the key numbers for who to call if someone makes a disclosure. A guide was developed containing the primary contact numbers for referrals and a section on specialist agencies who work with particular groups in the community. This guide was presented at the second forum and adapted based on feedback given by participants. The guide will be distributed to all NENHN members and participants at the Neighbourhood Houses Victoria conference in May 2019.

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria

The timing of the Stronger Together project coincided with the release of the Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Strategic Plan. The plan includes a focus on gender equity. Findings from this project can be used to inform the Gender Equity Strategy that will be developed in 2019.



FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Stronger Together project was the first stage of a larger body of work that needs to happen to fully support women who have experienced family violence into learning environments.

Surveying and talking to NENHN members revealed that there is a broad range of levels of understanding and preparedness to respond to women experiencing family violence. While some Neighbourhood House managers said that family violence wasn't an issue in their community others were very engaged in the issue and had ensured that all staff had participated in training. More work needs to be done with Neighbourhood Houses and Learn Local Organisations around understanding the drivers of gender based violence, the prevalence of the issue, recognising the signs and knowing how to respond. Through the project, managers also recognised the importance of volunteers being included in family violence training as they are often the ones receiving disclosures. Although low cost training is available on a monthly basis throughout the North East region by WHIN, time to participate in a four hour session was a barrier for some organisations. The one hour information sessions by WIRE were a good introduction to the topic and hopefully by understanding the issue more, managers would prioritise training.

There was also resistance from some organisations to engage with the project as they felt that they are not

specialist services and did not want their organisation to be inundated with women in crisis needing support. It takes time to shift perceptions about the role of Neighbourhood Houses and the potential for them to play a greater role in supporting women.

It is a slow process to spread the word that

- family violence is an issue in ALL communities
- it has many different forms, not just physical abuse
- there are many women who have or are currently experiencing family violence already using Neighbourhood Houses and Learn Local Organisations.

When these things are commonly accepted, Neighbourhood Houses and Learn Local Organisations will be better able to reach out to and respond these women.

Training is part of the strategy for building capacity, but the sector also needs to have systems in place to support staff who are receiving disclosures and regularly working with women who are experiencing or have experienced family violence. Only two organisations in NENHN have access to an Employee Assistance Program and less than ten percent have professional supervision for managers. With a predominantly female work force, working with people experiencing family violence is likely to trigger emotional responses relating to their own experiences. A sector wide Employee Assistance Program is needed.



Connecting with family violence services was challenging as these services are stretched, trying to respond to high volume of families needing support. Case workers and direct service staff were not available to attend networking events. This finding was consistent with what City of Whittlesea found when they convened a Family Violence Network a few years ago. It folded as workers did not have the capacity to attend. It is critical to reach the workers on the ground as they are the ones who would make referrals to Learn Local Organisations. The project produced some online tools (case studies and short film) that these staff can access, but more work needs to be done on how to effectively reach them. Raising the profile of Learn Local Organisations needs a well-resourced, statewide marketing and promotion campaign as knowledge of this sector is low across the broader community, not just family violence services. People who could benefit from the services often don't know that they exist.

Most of the connections that were made through this project were with people in community education roles of the family violence services. Some had previous knowledge of Neighbourhood Houses and Learn Local Organisations and others were surprised about the diversity of work that was happening. Community educators will act as advocates for Neighbourhood Houses inside their own organisations thus increasing referrals for participation in pre-accredited training. Bringing together the CEOs of Neighbourhood Houses Victoria and WIRE was an achievement of the project as they were able to talk about how the two organisations can work together at a strategic statewide level developing micro-credential training units for Neighbourhood Houses.

Working together on campaigns was an effective way to connect with family violence services as there was a shared goal. Neighbourhood Houses and Learn Locals can incorporate these campaigns into their annual planning and collaborate with local family violence services on events. By working together the relationships are strengthened and connections are made at different levels of both organisations.

Overall, the project was valuable in establishing connections with key services in region. Building relationships is a slow process, but the ground work has begun.

Summary of Recommendations

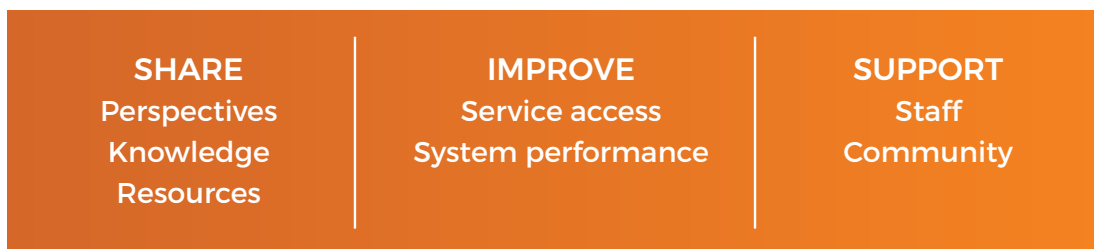
Short term recommendations that can happen now in Neighbourhood Houses and Learn Local Organisations:

1. Subscribe to Northern Integrated Family Violence Services eNewsletter to find out about and access training and information sessions
2. Promote use of Family Violence Referral Guide and online resources developed through this project
3. Use the Collaborative Framework with boards and staff teams to discuss family violence priorities and opportunities
4. Participate in local Family Violence Networks
5. Add family violence as a standing item on agendas for Local Government Neighbourhood House networks to discuss opportunities and resources
6. Participate in Family Violence Community of Practice that will be convened by NENHN to work together on developing a strategy for the North East and developing resources to support staff and volunteers
7. Seek opportunities to work with local family violence services on campaigns including Week Without Violence, 16 Days of Activism and International Women's Day
8. Present examples of pre-accredited learning opportunities for women who have experienced family violence at Family Violence Networks
9. Consider opportunities to partner with family violence services on funding submissions
10. Involve family violence services as guest speakers and invite them to neighbourhood house events regularly.

Recommendations that require further funding and co-ordination at a statewide level. Further work is needed to identify potential partners and funding options.

11. Pursue development of micro-credential unit on family violence (Neighbourhood Houses Victoria with WIRE)
12. Develop a statewide Employee Assistance Program
13. Roll out a statewide campaign to promote the value of pre-accredited learning opportunities

NORTH EAST METROPOLITAN AREA STRONGER TOGETHER



- BETTER OUTCOMES FROM LOCAL SERVICES
- IDENTIFY GAPS AND RESPOND
- JOINT ADVOCACY
- BUILD CAPACITY OF STAFF AND LOCAL SYSTEMS

**IMPROVED LEARNING AND WELLBEING PATHWAYS FOR
WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED FAMILY VIOLENCE**

VALUES

- Commitment
- Trust
- Clarity
- Leadership
- Understanding

PRINCIPLES

- Provide accurate information on services
- Provide clear entry points to services
- Make time to understand roles and language
- Develop organisational policies and practices for joint work
- Support partnership culture makers and keepers

This Collaborative Framework was developed as part of the Stronger Together Project funded by Adult Community and Further Education.

Resources are available at www.nenetwork.org.au/projects/family-violence-project



SELENA'S STORY

I heard that there was food available at the Neighbourhood House down the road from me. There were so many expenses with moving and getting set up that money was pretty tight. Getting help with the groceries meant that I'd be able to pay the next bill that came in.

I was glad they didn't ask my name or to see a concession card or give a reason why I was coming. Instead I was greeted with a cheery "help yourself to whatever you need". I was glad I could get it myself — choosing toiletries is pretty personal.

The next time I went there were a few people in the kitchen eating cake. They offered me a piece and invited me to have a coffee with them. At first I felt a bit weird eating birthday cake of someone I'd never met, but soon we were laughing and talking about our kids. For a moment I forgot the stress of all that I was going through.

Things were pretty chaotic over the next 12 months with court hearings and the kids going through lots of struggles at school. I would call into the Neighbourhood House and get food from time to time, I got to know a few familiar faces. One day when I was there I saw a poster calling for volunteers to help with the community lunch.

I'd been to the lunch a couple of times and thought I'd like to help out. I don't think I've ever buttered so much garlic bread! People seemed to come out of the woodwork for the lasagne. It was a wild and crazy day, but a lot of fun.

That was the first of many community lunches that I helped out with. I went on to do the Event Planning course to run the Women's Day. It felt so good to be able to give back, to nurture other women who were going through some of the things I'd experienced.

We all need to be able to contribute, to have a purpose and to help another person in need.

JAN'S STORY — NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE MANAGER

Our Neighbourhood House offers a range of vocational and recreational courses. I get to know lots of the students when we chat over lunch at the end the class. Jamilla was in one of our computer classes.

One day over lunch I discovered that she was a musician. She told me how she is passionate about bringing music into the lives of children. She had an idea to run a musical story time for toddlers. We worked on the idea together and got a grant for her to run this program.

Jamilla was a natural leader and the group was a great success.

After about a year I started noticing Jamilla saying things like "I can't do that, I'll have to check with my husband, he might not let me go." There were a few other red flags that made me start to wonder if she was OK.

Over lunch one day when we were in the garden, I asked "How's everything at home?" That's when she opened up and told me about the abuse she'd been experiencing for over ten years. She said that she always had her daughter with her as she was afraid that her husband would kill her if she left her in his care. I gave her information about the support services available and crisis response numbers.

She disappeared for three months then we got a call from her. She had gone to a safe house on the other side of the city. She called to let us know that she was OK and she wanted to collect her musical instruments. She told me that through being involved in the Neighbourhood House that she realised she wasn't dumb. She had friends. She felt connected. She said "it was my safe place where I could be me. It gave me the confidence and courage I needed to leave."

Event Planning is a pre-accredited course funded by Adult Community and Further Education.

The course covers:

- Designing an event
- Marketing and promotion
- Risk assessment
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Team work
- Customer service
- Evaluation



“I don’t feel I’m isolated with my situation anymore”
— Survive and Thrive Participant





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Project resources can be found at www.nenetwork.org.au/projects/family-violence-project

