**Watsonia Neighbourhood House Action Plan on Family Violence**

We have developed an Action Plan of events and activities that collectively address and raise awareness of gender inequality, rigid concepts of gender and gender roles in our community and violence against women. This initiative uses a participatory and strengths based approach to community development.

Watsonia Neighbourhood House recognises that family violence is an issue of concern within our community. Family violence is a significant preventable gender based problem that is the result of complex social, political and economic drivers that are historically entrenched. The majority of our House users, volunteers and staff are women so statistically we are already supporting women who have or are experiencing family violence.

Our consultation process involved speaking with a diverse range of women who had experienced family violence to determine the issues that they faced as they rebuild their lives after family violence. We also consulted with family violence organisations such as Berry Street and Womens Health in the North.

To establish funding and support we partnered with;

* Olympic Adult Education who have auspiced ACFE funding and Connected Communities Foundation who have provided one off grant funding for the Survive and Thrive programs.
* Banyule Youth Services to assist us to connect with young people in our community and develop projects to raise awareness of family violence and violence prevention.
* Women's Health in the North and Trans Gender Victoria to deliver training and share their expertise.
* Banyule City Council and Darebin Council to provide funding for the delivery for training.

We have been playing our part in *Change the Story* (national shared framework for the prevention of violence) and contributing to a safer community built on respect and equality. We are responding with local actions to address the drivers of violence, meeting the needs of people in our community who have experienced violence and raise community awareness of the issue. This includes;

* Delivery of training to our staff and volunteers by Women's Health in the North to strengthen the capacity of our organisation to recognise signs that women may be experiencing violence and how to respond appropriately and effectively when family violence is disclosed.
* Delivery of Survive and Thrive Community Mentoring Program. This 10 week program provides practical information and positive strategies for women to rebuild their lives after family violence. Through constructive conversations topics covered in this program include self care, self reflection and goal setting, financial management, techniques to deal with anxiety and conflict, police processes for reporting of family violence, dealing with feelings of shame and negative social stigma, how to access further training and education. We provide guest speakers including representatives from Victoria Police Domestic Violence Response, psychologist, financial counsellor and inspiring women from a range of backgrounds.

Currently being delivered in the evening (to accommodate women who are working), we are responding to feedback from a local women's refuge and from community members that running the program during the daytime would make it more accessible for some women. As a result we are collaborating with Greenhills Neighbourhood House to deliver the program at their centre during school hours and offer child care to the participants, reducing barriers to participation.

* Delivery of Survive and Thrive family violence mutual support group. This weekly support group provides reliable and supportive social connections and encourages positive ways of thinking, become independent and be empowered. They support each other to find ways to ways to move forward in their lives and create safe spaces for themselves and their children. Recently participants in this group have supported each other through house moving (packing up, transport and cleaning) and are about to go on a camping/hiking trip to Wilsons Prom.
* Provision of a safe space at the House where all community members feel welcome and accepted. We encourage an organisational culture which is inclusive and accessible, and communicate our values in a variety of ways including role modelling and visual representations of our values and code of conduct. We can provide private spaces for confidential conversations and accessible facilities where a community members can feel safe and comfortable throughout the week and weekend, in the daytime and evenings.
* Delivery of Gender diversity training to our staff and volunteers by Trans Gender Victoria to strengthen our gender diverse inclusive practice and understanding of issues impacting community members who identify LGBTIQ+. By addressing concepts of gender, gender norms and roles, we have improved our inclusivity for community members.
* Participation in community awareness raising events such International Womens Day and Week without Violence. The Clothesline Project, which we ran during Week without Violence, has brought a visual and powerful display of this issue to our House. Community members participated actively by donating unwanted t-shirts, painting words and images on them for display and having conversations about why we are doing this. These events provided opportunity for the expression of community voice through storytelling and sharing. It encouraged open communication between people with a diverse range of life experiences, strengthening community resilience and understanding.

This community development initiative is ongoing with plans for other activities to address family violence in our community. This includes bringing more men into the conversation about family violence, strengthening our connections with family violence specific services, delivery of more training to staff and volunteers, collaboration on projects with LGBTIQ support services and organisations, engagement with young people to break the cycle of family violence and addressing issues of violence towards the elderly and people with disabilities.

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October 2018