The Stronger Communities (Respectful Relationships) Project update October 2011.

Stronger Communities (Respectful Relationships) focuses on the primary prevention of violence against women. It is based on the framework developed by Vichealth which informs the Victorian Government policy, “A Right to Respect”.

It aims to support the communities of Hastings, Frankston North and Rosebud West by using a place based community development approach to preventing family violence and increasing opportunities for community participation.

Family Violence is a challenging subject and this project has encountered a few hurdles in the initial stages. One of these was introducing the subject matter to the community via the Neighbourhood and Community Renewal Committees. Some community members felt alienated by the gender focus of the violence prevention strategy and its apparent “deficit based” approach and some were initially hesitant to embrace the project in its original form. Interestingly, this has been the experience of all of the PVAW projects across Victoria, feedback which I hope will help frame the development of the prevention model in the future.

This resulted in a reworking of the message into a more “strengths based” approach focusing on fostering Respectful Relationships and Equity. This reframing has proved successful with a number of activities occurring in the first twelve month period.

West Rosebud Community Renewal

Conversations with the Community Renewal Steering group members highlighted the following issues:

- Women experiencing family violence felt isolated from other women.
- Many community members felt that the only solution to prevent family violence was to focus on the young people.
- There was a concern about issues of bullying in schools.

The steering group identified the following strategies for development:

- Programs for women to build self-esteem to address negative messages given to women and girls and to encourage women to support each other.
- Programs for schools (with community involvement)
- Addressing cyber bullying issues (raised by young people in 3940 arts Project)

These strategies have resulted in the following projects so far;

- Women’s Life Drawing (in partnership with Family Life) - A facilitated art class that promotes social inclusion and positive self-esteem.
- Respect Mural- Eastbourne Primary – Primary school students will explore the notion of “Respectful Relationships” and an artist has been engaged to support the creation of a large mural on the school building.
Participants of the Rosebud West women’s life drawing class

Frankston North Community Renewal

Women Living Positively - This group encourages positive social connections and promotes respectful relationships. In the past twelve months they have undertaken the following activities;

- Facilitated a music group for all ages and abilities.
- Organised a number of socially inclusive field trips and outings including a day in the Dandenong Ranges.
- White Ribbon Day morning tea- was held in November 2010 at the Mahogany Neighbourhood Centre in Frankston North.

Other Violence Prevention initiatives included;

**White Ribbon day Cricket match at Pines Cricket Club.** –After a successful event in 2009, the 2010 match was unfortunately cancelled due to bad weather; however the community remains committed to this event and are determined to have a winner in 2011.

**White Ribbon Day Service**- After a successful 2009 event held at the Anglican Church in 2010, residents expressed an interest in moving the event to Monterey Park however this resulted in lower attendance. In 2011, the WRD Service will be held to promote the White Ribbon Day “say no to violence” theme.

**Be The Hero** –Is a violence prevention program aimed at year ten boys. It addresses the concepts of respectful relationships and bystander behaviour and was developed by the Victorian Women’s Trust. This program has been embedded into the VCAL curriculum at Monterey Secondary College and introduced to Frankston Youth Services.

**Date With Dads and PitStop programs.** These are family strengthening programs run by “Better Men Australia” and will be held in Frankston North.

**Community Safety Forum** - Was held in September at the Mahogany Neighbourhood Centre and attracted around 30 local residents. Services providers were in attendance to provide information.
Hastings Neighbourhood Renewal

The Respectful Relationships Group.

This group encourages positive social connections and is focusing on raising community awareness of the Violence Prevention message. They have undertaken the following activities;

White Ribbon Day morning tea - A White Ribbon Day morning tea was held in 2010. There are plans for a 2011 White Ribbon Day BBQ in conjunction with the Blue Light Boxers.

Support information at Christmas – The group produced a “help card” with information for those who required support from Family Violence agencies over the Christmas period. This was in response to local community feedback that accessing services can be difficult at that time of year.

Family Strengthening programs - Rob Koch from “Better Men Australia” has been engaged to deliver the “Date with Dad” program in the three local primary schools in term four.

Training

Capacity building is an important aspect of the Stronger Communities project. Earlier this year the project invited VicHealth to run its “Short Course for preventing violence against women” in Mornington. Twenty people attended representing six local service providers. Feedback was positive with attendees finding the information useful in understanding prevention strategies.

Stronger Communities (Respectful Relationships) is now well placed to expand its activities throughout 2011 and beyond. The focus in the coming twelve months will be to continue the work in the renewal sites as well as building capacity within other community organisations, local government, sporting groups, community and faith based groups.

I would like to thank all the partner agencies that have contributed to the project outcomes so far.

Michelle Wright - Project Coordinator