

Faith Communities Unite for Safety and Respect Project

What

Women's Health East has provided funding for a project, led by Monash City Council in collaboration with Whitehorse, Manningham and Boroondara Councils, to build the capacity of faith communities to prevent and respond to violence against women. This project will contribute to the *Together for Equality and Respect Partnership (TFER) Action Plan 2017-2021*, which is the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Strategy to prevent violence against women lead by Women's Health East. The project will involve working directly with representatives of the Inner Eastern Interfaith Networks (IEIN) utilising a co-design approach. It will strengthen existing partnerships and provide a platform to collaborate, share skills, resources and develop new partnerships enabling a strong and unified approach to engaging faith leaders in promoting gender equity and preventing violence against women (PVAW).

The project objectives are:

- To strengthen the partnerships between Councils and Inner East Interfaith Networks in promoting gender equity and PVAW.
- To increase the capacity of faith leaders and communities in the Inner East to undertake primary prevention activities within individual faith settings.
- To promote safe and respectful relationships within faith communities.
- To encourage the ongoing involvement of faith leaders in PVAW.

Why

Faith environments are a powerful influence on social norms and beliefs, and their leaders can play a key role in building respectful relationships. The Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) found faith settings as a key setting of influence in prevention of, response to and recovery from family violence, and made several recommendations related to faith settings. This Project aligns with and complements these key recommendations, most particularly:

***Recommendation 165** - Faith leaders and communities establish processes for examining the ways in which they currently respond to family violence in their communities and whether any of their practices operate as deterrents to the prevention or reporting of, or recovery from, family violence or are used by perpetrators to excuse or condone abusive behaviour.*



Family Violence is also a key priority in all participating Councils' *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans 2017-2021*.

Preventing family violence is not new to faith settings. Over the past number of years, there have been a range of projects and initiatives that have provided faith based PVAW resources, training opportunities, learnings and pathways to support having a conversation with faith representatives.

Whilst significant work has already been undertaken with positive outcomes, faith settings in the Inner Eastern Region may require additional support to progress taking action by:

- Acknowledging violence against women as a community issue;
- Building their understanding of how this impacts the community;
- Building their capacity to understand how gender inequality and disrespect for women leads to violence/controlling behaviours;
- Understanding how to respond to attitudes of faith representatives within their individual settings who demonstrate disrespectful attitudes and/or behaviours towards women;
- Ensuring victims are believed and supported and perpetrators are accountable;
- Embedding primary prevention activities within their faith settings via services, youth groups, counselling services, men's and women's groups and faith-based media communications; and
- Making a commitment to prevent violence against women and promote gender equity.

How

The key project activities are:

- Interfaith workshops/discussions to build capacity and inform project materials
- Capacity building for Council staff working with Interfaith Networks
- Co-designed program messages, information and resources
- Unite for Safety and Respect Commitment Statement
- PVAW training for faith leaders and representatives
- Community capacity building forum for faith leaders/ community representatives
- Evaluation report

When

The project commenced in May 2018 and aims to be completed by August 2019.



Project Coordination

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Project Partners

Monash Council

Monash Interfaith Network

Whitehorse Council

Whitehorse Interfaith Network

Manningham Council

Manningham Interfaith Network

Boroondara Council

Boroondara Interfaith Network

