

# Week Without Violence 1999

The Week Without Violence campaign was conducted in October 1999. The primary aim was to increase awareness and knowledge of family violence issues amongst friends of family of women who are experiencing abuse.

*"Do you know someone who is being abused? Your help can make a difference!"*

Other aims were enhanced ability to respond appropriately when women seek help or disclose; strengthened organisational capacity and increased collaborative networking.

The Week Without Violence project in the Hume Region included a range of activities designed to achieve these aims including a Community Arts Project; Reclaim the Night marches; professional training days; and a regional launch of the Project. As part of the project, campaign products (information kits, posters, tea-towels and T-shirts) were distributed across the region.

A project report from the 1999 Week Without Violence campaign is available from Women's Health Goulburn North East. The report details the goals, purpose and strategies for the campaign, provides a summary of activities and measures activities and strategies against key performance indicators. The report analyses qualitative feedback from participants and workers and lists recommendations from workers involved.

## Case Studies

### Case Study 1

#### **Reclaim The Night Women's Gathering and March - a celebration of women's survival and strength**

"Women can provide support to each other, achieve something together."

Shepparton is noted as a conservative community, with a high transient population and few opportunities for tertiary education. A lack of tolerance of difference is apparent within the community. The economy is primarily based on agriculture and there are high numbers of health care cards, sole parents, early school leavers and other disadvantaged groups. " It's risk-taking to march in rural community."

On Friday, October 29th, women and children gathered in the Mall at 6.30pm. A speaker opened the evening, then the women marched along the main streets of Shepparton, finishing at the Queen's Gardens.

#### **There were three chants:**

WE demand the right  
To walk alone at night  
Without the fear of rape  
A women's right  
To go out at night  
Break the Silence About Sexual Violence  
Yes means Yes  
No means No  
However we dress  
Wherever we go

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At the Queen's Gardens, candles were lit in the women's symbol. Every participant was cleansed through the smoking by a Ceremonial woman from the Yorta Yorta tribe. Women were invited to speak and a number of women came forward to tell their story. Banners made by participants in the community artist's workshops were displayed or carried on the night. (These were also displayed along with T-shirts and tea-towels for the previous week in the mall, in Centrelink and in the Community Health Centre, and it is estimated that 4,000 people would have seen these.) The evening concluded with music and poetry.

About 100 people attended the Gathering and March, and around 200 participated in the planning, the workshops, the launch and other activities. It is estimated that 500 people would have seen the Reclaim the Night activities. More of the population would have been reached by media coverage which included an FM radio interview with four people involved in Week Without Violence; a second FM radio interview with one worker; and ABC radio bulletin; a TV interview with a survivor; and coverage of the Launch. Around eight people were on the planning committee, representing the community, the Koori community, community health, Marion House, Berry Street, Centrelink and welfare students. Through these people, MASA, CASA, the Hospital, The Bridge, the community house, police and the local council were also involved in the implementation of the project.

Outcomes included increased discussion of issues at workplaces and between the community and workers; solid participation by the Koori community and community members generally; positive liaison with police; and the "comfortableness" of the participation.

**"The positives were displayed and it gave hope that people can survive. There was strength and validation throughout the night. "**

## **Case Study 2**

### **Benalla Clothesline Project**

"Many participants had old old experiences they had already done personal work on and were ready to speak out. "

Benalla is a town with approximately 9,000 people on the Hume corridor. It traditionally was a mix of farming and public service people but there is now a noticeable increase in public housing recipients. There is a mix of wealthy ("old landed gentry"), professional, middle and lower income people.

A single day workshop was held with the community artist and women from the community. T-shirts, banners and mobiles were created. Lunch was shared and the conversation was good. The clothesline was hung outside the building and could easily be seen from the street. Many passers-by were visibly interested and stopped to read the messages. Almost all the participants came to the Benalla launch of Week Without Violence to see their work hung up and to wander around seeing other women's work. "Some potent messages were created and displayed."

Around 13 people were involved in implementing the project and at least 500 people would have seen the display itself and there were articles with photos in the two local newspapers.

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### **Case Study 3**

#### **Seymour Clothesline Project**

Four women met with a worker to create T-shirts, masks and scrolls as messages of personal growth through positive choices. The work was displayed high on a fence along a busy main street in Seymour.

What happened after this highlights the resistance that still exists to women speaking out against violence. The first night after the banners were erected, they were purposely damaged.

The culprit(s) were serious about their intent as they needed a ladder and wire cutters to bring down the banners from their public place. The group of women who had given so much of themselves to their precious works of art were very upset but determined not to 'let them get away with it'.

They made more banners with any material they could find, including one that said "We will not be silenced ". These were also destroyed. The Police were contacted but little action was taken. In all, the banners were stolen or damaged three times throughout the week, and each time, they were replaced by the group of women survivor. These women gained a growing awareness of the emotive nature of their action to display public messages about their experiences of family violence in their small community.

**The 'surviving' banners were used for the Reclaim the Night March on the Friday evening.**

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