

BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND CAPACITY

BENEFITS OF THE PARTNERS IN PREVENTION NETWORK

SUMMARY REPORT

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**Domestic Violence
Resource Centre Victoria**



CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	2
Commonly used terms and acronyms.....	3
About This Review.....	4
Research purpose and approach.....	4
Data collection and analysis.....	4
Ethics.....	4
Key Findings.....	5
Connection and collegiality.....	6
Coordination.....	6
Connection.....	6
Consultation.....	9
Access to information, resources and tools.....	11
Engaging with the evidence.....	12
Accessing the evidence.....	13
Understanding the evidence.....	14
Putting the evidence into practice.....	14
Conclusion.....	19
Notes.....	19

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Finally, thanks to the many PiP members who generously and thoughtfully informed this report through their participation in the survey and interviews.

COMMONLY USED TERMS AND ACRONYMS

PRIMARY PREVENTION

Whole-of-population initiatives that address the primary ('first' or underlying) drivers of violence against women. There is a growing body of evidence to demonstrate that gender-based violence can be prevented by changing the social conditions—largely related to gender inequality—that excuse, justify, trivialise or downplay violence against women¹.

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION / RRE

A holistic approach to school based, primary prevention of gender-based violence. It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as both education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence².

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN / VAW

Any act of violence that is specifically 'directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately' that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life³.

WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

A whole school approach goes beyond curriculum, recognising that what is taught in the classroom will only influence students' behaviour when the key concepts—such as respect, equality, gender and consent—are reinforced and modelled formally and informally throughout the rest of the school. This approach encourages schools to review existing procedures and culture embedded in staff practices, classroom management, school events, sport programs, formals and other occasions, to ensure all aspects of a school's operation are underpinned by gender equality⁴.

ABOUT THIS REVIEW

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND APPROACH

The purpose of this research has been to understand PiP's effectiveness and impact, as a network intended to build the capacity of professionals and organisations that support schools and early childhood services to deliver evidence based respectful relationships education.

The research for this report was conducted by Louise Simms, while on a placement with DVRCV as part of her Master's in Public Policy at RMIT University. The research process and the methods for collecting data were designed in consultation with DVRCV and supervisors at RMIT University.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The research design adopted a mixed methodology in order to address this purpose. The primary method of data collection was through 15 semi-structured interviews with PiP members as well as current and former staff stakeholders from DVRCV who were involved in creating and coordinating the network. This was supported by an anonymous online survey completed by 93 current PiP members and a review of project documentation including website and email analytics, network meeting minutes and funding proposals and reports.

ETHICS

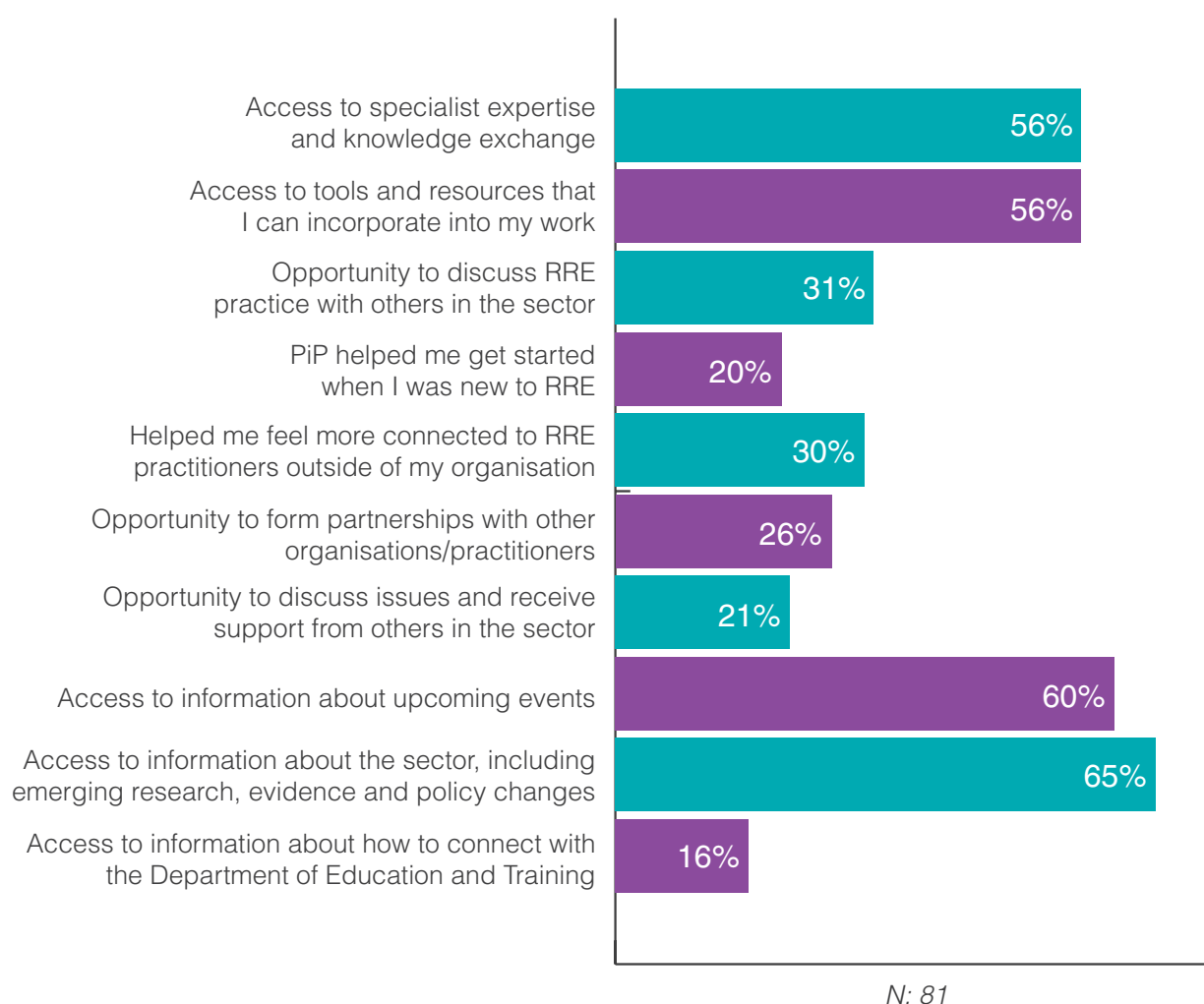
In accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007*⁶, this project qualified as human participation research and required approval from the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee. The project was assessed by the researcher to be negligible to low risk and was considered and approved by the College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN).

Preserving the anonymity of interview participants posed a challenge given the small size of the sector and the detailed information provided. In this report, names and identifying information about organisations, locations and programs have been removed.

KEY FINDINGS

This section highlights the benefits of the network, reported by PiP members through survey responses and interviews. These benefits are grouped into three categories: connection and collegiality; access to information, resources and tools; and engaging with the evidence.

Figure 1: Survey responses to the question ‘What benefits have you experienced since being a part of the PiP network?’



CONNECTION AND COLLEGIALITY

A key benefit members had experienced through being involved with PiP was the opportunity to connect and network with others in the respectful relationships education sector. This helped build members' capacity not only through coordinating and strengthening partnerships between organisations and programs, but by helping to alleviate a sense of isolation many reported feeling in their work.

COORDINATION

Some members saw PiP as responsible for 'creating a sector' for respectful relationships education in Victoria; bringing together individuals, projects and organisations doing similar work and providing a space to coordinate their efforts. According to one interview participant, before PiP was set up in 2007, 'respectful relationships education was patchy and piecemeal. There were people doing bits and pieces, but it wasn't coordinated'.

What I was kind of seeing as a practitioner and someone who had her eye across schools and the community sector [before PiP was set up, was] just a whole lot of confusion about who was doing what and who was saying what. Interview participant.

PiP, I find, is one of the few areas promoting people to work together, and trying to overcome [the problem] of numerous organisations doing something similar, but not doing it together. Interview participant.

Everyone's creative and everyone has great ideas, it's kind of a waste to not link in with people and share ideas and knowledge. We're not working against each other, we're working for the same cause, that's super important. Interview participant.

CONNECTION

Respectful relationships education is more likely to be a component of a PiP member's role than its core purpose. While less than 12% of survey respondents selected 'I am an RRE practitioner' in response to the question 'what is your role', nearly half selected 'other' and listed their role as health promotion, prevention/PVAW or social work, for example. Many of these members do work with schools in some capacity to deliver respectful relationships education and would be considered practitioners in the context of PiP.

One interview participant explained that, for the most part, respectful relationships education has been quite a small part of her work. She had heard about PiP and signed up to the bulletin while

working in a health promotion role that had a focus on preventing violence against women. It was only after moving to a new role, where she had the capacity to attend network meetings, that she started to focus more on young people and education settings. She felt that her engagement with PiP was what ‘got me in the position where I could really think about engaging with schools and [start] having those conversations’.

Figure 2: Survey responses to the question ‘What is your role?’

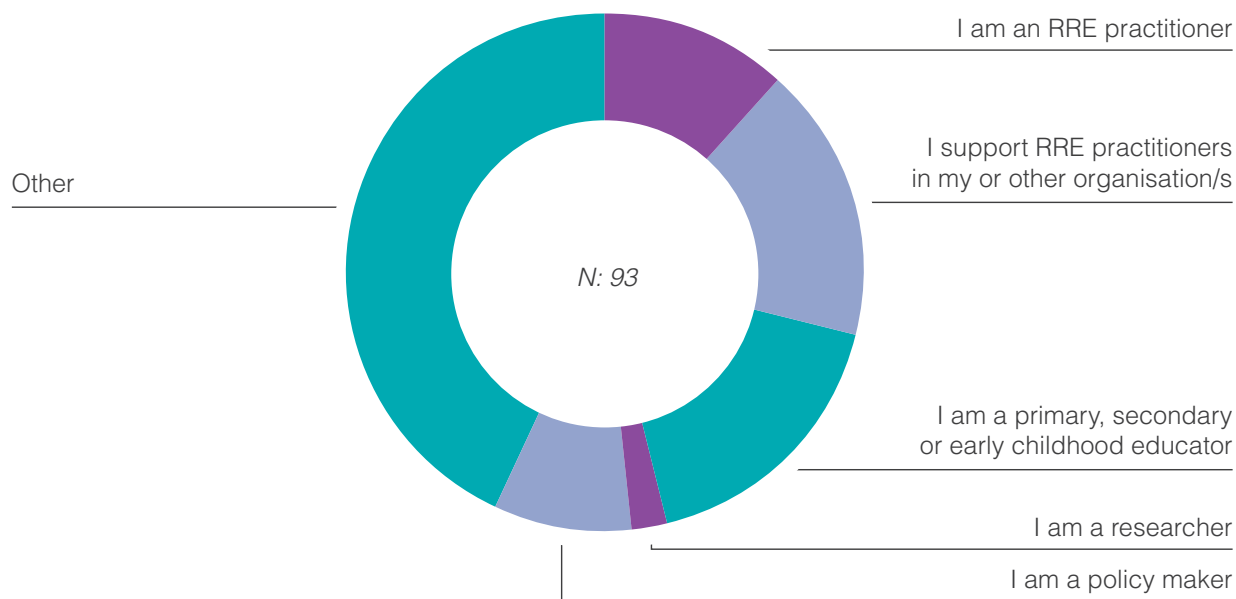
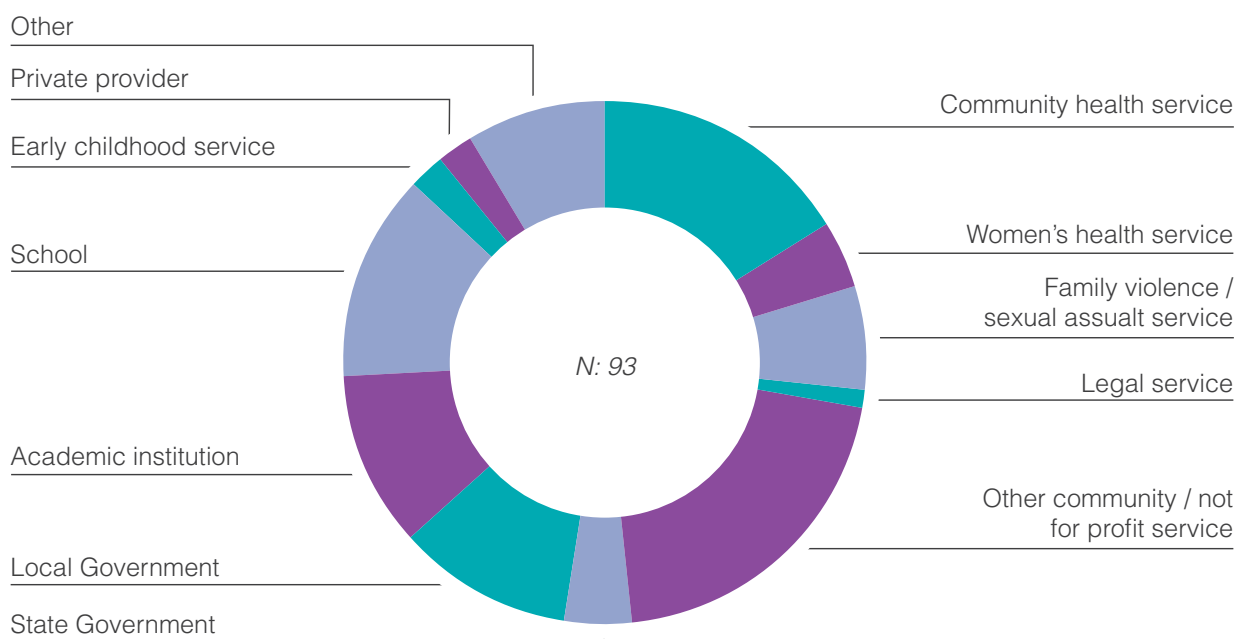


Figure 3: Survey responses to the question ‘Which best describes the organisation you work for?’



Just as respectful relationships education tends to be only a part of PiP members' roles, violence against women is not a core focus of the organisations they work within. Only 11% of PiP members work in domestic and family violence, sexual assault or women's health services. Thus the specialist nature of respectful relationships education work, within the broad context of primary prevention and the even broader context of each organisation, creates 'layers' of isolation.

I think that's something [PiP] does really well, to connect people up in the field. Because we can be across lots of different areas and lots of different organisations and you're often quite isolated, in this work. Interview participant.

One of the things that I initially found really useful with PiP—and I know I'm not alone in this—is that most people who work in primary prevention or RRE are the only person in their organisation who does that, and it makes it a very isolating role. Interview participant.

It's a tricky thing, feeling alone. I just feel like the network has supported people to feel like they can grow their practice and share ideas and not be alone for that. Interview participant.

First and foremost it [has been] a space to come together, and to feel like your work is connected to something. Interview participant.

Networks make it possible for individual members to see their work as fundamentally linked with others⁷, and interview participants reported that their involvement with PiP helped to alleviate this sense of isolation. This benefit cannot be over-stated as the opportunity to connect and network with others in the sector was PiP's most consistently reported and highly valued impact.

I think the connecting is really brilliant...I've really appreciated that role of PiP, and being able to meet with people who are doing the work and to have conversations. Interview participant.

From that point of view [being the only person doing prevention or respectful relationships education, in an organisation of around 100 staff], to be able to go and speak to people from a similar background, to hear speakers, to receive the latest information, it was just like a breath of fresh air for me. I still remember it, I came away from that first meeting just feeling so expanded and supported. Interview participant.

Connecting with other people who are doing the same sort of work is so valuable. I think seeing what other people are doing is really great. Interview participant.

As a non-youth practitioner myself, understanding and having those connections to some of those direct service providers and practitioners has really helped me to work with and support...youth practitioners [in my organisation]. Interview participant.

It's not just networking though, [it's] feeling as part of a group who is chugging along somewhere. Interview participant.

Taking this a step further, several interview participants highlighted the opportunities that PiP afforded them to talk about their respectful relationships education work in depth and detail, and the space network meetings provided for them to reflect on their practice.

Obviously this work is a learning journey for all of us...I think [PiP has] really been that key place to build my capacity and my understanding of the complexity of the work, of the key principals and frameworks that underpin the work. Interview participant.

All [our] roles are quite unique, so it's helpful to come together and just have a space, and not be doing the basic, 'this is primary prevention', 'yes, there's violence against women and it's connected to gender inequality, this is what we mean by that, this is what that looks like'. But to actually go into deeper issues around like, 'do we have single sex classes or mixed classes?', 'How do we ensure that we're demonstrating gender equality in everything that we do?', 'How do we evaluate our work?'. Interview participant.

Most organisations that are not overly resourced are actually [just] doing a lot of the doing, rather than the sitting down and reflecting. I think that's what PiP's real advantages are, allowing there to be that reflection and sharing and consulting time. Interview participant.

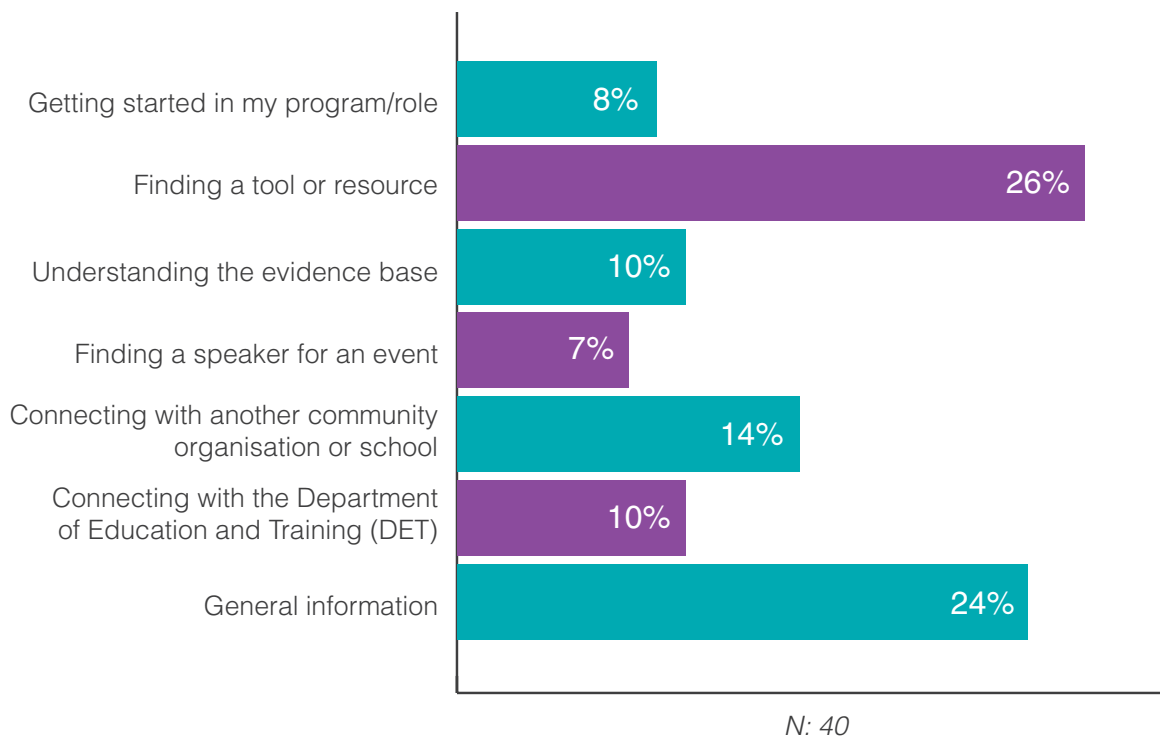
Because there's no other prevention worker in my office, there's often not people to bounce ideas off and to get support from, so having the PiP network is [like having] a bunch of people who can support you and help you make decisions. Interview participant.

CONSULTATION

PiP members also valued the collegiality and direct support they had received from each other and the PiP Coordinators. Nearly half of the survey respondents had consulted directly with the PiP Coordinator (48%), either in person, by email or over the phone, despite 37% of respondents only having joined PiP within the last year. Of those who had consulted with the Coordinator directly, 95% found this to be helpful or very helpful. Figure 4 shows the most common topics members had consulted with the Coordinator about, according to survey results.

Interview participants reported that having someone to act as a sounding board to process ideas and work through problems with was important to them. They were able to do this with other PiP members as well as receiving direct support from the PiP Coordinator, whose collegiality was particularly valued.

Figure 4: Survey responses to the question ‘Which of the following have you consulted with the PiP Coordinator about (by phone, email or face to face)?’



I know when I've had to make major decisions I've definitely met with [the Coordinator] and we've talked them through...so that, I've found to be really valuable. And there's a few people from the PiP network who I use in the same way, as a sort of peer support network. You know, as you would talk to a colleague in the office to nut something out, I talk to PiP members, because there's no other prevention worker in [my] office. Interview participant.

I could share some things with [the Coordinator] and be like, 'Is that ridiculous, or is that good, what do you think?' Just that kind of lovely, collegial support, I felt like she really provided. I feel like that was there in the [broader] network too, partly because she led it and she's got a lovely style that way. Interview participant.

Another thing that's been really useful [is] being able to call [the Coordinators] and run stuff by them. [The current Coordinator] has been fantastic in terms of me developing this model, because I can run stuff by her and she's [been] willing to look over the model and give me feedback and that's been really brilliant because there's nowhere else [I] can get that kind of support. Interview participant.

It's not always an easy area to work in, so I think being able to access the support, whatever support you can, is important. Interview participant.

Being able to access the Coordinators, so you're getting their advice and their expertise in the area, has been really important. And then, on from that, they've been able to make connections and assist us in programs, and vice versa they've sent people our way who are wanting assistance as well. Interview participant.

Having conversations and actually getting to talk with [the Coordinator] directly. A quick phone call, touching base about certain things...that was the piece that really helped me get to doing something [in the initial stages of working with a school for the first time]. It probably wasn't heaps of her time, but it meant a lot for the work and how it progressed. Interview participant.

The convenors, or the head of PiP...[have] an extraordinary ability to connect out with their members. Interview participant.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, RESOURCES AND TOOLS

Providing information and resources for members has always been a key element of the PiP network's activity. Membership is calculated by subscribers to the email bulletin, which was at 850 in October 2016. One survey respondent commented, 'The PiP bulletin is really great! I actually look forward to receiving it!' and this is reflected by the average open rate of 38% for these emails, which is significantly higher than the non-profit industry average of 25% or the social network and online community industry average of 22%⁸.

The PiP bulletin always provides information about things that will inform or affect our practice. When I talk about practice [I mean] I'm not doing respectful relationships education every day, but it's feeding into a whole range of things. Interview participant.

Actually the PiP bulletins are fantastic too. Just having all that information in one place, the resources, that sort of stuff. Knowing what's happening in the sector more broadly and where things are at, that's fantastic as well. Interview participant.

What's really been useful too is the newsletter, and the links they provide, so if you're not able to go along to something you're able to at least tap into what has happened. Interview participant.

In the three months to September 30 2016, 2,388 users accessed the PiP website 3,047 times, with an average visitor spending 2:28 minutes on the site. According to survey data, 53% of PiP members have used the website to access information for their own learning and development, while 43% have used it to access tools and resources to use in their practice and 28% have used it to gather information to support a case for evidence based practice.

I would've used a lot of the videos and things, that are on the website, in my practice. Lot's of things come through and you go, 'I haven't seen that [before]', and then you look it up and you use it. Interview participant.

The website's super easy to use and has like a million things on it. Interview participant.

Obviously their website is completely excellent. That is so beautifully pieced together, in terms of accessing resources. Whether you're a school, whether you want videos, whether you want these topics. It's really excellent, there's so much information available there. The same thing doesn't exist for PVAW work more broadly, it's one of a kind in terms of the setting of doing prevention. They've got that down pat, so wonderfully. Interview participant.

A number of interview participants mentioned specific resources they had been introduced to through PiP and subsequently incorporated into their practice, such as the *Love: the good, the bad and the ugly*⁹ website created by DVRCV and Women's Health in the North's 2009 video *Love Control*¹⁰. Others mentioned that their limited capacity as part time workers in small organisations made it difficult to seek out information and that they might not otherwise have access to some of the specialist experts and senior officials who present at network meetings.

The things that I find really useful are the PiP emails, the bulletin. I think just having a regular feed of what's happening in the world, globally and within Australia and specifically Victoria, is so important. I could spend [all] day researching all of that and I don't have the time for that. I've often used videos or articles, a bunch of different things that PiP has sent through, in my work. It's certainly built my knowledge and understanding of the context and the landscape, which has been really important. I can't undervalue that work they do, to bring that together. Interview participant.

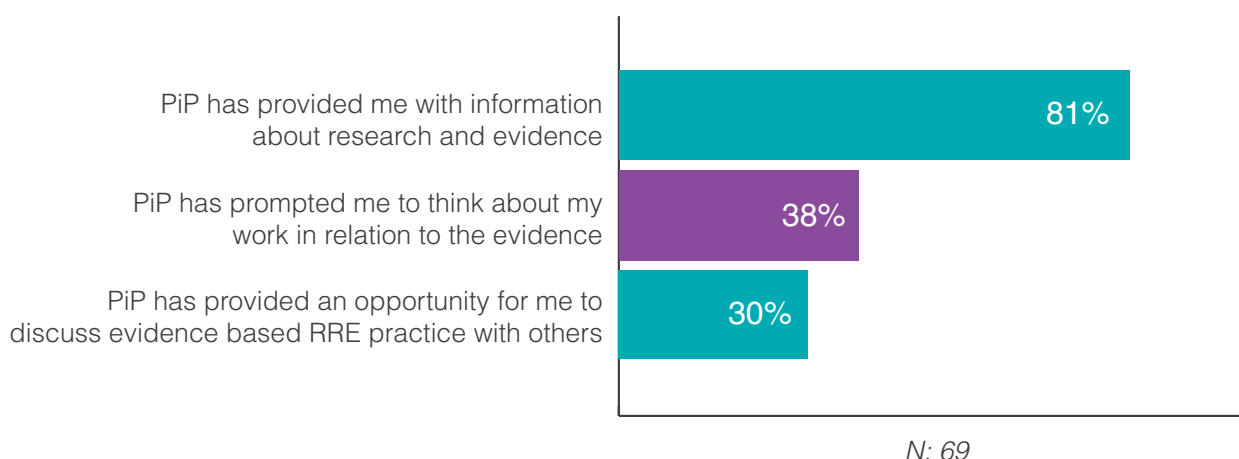
There's an opportunity that PiP offers to centralise some of those speakers that otherwise you might have to be paying to go to a conference to get to, and through this network you've got another way of accessing that information. Interview participant.

ENGAGING WITH THE EVIDENCE

PiP is a valued source of up to date research and evidence for its members. In 2009, the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) released *Respectful Relationships Education: Violence prevention and respectful relationships in Victorian secondary schools*¹¹, which reviewed existing programs and set out principles for good practice. While interview participants highlighted other important resources, this piece of formative research was referred to frequently and considered to be a 'key turning point' in developing the evidence base and the sector.

Survey data shows that PiP supported its members to engage with the evidence not only by disseminating new research as it was published, but through prompting reflection and discussion about its implications for their own work and what evidence based practice looks like.

Figure 5: Survey responses to the question ‘In what way/s has PiP helped you to better understand evidence based practice and how it relates to your work?’



ACCESSING THE EVIDENCE

According to survey data, most PiP members have received information about research and evidence through the network (81%). PiP’s role in sharing this evidence across the sector was seen as crucial both by members who first encountered pieces of research through the network and by people who felt that DET’s 2009 report, in particular, would not have otherwise achieved the reach it did.

PiP had a really key role in disseminating that [2009 report] to the sector, in passing that information on and making sure that people were across it, that people had opportunities to talk about it and talk about the implications for their practice, what they might do better. Interview participant.

PiP has definitely facilitated the practical application of the evidence. Coming together and talking about it, seeing what other people are doing but also creating tools, just discussing it, has been really important. Interview participant.

Me being involved in PiP means I have a really good understanding of the research and that’s really impacted the way I work now, and had an impact on the program [I deliver]. Interview participant.

UNDERSTANDING THE EVIDENCE

PiP also provides a space for members to consider the implications of this evidence for their work, and supported them to make changes to their practice to better align with the evidence base. Most interview participants situate respectful relationships education clearly within the broader context of primary prevention of violence against women and there was a general agreement that, while there is still some way to go, evidence based, good practice respectful relationships education is the goal and where the sector is headed.

In general, PiP members seem to frame their understanding of respectful relationships education in line with what the evidence says, describing their practice in the same terms as the research and referring to the evidence base explicitly.

[Respectful relationships education is] looking at what are the causes or the drivers of violence against women and how can we address those within the school setting. Interview participant.

[Respectful relationships education is] the opportunity to use the education and school systems as a catalyst for really significant cultural change to prevent violence against women. Interview participant.

For me [respectful relationships education is] part of a continuum of work that's around prevention. Interview participant.

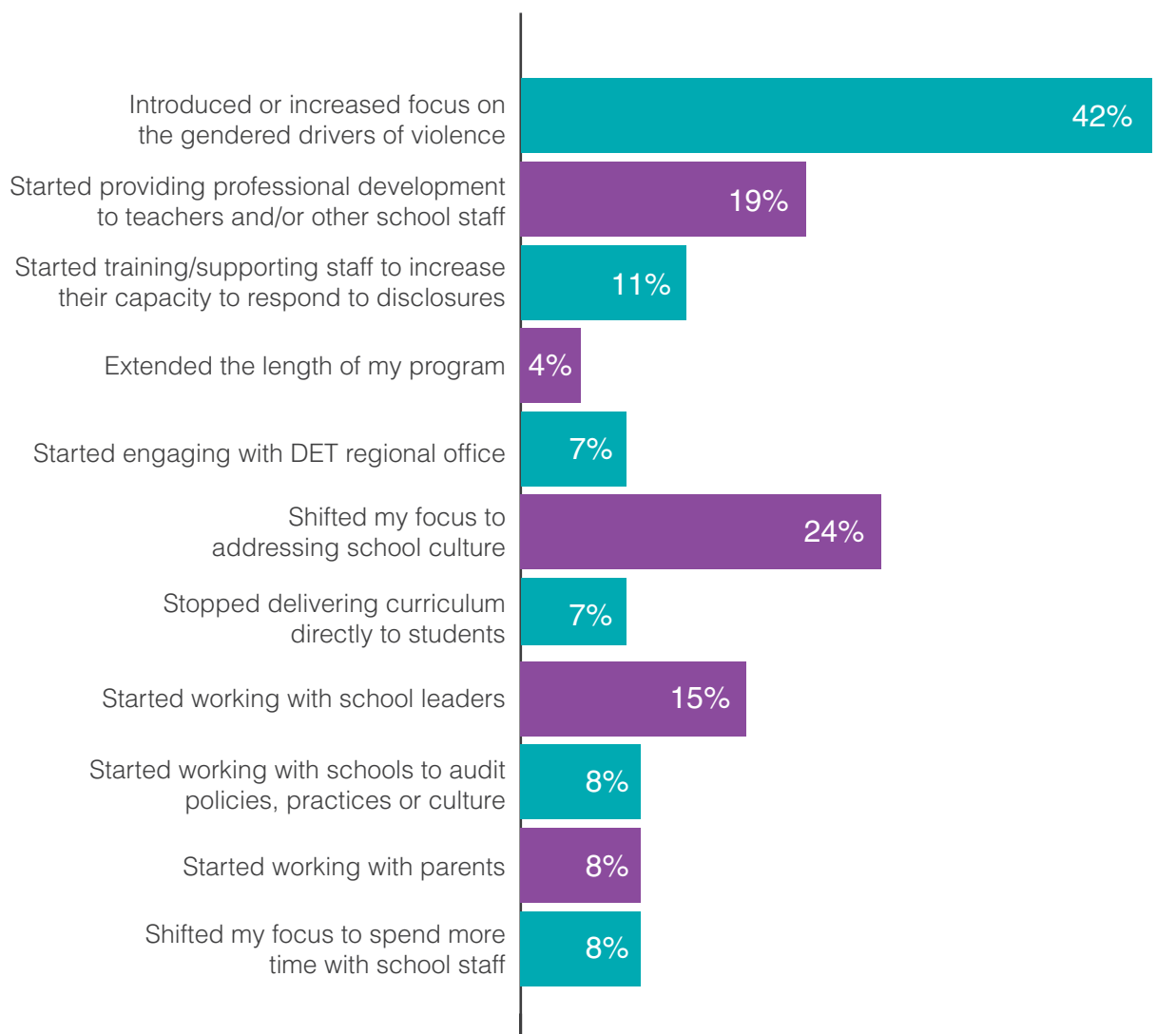
I think [respectful relationships education is] the philosophy and the school setting – it's not just the curriculum in the classroom that's talking about gender and power and consent, it's about how the school understands gender and respect through all of what they do. Interview participant.

[When I think about respectful relationships education] I'm thinking about that evidence [base], because that's how I framed my understanding of what RRE is. I can't think about RRE without thinking about that evidence. It doesn't just fit in, it is what I understand RRE to be. Interview participant.

PUTTING THE EVIDENCE INTO PRACTICE

Most PiP members who do respectful relationships education have made an attempt to bring their practice in line with current research (83%). Figure 6 shows the specific changes survey respondents reported making.

Figure 6: Survey responses to the question ‘What changes have you made to your practice in relation to the evidence?’



N: 69

Those members who had made changes, or attempted to change their practice, described a number of barriers they had encountered when trying to align their practice with the evidence. For the most part, these barriers were external to the member themselves; less a resistance to change and more about a lack of time or resources, and the challenge of convincing school leaders or leadership within their own organisations.

Challenges are the lack of understanding of most people around the determinants of violence against women and thus [a] lack of support from [my organisation's] management. Survey respondent.

Schools are focused on workshops for students and less likely to invest the time in the elements necessary for an effective whole of school approach. Survey respondent.

I think a huge challenge was within people's organisations. It's one thing to change the viewpoint of a practitioner, it's another to change the viewpoint of an organisation. I think, for many [organisations who have been] delivering curriculum, you know they get income from it, they've been doing it for such a long time, they've always had really positive feedback from the schools they work with, it's really difficult to change that. Interview participant.

PiP has been valuable in this context, particularly as a source of material to support a case for change and as a credible authority invoked by members in their own advocacy for evidence based practice.

[Understanding the evidence] really does help us to advocate to schools the importance of something being a whole school approach rather than just a one-off, the importance of changing culture and getting everyone on board....Having access to information through PiP has helped me to feel confident in some of that advocacy. Interview participant.

[Being involved with PiP] gives me credibility with whoever I'm speaking with but it does something even more than that—it seems to strengthen something within me. [It has helped me] become nearly matter of fact, quite clear about it. Interview participant.

Having some support and some guidance and some direction about where you should be moving to has actually been really helpful because I can take that back to my management and say 'this is what the sector is recommending, this is where we need to move towards', and that's been a really positive outcome. Interview participant.

The Victorian Government's announcement of the statewide roll out of mandatory respectful relationships education curriculum, in August 2015, has been the catalyst for PiP to focus more strongly on supporting members make changes to their practice to better align with the evidence.

It always has been the objective to try to encourage [an] evidence based approach, but that now is the key focus. Interview participant.

While interview participants highlighted promoting good practice and accountability as something PiP does, it was seen as a natural role for the network and had been experienced as an organic shift, in line with the changing policy context, rather than a deliberate or strategic change. Very few interpreted accountability to the evidence as one of PiP's objectives. However, PiP's role in encouraging evidence based practice came up frequently and was valued by participants.

I think [PiP is] trying to bring together what is being done across the state...maybe kind of standardising stuff a bit, so that there's not a whole bunch of different people running off doing something very different and not really looking at whether it's working or not. Interview participant.

[PiP distributed] a document about how to advocate with schools to ensure that they weren't delivering programs that weren't evidence based. Otherwise people would just do whatever they wanted I suppose. [PiP has] been so instrumental in protecting the work in that way. Interview participant.

What's so fantastic is [PiP brings] together all the best practice research and evidence and programs and resources, [and] provides kind of a one-stop-shop for everyone to know what's happening in the landscape of respectful relationships and that's really important. Because I think a lot of great work is developed, and then gets kind of left by the wayside, but PiP really gives life to things...and keeps people accountable to best practice, evidence based work. Interview participant.

[PiP is] actually a vehicle for promoting best practice...It houses that research but, more than that, it has a kind of an advocacy role in talking about what best practice looks like, should look like. So [it's] shifting the whole field to a new level. Interview participant.

I think [the PiP Coordinator] has done a pretty amazing job to try and keep bringing things back to the evidence base, and in a really diplomatic way too. Like even when people try to suggest things...that might be a little bit outside of what would be considered good practice, she does a really good job of saying 'that would be really good if it was done in this [evidence based] way' and directing [them] to resources that support that. Interview participant.

Because of PiP taking a much stronger stand about evidence based practice, a lot of the community sector has started to understand that that evidence base is real, that they've got to work within that evidence base and they've got to try to encourage the schools in their region to work in that way. Interview participant.

[PiP is] really about providing a community of practice and professional development, both formal and informal, which builds capacity of the sector to undertake really good practice respectful relationships education which is underpinned by a strong gendered analysis. It's underpinned by the evidence base, it contributes to the evidence base, and I think it fills a really unique role. Interview participant.

CONCLUSION

Since this review was finalised in late 2016, membership has increased more rapidly than ever before, growing from 850 to more than 1000 members. This is reflective of the changing RRE landscape, in particular the rollout of DET's mandated respectful relationships initiative. It also reflects the need for connection amongst RRE and PVAW practitioners and the links between their work and the emerging evidence base. This report clearly reflects the growing awareness and acceptance amongst RRE practitioners that good practice means engaging in and adapting to the evidence base, which is now well established and extensively cited across the community sector.

NOTES

- ¹ Our Watch, (2016) *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: The beginnings of change*, Our Watch, Melbourne. Retrieved 18 October 2016, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/health/ourwatchrespectfulrelationships.pdf>
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- ³ See note 1.
- ⁴ Department of Education and Training (2016) *About Respectful Relationships in Schools*, Victorian Department of Education and Training, Melbourne. Retrieved 26 October 2016, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/About-Respectful-Relationships-in-Schools.aspx>
- ⁵ Our Watch, VicHealth and ANROWS (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne. Retrieved 24 October 2016 from <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/1462998c-c32b-4772-ad02-cbf359e0d8e6/Change-the-story-framework-prevent-violence-women-children.pdf.aspx>
- ⁶ The National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (2015) *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007* (Updated May 2015), Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. Retrieved 30 October 2016 https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72_national_statement_may_2015_150514_a.pdf
- ⁷ Katcher, R. (2012) 'Unstill Waters: The fluid role of networks in social movements', *Nonprofit Quarterly*. Retrieved 24 October 2016, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2012/12/27/unstill-waters-the-fluid-role-of-networks-in-social-movements/>
- ⁸ Mailchimp (2016) 'Average email campaign stats of Mailchimp customers by industry', Mailchimp. Retrieved 20 October 2016 <http://mailchimp.com/resources/research/email-marketing-benchmarks/>
- ⁹ *Love, the good, the bad and the ugly*, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, Melbourne. Retrieved 30 October 2016, <http://lovegoodbadugly.com/>
- ¹⁰ *Love control* (2009) Women's Health in the North, Melbourne. Retrieved 30 October 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCP4pIKci-Q>
- ¹¹ Flood, M., Fergus, L. and Heenan, M. (2009) *Respectful Relationships Education: Violence prevention and Respectful Relationships Education in Victorian secondary schools*, Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Melbourne. Retrieved 24 October 2016 from <http://www.xyonline.net/sites/default/files/Flood,%20Respectful%20relationships%20education%2009.pdf>