Primary prevention of violence against women and children: How can local governments support the work in schools and other youth settings?

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Sharon Simon, Prevention Officer and Partners in Prevention Coordinator,
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

This presentation will discuss:

- Best practice and local governments role
- Local government case studies
- Other opportunities for local governments to support this work

What is Partners in Prevention (PiP):

PiP began in 2007 to support the work of Respectful Relationship Educators and is a capacity building network for these workers.

The project is currently funded by the Office of Women’s Affairs.

PiP provides:

- A community of practice
- One on one support, advice and guidance, both to new and established projects.
- Connect workers to others developing or implementing similar projects
- Develop a range of respectful relationships education resources
- Quarterly network meeting and an annual forum: meet people, share ideas and promote best practice
- Monthly e-bulletins and a website (http://partnersinprevention.org.au/): share resources, tools, ideas and information and promote best practice

Context for respectful relationships education:

Respectful relationships education is working with children and young people in the primary prevention of violence against women. It is a priority in both Victoria’s Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

Both plans recognise that gender equality must be at the heart of respectful relationships education.

Respectful relationships education provides a key component of a wider PVAW approach because:

- It is a time where views on gender, power and relationships are forming
• Young people are saturated with violence supportive messages. A respectful relationships program may provide the first opportunity a young person has had to question these messages
• Schools can be a place where violence supportive attitudes are reinforced
• Working with young people can have a lasting effect on their future relationships
• Schools, and many other youth settings, provide a captive audience.

Changes in the respectful relationships field in recent years:

• It’s a growing field, with increasing diversity in the types of organisations establishing respectful relationships programs
• There has been an increasing focus on younger years, including primary and early childhood
• This work is gaining momentum in settings outside of schools, such as youth settings.

Best practice and local government’s role:


Local Governments are in a unique position to provide advice to local projects, schools and other youth settings on how to meet best practice. As such, it is important to have a clear understanding of the evidence base.

The evidence base lists five criteria that form the minimum standards to meet best practice principles:

1. A whole school approach
2. A program framework and logic
3. Effective curriculum delivery
4. Inclusive, relevant, and culturally sensitive practice
5. Evaluation.

Addressing gender norms and violence supportive attitudes is a key component of each of the five criteria. As violence prevention is best achieved by addressing and challenging gender inequity and rigid adherence to gender roles, addressing these causes should be incorporated into a respectful relationships education program.

To be most effective, best practice respectful relationships education should be included in every year level, including early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education. The messages and discussions would be developmentally appropriate, reinforced and built upon in each year.
Criteria 1 - Whole of School Approach

This approach recognises that a curriculum in a confined classroom alone, no matter how good that curriculum is, is not enough. Multiple exposures to a consistent message is required. These messages need to be reinforced through all elements that make up the school.

Curriculum, teaching and learning

Gender equity learnings can be incorporated into every classroom. For instance, in Maths class, wage discrimination can be used to teach percentages. The changing role of women can be explored in History.

Staff need to be provided with training and the opportunity to reconsider their own view to ensure:

- Staff are trained in how to deal with disclosure
- The messages being provided by teachers are not contradictory to what is being taught in a respectful education class (i.e. if staff demonstrate sexist behaviour, it will undermine the work being taught through the curriculum)
- Staff are provided with an opportunity to think about actions they can take (i.e. teach wage discrimination through percentages).

School policies and practices and Culture

A whole of school approach should also address school policies, practices and the more informal school culture. For instance, are girls and boys roles within sport given equal value within school policy?

Even if school policy suggests that girls and boys are equally encouraged to play sport, how does school culture affect this practice? If both a girls team and a boys team get to the finals, do they receive the same recognition?

Some programs have found establishing a student leadership group to examine school policies, practices and culture an effective strategy. These groups have provided recommendations of how things can be changed from a student perspective.

The relationships between school, home and the community

Parents should be engaged in a conversation to reinforce the message being taught through the curriculum, providing an opportunity to question their own beliefs around gender norms.

Community partners, such as sporting clubs, local newspapers, youth centres, libraries, etc., should be engaged to ensure they are providing appropriate messaging around gender and relationships. Local governments provide a unique opportunity to facilitate these partnerships.

Criteria 2 – A program framework and logic

This criterion refers to the need to address the workings and cause of violence and how it can be changed — the need to make the link between violence, power and gender.
It also refers to the need to demonstrate how the program will achieve its goals.

**Criteria 3 – Effective curriculum delivery**

This criterion highlights the importance of addressing the cause of violence, not the risks. It should:

- Address gender inequity and rigid adherence to gender norms
- Address various forms of violence, including domestic and sexual violence
- Address not only attitudes, but also behaviours (this might include some role play to give young people strategies to respond in practice)
- Avoid focusing only on harm minimisation. A number of programs focus on how to keep safe, how to avoid violence, rather than addressing the cause of violence. The evidence base demonstrates that this is not effective. They place the responsibility of violence prevention on individual women and children, and can exacerbate victim blaming
- Account for the programs activities. For instance, why was a particular year level selected, why were female and male students segregated, why were they kept together? No choice is right or wrong, but each program needs to be tailored to meet the needs of the school or community setting.

**Criteria 4 – Relevant, inclusive, culturally sensitive practice**

Programs should be informed by the knowledge of your target group and local context. It’s important to note that this target group may be quite diverse.

Being aware of the cultures of the school and meeting with community and/or school representatives is crucial in planning or tailoring a program that will best meet the needs of the school.

**Criteria 5 – Evaluation**

An evaluation plan should be developed at the initial planning stage of a program and include short, medium and long term indicators.

It is important to focus on more than student satisfaction, instead evaluating the impact of the program on attitudes, skills and behaviours, as well as incorporating a theory of change.

More evidence needs to be collected to refine the best practice evidence base. Evaluation results should be shared — even if the results are not what were hoped for, they will add to the evidence base and support the sector.

**What not to do**

To minimise risks, it is important that program planners are aware of what can cause harm.

**Some don’ts include:**

- Not providing training all staff. This can be particularly harmful when dealing with disclosure. If staff are not appropriately trained in this area, this places students at risk. Note, a student
may not disclose to the classroom teacher where the curriculum is being provided, but rather to any staff member they trust

- Take action only after violence has occurred
- Focus only on strategies of support and welfare (secondary and tertiary intervention, rather than focusing on the cause of violence)
- Ignore the wider contexts of violence and its causes (this will not prevent violence)
- Use one-off sessions, isolated from other curriculums. A one-off session is unlikely to change attitudes and behaviours
  If a one off is required, instead run an activity that challenges gender norms, addressing the cause of violence without the risks associated with talking about violence
- Harm minimisation or protective behaviours program. These projects may cause women to internalise blame and reinforce cultural norms that women are responsible for violence.


Local government case studies

1. **Phoenix Youth Centre Maribyrnong Council**

   Chris Lynch, a youth worker at Phoenix Youth Centre at the City of Maribyrnong, worked with young men involved in the Youth Centre to identify opportunities to respond to violence against women. This led to a hip hop act, where the boys wrote and sang words around violence. These words were then mimed by workers at the City of Maribyrnong.

   The clip can be seen here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq4vktAhHak](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq4vktAhHak)

   This clip was not created in isolation but is part of a larger City of Maribyrnong project that has used the same messaging in other local prevention activities. The messaging is thus being reinforced at various points within a local setting.

   Additionally, Chris is continuing to provide ongoing work in the schools that the rappers attend, again reinforcing the same message.

2. **Project RESPECT**

   Project RESPECT began in 2010, driven by the local health centre, Dianella Community Health.

   On establishing the program, they went to their local council, Hume City Council, to ask for help. Hume City Council agreed to provide a male youth worker to co deliver the program.

   This partnership sends a strong message that Project RESPECT is a community response to a serious issue. It is not one organisation responding, it’s the health centre, the school and local government working together.

   The program included a strong youth participatory model, building young people as leaders in prevention. These leaders:
• developed respectful relationships messaging for their schools
• reviewed school policies and culture using a gender lens
• developed social marketing activities, targeting all staff, students and their families.

They involved the school leadership (principals, senior staff) from very beginning, assisting in the program roll out.

A 10 week gender equity and respectful relationship curriculum is being delivered as part of Health and PE class. Project RESPECT is also working with the school to identify opportunities to integrate gender equity and respectful relationship education across all aspects of the curriculum.

3. Darebin City Council

Darebin City Council initiated the development of a respectful relationships program, in response to their existing prevention commitments.

They began this work by tapping into their existing resources, the council-managed Youth Centre. Receiving strong support from within the Youth Centre, they began trialling sessions at the Centre, using existing internal staff to facilitate the sessions.

They have since partnered with Thornbury High School and developed a pilot program, to be piloted in Term 2 with students aged 14 and 15.

Respectful relationships sessions will continue to be delivered at the Youth Centre. As many Thornbury High School students also visit this Centre, the messages around gender equity and respect will be reinforced.

4. Monash Generating Equality and Respect (GEAR) project

The Monash GEAR project has developed a funding opportunity, providing grants of up to $2,500 to local organisations to support and encourage respectful relationships activities.

5. City of Whittlesea

The City of Whittlesea is supporting Northern CASA to roll out the Sexual Assault Prevention Program for Secondary Schools (SAPPSS) program in their area.

The Council provides a facilitator role, linking Northern CASA to local schools. They also provide support to Northern CASA to access funding.

Other opportunities for local governments to support this work:

• Support existing council staff that work with young people to reinforce PVAW messaging,
  i.e. Youth Services, Libraries, early childhood etc:
  o organise prevention of violence training
  o provide resources (i.e. provide libraries with a gender equity book list: http://www.welcomingschools.org/pages/books-looking-at-gender/)
• Play a facilitator role in connecting schools to existing services providing respectful relationships education, similar to the City of Whittlesea. Note, ensure the program has
been evaluated recently in terms of how it meets best practice. Recognise that the program will still need to be tailored to address the individual cultures of the school

- Work with areas of local council that are responsible for grants and other funding. Can you incorporate a PVAW element into the youth grants stream?
- Recognise that if you are establishing a program in a school, you will need to do the legwork, or bring in someone who will.

Some tools:

Below is a sample of existing tools and activities that can be incorporated into a respectful relationships education program.

Note: these tools should not be carried out in isolation; instead they can be utilised as part of a whole of school approach.

Many more tools can be accessed from the PiP website - [http://partnersinprevention.org.au/](http://partnersinprevention.org.au/).

**Sex, Love and Other Stuff (for boys)** developed by DVRCV and available as a booklet and on line:


**Love: yhe Good, the bad and the ugly (for girls)** developed by DVRCV and available as a booklet and on line:


**Teen power and control wheel:**


**Love Control** developed by Women’s Health in the North:
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DP_MuGJIrjA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DP_MuGJIrjA)