



**Gender Equity
is everybody's
business at
Yarra Ranges Council**

Introduction

This Action Plan details Yarra Ranges Council's approach to integrating gender equity considerations across policy, programs, and organisational processes.

Gender equity is a fundamental to ensuring that women and men's needs and voices are fairly catered to, included and respected. There are significant benefits to Council for working to promote gender equity:

- Attract the right employees, in the right roles at the right time
- Reduce cost of employee turnover.
- Enhance organisational performance due to increased diversity in the workforce.
- Minimise legal risks associated with sex discrimination and harassment claims.
- Enhance the organisation's reputation both to prospective employees and the community.
- Develop more effective and efficient policy due to an enhanced understanding of the diversity of community need..

The costs of inaction to the community are particularly significant. The issue of violence against women and children remains the main driver for Yarra Ranges Council to promote gender equity within its workforce.

Violence against Women

Violence against women is one of the most significant social and health issues affecting our community. It occurs in all areas of society regardless of location, socio-economic and health status, age, culture, gender, sexual identity, ability, ethnicity or religion.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics:

- In 2012, 17% of women aged 18 years or more had experienced partner violence since the age of 15.¹
- Nearly 1 in 5 women have experienced sexual violence (both partner and non-partner) since the age of 15; the level did not change between 2006 and 2013.²
- Intimate partner violence accounts for 1.3% of the total burden of disease amongst Australian women aged 15-49.³

It is also an issue affecting our local community. In 2013/2014, Yarra Ranges had the second- highest rate of reported family violence incidents amongst the seven local government areas in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne.⁴

Violence against women has serious social, economic and health consequences for women, their families and communities:

- A KPMG study in 2009 estimated that domestic violence and sexual assault perpetrated against women costs the nation \$13.6 billion per year. By 2021, the figure is likely to rise to \$15.6 billion if additional action does not occur.⁵
- In 2013/14, children were present at 35% of incidents in Yarra Ranges which were attended by police.⁶

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2013. *Personal safety survey*. Cat. No. 4906.0.
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4906.0Chapter7002012>

² Ibid.

³ Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation *Global Burden of Disease Study 2013 (Australian data indicators used)*
<http://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-compare/>

⁴ Victoria Police, 2015 *Family Incident Reports, rate per 100,000 population 2009/10-2013/14*
http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?a=internetBridgingPage&Media_ID=72311

⁵ KPMG, 2009, *The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children*, Safety Taskforce, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australian Government.

⁶ Victoria Police, 2014 unpublished data

Prevention

Violence against women is prevalent and serious, but it is also preventable. The approach to preventing violence against women in Victoria has been informed by the seminal work of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). The evidence compiled by VicHealth identifies that primary prevention activity needs to focus on redressing the unequal distribution of power between men and women and challenge rigid gender roles⁴. This involves understanding societal and individual norms which privilege one gender over the other.

The Connection

A lack of gender equality is consistently cited as an underlying determinant of violence against women. Gender inequality as a cause of violence against women also underpins approaches to prevention by organisations such as the World Health Organization (World Health Organization (WHO), 2010), and, in Australia, VicHealth (VicHealth, 2007). So it has long been understood that gender inequality is a problem, yet the evidence of the link between gender inequality and violence against women is rarely laid out clearly to illustrate this connection⁷. This is where Yarra Ranges can make a difference to its workforce.

The Role of Local Government

For many years, Victorian councils have played an essential role in working to prevent violence against women. Local government is uniquely placed to play a key role in the primary prevention of violence against women as they:

- Are responsible for creating safe and healthy environments;
- Have the capacity to facilitate and lead community responses;
- Can role-model and promote gender equitable workplace practices;
- Provide a range of community services, safe public spaces and community facilities;
- Can use existing structures, relationships and infrastructure to drive change.

Local government has been an early leader in this approach to violence prevention and will continue to model and promote equal and respectful relationships between men and women.

Local Context

Council has been actively involved in promoting gender equity and working to prevent violence against women. The Gender Equity Action Plan reaffirms Council's commitment and continues the momentum to this essential work undertaken over the past several years.

In September 2011, Yarra Ranges Council commenced a three and a half year partnership project with Knox and Maroondah Councils called *Preventing Violence against Women in Our Community* (PVAWC). The project was funded by the Victorian Government through the Office of Women and concluded in December 2014.

The PVAWC project was a primary prevention project to prevent violence against women before it occurs. Project initiatives contributed to building communities, organisations, and cultures where women and men are equally valued, respected, heard and included so that violence against women does not occur.

The key approach to delivering the PVAWC project was to build capacity within the three councils to apply a gender lens in policy, programs, infrastructure and services. The premise was that any changes to core council business would have community impact due to the influence of local government across the social, economic, built and natural environments.

⁷ Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014, *Gender equality and violence against women: What's the connection?*

This prevention approach aligned with Councils' roles to improve the health and wellbeing of their communities.

The project had a strong **leadership commitment**, with Project Control Group members Ali Wastie and Alison Cran, and Project Working Group members Barb Dobson (2011-12), Catherine Walker, Isha Scott and Rachel Murphy driving and supporting project activity and awareness of the role of gender equity in preventing violence against women in Yarra Ranges.

Yarra Ranges also made a **formal commitment** to support an eastern region approach to preventing violence against women by signing on to the Women's Health East *Together for Equality and Respect*. The Council's premier strategy on Health and Wellbeing includes the goal: "Yarra Ranges has a culture of gender equity and respect and women live free from violence".

The project initiated a number of **professional development opportunities** including two Gender Matters Workshops in partnership with Women's Health East (WHE) delivered to Youth Services and staff in Men's Health Week. Other activities through the project included, family violence workshops to Local Laws aimed to increase awareness and understanding of PVAW, a social marketing workshop targeting social planners held by WHE, and co-hosting an elder abuse session.

A number of **awareness raising activities** delivered the powerful message of the need for continual organisational conversations on gender equity. A White Ribbon YouTube clip featuring male leaders was successful in raising awareness of the need to address violence against women. Also, female staff working in male dominated workplaces initiated the *Steel-caps and Stilettos* program which included activities around workplace culture, mentoring from women leaders, career development and offered peer support.

The project also initiated the creation of the **Gender Equity Working Group** – a mixture of male and female staff from all parts of the organisation who joined together to discuss how the organisation could improve gender equity.

Given the PVAWC project officially concluded in December 2014, the challenge now facing Council is to determine how the work continues and what focus it will have in 2015 and beyond.

The Next Steps

The Gender Equity Working Group has developed an action plan for 2015 – 2017 that has a focus on staff, and how they can change attitudes and behaviours that will result in gender equity within the workplace and services that consider gender equality.

It is anticipated that the working group will provide advice and direction for the implementation of the action plan. It is estimated that the implementation of the plan and continued coordination of the Gender Equity Working Group will require a dedicated employee (0.4 EFT) and support from key managers.

Action Plan 2015 - 2017

Vision: Yarra Ranges has a culture of gender equity and respect where women and children live free from violence.

Stimulate and support leadership					
Objective: Develop leadership at all levels and departments, to build expertise and capacity for reinforcing gender equity messages and behaviours.					
Action	Measure	Timing	Lead	Resources	
Support the continuation and professional development of the Gender Equity Working Group with a focus on broadening the membership to ensure representation from most departments	<p>Output: Hold 4 meetings per annum, Members attend professional development opportunities</p> <p>Indicators of success: Membership of Working Group includes at least 1 Director, 4 Managers and at least 2 members from each directorate.</p> <p>Increase in understanding and knowledge as demonstrated by an organisational survey</p>	Ongoing	0.4 EFT role	Existing	
Develop and adopt an organisational statement on gender equity	<p>Output: Organisational Statement created</p> <p>Indicator of success: Adoption of statement by Council.</p>	April 2016	0.4 EFT role	Existing	
Include gender equity as part of the development of our Diversity & Inclusion Policy	<p>Output: Gender equity tabled as potential inclusion in policy.</p> <p>Indicator of success: Gender equity is referred to and integrated within the Diversity and Inclusion Policy</p>	Nov 2015	Mgr – People & Culture	Existing	
Identify champions within male dominated work areas that can participate in a ‘train the trainer’ program with the view to developing an internal mentoring and professional development program.	<p>Output: 10 participants per annum</p> <p>Indicators of success: Increase in understanding and knowledge as demonstrated by a participant survey</p>	Ongoing	0.4 EFT role	\$5K	
Include a module in the Leaders Induction program	<p>Output: Participants attendance</p> <p>Indicators of success: Increase in understanding and knowledge as</p>	Sep 2015	Mgr – People &	Existing	

	demonstrated by a participant survey		Culture	
Introduce better monitoring of gender equity staff indicators (including women in leadership roles, method of employment and talent identification).	Output: Indicators tabled at SLT Indicators of success: Results within the best employers range.	Sep 2015	SLT	Existing

Raise the profile of primary prevention				
Objective: To communicate the causes of violence against women and the barriers to equality.				
Action	Measure	Timing	Lead	Resources
Develop a series of events targeting staff for International Women's Day to help raise awareness of gender equity	Output: Events held Indicator of success: Increase awareness/commitment/willingness to undertake action as measured by a post-event survey.	Ongoing	IWD Working Com'tee Women's Health East	\$5K
Establish a Men's Action Group that could then develop a series of events for White Ribbon Day and the 16 days of activism to help raise awareness of gender equity	Output: Events held Indicator of success: Increase awareness/commitment/willingness to undertake action as measured by a post-event survey.	Ongoing	Mgr EYCD Men's Action Group	\$2K

Develop the workforce

Objective: Build the knowledge and skills of a broad cross-section of our workforce to achieve organisation-wide capability and support for gender equality.

Action	Measure	Timing	Lead	Resources
Introduce a module as part of our one day corporate induction related to Yarra Ranges commitment and expectations regarding gender equity.	Output: Included in compulsory Induction Session for all new employees	Ongoing	Mgr – People & Culture	Existing
Conduct organisational gender equity audit tool (including pay equity) currently being developed by Women's Health East	Output: Audit completed Indicator of success: Results within the best employers range.	Jan-April 2016	0.4 EFT role Women's Health East	TBA
Host two workshops per annum focussing on constructive techniques to confront gender equity (bystander) in the workplace	Output: Completion of two workshops Indicator of success: Increase awareness/commitment/willingness to undertake action as measured by a post-event survey.	Ongoing	People & Culture	\$5K
Upskill cross functional team members from across the organisation in contact offer principles, to provide advice and information to employees.	Output: 16 employees complete training	Dec 2015	Mgr – People & Culture	\$3K
Create learning content to be delivered online that includes a module related to Gender Equity and Yarra Ranges Values and Behaviours.	Output: employee completion Indicators of success: Increase in understanding and knowledge as demonstrated by a participant survey	June 2016	Mgr – People & Culture	Existing

Normalise workplace discussion about gender equity

Objective: Promote conversations about the causes of violence against women, to help people understand the role we all have in addressing the problem.

Action	Measure	Timing	Lead	Resources
Host a workshop with Council's Corporate Leadership Team on normalising conversations around gender equity	<p>Output: Completion of workshop</p> <p>Indicator of success: Increase participant knowledge and commitment to gender equity as identified by a post workshop survey</p>	October 2015	0.4 EFT role People & Culture	\$2K
Develop an internal Men's Action Group that focuses on what action men can take within the workplace to address gender equity	Output: Establishment of Action Group	Sept 2015	Mgr EYCD	Existing
Continue to support the Women's Network to share information, develop strong associations and explore opportunities to promote gender equity.	Output: Hosting of 5 events per annum	Ongoing	TBA	Existing
Support the Steel cap Boots and Stiletto network and seek opportunities to plan and promote activities with this network.	Output: Engagement of target audience in activities	Ongoing	Co-ord Bushland	Existing

Influence and adapt our business

Objective: Instil primary prevention and gender equity into our mainstream operations and practice to promote and support respect and equity in the community and workplace.

Action	Measure	Timing	Lead	Resources
Support communities to develop innovative approaches to gender equity by creating a new category within Council's Annual Grants for Community Program.	Output: Development of new category	Oct 2015	EO Com Dev	Existing
Apply a gender lens throughout the upcoming EB agreement review	Output: Review of existing agreement	Ongoing	Mgr – People & culture	Existing
Work with services to identify practices that can implement measures that address gender inequity	Output: 4 service improvement changes per annum Indicator of success: Increase resident knowledge and/or change behaviour as identified by survey	Ongoing	0.4 EFT role	Existing
Develop mechanisms to share understanding of best practice principles and learning	Output: Identifiable mechanisms that are in use across the organisation Indicator of success: Increase staff knowledge and/or change behaviour as identified by survey	Ongoing	0.4 EFT role	Existing