



November 24, 2020

## Together Our Voices Are Stronger / Walk In My Shoes

The voices of women and children with lived experience of domestic and family violence and sexual assault are at the centre of an exhibition on display in Bendigo during the 16 Days of Activism to end gender-based violence.

‘Together Our Voices Are Stronger’ is a series of artworks created by women and children who have been clients of specialist family violence response agency, Centre for Non-Violence, and crisis refuge and domestic violence service, Annie North.

‘Walk In My Shoes’ represents clients who have been working with specialist counselling and support service, Centre Against Sexual Assault Central Victoria.

The exhibition opens today, on the eve of the annual international 16 Days of Activism campaign – which starts on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs until 10 December, Human Rights Day.

The campaign calls for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls, across the globe – and promotes essential actions that can be taken by anyone to address the serious issue of violence against women in all communities.

The Victorian theme for 2020 is Respect Women, Call It Out – which engages people to recognise disrespect and the conditions that contribute to violence against women, and take action.

The global theme is Orange the World; Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect – which mobilises all communities to ensure specialist services are available to victim survivors across the world.

Centre for Non-Violence chief executive officer Margaret Augerinos says while 16 Days of Activism shines a light on the serious issue of gender-based violence, there needs to be ongoing focus on what is one of the leading social issues across Australia.

“Still in 2020, one woman a week on average is being murdered by a current or former partner,” she said.

“If we had these deaths occurring in other contexts, there would be greater community outrage.

“We’ve seen too many horror stories and tragedies where women have tried to leave, where women do absolutely everything right, they seek support, they get intervention orders, they seek safety, and still they are stalked, harassed and murdered.”

The exhibition highlights that anyone in our community can be affected by domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

Centre Against Sexual Assault Central Victoria chief executive officer Kate Wright says the Walk In My Shoes exhibition represents the diversity of people that experience sexual abuse and violence - from children as young as three to men and women in their 80s.

“Sexual assault and its impact does not discriminate,” she said.

“Sexual assault, for children, young people and adults is sadly very common. In fact almost 2 million Australian people will have experienced at least one sexual assault since the age of 15.

“Whilst we are seeing community responses and attitudes to sexual violence improving there is still work to be done.

“The National Community Attitudes survey shows that one in five people believe that non-consensual sex in marriage is legal and one in three people believe that rape is because men cannot control their need for sex.

“We know this is not true and we need to bust these myths. Along with many others. It is the responsibility of the whole community to work towards the prevention of sexual violence.

“We know that with assistance from our specialist therapeutic programs people can and do heal from sexual violence. The experience does not define you and you can recover.”

Annie North Women’s Refuge chief executive officer Julie Oberin says violence against women is a national emergency and has been a pandemic ‘long before COVID-19 came along’.

“In fact, it’s always been a pandemic. If we have to call it a Shadow Pandemic to get decision makers to take notice, then that’s what we will do.”

It is hoped the exhibition will help the central Victorian community recognise women’s resilience and hope, and engage in conversations about how they can respect women and call out disrespect or violent behaviour towards women.

Ms Augerinos says a whole-of-community effort is needed to address environments that enable concepts of ownership (for example ‘my partner’, ‘my children’) that can fuel violence, and contribute to gender equality.

“There is a responsibility on men – many men are horrified by how women and children are treated, but you need to be more than horrified, you do need to be taking those active steps,” she said.

“Men need to be supported and given the tools to be able to recognise what this is. For example, how do you respond to a friend who is saying something disrespectful about their partner or former partner.

“Calling it out is one way, but also starting to address how you as a man might incorporate other concepts of equality in your own life.

“What are the things you as a man have privilege over, how do you level the playing field?

“It requires men to create space for women to be equal on a whole lot of system and personal levels.

“It does involve active and conscious choices on the part of men to an understanding of non-violence, respect and equality.”

The exhibition is on display in the Bendigo Bank Exhibition B Space until December 7.

Centre for Non-Violence can be contacted on 1800 884 292

The 24-hour statewide safe steps family violence crisis response line is 1800 015 188

[CASA Central Victoria](#) on 5441 0430, the [Sexual Assault Crisis Line](#) on 1800 806 292,

Men’s Referral Service 1300 766 491 | In an emergency, call 000

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