

September 30, 2021

Crime statistics highlight need for more to be done

Central Victoria's leading specialist family violence response agency says a statewide increase in family violence incidents highlights the need for more to be done to prevent violence before it starts.

With the latest Crime Statistics Agency data showing significant increases across the Greater Bendigo, Campaspe, Loddon and Mount Alexander regions, Centre for Non-Violence is calling for all levels of government to listen to the experts to understand what is needed to address Australia's crisis that is violence against women and children.

In the 12 months to June, 2021, there were 2528 family incidents reported to police across the City of Greater Bendigo – an increase of almost 24 per cent. In Loddon, there was a 30.5 per cent increase; a 7.3 per cent increase in Campaspe and a 5.8 per cent increase in Mount Alexander Shire. There were slight decreases across the Central Goldfields and Macedon Ranges areas. However, we know family violence is significantly under-reported and these numbers do not tell the full story.

Statewide, there were increases in breaches of intervention orders, elder and online abuse and family violence perpetrated by young people. Some of the biggest increases occurred as coronavirus restrictions lifted between October and December, last year. The majority of victims continue to be women and children.

Centre for Non-Violence chief executive officer Margaret Augerinos says a rise in the number of reports of family and domestic violence as people were able to move more freely, was expected.

“We expected numbers to increase as we came out of lockdowns and women had more opportunities to connect with services, which many were unable to do while at home with the person abusing them,” she said.

“We have also seen good results from Victoria Police as a result of Operation Ribbon, which was introduced at the beginning of Covid-19 for officers to actively check in on those at high risk of family violence. We know perpetrators were finding new ways of abusing women and breaching intervention orders because of the pandemic, including pressuring the victim to allow him to return to the home because he was unemployed or without housing.”

Centre for Non-Violence will also soon start working with young people using family violence through our Making It Right program, which helps them reduce or cease their behaviour.

The program aims include: increasing safety of impacted family members and the young person using violence; assisting the young person and their family to understand impacts of trauma and how this affects the young person's behaviour and the parents'/carers' capacity to parent; improving the young person's emotional wellbeing, communication and problem-solving skills; and strengthening parenting capacity through engagement with parents and carers.

Making It Right is a proactive response, identifying early signs of behavioural issues. We hope to stop violence escalating or recurring, and to reduce longer-term harm, therefore meaning justice responses may be a last resort. Making It Right also works with the young person and/or their parent/carer to address gendered beliefs and assumptions that may facilitate and perpetuate the use of violence.

Ms Augerinos says until we see a change in attitudes that condone or excuse disrespect or violence against women, the appalling rates of abuse and tragic deaths will continue.

"Too many women and children are not safe to make their own choices about their lives. We work with women and children every day who live in fear of what may happen to them," she said.

With the latest data showing higher increases of family violence reports in regional areas, Centre for Non-Violence has renewed calls for greater engagement with the sector from all levels of government, calling on them to genuinely ask 'how can we help?'

Ms Augerinos says the sector needs: long term funding; tailored solutions for rural and regional areas; experts to be consulted about where resources should be prioritised and boosted; an end to short term funding and pilot projects that are based on political cycles rather than local need.

Regional areas require particular attention.

"Smaller regional shires are not necessarily better off as a result of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, not much has changed for some communities," Ms Augerinos said. "How do we prioritise some of these challenging areas around resource gaps?"

"The funding model is a problem. We need genuine consultation on how funding can be used in regional areas, and capacity to tailor programs to suit local needs. And we need acknowledgement that in many regional areas we can't recruit to six-month or short-term roles – people are not going to give up permanent, ongoing positions to come here, we need to give them certainty."

Centre for Non-Violence can be contacted on 1800 884 292 | The Orange Door Loddon can be contacted on 1800 512 359 | The 24-hour statewide safe steps family violence crisis response line is 1800 015 188 | Men's Referral Service 1300 766 491 | In an emergency, call 000 | For information, visit: www.cnv.org.au/we-are-here-to-help

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