

# United front to stop abuse

By Melissa Cunningham

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THE city's welfare workers see the human faces of family violence everyday.



WORKING TOGETHER: Family welfare advocates Denise Sheridan, Gayle Correnti, Michael Brandenburg, Marianne Hendron, Libby Jewson and Ballarat Inspector Bruce Thomas. Picture: Lachlan Bence.

The lives it shatters. The women and children living in fear. They hone in on the issue from different sectors but at the heart of all their tireless work is a joint mission: To end violence against women and children.

In the wake of the release of the recommendations of a Royal Commission into Family Violence, leaders from WRISC Family Violence Support, Berry Street Family Violence Services, Child and Family Services, Women's Health Grampians and Ballarat police have vowed to end the cycle together.

All welcomed the 227 recommendations from the commission and hoped the findings marked the beginning of greater intervention by the state and federal governments. Welfare agencies lauded proposed law reforms which would see an emphasis on holding perpetrators accountable.

They also welcomed a push for one-stop safety hubs where victims could get information and be linked to existing services in their local area. Ballarat's Child and Family Services manager of Family Violence Michael Brandenburg said evidence from the inquiry pointed to gender inequality being the root cause of domestic violence.

"There is a bigger picture about the culture that we live in," Mr Brandenburg said. "The document is very strong on pushing for more family violence service but there is a growing need for more education and prevention programs. This is a societal issue...we have to change the culture we live in today. Everybody has a responsibility to be a part of that change."

Berry Street Family Violence service manager Gail Correnti said tougher case management of perpetrators was critical.

"Why should women go and uproot their lives and the lives of their children and sit in a refuge for months waiting for housing?," Ms Correnti said. "This has to be turned around. Men have to be held accountable."

WRISC executive officer Libby Jewson who said a holistic approach to eliminating violence was paramount.

"We must push a whole of community response on every level," Ms Jewson said. "The only way things are going to get better, is if we work together. It's about joint projects, joint funding submissions and working locally to explore all the good things we can do together to support women and children."

Women's Health Grampians chief executive officer Marianne Hendron said the report was the start of changes required to eradicate domestic abuse.

"The report reflects an enormous amount of input and we see it as the beginning of something," she said. "But there is still a long way to go."