



Grampians Community of Practice for the Prevention of Violence against Women

Session 5: Unconscious Bias & Promoting Gender Equality Discussion Paper

7 September 2016

Beaufort Community Bank Complex, Beaufort

Thank you to the 33 people, representing 20 organisations from across the region, that participated.

A Community of Practice (CoP) is an effective way for people to share experiences, identify common challenges, solve problems and learn – thereby maximising opportunities to improve evidence-based practice in real time.

The GCOP-PVAW aims to:

- Assist people to access resources to improve their practice
- Translate research into relevant and accessible knowledge
- Facilitate the exchange of skills and knowledge
- Provide opportunities for people to support each other develop working relationships and share problem-solving strategies with one another.



Helen Macpherson Smith Trust

The Grampians Community of Practice for the Prevention of Violence against Women (GCOP-PVAW) is led by WHG and supported by the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust.

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Background

This Grampians Community of Practice for the Prevention of Violence against Women explored the topic of unconscious bias and promoting gender equality. Understanding unconscious bias is central to building communities of respect and equality for everyone. Stereotypes and social norms can unintentionally and unconsciously bias the way we perceive and act towards people. During this Grampians Community of Practice for the Prevention of Violence against Women, participants:

- Examined unconscious/conscious biases and the role it plays in workplace decisions and opportunities
- Heard local stories
- Shared useful tools and resources
- Meet others working in this area

Section 1: Grampians Update

1. Region Update: Darlene Henning-Marshall (WHG)

Grampians Communities of Respect and Equality (CoRE) Alliance

In May the CoRE Alliance was initiated with the launch of the plan to prevent violence against women and their children in the Grampians region. The Alliance has since grown to 40 organisations, clubs and networks, committed to taking action towards our shared vision for a safe, equal and respectful society for everyone.



The CoRE initiative is overseen by an Alliance Governance Group (AGG) with representation from 13 organisations from various sectors and from across the region. The AGG has met twice and developed an Action Plan to support the three key goals for the group that relate to: membership; quality progress; and sustainability. Terms of Reference and minutes are available on the WHG website.

A new resource ‘Taking Action to end violence against women and their children: What can your organisation do?’ has been developed and is available via the WHG website. This is a guide for members of the Grampians CoRE Alliance which offers practical ideas in line with the five action areas outlined in the Our Watch national framework to prevent violence against women ‘Change the Story’.

Organisations wishing to join the CoRE Alliance, can access the plan, membership form and see other members via the WHG website.

Why Gender Equality Matters: WHG submission to the Victorian Gender Equality consultation

WHG has provided a submission to the Victorian Government’s Gender Equality Strategy endorsed by 16 other local organisations. This submission was developed collaboratively by WHG, Central Highlands Integrated Family Violence Committee and key organisations and committees working in the Grampians region of Victoria. It recognises that gender inequality is a significant issue impacting not only on the lives of women and men, boys and girls, but also the social capital and productivity of our region. As leading organisations in the region, the organisations endorsing the submission are committed to working in partnership across a diversity of sectors including government, community, health, media and private business, to address the structural and cultural barriers to gender equality.

The full submission along with a short illustrated version of the submission is accessible via the WHG website.

2. Local Update, Dee Micevski & Kate Souter (WHG)

Participants shared information about local events, resources or initiatives from across the Grampians region.

Events

- Maree Crabbe Workshops 'Sex Ed by Porn' to help regional communities understand and address the damaging influence pornography has on young people.
- Stand for Council Elections. Victorian council elections to be held on October 2016 and there is a push to advocate for women in council. To progress gender equality it is important to have female representation at the highest level. Being a councillor is a conduit to give women a voice in the community, get involved and encourage women to participate in the political process and join council.

Initiatives

- VicRoads is working to exclude the use of objectifying or stereotypical language on number plates and on promotional channels in the customer service centre. This is a work in progress, and the hope is words such as 'hot stuff' will be taken off the screen. VicRoads is also engaged in Act@Work and is using influence to ensure contractors to VicRoads are compliant with VicRoads gender equity tender requirements.
- Damascus and Clarendon Colleges White Ribbon Youth Ambassadors engaged WHG to deliver a PVAW leadership briefing. This was well attended with 30 + students, highly engaged and inquisitive and asking follow up questions.
- Myer have selected WHG as a charity they will raise money for over the next year and WHG will provide a PVAW Leadership Briefing to increase the awareness and understanding on PVAW/GE among staff.
- Family Violence Services worker employed with CAFS
- Two new Respectful Relationships in School positions have been funded for the region.
- Central Highlands Community Legal Centre is coordinated Shoulder to Shoulder discussions on preventing violence against women

New Resources

The Diversity Council of Australia - Words at Work

Diversity Council Australia has launched a new campaign to promote greater understanding of the role that language can play in workplace cultures and the benefits that can flow from more inclusive language <https://www.dca.org.au/dca-research/wordsatwork---building-inclusion-through-the-power-of-language.html>

Tea for consent – Video

An animation relating the issue of consenting sex to having a cup of tea <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwvrxVavnQ>

The Line - Rate a Mate

The Line, a youth focused initiative of Our Watch, has developed a quiz for young men to check their mates behaviour with suggested actions on how to improve their respect towards women. <http://www.theline.org.au/Rate-a-mate-how-respectful-of-women-are-your-friends>

WGEA - Busting women in trades myth

Release of data showing that female representation in male-dominated industries has not improved over the last twenty years.

<https://www.wgea.gov.au/wgea-newsroom/busting-myths-about-women-trades>

Section 2: Understanding Unconscious Bias

1. Keynote Speaker, Dr Victor Sojo (University of Melbourne)

The key note speaker Dr Victor Sojo, from the Centre for Ethical Leadership, University of Melbourne explained the impact of subliminal attitudes and assumptions on opportunities for women in a workplace. Audience feedback showed they enjoyed the presentation and valued Dr Sojo's strategies to minimise unconscious bias.

Four key topics were covered by Dr. Sojo in the presentation: unconscious knowledge and unconscious bias, gender bias, strategies for minimising bias and what inclusive leaders do. Outlined below are summary points from the presentation.

The full presentation is available on the [WHG website](#).

Unconscious knowledge and unconscious bias

Unconscious bias refers to a consistent tendency to respond in a particular way. Victor compared fast intuitive and slow adaptive thinking as an important introduction for understanding how unconscious bias manifests and that we can take steps to overcome bias. Unconscious thinking is a product of fast, intuitive thinking and occurs without our awareness of the bias or its impacts. People can consciously over ride unconscious knowledge and produce unbiased responses.

Gender bias

The idea of unconscious association was exemplified by Dr. Sojo, including the potential negative consequences of relying on male and female stereotypes and how they can reinforce rigid gender roles, a known factor contributing to acceptance of discrimination and violence against women. Dr. Sojo used examples from workplace recruitment and task allocation to highlight gender bias.

Strategies for minimising bias

Dr. Sojo introduced the concept of 'Bias Hot Spots', situations where our reliance on unconscious knowledge can have a negative and consequential effects on judgments and decisions. He encouraged participants to reflect on bias hot spots. An example of an area to focus on in workplaces was recruitment and selection of employees. Strategies include open recruitment, de-identified CVs, and training the selection panel in gender equity and unconscious bias.

What inclusive leaders do

Dr. Sojo highlighted that the best leaders achieve great results by including diverse voices and creating a workplace culture that balances the sense of uniqueness and sense of belonging for all team members. He outlined forces that create and change cultures including collective, individual, internal and external factors.

2. The Privilege and Diversity Walk: Understanding the influence of unconscious bias on privilege, Kate Souter (WHG)

Attendees undertook an exercise to really get a physical/emotional understanding with the group to uncover the disadvantages some people face simply because of the gender, race, disability and/or sexuality they are born into. Couple these factors with family of origin, education and employment, parental and marital status and the differences of privilege can show quite a contrast. Those born into a privileged life may not have thought about how our societal structure creates disadvantages for some.

It's really an activity that should be done in a trusting and safe environment so to expect our Community of Practice to disclose their personal and/or private disadvantages may have created some issues so participants were paired up and each pair was given an identity.

The identities covered many factors; women, men, single, married, employed professional, unemployed, single parent, no children, lots of children, age, wheel chair bound, refugee status, Aboriginal, Caucasian rural or regional, home owner or renter, English as a first language.

Starting from the same line, participants were asked to take a step forward or back if the question was relevant to their identity.

For example:

- Is English your first language? If yes, move forward a place.
- Are you white/Anglo ethnicity? If yes, move forward a place.
- Are you a heterosexual man? If yes, move forward a place.
- Have ever experienced sexual harassment or sexist comments? If yes, move back a place.
- Are there people of both your gender and ethnicity well-represented in parliament and corporate leadership positions? If yes, move forward a place.
- Have you ever felt like your physical appearance (dress style, looks and body type) is commented on more than your ability to do a job? If yes, take a step back
- Has caring for children or elderly parents, impacted on your ability to gain employment, or work as much as you would like or need? If yes, move back a place.
- Do you have a disability? If yes, take a step back
- If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear of ridicule, take one step forward.
- If I choose not to have children, no one will question my reasons. If this is true, take a step forward

The resulting position of each pair at the end of the activity was telling. The pair at the front of the room held the identity of a 42 year old male, married with one child. Working full-time in a professional career in Melbourne and residing in the idyllic hamlet of Daylesford. The pair at the back had a 20 year old Aboriginal woman who was a shop assistant and renting a home in Hepburn Springs. Possibly an even more idyllic hamlet than Daylesford, yet the position of privilege between the two is at each extreme. Another up very close to the front spoke up and questioned why he would be in his position as an unemployed single white male with a mortgage in Nhill. Why indeed? Everyone responded to the same questions according to their given identity. Societal privilege is something that 'just happens', no one needs to be aware of it unless they don't experience it. The activity assisted to help understand that no one is really responsible for all (and sometimes any) of the disadvantage they experience.

Section 3: Translating Unconscious Bias to Preventative Action

1. Local Guest Speaker, Craig Whiteford (DELWP)

Craig Whiteford, Regional Manager of Community Programs at the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP), provided an overview of what the department is doing at a state and local level to address unconscious biases towards women in fire and emergency management leadership positions. Of note is that DELWP has appointed the first woman fire chief. Outlined below are summary points from the presentation.

The full presentation is available on the [WHG website](#).

DELWP undertook research to understand how they could increase the participation of women in fire and emergency leadership roles within DELWP and partner agencies. From the research the following results were surmised.

Common barriers to increase participation:

- Women had fewer role models and sponsors, and less developed networks than men
- Women faced barriers to accessing training and release for deployments
- Women faced higher career penalties for caring for families than men feeling isolated during maternity leave and not supported on their return to transition back into a fire role
- A 'boys' club where women were seen to dominate meetings and stereotype the abilities of women
- More men in senior roles leaving senior women isolated and often overlooked

Recommendations from the research:

- Establish a structured sponsor system for women
- Monitor the approval of training and release to attend fires on deployment
- Change the culture from a 'boys' club'
- Recruit a critical mass of women
- Improve the quality and accessibility of leadership training for women
- Improve support for family/ work balance for women and men

Workshops were held with DELWP and partner agency employees to share the outcomes of the research and assist in identifying short and long term strategies. A working group has been established to oversee development of three year Action Plan in six key areas with over 43 actions identified. Actions already progressing include greater focus on diversity in Project Firefighter recruitment campaign.

2. Addressing Unconscious Bias, Kath Deakin (WHG)

Participants took time to consolidate the learnings from Dr. Sojo's presentation on unconscious bias, specifically exploring how their own organisations can identify and address unconscious bias. Participants were asked to consider what they felt are the gender bias 'hot spots' in their organisation – the most pressing issues for women. They were then asked to reflect on what actions they could take to address the hot spots and think pragmatically what were the barriers they would need to overcome or opportunities that could assist them to take action.

Gender bias hot spots

- Management in-balance
- Attitudes of decision makers
- Allocation of administration tasks e.g. note taker, office maintenance to women
- Pay gap
- Lack of coverage of women in sport, women's sport not allocated as many resources and lack of opportunities for women to develop sports skills
- Lack of men taking part-time roles, not the morn and most often women part-time
- Woman dominated workplaces e.g. community still led by men despite high performance of women
- Workplace culture not attracting women
- Recruitment practices biased towards men e.g. assumptions about women when caring for children and career commitment

Action

- Education & training for workplaces
- Commitment from leaders
- 'Heroes' to challenge status quo
- Maternity leave – utilise nearby retired personal to backfill staff gaps
- Identify issues to address e.g. internal audit or survey, collect data
- Greater flexibility and opportunities for different life stages e.g. return to work, nearing retirement
- Actively support women to move into boys club – select staff/ board on gender or set quotas
- Improve sports facilities for women
- Improve attitudes towards women in sport - promote the opportunities and benefits to local clubs
- Budget to support initiatives e.g. maternity leave backfill
- Make those that exploit gender bias visible and accountable

Barriers

- Lack of recognition/ acknowledgement of gender bias
- Lack of leadership on issue
- Maternity leave – impact of backfilling positions, small business/ police in regional setting
- Limited opportunities for women to do training due to expectations of caring roles e.g. travelling to Melbourne not an option but needed for career advancement
- Return to work options not flexible or a step down in career

Opportunities

- Incorporate gender reviews into existing all staff survey
- Identify champions within the organisation who can get others on board, keeping good people on board
- Policy change to promote culture change
- Use cultural change initiatives and reviews to incorporate gender equity initiatives
- Use current political will and spotlight e.g. Royal Commission into Family Violence to push gender equity locally e.g. approaching councils, local government branches, local politicians

Acknowledgements

Women's Health Grampians would like to thank our guest speakers Dr Victor Sojo and Craig Whiteford, and the facilitator for the day Carolynne Hamdorf. We also thank the organisations and staff that participated:

Government, Justice & Legal

Central Highlands Community Legal Centre (CHCLC)
Dep't of Education and Training (DEET)
Department of Health & Human Services
Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP)
VicRoads /Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport & Resources (DEDJTR)
Victoria Police (VicPol)

Education

Federation University
Melbourne University

Local Government

Ararat Rural City Council
Pyrenees Shire Council
West Wimmera Shire Council

Community & Health Services

Ballarat White Ribbon Committee
Ballarat Community Health
Child & Family Services (CAFS)
Grampians Community Health (GCH)
Sports Central
Wimmera Health Care Group (WHCG)
Women's Health Grampians (WHG)
WRISC Family Violence Support
YMCA

For further information on this Community of Practice including film, audio recordings and presentation slides, please visit Women's Health Grampians website: www.whg.org.au



About Women's Health Grampians

Established in 1991, Women's Health Grampians (WHG) is one of 11 women's health services operating in Victoria, funded by the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services. It covers 11 local government areas across the Grampians region, extending in a wedge from Bacchus Marsh to the South Australian border. WHG aims to drive and support systemic change that will impact positively on the lives of women in the Grampians region. WHG has two priority areas: sexual and reproductive health and the prevention of violence against women (PVAW).

WHG adopts a population based, primary prevention approach to reduce and prevent violence against women. WHG seeks to address the social and cultural factors underlying violence against women: that is, gender inequities and attitudes and beliefs that support gender inequality, sexism and discrimination. Working in this area for over eight years, WHG has gained significant knowledge and experience, particularly in terms of region specific issues, primary prevention, local-level engagement and a 'whole of community approach'.

Please contact Women's Health Grampians for more information on the Community of Practice

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