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Women's Health West
317 - 319 Barkly Street
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14 October 2011

James Sherry
Community Safety Coordinator
Brimbank City Council
12 Hertford Rd
Sunshine 3020

Dear James

Re: Brimbank Community Safety Strategy

Further to our meeting on 10 October, Women's Health West is pleased to provide written feedback regarding the Brimbank Community Safety Strategy.

1. Introduction

Women's Health West (WHW) is the regional women's health service for the western metropolitan region of Victoria. Our services include research, health promotion, community development, training and advocacy around women's health, safety and wellbeing. Since 1994, WHW has hosted the region's largest family violence crisis support and prevention program. These two main arms of the service place WHW in a unique position to incorporate women's experiences directly into our research, health promotion and project work, ensuring that we clarify the connections between structural oppression and individual experience. As a feminist organisation we focus on redressing the gender and structural inequalities that limit the lives of women. WHW's work is underpinned by a social model of health and, as such, we recognise the important influence of, and aim to improve, the social, economic and political factors that determine the health, safety and wellbeing of women and their children in the western region.

Informed by the vision of equity and justice for women in the west, WHW work is guided by the following five strategic goals:

- Delivering and advocating for accessible and culturally appropriate services and resources for women across the region
- Improving the conditions in which women live, work and play in the western region of Melbourne
- Putting women's health, safety and wellbeing on the political agenda to improve the status of women
- Recognising that good health, safety and wellbeing begins in our workplace
- Working with others to achieve our goals

2. Gender Disaggregated Data and Additional Resources

Both the perception and the actual experience of safety is fundamentally gendered. For instance, 90.5 per cent of males in Brimbank reported feeling 'Safe or Very Safe When Home Alone at Night' compared with only 75.1 per cent of females.¹ Similarly, 59.7 percent of males in Brimbank reported feeling 'Safe or Very Safe Walking Alone in the Local Areas at Night', compared with 33.9 per cent of females.² Accordingly, it is essential that gender disaggregated data is used to illuminate the actual and perceived differences in the safety of men and women respectively in the Brimbank LGA, and that this is used to inform planning. *Women in Melbourne's West: A Data Book for Program and Service Planning in Health* is available at: <http://www.whwest.org.au/research/databook2.php>.

More generally, Women's Health West encourages Brimbank Council to consult the available design resources that specifically consider the health, safety, and wellbeing of women in the design and utilisation of public spaces. These include:

- The GLOVE Project - Gender, Local Government, and Violence Prevention: Making the Links Between Violence in Private and Public Space: http://www.vlga.org.au/Resources/The_GLOVE_Project.aspx
- Women's Design Service : <http://www.wds.org.uk/index.htm>
- Gender and the Built Environment Database: <http://www.gendersite.org/>
- Gender, Diversity, and Urban Sustainability: <http://www.rali.boku.ac.at/gdus.html>
- Gender and Space: <http://www.pukar.org.in/genderandspace/gender-space.html>
- Plan It Safe: Women Talking About Safety in Public Places: http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/swp/swp.nsf/pages/swp_1

¹ 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Data, cited in 'Women in Melbourne's West: A Data Book for Program and Service Planning in Health', 208.

² Ibid.

Women's Health West also strongly encourages Council to consult with the appropriate peak agencies representing women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women living with a disability, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander women, and others.

3. Responses to the Key Questions

The feedback outlined during the consultation is provided here in summary form only.

Are there any contextual issues that need to be highlighted in finalising Brimbank's Community Safety Strategy?

- The high rates of family violence within the Brimbank LGA justify a much greater emphasis on preventing family violence within the Community Safety Strategy. The stand alone Brimbank Family Violence Prevention Strategy is commendable, and should be strengthened by inclusion in the overarching Community Safety Strategy. The data on family violence incidents compared with other assaults and 'public violence' overwhelmingly justify this approach;
- As discussed above, data disaggregated by both gender and other groupings is a vital part of the context that is not presently reflected adequately in the Community Safety Strategy;

Are there any additional considerations for Council in finalising the Community Safety Strategy?

- Reference to the interface between the plans already committed to by Brimbank Council and the new Community Safety Strategy would strengthen the document. Chief among these is *Preventing Violence Together: The Western Region Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women* (see: <http://www.whwest.org.au/docs/PVTweb.pdf> Key Brimbank Contact: Rebecca Mangan)

Are there any additional comments regarding the definition of community safety that should be considered or incorporated?

- As discussed, given its disproportionate prevalence in crime statistics when compared with other assaults, it is appropriate that family violence is explicitly acknowledged as a major safety concern for Brimbank residents. Presently, the draft strategy merely acknowledges family violence as a significant problem, but does not translate this acknowledgement into proposed actions or strategies

Are there any comments regarding intergovernmental, community or Council roles that need to be addressed or expanded?

- *A Right to Safety and Justice: A Strategic Framework to Guide Continuing Family Violence Reform in Victoria 2010-2020* is the sister document to *A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women 2010-2020*. While the current state government is still considering their position on *A Right to Respect*, it is acknowledged as part of the intergovernmental policy framework informing the Brimbank Community

Safety Strategy, and we suggest that *A Right to Safety and Justice* should also form part of Council planning.

Are there any other data sets that we should consider? Are there additional interpretations of the data?

Please refer to section 1, above, regarding the need for gender disaggregated data.

4. Region Wide and Place-Based Actions

Are there other activities occurring in these districts that enhance community safety?

Prevention of violence against women has been a priority for WHW for over fifteen years, with our Family Violence Service dealing with the direct service impact of violence against women, and the Health Promotion, Research and Development team focussing on primary prevention strategies. WHW's health promotion strategies redress the determinants that perpetuate violence in the first place.

Our current Integrated Health Promotion Plan includes the following strategies that are being delivered across the western metropolitan region:

Capacity building to develop integrated strategies for the primary prevention of violence against women: Collaborative development and coordinated implementation of *Preventing Violence Together*, to which Brimbank Council is a signatory, that provides a range of mutually reinforcing actions to foster cultures of gender equity, non-violence and respect.

Anti-racism: Working in partnership with other agencies to prevent discrimination, vilification and harassment against women on the basis of their racial and religious background.

Lead On Again: Annual program with young women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds that increases their skills, knowledge and capacity to exercise community leadership.

Our Community Our Rights: A project that builds understanding, awareness and practical skills in civic participation, advocacy and human rights for women who experience compounding social inequity, disadvantage and marginalisation. The project is in its first delivery, with women from the Horn of Africa.

Sunrise Groups: Two groups providing a holistic, woman-centred program for women with a disability that responds to their expressed need for information, advocacy and resources to enhance their well-being and engagement in community life. The groups currently run in Laverton and Werribee, and are open to women with a disability from the Brimbank LGA.

The following programs are currently being delivered in specific districts within the Brimbank LGA:

Sunshine

Human Relations Program at Western English Language School (WELS): A five-week program delivered to newly-arrived young people at WELS twice each year that supports young women's capacity to exercise control over sexual and relationship decision-making.

Deer Park and St Albans

Power On: A twelve-week program that strengthens the skills and resilience of women who experience mental illness to enhance their own safety, health and wellbeing.

Sydenham

Girls Talk – Guys Talk: A whole-school program currently being delivered to Year 9 students at Taylors Lakes Secondary College, in partnership with school staff and local service providers. The program runs for one year in one school, and builds a school environment that encourages the development of powerful young people with access to knowledge, skills and supports that enhance their own life chances and that of the community in which they live.

How would the Community Safety Strategy increase overall integration and contribute to specific initiatives in local districts?

Women's Health West is committed to working with our regional partners to deliver integrated, strategic and evidence-based violence prevention initiatives. The projects outlined above are by no means a comprehensive list of the violence prevention and wellbeing strategies currently underway within WHW's health promotion plan; rather, they are indicative of the programs that can be integrated within the Brimbank Council Community Safety Strategy.

We recommend that Brimbank Council recognise in the Community Safety Strategy the community safety and violence prevention work that is occurring in the municipality. Furthermore, it is recommended that a commitment be made in the strategy to support and assist the delivery of WHW's violence prevention programs.

5. Summary of recommendations

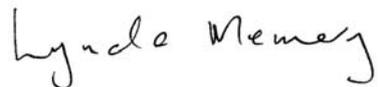
Women's Health West recommends that:

1. Gender disaggregated data is used to illuminate the actual and perceived differences in the safety of men and women respectively in the Brimbank LGA, and that this is used to inform planning
2. Data resources are used that specifically consider the health, safety and wellbeing of women in the design and utilisation of public spaces
3. Consultation occur with appropriate peak agencies representing women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women living with a disability, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander women, and others
4. Greater emphasis on preventing family violence in the strategy and in action planning
5. Explicit acknowledgement that family violence is a major safety concern for Brimbank residents

6. Inclusion of the Brimbank Family Violence Strategy and *Preventing Violence Together: the Western Region Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women* in the overarching Community Safety Strategy
7. Addition of *A Right to Safety and Justice* to the policy framework that will guide council planning
8. Integrated violence prevention program planning and delivery, and explicit recognition of the women's safety and family violence prevention work that is occurring in the municipality
9. Commitment to support and assist others, including Women's Health West, in the delivery of violence prevention programs in the municipality

We thank you once again for the opportunity to provide feedback. Should you require further information on any element of this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynda Memery". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lynda Memery
Manager
Health Promotion, Research and Development