



Community of Practice: Responding to Family Violence in Rural and Regional Communities

Hepburn Family Violence Action Group welcomed a group of 80 attendees to Victoria Park in Daylesford on 15th November for the fourth in the series of CHIFVC Community of Practice forums: ***Responding to Family Violence in Rural and Regional Communities.***

After introductions by **Libby Jewson**, Deputy Chair of CHIFVC, and **Pennie Mathieson**, Principal Strategic Advisor of CHIFVC, **Professor Sarah Wendt** delivered the keynote address. Prof Wendt presented her research paper *Seeking help for domestic violence: exploring rural women's coping experiences*. This research uncovered three main strategies women employed to cope with family violence in regional, rural and remote areas: placating and promising; shame and embarrassment; not coping.

Professor Wendt also explained the effects of isolation on these women, particularly the devastating effects of social isolation.

"Where tactics have isolated women, reaching out to family and friends is precarious – relationships are eroded or fraught. Women feel judged or blamed by their network, particularly if they have put up with it for a long time."

She strongly advocated for the system to be expanded beyond a crisis response to include increased opportunity for a long-term therapeutic responses.



Another theme of the research was the impacts on workers who are practising in a small community. Prof Wendt described how their work shaped the personal lives of practitioners and how they interact in their own communities.

Professor Wendt's research found that the hub and spoke model is the most effective way of delivering services in regional, rural and remote communities.

Following on from the keynote, **Yvette Jaczina** from the Centre for Non-Violence in Bendigo delivered an informative presentation, stressing the importance of strong partnerships when working in regional areas, and a reiterating the crucial need additional long-term therapeutic support for survivors of family violence.

Yvette spoke about perpetrator programs and the importance of keeping the perpetrator in view in the system, along with some of the challenges for men's behaviour change programs in small communities.

"Men are sometimes not prepared to attend group in their home towns. We need to create conditions so that men can be in groups with men they don't know, and therefore they might need to travel."



Roger Moulton from the Elder Abuse Network gave an update on the work undertaken over the past 12 months, and presented a series of resources.

Attendees participated in a reflective practice **case study activity**, which generated discussions around issues such as perpetrator accountability, local connections and geographical isolation.

The session concluded with a **Q&A panel**, comprising Professor Sarah

Wendt, Yvette and Roger, who were joined by **Sergeant Nathan Gardiner** (Victoria Police), **Marg Cooper** (WRISC Family Violence Support) and **Michele Thompson** (Hepburn Health Services).

The CHIFVC would like to thank the members of the organising committee and all who made a contribution to the day.

The next Community of Practice event will be held in Ararat in early 2019. Visit the [CHIFVC news](#) page or [follow us on Twitter](#) for updates about events or email info@chifvc.org.au to be added to our mailing list.