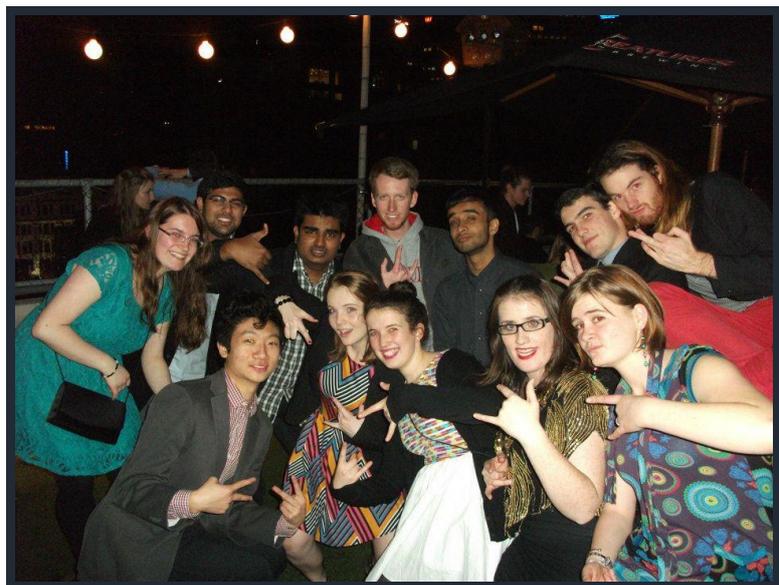


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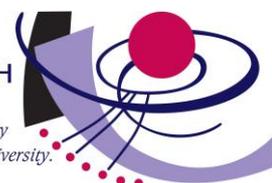
Preventing Violence Against Girls and Women Before it Occurs

Promoting Respectful Relationships
with Young People
in Rural Settings



WOMEN'S HEALTH
GOULBURN NORTH EAST

*Challenging inequity
embracing diversity.*





Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) was established in 2000. Previously known as NEWomen, Women's Health Goulburn North East is the government funded, specialist women's health service for the Goulburn Valley and North East Victoria.

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The report is based on information generously offered by agencies and youth providers participating in and contributing to WHGNE Focus Groups held across Hume region during 2012.

Our sincere thanks to them.

For more information, tools and resources, visit our website at www.whealth.com.au

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Preventing Violence Against Girls and Women Before it Occurs

Women's Health Goulburn North East promotes equal, respectful relationships between men and women as a primary prevention strategy to reduce all forms of violence against girls and women in Hume region.

Over the last decade our prevention work has involved a range of approaches including:

- Literature reviews
- Research
- Development of the [REAL Life program, It's REAL DVD and resources](#) to support youth providers and other professionals
- [Training programs](#) for organisations and service providers.

Supporting children and young people to develop and maintain healthy, respectful relationships is one of the most effective ways to prevent violence against women before it occurs. To ensure our prevention strategies are responsive and relevant, we wanted to hear from organisations and youth providers and identify ways to support innovative, flexible prevention programs and interventions targeting young people aged 12-25 years.



In 2012, four **(4) Focus Groups** were organised across Hume region to hear about the work of agencies and professionals working with young people in different settings and to explore how WHGNE could support organisations and youth providers to prevent violence against girls and women.

Engaging With and Listening to Agencies and Youth Providers

Focus Groups were designed to enable professionals from different organisations and sectors to:

- Share what respectful relationships means to agencies and providers
- Identify strengths of and barriers to their current work with young people
- Propose strategies to address key barriers faced by rural professionals
- Recommend how WHGNE could support organisations and youth providers to promote equal respectful relationships in their work with young people.



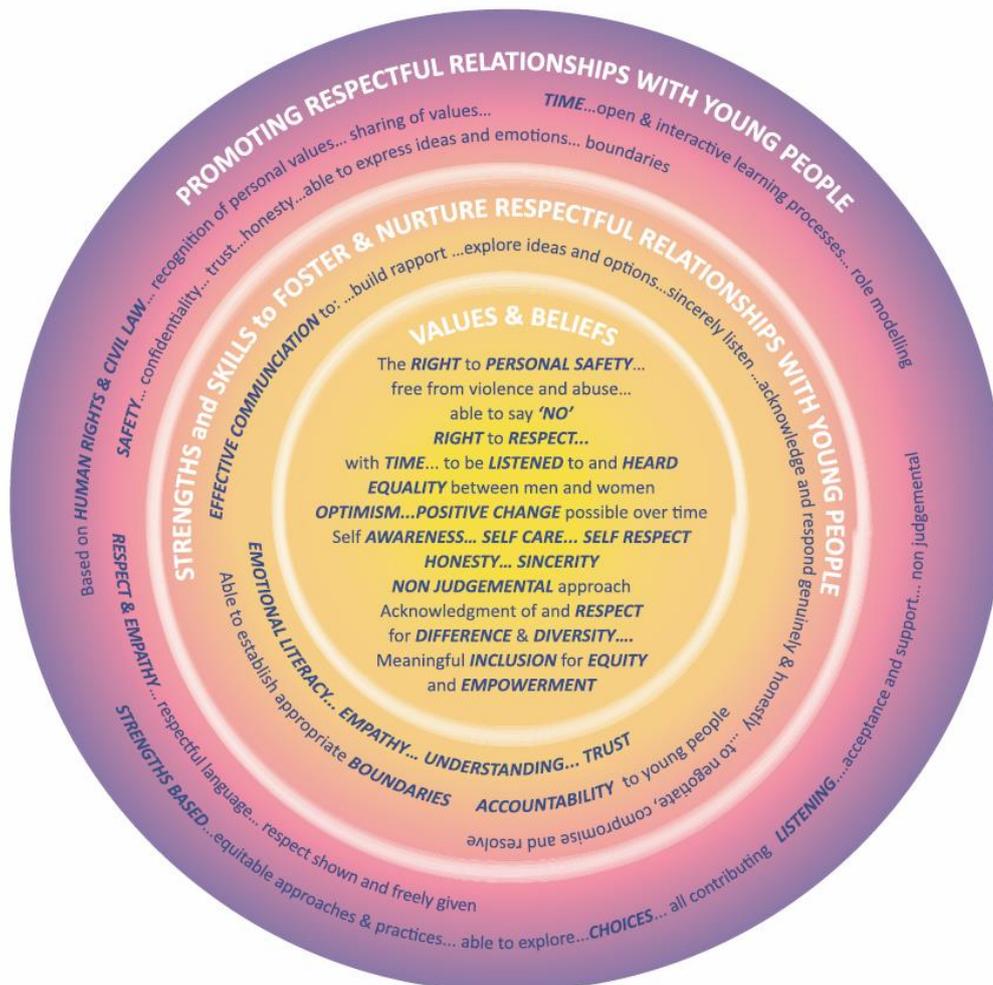
Central Hume Focus Group 2012

Eighty four (**84**) professionals from twenty seven (**27**) organisations and schools contributed to the Focus Groups from a range of Hume region sectors including:

- Local Government
- Education: State, Catholic, Independent, TAFE & Community Colleges with mainstream and alternative settings
- Disability Services
- Health: Division of General Practitioners
- Community Health Services
- Indigenous
- Victoria Police
- Youth and Community Services
- Private Sector: Health and Education

Understanding, Fostering and Promoting Respectful Relationships

Participants from all sectors reflected comprehensive understanding of the term respectful relationships. These working definitions have been graphically summarised in the diagram below and illustrate the complex interplay between beliefs and attitudes, knowledge and skills, behaviours and practices informing the violence prevention work of Hume region agencies and providers working with young people in different settings.



Highlighted in the **inner circle** are core values and beliefs underpinning equal, non violent relationships between men and women in personal and public spheres.

The **second circle** shows positive interpersonal skills and strengths necessary to the development and modelling of respectful relationships, particularly when working with young people in institutional and community settings.

Participant understandings of respectful relationships depicted in the **outer circle** illustrate the characteristics of more effective violence prevention strategies and interventions targeting young people.

Strengths of this work

What makes it work?

What can we build on?

Young People

- youth participation
- youth leadership & peer support
- commitment to young people...interest and advocacy positive change possible...
- aspiration & hope...
- empathy & trust

- respect: for young people... difference & diversity
- experience & understanding - youth issues & cultures
- strengths based
- creativity & flexibility
- credibility
- social & problem solving skills
- building & modelling respectful relationships
- patience... tolerance... perseverance
- personal boundaries
- positive mentors & role models

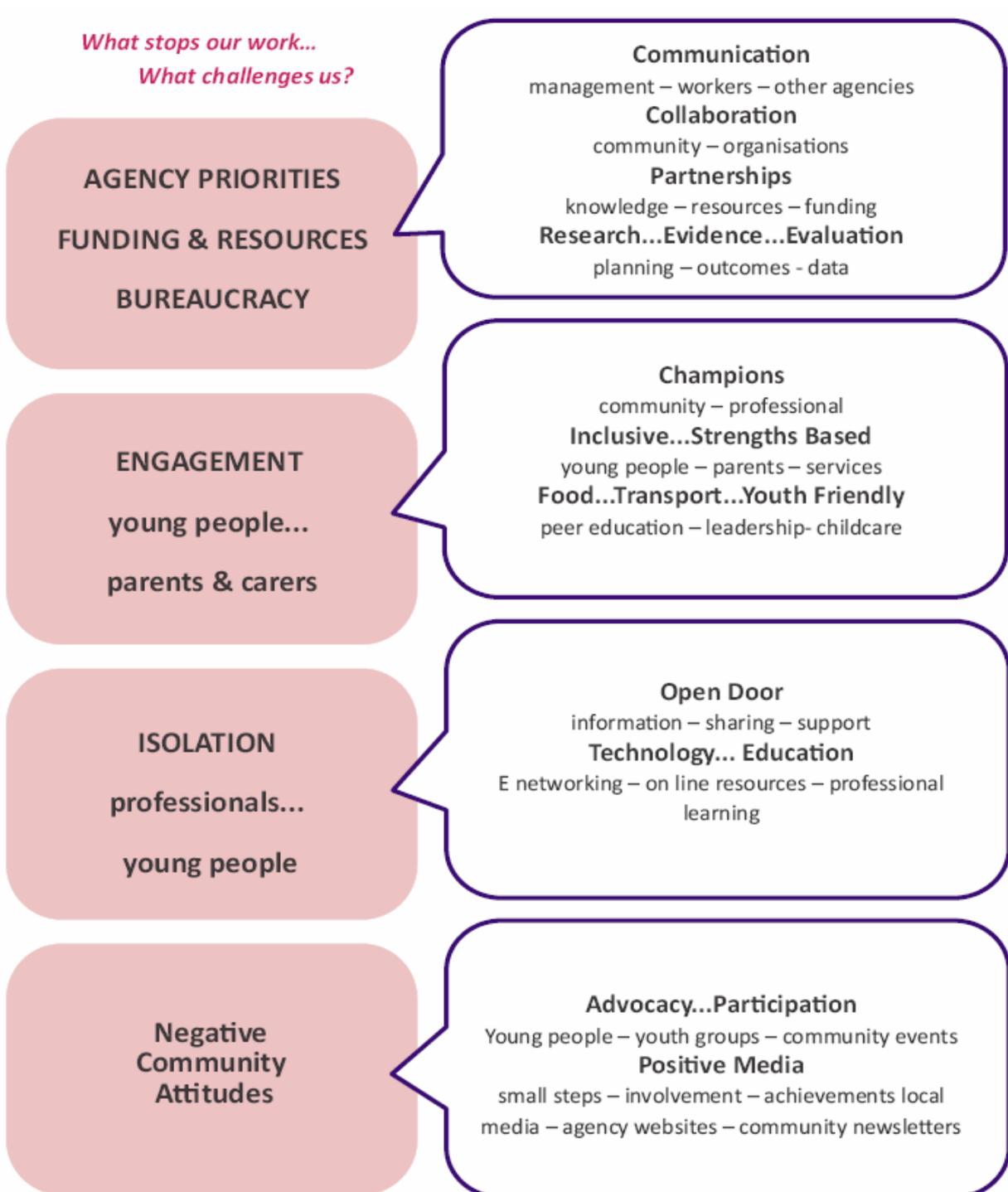
Workforce Knowledge Skills

- young people a priority
- safe, inviting environment
- confidentiality
- transport, food and resources
- networks & sharing
- cooperation & flexibility
- training & professional learning
- supportive schools and organisations
- building capacity
- sustained positive change

Organisations Collaboration Partnerships

Barriers to Prevention

Strategies to Address



Preventing Violence Before it Occurs: What have we learnt?

Agencies and providers working in different sectors across Hume region consistently identified young people (12-25 years) as a priority population for the prevention of violence within intimate, peer and adult relationships.

Participating professionals understood the value of violence free relationships to individuals, families, organisations and the broader community and identified many opportunities through their work with young people in different settings to develop, model and promote healthy relationships based on equality, respect and safety.



The following key themes emerged from Focus Groups to inform future violence prevention strategies and actions targeting young people who are living, studying, working and playing in rural settings.

1. Integrate support systems and education for vulnerable rural youth

Professionals working with individuals and small groups in non school settings such as Counsellors and Sexual Health Nurses universally adopted youth centered, strengths based practices however their contributions highlight the need for more *integrated youth support services* linked to *accessible education programs for vulnerable youth in safe community settings*.

Young people exiting school settings with complex needs impacting their health, safety and education lack school based support and opportunities to establish, negotiate and maintain healthy relationships with peers and adults. Vulnerable youth in rural settings face additional disadvantage due to barriers posed by isolation, over stretched services and negative stereotyping in small towns.

These young people require well coordinated youth services working collaboratively to provide appropriate support and resources as well as knowledge, skills and opportunities in safe settings to develop and sustain respectful relationships free from violence.

This recommendation aligns firmly with National and State violence prevention strategies that *build on young people's capacity to develop respectful relationships through actions strengthening integrated systems of support and access to respectful relationships programs in non-school settings.*

How WHGNE has responded

WHGNE has established Hume region *Respectful Relationships E Networks* to facilitate:

- the sharing of information and resources between youth providers working in different sectors
- collaboration and cross sector partnerships
- professional learning opportunities for agency staff and youth providers from different sectors.

In addition, WHGNE developed and resourced *youth focused health promoting partnerships* working with vulnerable youth in community settings to plan and implement a range of integrated prevention strategies promoting equal, respectful relationships.

These cross sector partnerships worked collaboratively to plan, resource and co facilitate flexible programs based on promising practice, with tools developed to meet young people's developmental and learning needs.



2. Build capacity in rural school and TAFE settings

The mapping of sixty nine (69) cross sector Focus Group participant programs and interventions in Hume region demonstrates best practice for ways of working with young people and some promising practice for the promotion of respectful relationships with rural youth (12-25 years) in different settings.

Focus Group participants identified educational settings as a priority for violence prevention strategies to reach large numbers of young people and provide opportunities to build capacity through cross sector partnerships.

Promising practice in Hume region exemplifies many critical elements required for effective violence prevention with young people, such as evidence based program planning and content, strengthened professional knowledge and skills, increased sustainability and community engagement.



Professionals working in Hume region school settings and TAFE colleges are committed and pedagogically skilled however challenges identified by rural providers such as isolation, funding cuts, externally driven priorities and lack of resources leave little time and few opportunities to plan, resource, deliver, evaluate and embed effective violence prevention strategies and programs.

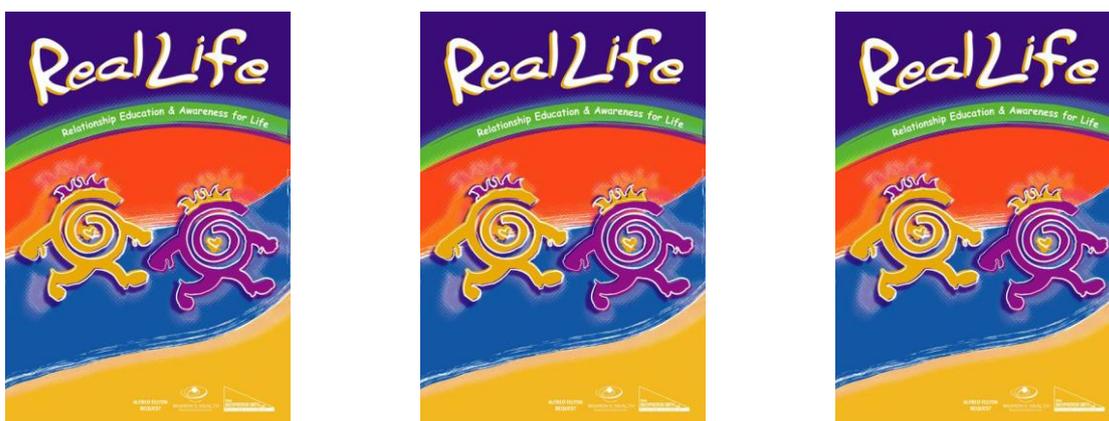
Despite government policies and resources supporting whole school approaches and emerging promising practice in respectful relationships education, professionals working in Hume region school and TAFE settings highlighted their continuing need for support to identify:

- information in accessible language and forms regarding youth focused prevention research and initiatives, primary prevention policies, programs, resources and evaluation tools to support educators working with *young people (12- 25 years) in rural settings*
- local and regional organisations, services and youth providers willing to work in partnerships with school based professionals to plan, resource, implement and evaluate violence prevention strategies and actions targeting young people
- inclusive community engagement processes to involve young people, parents, carers and community representatives during planning, implementation and evaluation that builds on local strengths.

How WHGNE has responded

Educators and youth providers working in school and TAFE settings are well represented in WHGNE E networks with updates and mail outs initiating collaboration and new partnerships between schools and community based organisations.

Our participation in Hume region youth provider networks also enables promotion of violence prevention policy and research, new initiatives and programs and identification of agencies and service providers for future partnerships and capacity building.



During 2012, WHGNE supported partnerships between three **(3)** Hume region secondary schools (State, Catholic and Independent), Victoria Police, Community Health and Youth service providers to plan, resource and implement violence prevention programs with younger adolescents in educational settings.

Using the [WHGNE REAL Life](#) program as a guiding framework, these primary prevention programs addressed the gendered determinants of violence within intimate, peer and adult relationships using activity based learning, multi media and updated tools. Programs aimed to equip adolescents with **knowledge and skills** to develop and maintain non- violent, respectful and equitable relationships.

Supported partnerships between schools and community based organisations enabled:

- the development of professional knowledge and skills regarding gender, power and violence
- planning and resourcing of flexible, co facilitated programs based on adolescent learning principles, curriculum and logistics specific to different school settings
- the embedding of sustainable educational programs based on best and promising practice



3. Build knowledge and skills to support partnerships across sectors and settings

According to Vic Health (2012), [understanding](#) the causes of violence against women, gender inequality and the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women is crucial for more effective primary prevention aimed at changing attitudes and organisational cultures supporting violence against women.

To prevent violence against women before it occurs, agencies and organisations leading primary prevention strategies are encouraged to build knowledge of the determinants of violence to support partnership strategies and actions in different settings. Partnerships working with clear understanding of the gendered nature of violence and prevention can be empowered by improved skills in planning, implementing and evaluating health promotion strategies to prevent violence against women and children.

How has WHGNE responded?

To build and enable more effective partnerships supporting violence prevention initiatives across Hume region settings, WHGNE will continue to:

- Support existing and new cross sector partnerships to plan, implement and evaluate integrated health promotion strategies aimed at preventing violence against girls and women
- Identify key professionals and organisations working with young people in different settings to support potential cross sector partnerships
- Provide gendered [data, policy frameworks and best practice models to support planning and evaluation](#)
- Build evidence based knowledge of primary prevention strategies targeting rural youth.



Central Hume Focus Group: 2012

Promoting Women's Equity, Health and Safety in Hume Region

Hume region agencies and youth providers provided rich data and recommendations to inform WHGNE strategic planning for 2013-2017. Identified in response to a range of gendered data, our integrated health promotion priorities aim to address barriers to prevention work in rural settings (p.8) with young women aged 12 to 25 years targeted as a priority group.

Priority Area: Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children

Drawing on an ecological approach, WHGNE has planned a range of strategies over the next four years to prevent violence against women and children in Hume region. Utilising the Vic Health framework for primary prevention, our strategies focus on:

- Developing professional knowledge and skills regarding gender, the determinants of violence and evidence based prevention education
- Identifying and enabling supportive environments promoting nonviolent norms and equal, respectful relationships
- Undertaking and supporting research to inform primary prevention responses in rural settings.

Actions planned include the review of existing training programs in gender and the determinants of violence and the development of key partnership platforms in Hume region to engage professionals in prevention education and training. Training programs for evidence based programs such as *Baby Makes Three* offer promising practice for targeted partnerships to explore gender norms and expectations and promote equal, respectful relationships.

Priority Area: Sexual Reproductive Health

The sexual and reproductive decisions and rights of girls and women are strongly influenced by intimate relationships as well as the cultural norms and social structures they live, work and play within. Strategies planned within our Sexual Reproductive Health priority will build on violence prevention work to promote change in gender norms within Hume region communities and safe, respectful sexual reproductive health beliefs and practices targeting young people.

Objectives and actions complementing violence prevention strategies emphasize:

- the building of partnerships with key stakeholders working in organisations and community settings such as sporting clubs and local councils to lead change and to promote safe, respectful cultures
- meaningful involvement of young people in research and the planning and development of youth strategies, tools and resources
- research to build knowledge and support interventions to advance women's sexual and reproductive health rights in rural settings.

Conclusion

Engaging with organisations and youth providers to learn about their work with young people to promote equal, respectful relationships affirms the value of working at different levels and in different settings to prevent violence against women.

Participant contributions also affirm the need for women's health agencies to provide leadership in gendered research, capacity building and advocacy to promote women's health, safety and gender equity.

Women's Health Goulburn North East will continue to engage with community, sectors and organisations to empower women in Hume region and work with women's health services, agencies and partnerships to lead and drive change.



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