

“EVERY INTERACTION MATTERS”: BACCHUS MARSH HOSTS FAMILY VIOLENCE FORUM ON THE VOICE OF CHILDREN

Nearly 80 professionals from across the health, community, legal and education sectors took part in a Community of Practice forum in Bacchus Marsh on 26 July, *Through the Eyes of the Child: Working across sectors on ‘whole of family’ approaches to family violence*.

Organised by the Central Highlands Integrated Family Violence Committee (CHIFVC), the forum explored the importance of a child-focused approach and that every engagement with a child has an impact.

“We often focus on trying to heal the parent, and don’t think enough about the consequences for children at a pivotal time in the foundation of the rest of their lives”, said Dr Wendy Bunston, keynote speaker at the forum.

“We need to flip this adult centric mentality on its head... There are windows of opportunity we can take to give children the sense of being seen and this does make a powerful difference”, she said.

Dr Bunston shared insights from over 30 years’ experience in this field, including authoring international articles and books and leading multi award-winning family violence programs.



She shared practical ways to consider the experience of family violence through the eyes of the child and provide children with a voice. This includes having conversations that are healing with the child in the room rather than separate from their attachment figure.

“They are so ready to talk to us... Get down on the floor, pick up a toy and they have so much to tell you,” she said.

Dr Bunston also highlighted the importance of connecting with the emotional self and providing a compassionate response for babies and children. “How we feel and the vibe we present is powerful, not just what we say... You get incredibly attuned to what is not said.”

She said that asking parents what they think it is like for their baby or child to experience violence in the home can also provide a crucial turning point.

“This can be an incredibly motivating time for parents to bring about change, particularly where there has been an experience of intergenerational violence... A baby can represent their future and their hope that they can create a different future for their child”, she said.

Dr Bunston’s keynote was followed by presentations from local lead practitioners on programs operating in the Moorabool Shire, including ‘VAN GO’ (a mobile art therapy van) and ‘Let’s Talk about Children’ which operates across the Grampians region.

The presentations, which included expressive and moving examples of artwork created by children, reinforced that ‘babies can’t wait’, the importance of intervening early and doing this more purposefully in our work as practitioners.



“We need to constantly remind ourselves to focus on the voice of the children. Their voices are valid, and historically they’ve been suppressed...” said Peter Rademaker, team leader of Family Services at Child and Family Services (CAFS).

“Every time you as a professional go into a home, or work with a child, has an impact on that child.”

Feedback from the day was overwhelmingly positive with participants appreciating the practical insights shared throughout the day, and the cross-sector networking opportunities.

The next Community of Practice is scheduled for October 2018 in the Hepburn Shire.

Visit the [CHIFVC news page](#) for updates about events or email info@chifvc.org.au to be added to the mailing list.

Resources from the 26 July forum are also available from the [CHIFVC resources page](#).

The CHIFVC would like to thank members of the CHIFVC Working Group for their input to the forum, and all presenters on the day as follows:

- Libby Jewson, Executive Officer of WRISC Family Violence Support and Chair of the Working Group
- Dr Wendy Bunston, Researcher, Author and Practitioner in the Child and Family Welfare sector
- Sally Goldstraw, Manager of the Van Go pilot, WRISC
- Cheree Cosgriff, FAPMI Coordinator (families where a parent has a mental illness)
- Peter Rademaker, Team Leader of Family Services at Child and Family Services (CAFS)



The Central Highlands Integrated Family Violence Committee acknowledges the traditional owners of the land we meet and work on and pays respects to elders past, present and emerging