

# The Gippsland **CommUNITY Walk** Against Family Violence



Evaluation Report  
March 2011



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Suggested citation: Laming, C., Crinall, K., Hurley, J., Patten, S., Goodall, D., Yarram, D., Hamer, K., and McDonald, P. (2011), *The Gippsland CommUNITY Walk Against Family Violence: Evaluation Report*.

Produced and published by: Monash University, Gippsland Campus, Switchback Rd, Churchill, Victoria, 3842, Australia.

ISBN: 978-0-646-55432-7

## Warning:

**This report may contain images of  
Aboriginal people who are now deceased.**

# Foreword

The *Closing the Gap* Committee's campaign highlights the social disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to experience. This tied with family violence becomes a more complex problem for victims, family networks, services and whole communities.

*The Gippsland CommUNITY Walk Against Family Violence evaluation report* is an excellent account of an initiative that encouraged unity, respectful partnerships and genuine collaboration. The report highlights the importance of community education, community participation and changing attitudes of all community members on an issue that is so often shrouded in shame.

More importantly *the Gippsland CommUNITY Walk Against Family Violence evaluation report* discusses what works and what did not work and what aspects of the initiative are transferable to other communities – providing guidance and role modelling best practice to communities across Victoria and more broadly.

It is vital for Aboriginal people to take the lead in driving the thinking around solutions to problems affecting them. This initiative gave Aboriginal people the opportunity to help make non-Aboriginal services more accessible to Aboriginal people. As well as building community strength through celebrating culture and difference and building trust through a shared vision.

*The Gippsland CommUNITY Walk Against Family Violence evaluation report* emphasises the importance for communities to take ownership of problems directly and indirectly associated with family violence.

Congratulations to the Family Violence Regional Action Group, the Community Walk Reference Group, and the many services and other stakeholders who rallied around the Aboriginal leadership that achieved successful outcomes through the Gippsland CommUNITY Walk Against Family Violence initiative and this evaluation report.

This evaluation report also demonstrates how community education empowers its members to participate in the solutions to Family Violence regardless of gender, socio-economic status or cultural background.

Family violence is an issue that affects all kinds of communities across Australia – this problem belongs to all of us and we can all be part of the solution.

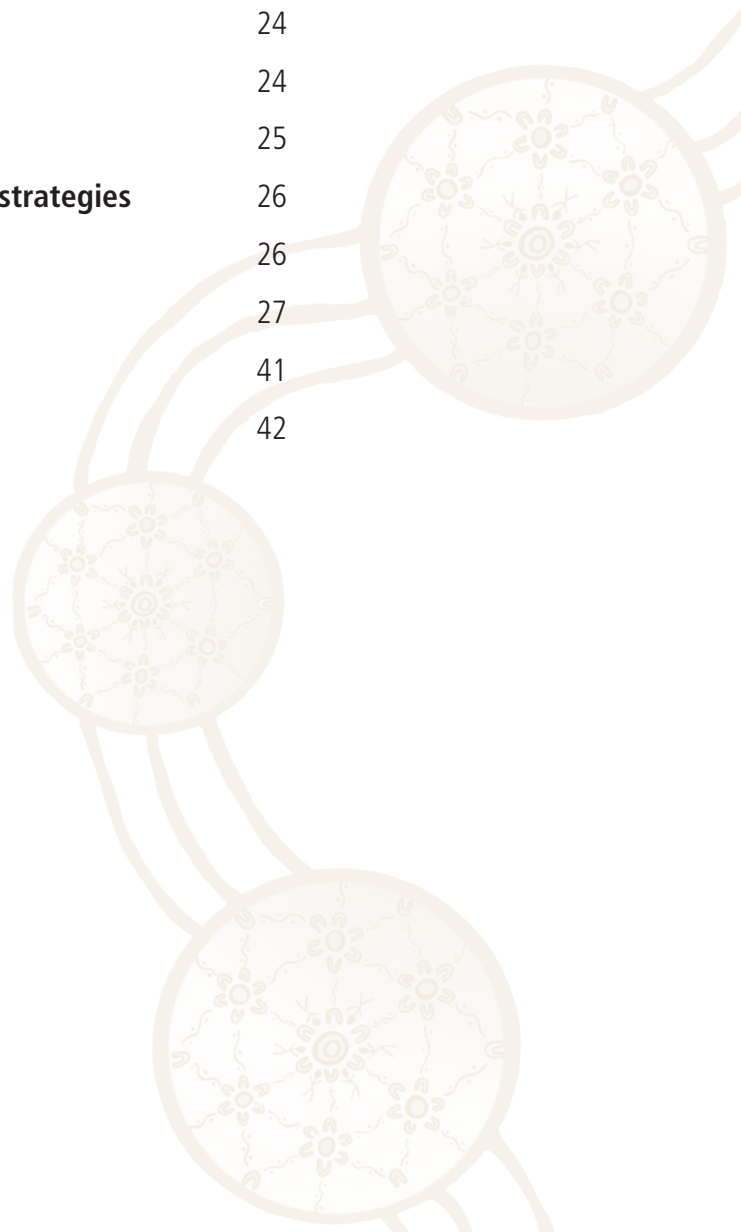
*Ms Josephine Bourne*

(Inaugural Co-Chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples)

The National Congress is an organisation driven by a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership and elected leaders. All forms of violence affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities will no doubt be part of discussions at annual National Congress forums.

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# Abbreviations

## **DHS**

Department of Human Services

## **DPCD**

Department of Planning & Community Development

## **DV**

Domestic Violence

## **EGFVRAG**

East Gippsland Family Violence Regional Action Group

## **FV**

Family Violence

## **FVA**

Victoria Police Family Violence Advisor

## **FLVO**

Victoria Police Family Violence Liaison Officer

## **GWHS**

Gippsland Women's Health Service

## **The Walk**

The Gippsland CommUNITY Walk

## **VicPol**

Victoria Police

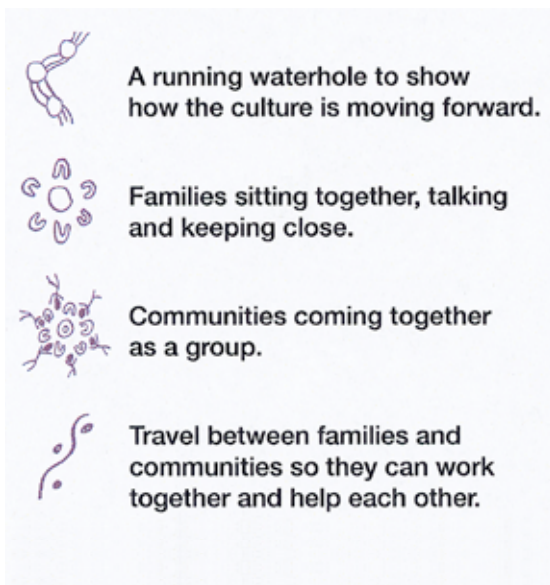
The image on the cover and as a watermark in this document is used with permission from:

*Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families. Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities.*

Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, 2nd Edition, 2008.

"The design is by Catherine King from Geelong and represents families and communities staying together by helping each other.

The elements depicted are -"



## **Terminology:**

Use of the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Indigenous'. Two and a half years ago, when planning for the CommUNITY Walk commenced, Indigenous was the term used by government for referring to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Recently Aboriginal peoples has been identified and acknowledged as the most appropriate terminology. Therefore, wherever possible 'Aboriginal' is used as the preferred term, except when quoting directly from published sources.

# Acknowledgements

We wish to thank a number of organisations and individuals, recognising and acknowledging the essential part they each played in this evaluation. In particular, we thank all the women, men and young people who contributed through focus groups, interviews and feedback forms on the day of the Walk. Your input helped to test and verify the other data we received.

We thank the Sale Aboriginal Co-operative, Ramahyuck, for hosting our reference group meetings and providing a venue and space that was comfortable, functional and geographically central. In addition, Ramahyuck is steeped in Aboriginal history of the region, as well as being the present day public face of Aborigines in the Sale region of Gippsland. As such, having the opportunity to hold our monthly meetings at Ramahyuck, symbolised a remembering of the past, on going collaboration about the present, and the importance of doing business respectfully in a distinctly Indigenous space under Aboriginal leadership and facilitation. We are very grateful to Ramahyuck for this opportunity, the spirit in which it was given and the yarns that it enabled.

We are also grateful to the Elders of Gunai-Kurnai country for their support during the course of the evaluation, the wisdom they brought and their generous insights and encouragement.

We thank the Victorian Government's Departments of Human Services (DHS) and Planning and Community Development (DPCD) and Victoria Police, for the various ways they enabled and supported the CommUNITY Walk and its evaluation, through the availability of key staff and resources.

We also acknowledge and thank the Gippsland Women's Health Service for their continued and ongoing encouragement and support of the Walk and its evaluation, as well as deep commitment to community education and the learnings achieved.

We recognise, the central part played by the East Gippsland Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group, in the Walk and in its continued interest across the region and more widely. In addition, the Yoowinna Wurnalong Healing Service at Lakes Entrance gave significant support to the project at crucial times.

We thank our research partners in this project for their openness, generosity and trust, as well as their passion, this was the single largest factor in enabling the evaluation research project. Thank you for allowing us to share your journey and inviting us to learn together with you.

Finally, we acknowledge and thank VicHealth for their foresight in recognising the potential of the CommUNITY Walk and for funding the evaluation. We also appreciate their readiness to be flexible in the timelines. This has very much reflected a similar process of give and take in the CommUNITY Walk itself, where agencies were flexible rather than rigid, trusting rather than suspicious, respectful rather than controlling, and hopeful rather than indifferent.

*Chris Laming and Karen Crinall*

# The Gippsland CommUNITY Walk Against Family Violence

## Evaluation report

### Background to project

This evaluation report describes a community initiative that took place in East Gippsland in late November 2008. *The Gippsland CommUNITY Walk Against Family Violence* extended over four days and brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women, children and men, and agencies across the family violence and criminal justice service sectors. The Walk aimed to bring about change in community attitudes towards family violence, by focusing on celebrating culture, strengthening communities, building partnerships and publicly demonstrating an attitude of no tolerance towards family violence. The Walk is

widely regarded as a successful, ground breaking, Aboriginal-led event.

The walk was initiated by Aboriginal people and led by the East Gippsland Family Violence Regional Action Group (EGFVRAG) in partnership with Yoowinna Wurnalong Healing Service and Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men. Overall, the event involved collaboration between 26 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services. In a collective public outcry, over one thousand Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members: workers, women, children and men spoke out against community and family violence.

As a creative, participatory, community-based action, shaped by Aboriginal approaches, the initiative offers a unique opportunity for understanding and identifying potential strategies for bringing together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services and communities in order to address the shared problem of family violence.





This evaluation, funded by VicHealth, is the result of a partnership between Monash University Gippsland and the East Gippsland Family Violence Regional Action Group (EGFVRAG). Members of the Regional Action Group and others, have shared their stories about being involved as organisers and participants in the Walk. These stories are discussed here in the context of the Victorian state government policy, initiatives, strategies and reforms aimed at reducing family violence in Aboriginal communities. The evaluation process adopted a realistic participatory approach; this is briefly explained below, prior to outlining the social and policy context and background to the Walk. The final section discusses the evaluation findings based on feedback surveys, focus groups and interviews with CommUNITY Walk participants and organisers.



## Methodology

The evaluation research employed a realistic participatory evaluation methodology (Crinall and Laming 2010). This approach reviews research evidence about complex social interventions in order to supply an explanatory analysis about how and why they do, or do not work in a particular context or setting (Pawson et al 2004: iv).

Realistic participatory evaluation is an evaluation model developed for human service settings where knowledge beyond the success or failure of program objectives is required in order to inform ongoing service delivery and program and policy development. This approach aims to explain how and why something worked or did not work, and how it might work better in the future. The model involves cooperatively developing evaluation aims, objectives and rationale (theories) as part of a cycle of continuous practice improvement and agency capacity building (Crinall and Laming 2010:2). The model is informed by participatory action research and realistic evaluation methodologies.

The evaluation process was also informed by Aboriginal epistemology (Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce 2003; Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum 2008; Street, Baum and Anderson 2008) and therefore sought to incorporate a holistic approach that recognises: the centrality of environment and context when working with communities, families and individuals; the need to achieve collective change; the importance of creating safe, non-threatening spaces for knowledge building, healing and growth and, respect for the time it takes to achieve genuine change. As such, a team of partner investigators representing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services selected from key players comprised the reference group. This group met monthly over the duration of the evaluation project, which commenced in February 2009. The reference group had responsibility for finalising the evaluation questions, over viewing and advising on the evaluation process, facilitating access to Walk participants for interviews and focus groups, endorsing the final evaluation report, hosting and chairing the monthly meetings, and approving any arising publications authored or produced by the evaluation team before release. Table 1 lists reference group members.

**Table 1: CommUNITY Walk Reference Group**

Member	Role
Ms Sandra Patten	Indigenous Family Violence Regional Coordinator for East Gippsland and Wellington, Department of Human Services
Mr Damien Goodall	Chairperson of the East Gippsland Family Violence Regional Action Group (East Gippsland and Wellington area)
Ms Daphne Yarram	Manager Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service, Chairperson of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce, 2005
Ms Kerry Hamer	Family Violence Strategic Directions Coordinator, Gippsland Women's Health Service (GWHS), Sale
Mr Paul McDonald	Indigenous Community Engagement Broker, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.

The reference group played a crucial role in the veracity of the evaluation, in its meaningfulness and applicability. This was because it represented the key stakeholders, initiators and organisers of the CommUNITY Walk, who were principally Aboriginal leaders, as well as those who enabled and supported them to play that role.



## Evaluation Aims

### The evaluation aims were to determine:

1. Successful and less successful actions, features and products of the Walk
2. Transferable approaches and actions
3. Contextual factors contributing to the success of the Walk
4. Future strategies for best practice, knowledge sharing and partnership building between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and services

### The following methods were employed:

- Literature review of relevant international and local literature
- Face-to-face interviews with key players
- Focus groups with participant groups
- Audit of visual products
- Analysis of media coverage, photographs and video documentation

The level of engagement, the complexity and multi-layered cultural nuancing of the participatory research process as it unfolded over the course of the evaluation is difficult to articulate, and certainly not done justice here. The reality of what we found and shared is far more profound than these headings reveal. The interviews and focus groups provided privileged glimpses of the culturally enriched understandings surrounding the CommUNITY Walk and gave rise to deeply moving accounts of the experience of being a participant.

The 'question bank' developed in consultation with the reference group played a central role in the elicitation of these yarns and stories. The questions, listed in Table 2 (next page) were not meant to be prescriptive, but rather acted as a guide to explore areas of significance identified by the reference group. These areas of focus reflected the aims of the evaluation. The original application to VicHealth to fund an evaluation of the CommUNITY Walk, was drafted by the fledgling, 'yet to be' reference group, comprised of members of the planning and organising committee.



**Table 2: Evaluation question bank**

Evaluation Objective	Questions
Identify and articulate successful (and less successful) actions, features and products of the ComWalk.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What evidence is there of the success or otherwise of this project?</li> <li>2. Was there transparency, honesty and risk-taking in planning and implementation?</li> <li>3. Is there now more co-operation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous FVS?</li> <li>4. Is there now more participation in Indigenous FVS?</li> <li>5. Are there features that can be identified as 'best practice'?</li> </ol>
Identify transferable approaches and actions for projects with similar broad goals.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. What enabled non-Indigenous organisations to become involved in an Indigenous initiative?</li> <li>7. What skills and tools were shared and how were these offered?</li> <li>8. How might the tools, processes and elements of successful co-operation achieved in the ComWalk project be transferred to other similar contexts?</li> </ol>
Examine and determine contextual factors that contributed to the success or otherwise of the ComWalk.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. What political and policy factors contextualised this project? (both local and national)</li> <li>10. Were there particular conditions that contributed to a climate of co-operation and trust?</li> <li>11. What part did government organisations play?</li> <li>12. What role did key individuals/champions play?</li> <li>13. What role did police play?</li> <li>14. What were the features of the walks in each of the towns, and how did these affect the perceived success of the walk in that town?</li> <li>15. Who was/wasn't involved in the walks?</li> <li>16. What function did the visual products play?</li> <li>17. How did the media respond to the walks?</li> </ol>
Identify future strategies for best practice, knowledge sharing and partnership building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and services.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18. What was the nature of the relationships formed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants?</li> <li>19. How was the history of competition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous family violence services overcome?</li> <li>20. What role did Elders play in the success of the Walk?</li> <li>21. How did Koorie men generally, contribute to the success?</li> <li>22. What were some of the positive outcomes for Koorie men who participated in the Walk?</li> <li>23. What role did men with a history of violence play?</li> <li>24. Are non-Indigenous services now implementing strategies or changing practices to include Indigenous people?</li> <li>25. Are more Indigenous people now accessing non-Indigenous services?</li> <li>26. What meaning did people make of the walks?</li> <li>27. What contribution might be made to the literature about forming co-operative, trusting relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups?</li> <li>28. Can a model of 'best practice' be developed from this project?</li> </ol>

NB: These questions have been used as broad guides rather than as definitive or limiting

Six face-to-face interviews and seven focus groups, involving 21 people were conducted with Walk participants, organisers, reference group members, and representatives of key organisations and agencies. In addition, 65 evaluation sheets were collected from participants on the day they participated in the Walk.

**Table 3: Data collected**

Data Method	Description
Focus group 1	Reference group members (5)
Focus group 2	Aboriginal Young Men (3)
Focus group 3	GEGAC, Morwell (2)
Focus group 4	GLCH employee (1); Healing Service employee (1)
Focus group 5	Centrelink employees (2); Young Koorie woman (1)
Focus group 6	Vic Pol (3)
Focus group 7	Participants (2); organiser (1)
Interview 1	Gippsland Women's Health Service employee
Interview 2	Young Koorie man
Interview 3	Quantum employee
Interview 4	DHS employee
Interview 5	Aboriginal organisation employee
Interview 6	Aboriginal organisation employee
Evaluation sheets	65 completed on the day by participants

## Ethical considerations

Guided by Indigenous principles of ethical research, close attention was paid to ensuring benefits to Aboriginal people. As such, an extensive effort was made to engage an Aboriginal research assistant, however finally this became unachievable and a non-Aboriginal researcher was employed to assist with the preparation of the report. The project was approved by the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethical Research involving Humans (SCERH).

### Overview of report

The first section of the report provides an overview of the social and policy backgrounds, as well as describing the local practice context of the Walk. This is followed by a discussion of the findings, and considers what worked well and what might have worked better. The final section describes potential transferable approaches and strategies that might have application elsewhere.

## The social context

The International Violence against Women Survey (2004) found that 34% of Australian women have experienced some form of violence by a current or previous partner. For Australian Aboriginal women the figures are far more concerning, the same survey estimated their rate of family violence victimisation as 40 times higher than that of non-Aboriginal women (Carrington & Phillips, 2006). In addition, Aboriginal women reported three times as many incidents of sexual violence compared with non-Aboriginal women, as well as higher levels of physical violence (Mouzous & Makkai 2004). The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce (2003) estimated that one in three Aboriginal people have a relative who is a victim, or are witness to an act of interpersonal violence on a daily basis (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV) 2008). It should not be assumed however, that Aboriginal women's and children's experience of family violence always happens at the hands of Aboriginal men as 'around 60%



of Aboriginal women are with non-Aboriginal partners' (AAV, 2008: 11). A feature of the Community Walk was encouraging all men to march.

The Aboriginal definition of family violence is shaped by an understanding of family as an extended community and kinship network. Family violence in Aboriginal communities includes intergenerational violence and abuse and is seen as:

*An issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one-on-one fighting, abuse of Indigenous community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide. (Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Report, 2003:123)*

The underlying causes of family violence in Aboriginal communities are inextricably bound with the legacy of white settlement and colonisation in Australia. Lateral violence<sup>1</sup>, arising from the effects of dispossession of land and traditional culture; breakdown of community, kinship systems and Aboriginal law; racism and vilification; economic exclusion and entrenched poverty; institutionalisation and child removal policies and loss of traditional roles and status (AAV 2008: 12 & 27), is recognised as a deeply destructive problem that must be overcome through positive, inclusive, affirming Aboriginal leadership and collective action. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence Report (1999) contextualises the devastation and dimensions of violence experienced by Australia's Aboriginal people and communities:



<sup>1</sup> Lateral violence is when victims of a dominating situation internalise their anger and frustration and begin turning against each other. It can manifest as a result of racism, colonisation, poverty, workplace bullying, marginalisation and a range of oppressions. It can include gossip, shaming, blaming, putting others down, family feuding, family and community violence, outward jealousy, envy of others and other aggressive behaviours. <http://definitions.uslegal.com/l/lateral-violence/>

*Dispossessed of both land and kin, many Aboriginal people have been subjected to a lifetime of social isolation and discrimination. They have been sustained by a diet of welfare and suffered poor health and economic instability. They have been profoundly affected by the removal process and haunted by the loss of their children. The consequences have been so disempowering that it is difficult for many non-Aboriginal people to comprehend.*

*Aboriginal people have been marginalized and assigned to the outer edges of society. They have suffered from deep-seated and entrenched economic and social impoverishment, which has led to the multiple problems being experienced today.*

*(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence Report 1999:61 cited in Patten & McDonald 2008)*

These sentiments are echoed by Memmott, Stacey, Chambers and Keys (2001: 19) who cite situational factors for Aboriginal communities across Australia, such as poverty, unemployment, boredom, interfamily feuds, overzealous policing and interracial tension as contributing to the

likelihood of violence. In particular, 'many Aboriginal men have lost both their status and their self respect' (Memmott et al 2001:29) and this also exacerbates anger, resentment and possible violence. In the light of this, the leadership played by Aboriginal men, particularly the young men, in the Community Walk, was extraordinary, as will be seen.

Aboriginal Australians want change and they want action, as the following statement makes clear:

*We must no longer allow ourselves to be portrayed as victims, but as proud and strong people ... we can break the cycle of violence and we can work toward a future that allows children to be proud of their cultural identity and to live free of fear of ongoing violence and abuse.*

*(Boni Robertson, Chairperson, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence, 2000: viii)*

This report describes one of the ways the Aboriginal communities of Gippsland are responding to the challenge of reducing family violence.





## Policy background to the Walk

Extensive policy and practice reforms are being initiated in Victoria, coordinated through whole of government collaborations focused on implementing an integrated family violence service system across the criminal justice and family violence services sectors. Less than a decade ago, the state government of Victoria embarked on a program of widespread reform, beginning in 2002 with the launch of the *Women's Safety Strategy 2002–2007*; a policy framework for a whole of government approach to addressing violence against women. In 2004 Victoria Police introduced a new *Code of Conduct for the Investigation of Family Violence* that targeted safety and support for victims and accountability of perpetrators. In 2005 the Victorian Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence released the report *Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria*. Known as the Women's Safety Strategy, this whole of government approach is designed to address Victoria's specific needs through a multi-agency response model that includes police, the justice system, housing and community services (Report of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence 2005: 5–6).

Subsequent years have seen the Victorian service system undergo widespread reform, with the introduction of complementary plans: *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a Safer Future for Indigenous Families and Communities (2008)*; *Guiding Integrated Family Violence Reform 2006-2009*; *A Right to Justice and Safety. The strategic framework to guide continuing Family Violence reform in Victoria 2010-2020 (2010)*; and *A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women 2010–2020*. The State government has

committed in excess of AUD \$175 million since 2005 to bringing about law reform, reshaping the service system across Government and community agencies, and shifting community attitudes towards family violence (OWP 2009).

*Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a Safer Future for Indigenous Families and Communities 10 year plan (2008)*, is informed by the *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force Final Report, (2003)* and was written by the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum. The plan outlines nine guiding principles for developing responses to family violence in Aboriginal communities, with particular focus on: the need to recognise the complexity of family violence for Aboriginal people; the context of dispossession and disadvantage caused by the effects of white settlement; the importance of Aboriginal leadership and local solutions; strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services; emphasis on holistic healing to overcome and address family violence, and respectful and transparent partnerships between Government and community (AAV 2009: 8–9, 12).

*Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, also sets out eight Objectives to prevent and eliminate family violence:

1. **Cultural Safety:** Make Victoria a safer place for all Indigenous Victorians.
2. **Healthy Families:** Support strong, robust and healthy families that provide a safe nurturing environment.
3. **Education, Awareness, Prevention:** Intervene early to improve education, awareness and prevention of family violence.
4. **Safety for Victims:** Increase the safety of Indigenous families and individuals, especially women and children.

5. **Accountability:** Increase the accountability and personal responsibility of perpetrators of family violence within Indigenous communities.
6. **Healing:** Increase opportunities for healing for victims and perpetrators.
7. **Service Capability:** Increase the cultural competency and capacity of the service system to improve responses to Indigenous family violence.
8. **Research and Evaluation:** Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of responses to Indigenous family violence through ongoing research and evaluation.

(AAV 2008: 32)

The Community Walk provided an opportunity to make progress in each of these areas, as a way of realising state government policy at the local level in East Gippsland.



## Local level response

Accomplishing the integration of family violence services at the local level is a critical component of the reform process, requiring local leadership. Aboriginal Family Violence Regional Action Groups were set up across the state, Victoria Police introduced Family Violence Advisor and Liaison positions, and Family Violence Regional Integration Committees were established.

### The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce

The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce was formed in 2002 to provide advice to the Victorian Government about how to effectively address family violence within Aboriginal communities. The taskforce addressed a number of challenges facing Victoria's Aboriginal families and communities, including the fact that 75%

of the Aboriginal population is under 25 years of age, child protection notification rates are the highest in Australia, and within the Criminal Justice system, 85% of violence is attributed to family violence (Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce Final Report 2003). A key role of the Taskforce was to ensure local solutions were developed in line with local conditions and needs (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria 2008). The 600 page report presented the Victorian Government with 28 recommendations, built around promoting Aboriginal leadership and empowering Aboriginal communities to take responsibility for taking action and forming solutions at the community level. The ensuing response of the Victorian government has proven exemplary, and 'of all Australian States and Territories, Victoria is unique in its community-led approach to family violence' (AAV 2008:18).



### Family Violence Regional Action Groups

The ten Family Violence Regional Action Groups which were set up across the State, comprised of elders, women, men, young people and Aboriginal community leaders, provide a key mechanism for developing regional action plans, advising Government about the needs of local communities and promoting local initiatives for addressing family violence. In East Gippsland, through a partnership with Gippsland Lakes Community Health Service, the Regional Action Group was successful in achieving funding for the Yoowinna Wurnalung (Our Safe Place) Healing Service. An Aboriginal Men's Time Out Service for men who are perpetrators of family violence has also been funded through this alliance. Both the Chair of the East Gippsland Family Violence Regional Action Group and the manager of Yoowinna Wurnalung were central to the success of the Walk.

### Victoria Police Family Violence Advisors

Ten Victoria Police Family Violence Advisor positions at the level of sergeant were appointed at both metropolitan and country locations. Their role is to coordinate the work of the police family violence liaison officers, of which there is one at each twenty-four hour police station.

The police sergeant appointed to Gippsland was a member of the East Gippsland Family Violence Action Group (EGIFVAG) and played a key role in the planning and implementation of the CommUNITY Walk.

### Family Violence Regional Integration Committees

The state-wide family violence integration strategy also required each region to form a Family Violence Regional Integration Committee, and the appointment of Family Violence Regional Integration Coordinators. All funded family violence services, including Aboriginal agencies and key stakeholders such as police, courts, legal services, family and children's services, Child Protection and Child Sexual Assault services are potential members of these committees. In Gippsland, men's and women's services also sit together around the table, meeting bi-monthly and chaired by the Gippsland Women's Health Service (GWHS). The person who holds the Regional Coordinator (RIC) position in the Gippsland region was a key player in the organisation and success of the CommUNITY Walk.



To progress the integrated family violence reforms within a consistent State framework, nine short to medium term priority action areas were identified. One of these is the requirement that the Regional Family Violence Integrated Committees (largely comprised of non-Aboriginal agencies) are to ensure close working relationships with the Family Violence Regional Action Groups and related Indigenous family violence initiatives. Priority no 5 in *Guiding Integrated Family Violence Service Reform 2000 – 2009* was to “Improve Access for Indigenous Victorians” to Family Violence services.

The idea to organise the East Gippsland CommUNITY Walk grew in this context of fostering safe, healing spaces where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services, communities and people could come together on common ground over the shared social issue of family violence.

## The practice context: first steps

An effective partnership strategy to address severe levels of community violence in East Gippsland Aboriginal communities was implemented during 2007 and 2008. The problem of family violence, on the other hand was continuing to escalate. The mainstream family violence service system seemed to be only able to deliver a disjointed, fragmented response to Aboriginal people seeking help. The EGFVRAG recognised the need for a collaborative approach between local community members, agencies and service providers to simultaneously address the underlying causes of family violence at a number of levels. Efforts to bring non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal services together through formal conventional mechanisms, such as network meetings and forums were proving unsuccessful, even though collaboration between these sectors was endorsed by State policy and identified as actions in the family violence plans (Patten & McDonald 2008).



Identified need was focused on the following areas:

- Disjointed/fragmented responses by services
- Non-Aboriginal services were not confident and didn't know how to engage with Aboriginal services and communities
- No Aboriginal specific FV services to support Aboriginal men
- Aboriginal people not accessing any FV services unless mandated, because they were experienced as not culturally appropriate and not inclusive or welcoming

The Indigenous Family Violence plan: *Strong Culture, Strong People, Strong Families*, Objective 6: Healing, Action 6.1.3 calls for improved 'referral pathways to therapeutic counseling for Aboriginal victims of family violence through promotion of schemes to support access to clinical practitioners'. Furthermore, Action 6.2.1 requires the establishment of 'mechanisms to ensure that mainstream organisations funded to provide services to Indigenous clients deliver culturally competent responses to Indigenous people' (AAV 2008:45). Such a mechanism was initiated in a very simple way, over a cup of tea, which led to the planning and implementation of the CommUNITY Walk Against Violence.

Over a 'cuppa', Aboriginal family violence and healing service workers began yarning about the problem and how it might be effectively addressed. The key concerns that were identified included the reticence and resistance, of non-Aboriginal (or mainstream) services to engage with Aboriginal clients and services, and the cultural inappropriateness experienced by Aboriginal people when they did try to access these services. It was also recognised that speaking about family violence was largely taboo in the Aboriginal community, therefore before Aboriginal women, children and men would come forward to seek help, there needed to be some form of public expression to bring the problem into the open.

Drawing on previous achievements with an initiative to raise awareness about child sexual assault in southern New South Wales, the idea for a community walk that would align with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women – White Ribbon Day; 25th November, was proposed by the Indigenous Family Violence Regional Coordinator, DHS, Gippsland, Sandra Patten. It was recognised early

on, that success depended on the involvement of key players from both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. One of the first items on the agenda was "Who can we 'dob in'?"

There was also a strongly perceived need for the active participation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men and for developing positive roles for them to play in their communities. In the Walk, this translated into young Aboriginal men leading and taking pride of place in the demonstration and showing visible leadership to others, including to non-Aboriginal men. As already identified, a key feature of this event was Aboriginal leadership and action showing the way to the non-Aboriginal community, about a serious shared concern, both in the planning and the implementation stage. Another strength of the CommUNITY Walk was the way that it connected policy with practice.





The project was underpinned by the Indigenous 10 year plan: *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families* (2008), in particular *Guiding principle 8: Holistic healing approach to family violence in Indigenous Communities*, which asserts:

*We appreciate the importance of a holistic healing approach to family violence in Indigenous communities based around family and Indigenous community strengthening, collaborative approaches, appropriate resources and flexible program and service delivery arrangements.*  
(AAV 2008:9)

Associated with this principle, there was recognition of the high level of risk-taking involved and trust-building required. If Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, communities and service sectors were to come together to address this difficult and confronting issue, then safe, inclusive spaces needed to be created, in which to move forward together, in a spirit of non-violence. A walk could provide such a space – by fostering inclusion, while at the same time protesting against family violence, with the leadership of Aboriginal men, and through marching proudly together to celebrate the strength of culture, family and commUNITY.

The vision identified by the Regional Action Group for the community walk was to:

*Raise awareness, bring family violence networks together, bring the Aboriginal community together (men, women, youth, Elders and families) in order to promote Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services, strengthen links, identify unity across both communities and to ensure a community approach against family violence. (Patten & McDonald 2008)*

The project emerged from the ground up, with Aboriginal community leadership. Through enormous effort, good will and commitment, and a lot of hard work, the vision became a reality. The Walk extended across four days of White Ribbon week in November 2008, beginning on 24th November in Cann River and concluding in Rosedale on Thursday 27th November (see map below). It took place in eight communities throughout East and Central Gippsland: Cann River, Orbost, Lake Tyers Trust, Lakes Entrance, Bairnsdale, Sale, Morwell and Rosedale.

The next section presents the evaluation findings.





# Findings

The findings are divided into “What worked well” and “What might have worked better”, and are based on analysis of: face-to-face interviews; focus groups with participants; feedback forms; visual products; media coverage; photographs and video documentation. Recommendations for transferable approaches and strategies are also included here.

## What worked well

### 1. Vision and Purpose

#### Positive focus:

- Celebration of culture while simultaneously addressing a difficult and serious social problem.
- Enhanced and built self-esteem, particularly for Aboriginal men, women and children.
- The Walk was inspirational – general feeling that it was the beginning of something very positive.

#### Shared, Common goals:

- Prevention of family violence.
- Improved family violence response by services.
- Break down of barriers to non-Aboriginal family violence services for Aboriginal people.

#### The message:

- Right message at the right time.
- Clear, focused message – “No to violence” imbedded in broader, global White Ribbon campaign.
- Public announcement of no tolerance for family violence.
- Attracted wide attention at state, interstate and international levels.

### 2. Organisation and planning

#### Leadership:

- Aboriginal leadership for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and services.
- Non-Aboriginal organisations offered support without exerting control.
- Aboriginal men leading and participating in public demonstration of no tolerance for family violence.
- Individual ‘champions’ – the success of the Walk appears to have heavily depended on a core group of dedicated, highly skilled and strategic players who worked as a team.

#### Cooperation and respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services:

- Aboriginal leadership supported by non-Aboriginal services and administrative resources.
- Creation of safe, inclusive ‘spaces for change’
- Required risk taking.
- Contributed to trust building.
- Respectful and cooperative relationships at all levels and between all groups.

#### Linkage with state policies and regional structures:

- *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families* and non-Aboriginal family violence policies informed Walk aims and approach.
- Strategic utilisation of regional and sub-regional family violence committees: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.
- Family Violence Regional Steering Committee: key members provided professional support and expertise.

- Aboriginal leaders in key organisations negotiated with Aboriginal co-operatives. Victoria Police Family Violence Advisor played a key role and ensured participation and support of local police stations.
- Guiding Integrated Family Violence Service System reform 2006–2009.

### 3. The Event

#### Walking together:

- Promoted cooperation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, people and services.
- Created a space of connection – with new and familiar people.
- Barriers were broken down between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, communities and services.
- Adopted an inclusive, whole of community approach – children, youth, families, elders walked together.

#### The image and the experience:

- Visual products enhanced and communicated the message.
- Cultural activities, such as dancing and music fostered inclusion and celebrated Aboriginal culture.
- Photographs created a visual record and memory of the Walk and inspiration to other groups to hold no to violence Walks.
- Media coverage promoted the Walk and affirmed its message.
- Brochures and posters designed specifically for the Walk used the same watermark design as “Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families”.

#### The effect:

- Educational: informed on-lookers and participants about the issue of family violence and the services available for support.

- Attitude changing: shifted perceptions of relationship between Aboriginal people, communities and violence
- Aboriginal people seen as part of the solution, rather than ‘the problem’
- Aboriginal young men reported their pride and positive experience of walking.
- Family violence can now be more openly discussed in Aboriginal communities.

## What might have worked better

### 1. Planning

- Some services reported feeling rushed at the last minute, and would have preferred to be involved earlier in the planning stages.
- Evaluation from the beginning – a formative, participatory action evaluation model may have assisted in a more timely evaluation report and dissemination of findings.

### 2. Publicity

- More handouts, flyers and placards available at each location.
- More publicity to engage participation of services prior to the Walk.

### 3. The Walk design

- Some respondents felt the Walk could have been longer in each town to allow for more time to reflect and connect.
- A separate area in each town where services could set up stalls might have increased information sharing and access to services.

### 4. The follow-up

- Capacity to stage follow-up events to maintain enthusiasm and momentum instigated by participating in the Walk.

# Recommendations for transferable approaches and strategies

This section presents successful features of the Walk for consideration in planning for future similar events. It is of interest to note that these 'transferable features' mirror many of the elements of success outlined by Memmot, Chambers, Go-Sam and Thomson in *Good Practice in Indigenous Family Violence Prevention – Designing and Evaluating Successful Programs (2006)*. It is also important to acknowledge that this event took place in a particular place, at a particular time under the leadership of a unique group of people. It was nurtured through deeply respectful relationships and built on existing strengths.

After outlining the framework of the Walk program for each town, eight recommended elements are discussed with reference to the supporting evidence derived from the evaluation process.

## Features of the Walks in each Town

- Welcome to country
- Aboriginal men leading the Walk and speaking
- Thorough organisation demonstrated in smooth staging of the Walk in each town
- Involvement of Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal service providers, handing out information
- Aboriginal Dance troupe
- Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal walkers
- Involvement of all ages – elders, families, young people, students, older people, children
- Relevant speakers at each Walk
- Debrief and planning session at the end of each day





- Police walking with participants and sharing their message
- Media coverage
- Strong visual presence – caps, T-shirts, banners, placards, etc
- Sharing of food at culmination of Walk

## Successful elements

### 1. Aboriginal leadership and involvement of Aboriginal men

Aboriginal leadership was essential to the success of the CommUNITY Walk. It should be noted that while Aboriginal leadership of Aboriginal communities and organisations was fundamental, it was the leadership that Aboriginal individuals and organisations demonstrated in the non-Aboriginal sector that was most profound, and this sits at the heart of the success of the Walk. It must also be acknowledged that the support

shown by non-Aboriginal services and individuals for Aboriginal leadership was equally important. Planning for future projects with a similar vision and purpose will need to be mindful of this key element. As one of the non-Aboriginal organisers commented: *“It wasn’t up to me to take over. I was the support system”* (Interviewee).

A further crucial factor was the role Aboriginal men played. As identified above, the organising committee recognised that the success of the Walk would depend on the active participation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men. Aboriginal men took central roles in organising and leading in the Walk, making these positive roles visible in their own communities and the wider public. This translated into young Aboriginal men leading and taking pride of place in the demonstration and showing visible leadership to others, including to non-Aboriginal men. In one community approx 60% of marchers were youth (male).

One young Koorie man commented that the participation of Koorie men in the Walk showed the wider community that men within the Aboriginal community acknowledge that violence is wrong, and that they are taking action to deal with it (Focus Group 1). There was also discussion around the common assumption that Aboriginal men are responsible for most violence generally, and although there may not have been an attitude change, there was:

*an understanding of the fact that we're conscious about [violence] and to take it outside our own community where we try to hide it, and make sure we feel ashamed if it goes out there, but that day just proves that we need to get it out there so it's more understood by everybody, male, female, black, white, community members or not, it doesn't matter. (Focus Group 1)*

One young man reflected that the Walk:

*opened up a lot of gateways through talking to girls about violence, what they wouldn't probably want to talk about to men, and because they had my trust – I think they kind of felt relieved that there was a few men in the community they could talk to ... it opened up [discussion] without trying to say, no, no, this wasn't happening. [I]t made me feel really good and very proud of the walk I did. Because a lot of the girls were there, I kind of grew up [with] from school ... the ones what came up to me were Koorie girls and they were – they opened up a lot of stuff and I found out about myself then and it made me feel really, really good. (Focus Group 1)*

Another commented:

*I've had other lads watching from the sidelines see me [and other young men]*

*walking and say, mate, they're strong, let's join them. (Focus Group 1)*

Even where Aboriginal men were not playing a leadership role, they made a public contribution:

*We had blokes from Wulgungo Ngalu<sup>2</sup> come up and do the marshalling for us. Those blokes are going through their own trials and tribulations at that particular time, but they still came and helped with the marshalling and I thought that was just absolutely terrific. (Focus Group 1)*

## **2. Shared vision enacted within the context of a positive, inclusive, culturally appropriate way forward.**

The progression of the Walk from one location to another mirrored an ongoing hopeful journey. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations, young and old, male and female, rural and townspeople, moved forward together with the shared message that violence is unacceptable. The Walk created a safe, inclusive space for sharing in protest against family violence. It was also noted that the Walk brought people together who normally don't mix with each other:

*We had people that didn't get along and don't get along but they attended that day and they all ate in the same area and you never see them in the same area unless there's conflict. (Focus Group 1)*

Another 'walker' observed:

*[The Walk] was different, because this was something that, with NAIDOC and Reconciliation, that was about Aboriginal people. [But] this was about something that affected and touched everybody. It was general, across the board. Everyone that walked wasn't just about violence about Aboriginal people or violence about any*

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<sup>2</sup> Wulgungo Ngalu Learning Place, in Gunai Kurnai language means 'which way together'. Wulgungo Ngalu is a statewide, culturally appropriate residential diversion program for Indigenous adult males who are on Community Based Orders.



*other nationality, it was just about violence. Everyone that walked shared something. (Focus Group 2)*

Another profound example of the Walk providing a safe inclusive space and managing dissent in a positive way was the response to an on-looker who had difficulty with aspects of the Walk and was voicing her objections. Her distress was handled with sensitivity, without affecting the solidarity of the Walkers:

*There was some language coming from this community member and ... the lads [were] talking to the younger fellas, "just ignore this, what we're doing is important" ... The younger ones that were with us, they came closer to me ... saying, are we right, are we doing the wrong thing? I was like, how can stopping violence be wrong? I said, we can block stuff like that out, this is why we're walking and they asked if they'll be safe, I said, you are safe. What happens if they see us down the street tomorrow and you're not around? I said, it will not happen because – I gave them that assurance it would not happen because there's – look how many of us is walking. Feel good for what you're doing because it is a good thing. (Focus Group 1)*

Interviews, and the focus group with reference group members revealed a shared vision, as well as a firm commitment to the objectives of the 10 year plan – *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*. As described in the previous section, the Walk, as an idea and event was located within a framework initiated by the Victorian Integrated family violence reforms, which established local

structures for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services to co-ordinate and take action. In East Gippsland these groups were brought together through the initiative of the Family Violence Regional Action Group, who invited the Regional Integration Coordinator to participate. In other words, through Aboriginal leadership, the non-Aboriginal Family Violence service network and the Victoria Police were invited to 'join the journey'.

In addition, there was a strongly felt, shared need to bring non-Aboriginal services to 'the table' in order to increase access to services for Aboriginal people. Values that enabled the planning process and the project to move forward to implementation, included: respect, resilience, generosity, empathy, patience, optimism, and uncompromised commitment to the vision. As one reference group member stated (amid a circle of nodding heads): *"The overall concept was unifying, and about unification"*. Another participant made the point that: *"Uncertainties and antagonisms were put aside in the interest of the common cause, getting the Walk happening"*.

The Walk represented an impressive collaboration of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal skills and resources.

## Skills and resources offered and shared

- Application for project funding was a joint effort between a key Aboriginal leader and a key DPCD employee. This application provided the basis for the document that the 26 agencies signed up to.
- Resource funding from the Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee, Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service, East Gippsland Regional Action group and Department of Planning and Community Development to support the Walk.
- GWHS: funded additional administrative assistance to help with organisation of the Walk.
- Aboriginal Co-operatives took on responsibility of providing the food.
- Making of placards – Aboriginal women spent two weeks making placards at Ramahyuck in Sale.
- Local business in Bairnsdale printed t-shirts (Paid for by the Healing service) and caps were printed in Sale (Paid for by the Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee) with “Gippsland Says No to Violence”.
- Quantum Support Services in Morwell took the lead role for organising, resourcing and supporting the Walk in Central Gippsland as there were a number of agencies including the Kode School, for Aboriginal students, involved. The Gippsland Integrated Family Violence Service Reform Steering Committee covered the costs, however Quantum contributed significant staffing hours.

The diagram below shows how the East Gippsland Family Violence Regional Action Group envisaged the local collaboration and engagement that underwrote the success of the Walk.

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### A Regional Approach: model used by EGIFVRAG





### 3. Immediate and frequent reflection and further planning – Debriefing and yarning at the end of each day

Debriefing yarns were held at the end of each day of the Walk. This provided an opportunity to reflect over what happened, and to adjust plans for the following day on the basis of insights gained. Reference group members felt that this time for reflection contributed to keeping up their energy as well as being an essential organisational tool. A 'check list' was compiled early in the planning process, it was constantly referred to by the organisers and acted as a guide, or map for taking the next steps.

The barbecue, socialising and dancing was recognised as an important cultural event, "a strong force in itself". (Focus Group 2)

### 4. Trust building

The Walk provided a tangible reason; a vehicle, through which to build trusting relationships. One of the most successful examples of this was the increase in trust between Victoria Police members and members of the Aboriginal community. The experience of police as participants in the Walk opened their eyes, minds and hearts to the circumstances of Aboriginal people and communities. Victoria Police members, with the strong leadership of the FVA, put aside 'business as usual' to focus on the Walk's cause – the prevention of family violence. Police walking side by side with Aboriginal youth, women and men enabled a different level of engagement and new understanding.

One young Aboriginal man acknowledged that Victoria Police were "a very integral part" of the march because police are "probably the people that our community members have the most



contact with ... we want this violence to stop and we need help with [stopping] it". (Focus Group 2) One policeman even got involved in a traditional Aboriginal dance, which for onlookers was "hilarious" and it was "very powerful to be able to laugh [with] a policeman". (Focus Group 4)

Aboriginal leadership supported risk taking within a safe space, and this was a central element in the success of the Walk:

*It really snowballed because a lot of people maybe didn't have the courage to get up and, seeing the courage by other people walking in it, they thought ... let's start mingling, let's start happening, let's get behind these guys as well and these women and these kids and it snowballed.* (Focus Group 3)

The Walk was also able to achieve trust building between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services:

*[The Walk] has strengthened the link between service based family violence*

*funded services and the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy but also strengthened the links for the way in which we can work better ... with Aboriginal people."* (Interview 4)

## 5. Embracing culture and difference

The organisers of the Walk saw difference as an opportunity to engage, learn and share skills and knowledge, rather than as an obstacle.

Participants at the Walk were also able to embrace this opportunity by entering the Aboriginal space created by the Walk and being invited to engage, in a non-threatening way with the culture. Of 65 evaluation sheets collected at the time of Walk, 33 respondents identified as being from Aboriginal backgrounds and 26 identified as non-Aboriginal (six were not stated)<sup>3</sup>. For Aboriginal participants, the metaphor of the Walk as a journey, the land and geographical locations, connected to deep spiritual values and yearnings for themselves and their families.



<sup>3</sup> The main responses to the evaluation sheets are captured in the results section.



As one respondent noted:

*I reckon the cultural side of it, the dancing and the after walk barbecues and meetings and greetings, I saw a lot of people mingling, mixing, introducing themselves to different people. The cultural side with the dancing and stuff like that and people taking part in the dancing, that was a real strength wasn't it? (Focus Group 1)*

For another participant it was the excitement of doing something new together:

*I wasn't aware of how effective it was until perhaps a week or two after I'd spoken to participants and organisers ... from Cann River [and] Rosedale. The non-Indigenous and Indigenous organisations that participated, I thought, worked together incredibly well. There seemed to be a sense of adventure, if you like, and aren't we clever in doing this? A bit like children around*

*at a birthday party with lots of cakes and sweets and sharing in this, and thinking to themselves, perhaps, why haven't we done this before? It's so easy. (Focus Group 4)*

One interviewee expressed the importance of valuing cultural difference while acknowledging the commonality of the issue of violence:

*[W]e need to come together as a community I think. We focus too much on Indigenous violence, non-Indigenous, other races and other diversities. I don't think from my opinion, violence doesn't know race. Violence doesn't know the difference. (Interviewee)*

## **6. Visual and embodied communication**

The role of the visual was crucial in the success, influence and longevity of the Walk's message. Table 3 next page shows the audit of the main visual products and objects used in the Walk.

**Table 3: Visual Audit of CommUNITY Walk**

Object/Item/Concept	Form	Where/when primarily used	Primary Purpose	Additional Effects
Metaphor of Journey/Walking Together	Concept	Across project	Vision, Unification & cultural relevance	Framework for narratives about the Walk, moving forward
Cover design from Strong Cultures, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 10 year plan by Catherine King	Artwork Watermark on promotional materials	Across project	To link Walk with state policy level and 10 year plan	Conveyed message of families and communities staying together and helping each other Authorised Walk
White Ribbon Campaign logo and other promotional materials, ie pamphlets	Image Promotional materials	Across project	Message that Walk was about men saying no to violence against women (VAW)  Situated Walk in 'White Ribbon' week and wider global movement of men marching against VAW	Strengthened message Authorised Walk Consistency of message Recognition Contributed to visual, conceptual and political coherence
Caps	Text & object	During Walk	Unity Clear message	Unified & delineated marchers from non-marchers Souvenirs/memory
T Shirts	Text & object	During Walk	Unity Clear message	Unified & delineated marchers from non-marchers Souvenirs/memory
Placards	Text & object Art & image Colour	During Walk	Unity Clear message	Unified & delineated marchers from non-marchers Souvenirs/memory
Posters	Colour images Text	Prior to Walk	Promotion Clear message Connection with policy (watermark)	Gathered support/ encouraged participation
Flyers/pamphlets	Handout	Prior to Walk During Walk	Promotion Information Clear message Connection with policy (watermark)	Gathered support/ encouraged participation

Object/Item/ Concept	Form	Where/when primarily used	Primary Purpose	Additional Effects
Banners	Colour Text & image  Art	During Walk	Unity Clear Message	Authorised walk Cultural message Conveyed main message Signified pride for Aboriginal men– used at Men’s service as reminder of walk & emblem of pride & change
Media releases	News articles  Text	Prior to Walk  During walk	Promotion	Gathered support & participation  Record  Gained attention of broader community
Show Bags containing various items, flyers about services, water, wristbands etc	Objects & text	During Walk	Unity/message/ functional connection with larger movement	Conveyed further information  Gave walkers something to take away with them
No to Violence Wrist bands	Text & object	During Walk  After Walk	Unity/message – connection with larger White Ribbon movement	Identity/connection  Memory  Connected people through contemporary cultural sign of ethical values
Media coverage	Images  Speech	During Walk	Reportage	Promotion, record, state- wide authority
Photographs	Images  Colour	After Walk	Record/promotion after the walk/marker of importance	Record of walk/future promotion/marked the celebration  Memory
Powerpoint presentations	Image & text  Colour	After Walk	Promotion/record	Record, promotion  Memory

The Gippsland  
**CommUNITY Walk**

Against Family Violence  
24-27 2008



**Gippsland says NO to violence**

Permission was gained by the organising committee to use the same watermark for the Walk brochures and posters as the artwork on *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, this established a solid visual connection and therefore linkage with the Statewide policy. Other forms of visual communication, such as placards, baseball caps, T-shirts, banners, photographs, dancers, together with music and chanting, further communicated the message more widely and effectively than written text. These also produced a positive emotional connection with the memory of the Walk experience. Photographs provided a visual record and were shown in powerpoint presentations at state, national and international forums, and encouraged interest in organising similar Walks in other areas and regions. Participants wore their caps and T-shirts to community events after the Walk, this extended the message and incited further yarns and sharing about the experience.

*One sign that really got most of us blokes motivated was **strong men, strong community** signs which we were able to souvenir for the Men's Time Out Service. We went up first and grabbed those because the signs said it all, "strong men, strong community". It was proud for the followers to be able to carry that sign. (Focus Group 1)*

The message 'Gippsland says No to Violence' was articulated verbally, in banners, posters, and on T-shirts. Chanting, songs and speeches delivered a clear message, that resonated with people's experience, cultural pride and sense of integrity. The strategic association with the White Ribbon campaign ensured meaning and application beyond the Gippsland communities where the Walk took place.

Many participants spoke very positively about how being involved made them feel:

*Everybody was happy chanting ['no to violence'] all the way along and it was*

*just the best feeling ... [I]t was like taking ownership of what's happening.  
(Focus Group 4)*

... while the atmosphere of the Walk clearly invited the attention and approval of those who were not marching:

*One of the biggest things I noticed was as we were marching up the streets of the various towns where we were walking, was the amount of shop owners and general members of the public, especially the wider community members that came out and actually cheered and clapped as we walked past, seeing what the march was about, saying 'no to violence'. (Focus Group 1)*

Another benefit of the Walk as a visual form of communication was that it delivered messages about referral pathways and access to Aboriginal services which had been under utilised:

*When we got to the last day of the walk, one agency actually said to me ... "do you realise what this walk has actually done for these agencies or for us as a referral centre?" They said, "this is actually going to be now opening up a Pandora's box because along the length of the walk, people have been speaking to these people so they have given their numbers out"... Now that manager spoke to me ... and made it very clear. She said, "you realise you've actually just put us on the map because prior to ... this ... people were unsure of what this agency's referral pathway was and what program pathway they had in their agency... But that walk identified for the whole length of that four days ... that manager and their workers and people seeing them face to face, actually had a huge impact on what they actually do ... A very good visual way for Aboriginal people, may I add, because it's an Aboriginal service. (Interviewee)*



Lack of visibility was a problem for participants in the Walk held in the township of Sale, as one respondent expressed:

*We walked around the park, it wasn't through the main streets. I was a little bit disappointed ... it should have been through the main street ... is there something wrong with me doing a march [through the main street]? (Focus Group 2)*

### 7. 'Harnessing the energy'

The organisers capitalised on the 'snowballing' effect to 'harness' the energy created by the Walk, eg. the overwhelming majority of those who filled out feedback forms on the day of the Walk ticked the 'Yes' box indicating that they would be interested in further activities. Subsequently, members of the East Gippsland Family Violence Action Group have promoted the Walk through presentations and yarning, keeping the event alive as a positive memory and encouraging other groups to consider conducting a similar Walk. Furthermore, participants have continued to work together and strengthen relationships:

*The relationships, particularly the Aboriginal relationships, have just grown and developed ... my trust in them and their trust in me – it's a two-way thing – has just*

*been unbelievable ... I think that a bond, a relationship, a trust had grown and it's still there. (Interviewee)*

Access to non-Aboriginal services was opened up by the Walk, and this has been maintained:

*So this agency in Far East has taken that role on [of providing a service] that is culturally – safe for our Aboriginal clients here, that are flooding into this agency. (Interviewee)*

But it was not only Aboriginal people who benefited from the information provided by the Walk, there were also non-Aboriginal Walk participants who had experienced family violence:

*[There was] a middle aged white woman who had been subjected to violence most of her life but was very isolated. [She said] "Look, I've come to support you on this walk ... but I still don't know where to go [for help]". So by her being on the walk we were able to then give her [help]. (Interviewee)*

One non-Aboriginal participant reported the positive flow-on the Walk had for his daughters and their classmates:

*When I dropped the girls off at school a week later some parents came over and asked me what the march was all about,*

*because their children wanted to discuss family violence and how bad it was. I told them it was a march against family violence and that Aboriginal people has taken a lead role in organising the marches across Gippsland about an issue that affected everyone in some way. The parents were so impressed that their children had come home saying that it was very bad to hurt other people ... I expected the parents to be put out however they were happy their children were questioning and learning. One parent said that she feared the children were being desensitized as they were exposed to many images of violence on a daily basis through the media, DVDs and games. Discussions about family violence made the horror of violence real. (Written submission)*

There was also lament about the lack of follow-up events for keeping the momentum going:

*The only thing that I was a little bit disappointed in the whole thing was – only because I wanted it to happen again as fast as I could, but it wouldn't be the week after, I was thinking maybe everyone was on a high after it was finished for about a week and I thought that's starting to – that high is – that energy's starting to go away and I was thinking maybe two or three months after it there could have been a community barbecue again, just something to follow it up. (Focus Group 1)*

A number of respondents supported this view, and as we have suggested, it would be useful if this was considered in planning future similar projects. In this way the message could be reinforced and there would be opportunity for a 'next layer' of involvement and engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services and communities.

## 8. Participatory Evaluation

The reference group and organisers believed that future projects would be well advised to consider including a formative participatory evaluation process in the project budget. This evaluation, although commenced after the Walk finished, has become an extension of the Walk and part of the on-going journey. The reference group meetings have informed the evaluation, while at the same time extended trust building and bond formation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sectors, and between academic researchers and practitioners. The evaluation has contributed to further initiatives arising from the Walk, such as presentations at international conferences, regional seminars and publications, thereby broadening recognition of the Walk to academic, other social and community services and international audiences. Had the evaluation commenced from the beginning of the planning for the Walk, there would have been opportunity for the evaluation to feed into the Walk process, to more effectively document, reflect, and most importantly build skills in evaluation research for practitioners and the Walk organisers.





## Concluding reflections

Through Aboriginal leadership the CommUNITY Walk established Aboriginal people as part of the solution, committed to addressing violence in their own communities and families, as well as challenging the mainstream community to address men's violence and raise awareness. The stereotype that the Aboriginal community are the problem was also confronted. The barriers to accessing family violence services for Aboriginal people, have started to break down, with a significant increase in uptake of those services, to the extent that they now need further resourcing. Collaborative directions are being taken, and new relationships have been formed. Greater understanding has led to trust building and strengthened relationships with police. People now know each other and partnerships are being built between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services. Learnings from the experiences of the Walk are informing other Regional Action Groups throughout the state of Victoria, about how to organise walks, and interest has also been shown in other states. Through the establishment of new alliances and collaborations, more safe spaces are being created where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can come together to challenge family violence and heal the social, cultural and personal wounds that it causes. Despite the success of this one event, there are many more steps to take in this journey. Much work is yet to be done before the effects of initiatives such as these are felt through a wide-spread reduction in violence in families, principally men's violence against women and children. What this event has done is show Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities how each can gain through Aboriginal leadership.



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