

# Strength2Strength: Engaging CaLD Men and Boys in Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women

## The Strength2Strength Project

Funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Strength2Strength project with action research was developed in 2018 as an innovative primary prevention approach to engaging CaLD communities in domestic violence (DV) prevention as part of the National Plan. The overall aim of the project was to examine, discuss, confront and reframe attitudes towards manhood, masculinity, and violence towards women among CaLD boys and men. The project further sought to deepen understanding of the kind of approaches most likely to secure the sustained engagement of men and boys from CaLD backgrounds in learning, dialogue and activities related to DV awareness and prevention.

## Where Was the Project Conducted?

City of Gosnells - a local government area within south-east metropolitan Perth, WA, which is a major settlement destination for humanitarian and refugee entrants to Australia. Partners included the City of Gosnells, Redeemed Care Inc., WA Police and White Ribbon.

### Time frame:

- Phase 1 : April 2018 – April 2019 (1 initial funding - Program implementation)
- Phase 2: July 2019 -April 2020 (funding extension – research and community awareness raising)
- Phase 3: July 2020 – March 2021 (further funding extension, program delivery)

## Project Activities

### Phase 1 April 2018-April 2019

Working with three tiers of the community, the project targeted cultural community leaders at Tier 1, boys aged 11-16 years in Tier 2, and high-school aged young people at Tier 3.

**Tier 1:** cultural community leaders were engaged in one-on-one conversations and focus group discussions on healthy family relationships, run by a group facilitator with domestic violence expertise. The aim was to increase knowledge and understanding of healthy attitudes towards women and children, and manhood and masculinity, in their respective cultural communities.

**Tier 2 and 3:** a series of primary prevention workshops, consisting of sporting activities, discussions and excursions, delivered through an after-school program over four school terms with boys from refugee backgrounds (Tier 2) and school-based workshops (Tier 3). Using the Our Watch framework, Tier 2 and 3 participants role-played how to respond to disrespectful behaviour and learned about the different forms of Violence Against Women.



## Research Activities

- Entry and exit surveys (Tier 1: 11 participants, Tier 2: 22 participants, Tier 3: 39 participants) assessing values and attitudes towards the four gendered drivers of violence against women based on Our Watch's Change the Story.

## Project Achievements and Impacts

The Strength2Strength project successfully engaged nineteen African men, twenty-two boys aged 11-16 years, and nearly forty young people from two schools. The project's impacts were significant. Notably:

- Tier 1 participants reported increased knowledge about domestic violence policies and laws in Australia; greater awareness of the elements of healthy relationships; a broader understanding of non-physical forms of violence and the impact of domestic violence on women and children. Participants also reported increased confidence in addressing violence against women and their children in their communities.
- Quantitative and qualitative data indicated positive changes among Tier 2 participants in their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions linked to harmful masculinity and violence against women.
- Information obtained from discussions with Tier 2 participants' mothers during and after the program attested to aspects of behaviour and attitudinal change among some of the boys.

Tier 3 participants identified that violence against women has wider impacts than just the individual affected and 87% of participants agreed they can do something about violence in their communities.

The value of Strength2Strength was found to have extended beyond the intended objectives to include; (1) providing a culturally safe space for men and boys to express themselves on a range of other issues; (2) building friendships and connections; (3) building self-confidence among young people; and (4) exposing CaLD boys and young men to youth, recreation and sporting opportunities.

### Phase 2 July 2019 – April 2020

A partial funding extension limited the next Phase of the project to desktop resource. A project officer was recruited to evaluate the outcomes of the project and share the findings with community stakeholders. Contributed to by feedback from participants and their families Save the Children produced an evaluation report, presented findings at the Intersectionalities in Domestic Violence and Stop the Violence conferences, contributed to ANROWS reports and webinar presentations and completed a first draft program manual for Tiers 2 and 3 of the program.

### Phase 3 July 2020 – March 2021

DSS has provided a further extension of funding for Save the Children to undertake a short series of codesigned leadership workshops with young people which will provide the opportunity to develop youth mentors and build the capacity of bicultural workers to engage the community in discussions around primary prevention. An external review of workshop materials will ensure an evidence-based framework for the production of a final program manual. Lessons from the pilot project and Phase 3 will be disseminated to target CaLD communities in the South East of Perth.

### Feedback from Participants:

- *"...I learnt that silence can be a form of malice that one spouse can use to inflict emotional abuse on another. So, I learnt that silence can be a form of emotional abuse which I didn't know before."*
- *"Sometimes the way I talked to [girls] wasn't nice. It has changed now. It has changed a lot."*
- *"At first, everyone said, don't cry, don't show feeling in public, you will lose your reputation, someone might not respect you. [here] we learnt it's ok to be emotional, to cry."*
- *"I learnt plenty of things, but the main thing is that girls and boys are equal and being a girl isn't what you should be ashamed of."*

## Lessons Learnt and Issues for Future Consideration

The main learnings emerging from working with CaLD men and boys and their communities more broadly included:

- Program planning and content development in consultation with the community is indispensable.
- Consultations and relationship building take time.
- Faith-based leadership can be useful as an avenue for recruiting and retaining CaLD men in primary prevention initiatives.
- Flexibility in the project design to respond to emerging needs among young people is essential.
- There is much the community can learn about different kinds of abuse, not just physical abuse.
- The focus of education should be on challenging assumptions about gender (in)equality not merely on educating about violence.
- Recognizing and acknowledging intersections between gender, race, class and culture is key to engaging CaLD men and addressing resistance.
- Future efforts should consider focusing more on CaLD boys and young people because of their openness to adapt to their new world and to challenge attitudes that support violence against women.
- Ongoing funding will allow continuity of service delivery and avoid the loss of staff with relationships within the community and program knowledge