



Learning together

Strengthening approaches to
primary prevention through
Communities of Practice.



CONTENTS

4	Introduction
5	Executive summary
6	What is a Community of Practice?
7	DVRCV CoPs in practice
8	The impact of Communities of Practice on the prevention sector
11	A Community of Practice story
12	The strengths of the DVRCV model
16	Developing our model
17	Helping Communities of Practice to thrive
18	Conclusion

52 Cardigan Street, Carlton 3053
ABN 31 202 397 579 | **RTO** 20853
T 03 9486 9866 | **F** 03 9486 9744
E dvrcv@dvrcv.org.au

Partners in Prevention is a project funded jointly by the Victorian Office for Women, Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Education & Training.

INTRODUCTION

A community of practice is a ‘group of people who share a concern, set of problems, or passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.’

FOR OVER 30 YEARS AT THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCE CENTRE VICTORIA (DVRCV), WE HAVE BEEN WORKING TOWARDS OUR VISION OF A WORLD IN WHICH WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN ARE THRIVING, RESPECTED AND FREE FROM VIOLENCE.

We focus on how to respond effectively to violence against women, and how to prevent it before it occurs. In order to achieve our vision, we build the capability of those who prevent and those who respond to violence against women in Victoria. This paper focuses on the prevention workforce.

Prevention practitioners come from diverse organisations, dispersed locations, and varied settings, and feelings of isolation can occur as a result. This isolation creates difficult working environments and reduces the opportunities to work collaboratively or build practice skills and wisdom, which can have a negative impact on growing the prevention sector sustainably.

Communities of practice (CoPs) are emerging as a successful and sought-after mechanism to improve the wellbeing of individual workers and their practice, as well as organisations and the broader prevention sector. CoPs are an important tool for supporting the knowledge and skill development, confidence and resilience of prevention workers. Combined with other information sharing and capability building activities, CoPs have a sector-wide impact that contributes to the prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women.

This paper outlines the evidence-based benefits of CoPs for practitioners, and proposes that further investment through funding, time and resources will help the Prevention of Violence Against Women (PVAW) sector to thrive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AT DVRCV, OUR COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE (COPS) BRING PRIMARY PREVENTION PRACTITIONERS FROM AROUND THE STATE TOGETHER IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT THAT ENCOURAGES COLLABORATION, STRENGTHENS EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES, AND DEEPENS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE.

All of these outcomes build a more robust, unified, and professional support system for practitioners, which in turn leads to better outcomes across the sector.

A community of practice is a 'group of people who share a concern, set of problems, or passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.' (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002, p.4). The three key characteristics that define a CoP are the domain, the community and the practice.

We have drawn on decades of evidence-based research and practice, including findings from *Change the Story: A shared Framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children* (Our Watch et al. 2015) and the principles of the *Preventing Family Violence and All Forms of Violence Against Women Capability Framework* to inform our CoP initiatives. We have applied a deep knowledge of the prevention sector and a clear understanding of CoP design in order to develop a customised model that meets the growing and changing needs of prevention practitioners.

The impact of CoPs on the prevention sector is immensely positive. Protective factors for prevention practitioner health, wellbeing and sustainability are supportive peers and a safe environment in which to share challenges. CoPs are a way of enabling these protective factors to emerge across the sector. We often hear that prevention practitioners feel isolated in their work. We know that they face both unique and shared challenges that can be alleviated through sector building, strengthening connectivity, and collegiality. A CoP supports the formation of connections and results in participants feeling supported to face specific challenges, trials and barriers in their work. CoP participants connect and grow their networks while also deepening reflective practice and learning about evidence-informed approaches.

Reflective practice is a core part of the transformative work of all organisations and practitioners in the family violence sector, including those involved in primary prevention.

Through peer learning and expert facilitation, CoPs provide opportunities for personal growth and practical skill development, which leads to measurable change in the sector. Our CoPs provide an invaluable service to government in supporting sector development and 'sense-making' for professionals operating in a complex sector that is undergoing rapid change and expansion.

At DVRCV, we are committed to a process of continual reflection, review and improvement of our CoP model. We have developed an annual review cycle that draws out the strengths, areas for improvement, and new and exciting opportunities for our evolving model. It is important to us that our CoP model is grounded in a strong foundation of research and design, while also being nimble and responsive to developments in the sector.

Funding, leadership and commitment are three key elements to the ongoing success and advancement of CoPs within the sector. DVRCV's CoP model provides great opportunity for further funding in order to ensure the expansion, evaluation and continual improvement of our design and delivery across the state. Similarly, there is great opportunity for leaders in the prevention sector to encourage and support their workers to participate in one of our CoPs. There is also an important role for CoP participants to play in emboldening the efforts of the prevention sector more broadly. Commitment to active participation in a DVRCV CoP has individual benefits for each participant, as well as contributing to the creation of a positive ripple effect throughout the prevention workforce.

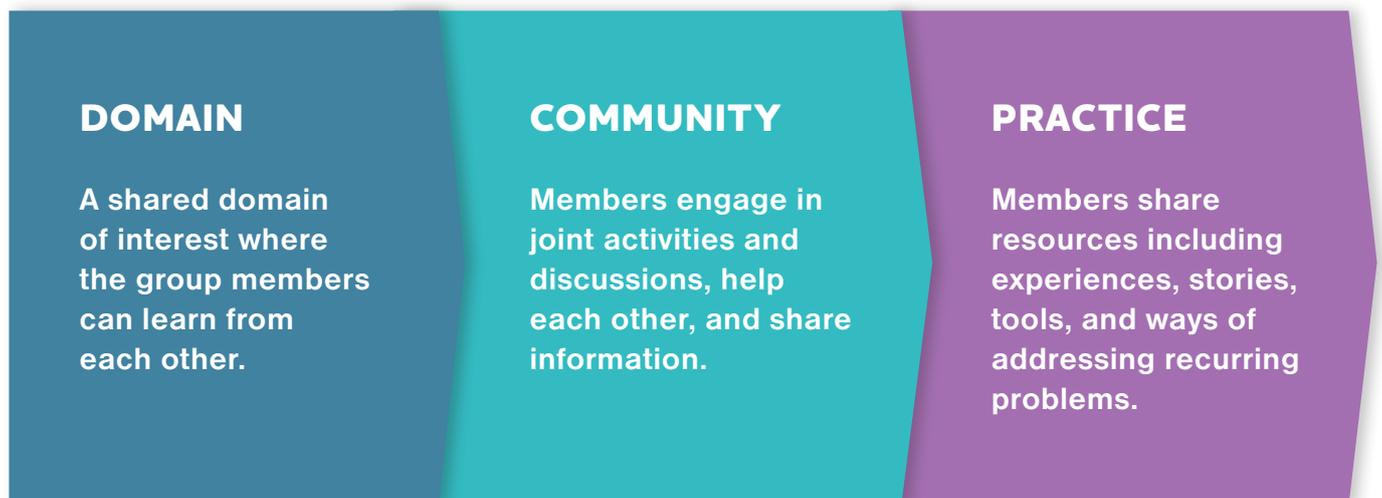
WHAT IS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE?

LEADING INNOVATORS IN THIS SPACE DEFINE A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE AS A 'GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO SHARE A CONCERN, SET OF PROBLEMS, OR PASSION ABOUT A TOPIC, AND WHO DEEPEN THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE IN THIS AREA BY INTERACTING ON AN ONGOING BASIS.' (WENGER, MCDERMOTT AND SNYDER 2002, P.4).

A successful CoP has a clear and agreed purpose that drives its existence. A purpose may include: problem solving, requests for information, seeking experience, building an argument, coordination and synergy, growing confidence, discussing developments, documenting projects, mapping knowledge and identifying gaps, and building change across the whole community (Adapted from Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 3 & Hoadley, 2000).

CoPs take time to develop, mature and maintain sustained interaction. Over time, supported by expert facilitation, participants assume the responsibility for co-designing and managing content to develop the community and to reflect, share, explore, and create knowledge.

THERE ARE THREE CHARACTERISTICS IN ANY EFFECTIVE COP:



(Wenger-Trayner, p.2, 2015) (Adapted from Wenger 1998, pp. 73-85; and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.4).

DVRCV CoPs IN PRACTICE

FREE FROM VIOLENCE

The Free from Violence Workforce Capability Building Project (Free from Violence) is an initiative of the Victorian Government.

As a part of this project, from 2018, DVRCV has provided funded training to the workforce in primary prevention of family violence and prevention of violence against women.

The program included four two and a half hour sessions run for three key groups: cross-sector entry level practitioners; sector leaders and senior Prevention of Family Violence (PFV) and Prevention of Violence Against Women (PVAW) practitioners; and PVAW and PFV practitioners working in tertiary education settings.

PARTNERS IN PREVENTION

DVRCV set up Partners in Prevention (PiP) in 2007 to coordinate and build partnerships between professionals working with schools delivering respectful relationships education and primary prevention activity.

Respectful relationships education engages schools in their role as education institution, workplace and community hub to create generational and cultural change.

A key part of the PiP project is delivering capability building activities, information sharing activities, and networking opportunities. Our CoPs embody each of these key elements. Our CoPs were piloted in 2017, and then run again in 2018 and 2019-20. In-person groups were up to 20 participants and online groups were up to 12 participants, meeting once a month, over six months.

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE ON THE PREVENTION SECTOR

At DVRCV, we acknowledge that the prevention of violence against women is a challenging social change project. We believe that an engaged, expert and sustainable prevention workforce is essential to achieve that long-term change. Based on the research and our evidence, CoPs constitute good practice for prevention workforce development and sector-wide impact.

Reflective practice is a core part of the transformative work of all organisations and practitioners in the family violence sector, including those involved in primary prevention. The nature of prevention work means that sometimes practitioners are the only ones in their organisation delivering prevention projects.

“It can feel lonely at times doing this work, however the session today helped me to hear that there are others out there, facing similar challenges, and left me feeling energised and motivated.”

– ONLINE PIP CoP PARTICIPANT, 2017-18

A CoP supports practitioners to develop a reflective practice by forming connections and feeling less like they are the only person facing common challenges. DVRCV's PiP members reported that the networking activity offered by the CoPs had a significant positive impact on their morale and quality of their practice.

“Meeting and being in a group that are like minded and share the passion of the PVAW cause has made me feel supported and has given me the confidence to continue my work towards the PVAW movement.”

– EARLY CAREER CoP PARTICIPANT, 2018-2019

CoPs also provide a space for transformative learning – ‘the process by which individuals change their frame of reference, their convictions and lifestyle through making meaning from their own experiences. Transformative learning can happen through: discussion and reflection on one's own experiences, engagement in political and ideological analysis while critiquing the distribution of social power, and developing a sense of solidarity with a social group

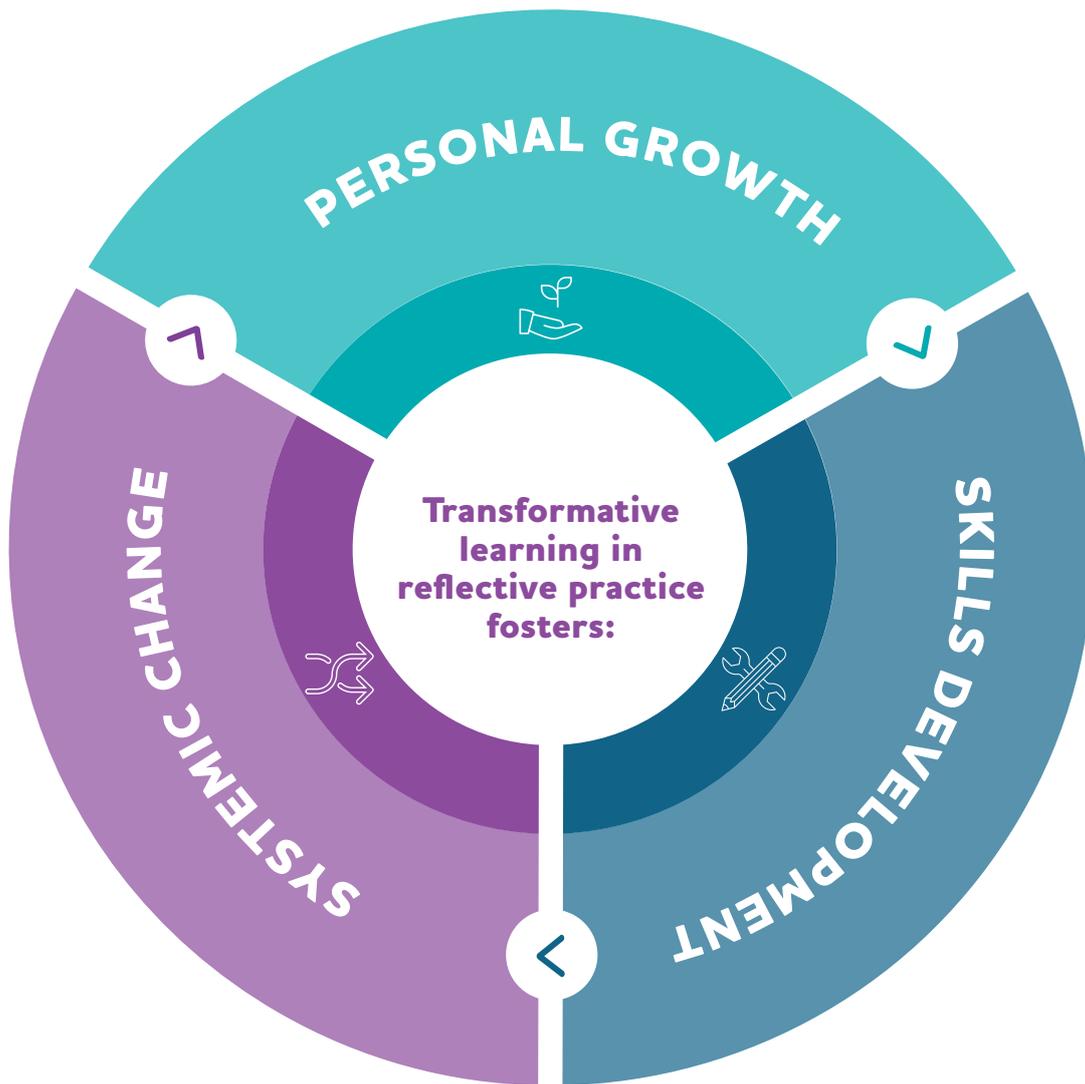
and making a commitment to making changes in one's own life and context.’ (Adapted from Bartel 2018, pp. 2-3; Hoadley, 2000; Pyko, Dorfler and Eden, 2017, p. 391 - 392).

As part of a CoP, participants have the opportunity to think critically about identity and power, as well as develop the skills to manage the emotions that may arise in such conversations and in this work. The relationships and trust nurtured in the CoP enable deeper thinking and valuable group conversations. Part of the magic of a well facilitated CoP is the strengthening of the connection between the head and the heart in doing prevention work. The skilled CoP facilitator safely guides the group to a place where the wisdom of the heart and knowledge of the head coexist to enable deeply reflective and transformative work to happen. This is a powerful and empowering experience for participants that can have positive ripple effects throughout the entire sector.

“Participating in the CoP supported me to develop an understanding of ... how important it is to create an environment that facilitates honest, open and vulnerable conversations about work challenges, personal prejudices and assumptions about gender and privilege. Prior to participating in the CoP I hadn't thought about the importance of this.”

– EARLY CAREER CoP PARTICIPANT, 2018-2019.

The value of reflective practice as a supported and normalised element of primary prevention work cannot be underestimated. Reflective practice enables focussed skill development and knowledge sharing in a supportive and structured environment. It enables continuous improvement for practitioners as well as the sector. In the response sector, reflective practice is fostered through the well-established and respected mechanism of structured supervision. However, no such mechanism exists for those working in the prevention space, which limits the development, and therefore impact, of this vital workforce.



Personal growth: Thinking critically about their own beliefs and attitudes through exploring their personal experiences of gender, violence and power as well as listening to and developing empathy for the experiences of others.



Skills development: Building new skills and practice behaviours to improve communication, enhance negotiation, and de-escalate conflict.



Systemic change: Developing a sense of cohesiveness, solidarity and belief in their power as a group to effect change.

(adapted from Bartel 2018, p.1)



“[The CoP has given us] a chance to critically reflect on ourselves as practitioners and the role that we play. Having that time to reflect really energises me and gives me the strength to keep on pushing especially when things are hard at work.”

– EARLY CAREER CoP PARTICIPANT, 2018-2019

The opportunities, provided by our CoPs, for transformative learning and reflective practice enables continual improvement across the prevention sector. The vulnerability, empathy, compassion and care that CoP participants are able to feel and enact for themselves and each other develops overall workforce capability, which improves outcomes in individual practitioner’s work and the collective work happening across the sector. The safe space provided by the CoPs encourages a learning mindset that motivates practitioners to continually look at how they can do things better, leading to more effective outcomes for the sector.

“We did an exercise around describing a ‘superpower’ we have, how it’s useful in PVAW and how others can foster it. Framing something that may just be an aspect of our personality as a superpower was quite profound to me – the recognition that all kinds of skills, attributes and experiences are of enormous value to do this work.”

– EARLY CAREER CoP PARTICIPANT 2019-2020

A PERSONAL REVELATION LEADS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE STORY

A PRACTITIONER, WHO HAD RECENTLY MOVED FROM THE CITY, WAS CONFRONTED BY SOME OPENLY SEXIST ATTITUDES HELD BY THE PEOPLE IN THEIR NEW HOME COUNTRY TOWN. THE PRACTITIONER RECEIVED SOME FUNDING FOR A SMALL PVAW PROJECT BUT THEY WERE STRUGGLING TO WORK OUT HOW TO BEST USE THE MONEY WHILE READJUSTING THEIR EXPECTATIONS TO WHAT COULD BE ACHIEVED IN THIS RURAL VICTORIAN CONTEXT. SO, THE PRACTITIONER ASKED FOR SUPPORT AND BRAINSTORMING FROM THEIR COP.

During the conversation, the practitioner had a revelation; the first thing to do was actually engage in some conversations with the people who live and work in the area to ask them what they think is most needed and useful.

The practitioner realised the power of 'meeting them where they're at' rather than designing a project without consultation. The practitioner saw how it is important to listen and take the time to look around, rather than get bogged down too soon in project design that's based on assumptions. Because while the project may look amazing in theory, it is less likely to achieve full community engagement and therefore succeed.

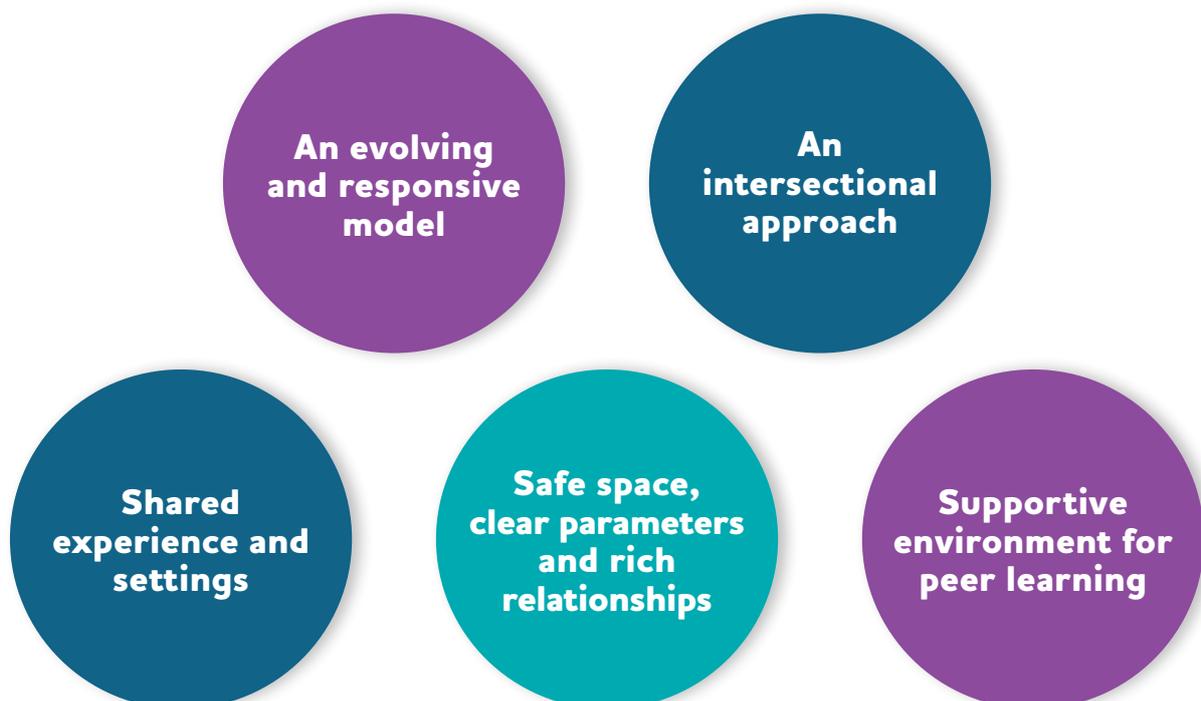
The practitioner's energy shifted from being disappointed about the apparent lack of appetite for PVAW work amongst the community to feeling positive about the prospect of taking some achievable steps with their community as a partner.

THE STRENGTHS OF THE DVRCV MODEL

AT DVRCV, WE DRAW ON DECADES OF EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND SPECIALIST EXPERTISE TO DELIVER COPs TO THE VICTORIAN PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND FAMILY VIOLENCE SECTOR. WE INCORPORATE NATIONAL AND STATE-BASED STRATEGY TO MAXIMISE THE IMPACT OF OUR INITIATIVES.

In 2017, the Victorian Government released the *Preventing Family Violence and All Forms of Violence Against Women Capability Framework*. We have embedded the principles of this framework in the design and delivery of each component of our Free from Violence Workforce Capability Building Project and Partners in Prevention project (see case studies above), drawing on expert advice and content from key project partners. We also draw on the findings outlined in *Change the Story: A shared Framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children* (Our Watch et al, 2015) to inform our CoP initiatives.

Combining these key prevention frameworks with a deep understanding of how to build effective CoPs, we have honed a model that responds to the unique needs of the prevention sector and its emerging workforce. Each component described below has been incorporated into the model in recognition of the challenging and dynamic nature of prevention work, as well as building on the skills and knowledge relevant to the level of the cohort.



AN EVOLVING AND RESPONSIVE MODEL

The growth of the prevention sector and the expansion of work into new settings has seen an increase in demand for in-person and online DVRCV CoPs. Our CoP participants consistently report that the focus on shared values, deep connections, and reflective practice is unique and highly valuable. This hunger and enthusiasm demonstrate both the need for, and success of, a model that holds connectivity and reflective practice at its heart.

“I would love to see [the] CoP continue on because it has been essential in providing internal reflections and support from the group.”

– EARLY CAREER COP PARTICIPANT 2018-2019

Through consistent and thorough evaluation, we change our delivery to meet the needs of our communities. This is why we have offered CoPs for people at different stages in their careers. In response to emerging pockets of work across the sector and new funding, we have also found value in putting a thematic emphasis on our CoP offerings. This enables each group to focus on the challenges and practice questions that arise for their specific area of prevention work. For example, early career practitioners, leaders, or those working in specific settings like respectful relationships education or tertiary settings.

We listened when a number of PiP members advised that they wanted access to more peer learning opportunities and forums that would allow them to explore practical strategies and tools to enhance their practice. This is why we have put the CoPs on our permanent training calendar; CoPs roll on one after the other throughout the year so participants can essentially ‘join again’.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all our in-person CoPs transitioned to online sessions. We utilised platforms like Zoom and Basecamp to enable the groups to maintain the momentum of their shared learning journey while continuing to deepen their connection with one another through a time of great change, uncertainty and stress.

“The only way to ensure these networks are sustainable is to make them ongoing.”

– EARLY CAREER COP PARTICIPANT 2018-2019

AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

One of DVRCV’s guiding principles is an intersectional feminist approach. We centre the experiences, voices and leadership of women from diverse communities and backgrounds and explicitly consider marginalised women’s experiences and needs in all of our work.

Through our projects and initiatives, including our CoPs, we have established and fostered a range of successful and valuable collaborations across the sector with organisations that possess specialist expertise on engaging with marginalised groups. Prioritising an intersectional approach to our CoPs has had the dual impact of benefiting our participants in their own practice and establishing our model as a respected mechanism for collaboration amongst practitioners across the prevention sector.

Some of our collaborator organisations include Djirra, Spark Health, drummond street services, the Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health, Respect Victoria, Senior Rights Victoria, Women’s Legal Service, VicHealth, Centre Against Sexual Assault, Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Gender Equity Victoria, Municipal Association of Victoria, Women’s Health Victoria, Carrington Health, and The Men’s Project.

“I aim to create a space where people are less bounded by structural barriers relating to workplaces, class, and ‘professionalism’ to inhabit a space where people can be more fully themselves, and have room to undertake critical reflection and transformative learning.”

– DVRCV COP FACILITATOR

SHARED EXPERIENCE AND SETTINGS

Our CoPs engage practitioners from across Victoria and are organised according to the type of work they are doing, their career stage in the prevention sector (e.g. entry level, leader, etc.), or the settings in which they work. This leads to meaningful exchanges, resource and experience sharing, and rich relationships.

“[It’s great to connect with] people that are happy to share things. Some organisations are really reluctant to share things... So, it’s really refreshing to come where everyone is so open and happy to share, and talk about similar things.”

– EARLY CAREER COP PARTICIPANT 2018-2019

Organising our CoPs in this way means that they complement other CoPs that are regionally focused, such as those run by Women’s Health Services. Practitioners working in the same locale are brought together to discuss issues relevant to the community within which they work.

SAFE SPACE, CLEAR PARAMETERS AND RICH RELATIONSHIPS

There are two key roles in a CoP which contribute to a successful community: the participant and the facilitator. The facilitator is responsible for creating a clear structure, a consistent meeting practice, and a safe environment where participants can have robust and vulnerable conversations. The participants are responsible for contributing the content and producing the outcomes. In addition to being trained and highly skilled, our DVRCV facilitators are also subject matter experts which means that the whole group shares a common language and understanding of primary prevention. The facilitators’ knowledge builds participant confidence and allows the discussions to deepen.

There are key practical parameters that help to create an engaged and effective CoP. With the guidance of the facilitator, the participants define a purpose at the formation of their group. This allows the group to agree on a clear goal that is relevant to their shared practice. A set of group agreements is also negotiated, which establishes the expectations and tone of the group and helps create a safe, supportive group culture. These processes highlight the participant-driven nature of our CoP model, where activities that centre, or ground, participants and enable respectful, robust discussion and exploration of ideas is emphasised.

“My experience of the CoP has been nothing but positive, I’ve felt deep trust and respect and always felt able to be myself and say what was on my mind.”

– EARLY CAREER COP PARTICIPANT 2018-2019

Group sizes are kept small enough to allow everyone to share their voice, but large enough to draw on a range of knowledge and experiences. This differs between in-person (maximum of 20 participants) and online (maximum of 12 participants) CoPs.

A CoP needs to be more than a once off meeting in order to mature and have long-term impact. Our CoPs are six meetings held monthly. This is an optimum time to build a rapport with the facilitator and each other, and achieve outcomes without overreaching time commitment. This regular meeting establishes the sense of consistency.

Regular meetings are matched with an expectation of attendance; participants attend a minimum of four out of the six meetings. And the first attendance has to be within the first two meetings, with an emphasis placed on attending the first meeting. What's more, the community focus is on the individual not their organisations. If a practitioner moves organisations but remains in the prevention sector they stay within the CoP and there are no substitutions. This contributes to the sense of consistency and connection within the community and also helps foster trust and safety.

“I’m not scared of being misunderstood, [I felt] that I could freely bounce my ideas and get feedback from similar people, as well as the experts.”

– EARLY CAREER COP PARTICIPANT 2018-2019

Our participants have reported that the sense of solidarity in their CoP aided the free and generous exchange of information, knowledge and ideas. The creation of a safe space facilitates openness, enhances learnings, and enables genuine connections among members. Our participants value the opportunity to form deeper relationships with other practitioners who share similar passions, barriers and challenges in their work. These outcomes should not be undervalued as participants have advised that the willingness to share can be limited in a sector where there is often competition for resources.

Our CoP model is more than a network; it benefits practitioners through a consistency of membership attendance in a group size that allows everyone to have a voice and the time to form trusting and rich relationships.

“One of the most important things to be able to do if you’re experiencing resistance, is to be able to get allies and celebrate success and support each other and do that collective self-care.”

– COP FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR PEER LEARNING

Our CoPs create the space for peer learning and problem solving. Participants share their own experiences and learn from other practitioners working in similar contexts in a trusting and supportive environment.

“The sort of stuff that isn’t included necessarily in evaluation reports is what we get from talking with our peers. You know, what hasn’t worked, and what the workarounds are...”

– EARLY CAREER COP PARTICIPANT, 2018-2019

Peer learning improves individual practice as practitioners apply the knowledge they've acquired in the CoP to their own workplace challenges and projects. In turn, peer learning and continuous improvement enables the delivery of improved, measurable results across the sector.

DVRCV also provides online platforms, such as Basecamp, to enable easy connection, resource sharing and continued learning between practitioners beyond the CoP meetings. This helps to nurture a network that has momentum and ongoing benefit for its participants.

“One of the other participants in my CoP was someone who is blind (...) As a result, I have been a much greater advocate for considering accessibility much earlier with the work that we do.”

– EARLY CAREER COP PARTICIPANT 2019-2020



DEVELOPING OUR MODEL

AT DVRCV WE CHALLENGE OURSELVES TO IMPROVE, GROW AND SPREAD OUR COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE. OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS WE WILL WORK TO DEVELOP OUR MODEL BY:

- Ensuring the CoPs remain a key element of capability building offerings to the prevention sector. They continue to enable practice development opportunities as part of broader efforts to build, advocate for, and contribute to the ongoing professionalisation of the expert prevention workforce in line with the Industry Plan, Change the Story and the Free From Violence Strategy.
- Continuing to draw on intersectional feminist approaches to underpin and support the development/evolution of our CoP model.
- Maintaining an organisational commitment to participant-driven, inclusive, thoughtful CoP facilitation and overall delivery.
- Further investment in developing specialisation in convening online CoPs to ensure that CoP delivery modalities are fit for purpose and support a range of access requirements.
- Exploring possibilities for running a rolling general PVAW community of practice (face to face and/or online) where people from previous cohorts can participate.
- Exploring options for setting up a CoP alumni network to ensure COP participants remain connected organically and create opportunities for greater sector coordination.
- Scoping options for synthesising the CoP model and the Group Supervision approach offered to response workers, and the potential to develop a model suitable for both response and prevention workers.
- Using data from DVRCV project evaluations, input from the PiP network and other prevention channels, ensure that CoP design and delivery remains informed by and responsive to sector and practitioner needs.

HELPING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE TO THRIVE

The prevention sector Communities of Practice require further investment if we are to reach our goals and achieve our shared vision of creating a world in which women and their children are thriving, respected and free from violence.

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE IN HELPING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE TO THRIVE:

FUNDING

Funding for DVRCV to continue to deliver the platform to prevention practitioners, and so we can continue to evaluate, learn and adapt our model to meet the changing needs of the prevention workforce.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership to provide their prevention practitioner staff with the time and the resources to participate and contribute to a CoP.

COMMITMENT

Commitment from prevention practitioners to engage with their CoP to share with, learn from, and support their peers.

CONCLUSION

IF WE ARE TO CREATE A WORLD WHERE WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN ARE FREE FROM VIOLENCE THEN IT IS VITAL THAT PREVENTION PRACTITIONERS RECEIVE SUPPORT TO DO THEIR WORK IN A PROGRESSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE WAY. AND BASED ON EVIDENCE, PARTICIPATION IN COPS IS RECOGNISED AS GOOD PRACTICE FOR PEOPLE WORKING IN THE PREVENTION SECTOR.

Given the scale of investment in violence prevention and its growing workforce, there is an ongoing need to provide clarity and consistency in supporting the professionalism and expertise of the sector.

We have seen CoP participants connect and grow their networks in a sector undergoing rapid change and expansion. We recognise that prevention workers face unique and shared challenges. CoPs play a key role in supporting practitioner wellbeing by fostering a sense of safety, support and collegiality among members, significantly boosting morale and reducing isolation. Having supportive peers and a safe environment to share challenges is important for practitioner, and therefore sector, health and wellbeing. By participating in CoPs, prevention practitioners have access to evidence-based information and resources, as well as opportunities to reflect on how their practice aligns with the broader sector.

Over and above the obvious benefits to members, DVRCV's CoPs provide an invaluable service to government in supporting sector development and 'sense-making' for professionals operating in a complex and evolving context. When CoPs are incorporated into sector networking and information sharing activities, practitioners can continuously improve their practice. By participating and investing in CoPs, we can work towards our shared vision for a world in which women and their children are thriving, respected and free from violence.



REFERENCES

Bartel, Doris. (2018). *Training and Mentoring Community Facilitators to Lead Critical Reflection Groups for Preventing Violence Against Women*. The Prevention Collaborative. https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/PRACTICE-BRIEF_Training-and-Mentoring-220818-Low-Res.pdf

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (2019). *Community of Practice Facilitation Guide V3*.

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (2019). *Free from Violence Workforce Capability Building Project Evaluation Report*.

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (2019). *Partners in Prevention Evaluation Report*.

Hoadley Christopher (2000). *What is a community of practice and how can we support it?*

Our Watch et al. (2015). *Change the Story: A shared Framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children*: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/>

Pyrko, Igor., Dörfler, Viktor. & Eden, Colin. (2017). *Thinking together: What makes Communities of Practice work?* Human Relations, Vol. 70(4) 389 –409

Wenger-Trayner (2015) *Communities of practice: a brief introduction*: <https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>

Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002). *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*.

Victorian Government (2017). *Preventing Family Violence and All Forms of Violence Against Women Capability Framework* <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-05/Preventing-Family-Violence-and-Violence-Against-Women-Capability-Framework.pdf>



52 Cardigan Street, Carlton 3053
ABN 31 202 397 579 | **RTO** 20853
T 03 9486 9866 | **F** 03 9486 9744
E dvrvc@dvrvc.org.au

