**Case Study: Bega Valley Staying Home Leaving Violence Project (Australia)**

The Bega Valley Staying Home Leaving Violence initiative was developed as a result of the Australian government’s growing concerns over the effects of homelessness on domestic violence survivors. It aimed to reduce the risk of homelessness and trauma of relocation for survivors; engage the community in supporting more options for all parties affected by the issue; and facilitate a collaborative partnership and coordinated strategy to improve service support to women and children. The initiative was launched in October 2004 as a two-year pilot supported by the New South Wales Department of Community Services and managed by the Bega Women’s Refuge. It was developed following [research findings](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/SHLV.pdf) published by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse that recommended making the home safe for abused women and their children.

**Background and process:**

The initiative had a focus to provide new options for women and children experiencing domestic violence. In particular, it aimed to identify the conditions required for women to stay in their homes in order to promote their long-term stability and security within their home and community environments (Bega Staying Home Leaving Violence Pilot Executive Summary, 2007; Staying Home Leaving Violence website, 2007). The initiative also tested traditional assumptions about women in domestic violence situations, such as:

* Escaping violence reqires women to leave home.
* It is not safe for women to remain in their homes.
* The perpetrator will not leave the home.

The initiative was designed with several stages, beginning with a pilot from October 2004 to May 2005. The initiative was heavily informed by the knowledge and experience of similar pilots, including:

* An Eyre Peninsula Women and Children’s Support Centre initiative from 1998
* A Victorian Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Services initiative from 2002

Coordinated Responses

Recognizing the experiences from other states and territories, the pilot noted that a successful domestic violence model would require a collaborative network of key agencies. A number of agreements and partnerships with local police and the departments of Housing and Corrective Services contributed to a collaborative service provision model in Bega. The model promotes key actions by several actors within the system:

*Police*

* Encourage women and children to remain in their homes unless there are immediate dangers identified.
* Encourage women to actively seek exclusion orders if an offender was arrested and/or [telephone interim order](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/vaw/dvguidelines.nsf/pages/protectvictims) issued.
* Contact both the survivor and domestic violence worker to inform them of the conditions of bail or telephone interim order.
* Offer accommodation for the offender at nominated accommodation centres.
* Complete of the Victim Consent form and submission to Bega Women’s refuge for follow-up.
* Update of original COPS entry with information that the victim and location are part of the pilot programme, which enables all police to be aware of a victim/location being part of the programme if called to another incident involving the parties.
* Inform all police at stations where there are victims in the pilot of the victim/location so that proactive patrols can be made and recorded of the location.

*Pilot Staff*

* Receive referrals of women from police, other services or self-referral.
* Conduct a risk assessment procedure designed to assist the client to make an informed choice about staying in the home.
* Ensure women have necessary protection orders including an exclusion order.
* Conduct a safety audit of the home, and offer/ install security upgrades in the home (e.g. Vitalcall phone alarm, a mobile phone, security doors, changed locks and sensor lights).
* Conduct safety planning with women.
* Refer women to appropriate support agencies (e.g. victims services counsellors).

*Court*

* Staff provide women with information about the pilot.
* Demonstrate public support on the aims of the pilot (local Magistrate) and cooperation in providing benchmark data on the numbers of exclusion orders made (e.g. for a 6-month period following client support work).
* Mandate offenders to a Department of Corrective Service Perpetrator Program (Magistrate).

*Programme staff working on community engagement*

* Distribute information about the pilot through a community education campaign to 10,000 homes in the Bega Valley, followed by radio and theatre commercials, print and radio interviews.
* Organize an information forum by the pilot, attended by many services from the region and featuring key speakers (the Bega Valley Mayor, the Assistant Commissioner of the New South Wales Police, etc.).

Collaboration with key agencies was facilitated through the following measures:

* A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the local police, which addressed practice issues, the need for information sharing, problem solving and training. This helped to reduce the negative impact of police staff turnover on the pilot. It also improved relations between the pilot staff and local police, but was limited by the lack of a senior police staff member serving as the liaison for the project.
* A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the local Department of Housing, “outlining referral procedures, processes for upgrades to Department housing with SHLV clients and the provision of temporary accommodation to excluded partners”.
* A Memorandum of Understanding was also signed with the Bega Women’s Domestic Violence Court Assistance Scheme to clarify referral and case management parameters.
* MOUs were planned with the Sapphire Coast Community Tenancy Scheme and the Victims Assistance Scheme to allow the pilot to lodge applications for replacement locks, repairs and cleanup related to domestic violence.

Direct support services and expanded outreach

Following the important publicity campaign (2005), the pilot began to support women choosing to stay in their homes. A [new message](http://www.stayinghomeleavingviolence.org.au/10746%20WomensRefugeBro.p0002.pdf) was developed in 2006 for launch in early 2007: “*it doesn’t matter where you live, who you live with, how many times it has happened, you have the right to live safely in your home*.” The message reflected the diversity of women who accessed the pilot and aimed to reinforce a sense of community engagement with the pilot and its goals. The programme had a multi-pronged communication strategy to reach a broad range of audiences:

* A large card format with the message was distributed to 10,000 homes.
* A [website](http://www.stayinghomeleavingviolence.org.au) with materials from [community and advertising campaigns](http://www.stayinghomeleavingviolence.org.au/staying%20home%20leaving%20violence_community_%20education.htm); [advice for women and children escaping domestic violence](http://www.stayinghomeleavingviolence.org.au/staying%20home%20leaving%20violence_practical_info.htm); programme policies and procedures and research materials was created.
* A series of television, radio and theatre advertisements were produced, featuring local respected authorities (Bega Valley Shire Mayor, an Aboriginal elder and a newspaper editor).

The second round of the educational campaign cost approximately $13,000, supported by the Bega Valley Shire Council, local clubs through the Community Development Support Expenditure Program and donations of free playtime on local radio, television and cinema.

Policies and Procedures

To enhance the initiative’s operation, procedures were developed including risk assessment, safety plans and security upgrades to the homes. Security features were the most appreciated elements of the service and 70% of women chose to have the upgrades installed. The security upgrades cost on average less than $200 per woman and proved very effective.

**Results**

In June 2007, Purple Kangaroo Consultants evaluated the Bega pilot covering the period April 2006 to March 2007. It concluded that the aims related to reducing the risk of homelessness and trauma for survivors and engagement with the community were achieved, but that significant challenges prevented the achievement of greater collaboration with partners.

Results of the evaluation identified key outcomes from the pilot:

The risk of homelessness and the trauma normally associated with relocation were reduced

* A majority of women (59%) had positive outcomes from being able to stay safely in their homes or able to stay safely in the area.
* Out of 27 cases: 16 had positive experiences (either remaining in their home, in the area, or relocating to a new area); 11 women reported negative experiences (either as a result of needing to relocate or remaining in the violent relationship); and one woman’s case was terminated due to inappropriate behaviour.
* All women interviewed (16 total) reported feeling safer after participating in the pilot, noting the physical safety improvements to their home as the most effective factor.
* The pilot promoted a number of agreements and partnerships, which formed the basis of a collaborative service provision model.

The community engagement supported more options for all parties affected by domestic violence

* Community engagement was developed through a [community education campaign](http://www.stayinghomeleavingviolence.org.au/staying%20home%20leaving%20violence_community_%20education.htm), which presented a positive message that “the home could be made safe for women and children who had experienced domestic violence, and perpetrators could change their behaviour” (Bega Valley, 2007). The new message was widely embraced by the community.
* The campaign was also successful because women could inform themselves about their rights in a normal environment (such as the theatre, at home, etc.) “*the pilot promoted a new way of looking at domestic violence in the general community – not ‘she and her kids should leave’, but ‘she and her kids should be safe at home’*.” Bega Valley, 2007).
* The effectiveness of the second communications campaign (2007), demonstrated “...*a 94% recognition rate (TV commercials being most recognized, followed by radio) matched by a good understanding of the issues raised by the campaign and emphatic support for the aims of the pilot*.” See the street survey.

(Bega Staying Home Leaving Violence Pilot Executive Summary, 2007)

Collaborative partnerships and coordinated strategies improved support services

* Standard Operating Procedures were developed with the local police facilitated through reference cards to maximize information sharing, encourage police removal of violent partners, inform women about the pilot and excluded partners of their options.
* Temporary hotel accommodation was provided by the Department of Housing to homeless excluded partners.
* The Department of Corrective Services funded a mandated perpetrator programme.
* Training sessions on supporting women who decided to stay in their homes were offered to community service agencies and police staff.
* Relationships with police and courts remained strained, despite women reporting satisfaction with the non-judgemental, supportive assistance of the case workers.

Given these positive outcomes, the pilot received support from the Department of Community Services, Community Services Division to continue.

**Lessons learned**

* Dedicated policy-level support, mandating required changes in practices, is needed at the local and regional level to maintain interagency agreements and prevent loss of institutional memory related to staff turnover in key agencies and departments.
* Programmes should be designed with institutionalized and consistent staffing to ensure commitment and knowledge retention (within the programme and partner agencies), maintain relationships with partner agencies and enable programme components to be successfully implemented over time. The Bega Pilot was designed with a change in staff following the public information campaign (2005-2006), which contributed to a loss of knowledge and implementation capacity and was compounded by high staff turnover across partner agencies.
* A collaborative service approach requires strong partnerships with core agencies and clearly outlined responsibilities through MOUs to ensure holistic support to survivors at all times and prevent gaps in critical programme components.
* An important educational campaign can ensure women are informed of the option to stay in their homes, and to gain community support for the model. Such campaigns can be financially feasible by engaging a variety of partners for contributions (e.g. funders, governmental agencies, media, clubs and other organizations).
* Designing educational campaigns to the specific geographic and social context is critical to their success. The Bega campaign was based on its rural context and engaging the many existing domestic violence services and collaborative network in place to successfully raise awareness of the problem locally. The message of the second educational campaign was also efficiently spread across the Bega Valley using a wide array of mediums: print information, website and television, theatre and radio advertisements, drawing upon significant local contributions.

**Recommendations**

In the [Pilot Executive Summary](http://www.stayinghomeleavingviolence.org.au/Exec_Summary_Repor_Aug_2007.doc) by the Bega Women’s Refuge Inc., staff created recommendations to inform future programmes, including:

* Establish a domestic and family violence strategy or framework to link all family violence-related programmes operating within the region to support the achievement of the State Plan.
* Ensure key government agencies take responsibility for supporting and implementing such a Strategy.
* Link the project with other domestic and family violence related programmes under the Strategy.
* Develop generic Memoranda of Understanding; policies and procedures to facilitate replication.
* Prioritize the location of pilots in areas with a well-resourced network of Aboriginal domestic violence services to ensure optimum outcomes for Aboriginal families.
* Ensure membership of key indigenous services.
* Promote the Department of Corrective Services to establish a state-wide programme to respond to offenders as part of the domestic violence strategy.
* Develop state-wide training on the model to support the broad expansion of the programme.
* Assign a local domestic violence liaison officer or senior police liaison for the initiative.
* Advocate for the amendment of tenancy legislation to include domestic violence as a cause for terminating a tenancy agreement.
* Establish regional committees for similar initiatives which report outcomes and share learning.
* Develop a state-wide and regional communication strategy to promote expansion of the programme.
* Utilize a broad range of communication media to raise awareness of the programme to ensure the most vulnerable groups have access to information and can make informed choices.
* Train relevant agencies to understand their role and responsibility to the initiative and domestic violence survivors.

Sources: Edwards, 2004. [“Staying Home Leaving Violence”](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/SHLV.pdf); Staying Home Leaving Violence website, 2007; Bega Valley, 2007.