

The fight is on to tackle increasing incidents of domestic violence

Breaking the culture

THE impact of domestic violence is sweeping through the region and Cooroonya Domestic Violence Services has made a plea for the rural city to unite its voice and alert neighboring communities of the problem.

After an executive board meeting this week, following the release of last week's VicHealth report outlining the severity of domestic violence in the state, acting team leader, Simone, said it was time to identify the real issues surrounding the crime.

Physical, sexual, emotional, economic, verbal and social factors are the most common instigators of domestic violence and often one is not in isolation.

Simone said Cooroonya, together with the other local support networks, including the police, and the courts, are about to strengthen their commitment to the region's FAX-BACK and Fresh Start initiatives.

"We are committed to challenging the culture of family violence in the North East," Simone said.

"It is about empowering women and children to create possible change."

Simone said the region's latest projects have increased the awareness and the number of reports made to the service, but there is still improvement to be made, with only 20 per cent of the region's victims of domestic violence seeking help.



Special feature by journalist **Harriet Morley**

"People are starting to talk, opening up the discussion about relationships," she said.

The local initiatives will soon include an anger management component where the perpetrator can seek counselling and help to overcome domestic abuse attacks, which can often be a result of a history of family violence.

Wangaratta's Senior Sergeant Shane Downie admitted the integration projects do not offer direct support services to the offending person saying it is important to enforce a service capable of assisting all parties in overcoming the crime.

The most recent addition to the local initiatives was to give police the right to bring couples before the Wangaratta Magistrates Court to have intervention orders sought, in an attempt to protect victims.

Snr Sgt Downie said in the past it was common for a woman to obtain an intervention order and days later request the order be lifted after the couple 'made up'.

"We saw it so many times. The police were called back days later to the same house for another complaint of abuse.

It is about empowering women and children to create possible change.

"I was once called to the same premises 27 times.

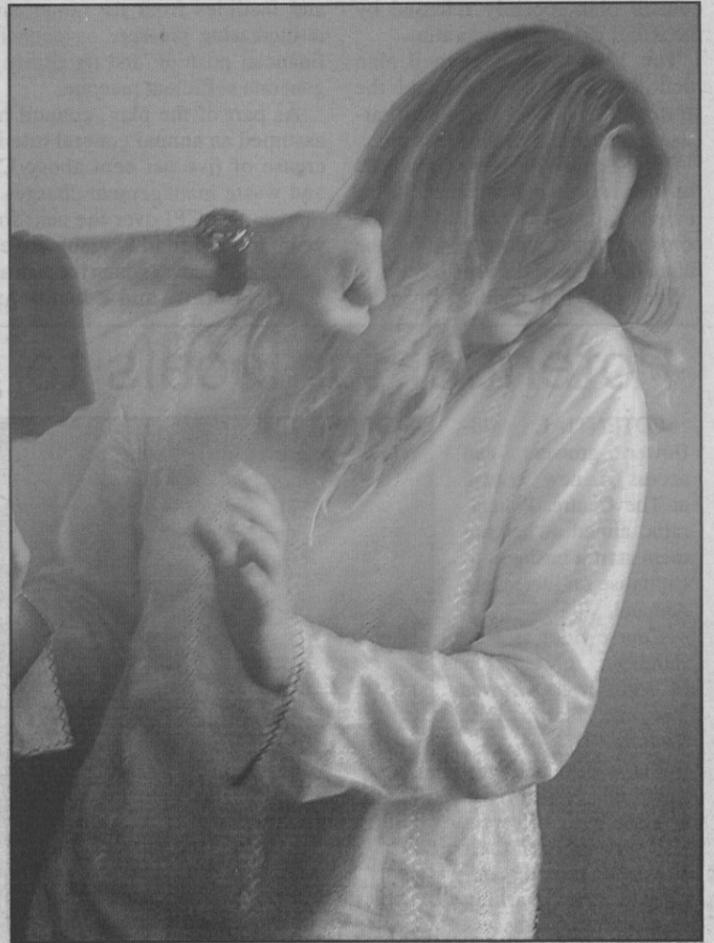
"It is important the magistrate hears this evidence from the police, and the police are given the duty to protect the victim as much as they can."

Snr Sgt Downie said the FAX-BACK initiative had been a successful system of collaborative support with police reporting each incident to appropriate support services, like Cooroonya, who then make contact with the victim.

Simone said it is important the community is aware of the service's 24-hour telephone help line and the confidentiality of the service.

"Cooroonya is a free confidential service for women and children, provided on an individual basis, which assists women in accessing crisis and emergency accommodation and support," Simone said.

To seek help call Cooroonya's 24-hour help line support service on 1800 721100.



Domestic violence can take up a full day each week at Wangaratta Magistrates Court. Here's a handful of cases (names withheld) dealt with this week...

Case 1

A WANGARATTA woman told local magistrate Peter Couzens this week she feared for her life and the life of her eight-year-old son.

The woman sought a second intervention order on her former husband who allegedly breached the previous order a number of times and made threats to kill her and her son.

The woman told the court her ex-husband had harassed teachers at her son's primary school and verbally abused her on numerous occasions.

"I am extremely scared of him," she said.

The woman told the court the man had never paid maintenance costs and her son had made the decision to discontinue contact with his father.

"I ask the court to prevent him from having any contact with my family without the presence of a police officer," she said.

Magistrate Couzens told the woman her former husband would not be allowed to assault, harass, intimidate, contact, or be within 200 metres of her and her son.

"If he breaks this order he could face two years imprisonment and a \$24,000 fine, before any other convictions," Magistrate Couzens said.

Case 3

WANGARATTA magistrate Peter Couzens refused a Wangaratta couple seeking to have their intervention order lifted this week.

The order, which has three months remaining, will continue after police gave evidence to the court that officers had attended the couple's house 14 times in eight months on matters involving family incident reports.

Wangaratta's Senior Constable Health Dosser told the court police felt there was a need to keep the order in place because of the man's repeated history of domestic violence.

Case 2

POLICE believe a local man who married 12 months ago has abused his wife in the couple's Wangaratta home, and requested magistrate Peter Couzens to impose an intervention order on him.

The man was sentenced with a seven day interim order, and will re-appear in court next week.

Police prosecutor Senior Constable Health Dosser told the court police attended the couple's residence after a civilian reported domestic violence.

Snr Const Dosser said police thought it was in the best interest of the woman to have an intervention order placed on her husband.

The matter was stood down for seven days to allow the woman, who is not an Australian citizen, to seek legal advice.

The man told the court he worked to support them both and it took a toll on their relationship.

"We have had arguments but I have never hurt my wife," the man said.

Case 4

A BEECHWORTH man with a history of family violence was ordered to have a psychiatric and psychological assessment and will reappear at the Wangaratta Magistrate's Court on two counts of dangerous driving and one count of assault.

Solicitor Debra McLay told the court the 21-year-old had been physically abused by his father on numerous occasions, and had personal previous convictions related to physical abuse.

The man had been charged with the offences after unlawfully assaulting a man who verbally abused his girlfriend, before driving away from the scene in a dangerous manner.

Ms McLay told magistrate Peter Couzens her client had taken positive steps to make a recovery from his behavioral trends by seeking ongoing psychological assistance and anger management counselling.

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