

# Promoting equality and respect: An interfaith collaboration on preventing family violence

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## Abstract

Faith communities are an important setting for the prevention of violence against women. Faith leaders are significant role models and provide moral guidance and ethics to the community. Therefore, they can play an important role in influencing social norms and beliefs that prevent and reduce violence against women. Faith leaders can also lead the way in advocating to change gender inequitable structures and practices within their own settings and in broader society (such as advocating for greater inclusion and participation of women in leadership and decision-making positions).

The CHALLENGE Family Violence project (2013-2015), funded by the Victorian Department of Justice and Regulation in partnership with City of Casey, Cardinia Shire Council, City of Greater Dandenong and Monash Health, built the capacity of community leaders across faith, culturally and linguistically diverse, sport, business and local and state government settings to challenge violence-supportive attitudes and promote equity and respect toward women. The City of Greater Dandenong collaborated closely with leaders and people of diverse faith and spiritual traditions including Baha'i, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islam, Jewish, Sathya Sai and Sikh to develop a resource kit to prevent family violence and, specifically, men's violence against women in the community.

In close partnership between the City of Greater Dandenong and an Interfaith Working Group, a resource kit, *Promoting equality and respect: An interfaith collaboration on preventing family violence*, was developed; to enable faith leaders to have discussions about family violence prevention within their communities and to support faith leaders to identify and challenge gender inequitable systems, structures, attitudes and beliefs that can contribute to family violence within their settings. The resource kit contains information about family violence, violence against women and primary prevention, ideas for taking action to prevent violence against women, along with references to religious texts that reinforce gender equality and respect toward women.

Project evaluation findings reinforce the importance of faith-based contexts for the prevention of men's violence against women through the promotion of gender equality and respect toward women. There is also significant value of an interfaith approach in developing shared understandings, cooperation and actions between faith and spiritual communities to prevent and address family violence. Such an approach has resulted in the development of a vital resource kit that is far reaching and inclusive of a range of faith and spiritual traditions.