



Evaluation Report

OF THE
ABORIGINAL FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION
AND LEGAL SERVICE VICTORIA'S
EARLY INTERVENTION AND
PREVENTION PROGRAM



Aboriginal Family
Violence Prevention
& Legal Service Victoria
**Standing Firm Against
Family Violence**



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Acknowledgements:

Artwork by Wanda Bargo

Wanda Bargo is a Kuku Yalanji woman born on Wurundjeri land. Her artwork is featured through this publication.

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1 Project Background

The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria (FVPLS Victoria) is an Aboriginal community controlled organisation established in 2002. It receives funding from the Commonwealth and State Government, Victoria Legal Aid and the Legal Services Board to provide assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Aboriginal) victims of family violence and work with families and communities affected by violence..

FVPLS Victoria's vision is to 'see strengthened and resilient Aboriginal communities with increased access to justice, reductions in family violence and improved holistic well-being resulting from the provision of culturally safe services'.

To achieve its vision FVPLS Victoria provides legal services to Aboriginal victims of family violence and sexual assault, advocates for legal and policy reform¹ and conducts a range of activities as part of its Community Legal Education (CLE) program. The focus of these activities is:

- building capacity to prevent family violence
- addressing the impacts of family violence, and
- reducing family violence re-victimisation.

The CLE program incorporates Early Intervention and Prevention (EIP) activities which have been created by, and for, Aboriginal women. The activities are culturally safe, respect the personal and sensitive nature of family violence and have an emphasis on participants' social and emotional well-being.

EIP activities include *Sisters Day Out*[®], *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey*. The *Sisters Day Out* workshop was developed by FVPLS Victoria and has a registered trademark to FVPLS Victoria. The *Dilly Bag* program was

developed by Wanda Braybrook and Kelly Faldon of Kellawan Pty Ltd and has been delivered in partnership with FVPLS Victoria. More than 6,000 Aboriginal women have participated in these activities since 2007.

FVPLS Victoria cites a number of reasons for focussing these activities on the needs of women. Firstly and most importantly, they assert that women are more likely to be the victims of family violence, and therefore should be the primary recipients of their services and support. FVPLS Victoria states that approximately 90%² of its clients are women.

In 2013, FVPLS Victoria received a funding grant from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation to engage an independent evaluator to assess the outcomes of its EIP program. FVPLS Victoria indicated³ that the outcomes of the EIP program should be measured by evaluating the following EIP activities: *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey*.

By seeking to evaluate its EIP program FVPLS Victoria displays an understanding of evaluation as an integral part of the planning and management of community engagement and education programs. The evaluation project will provide information to FVPLS Victoria and assist in its assessment of the following:

- are the programs' expected outcomes being achieved, and
- are the programs meeting the needs of Aboriginal victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault.

The evaluation project will also provide a qualitative and quantitative evidence base which will allow FVPLS Victoria to explore further funding options.

This report presents the findings of the EIP Program Evaluation Project (hereafter referred to as 'the project').

July 2014

**This Evaluation Report was prepared by
Barbara Karahasan for FVPLS Victoria.**

¹ FVPLS Victoria does not receive government funding for policy and advocacy activities – this work is supported through philanthropic funding

² Statistic provided by FVPLS Victoria, March 2014.

³ FVPLS Victoria, *EIP Program Evaluation Project, Request for Offer*, 2013

2 EIP Activities

The following EIP activities will be evaluated by the project:

- **Sisters Day Out**
- **Dilly Bag**
- **Dilly Bag: The Journey**

In this report:

- observations, comments and findings that refer to **Dilly Bag: The Journey** also apply to **Dilly Bag** unless otherwise stated
- 'Dilly Bag programs' means **Dilly Bag** and **Dilly Bag: The Journey**
- the words 'program', 'workshop' and 'activity' are used interchangeably and have the same meaning.

2.1 Sisters Day Out

2.1.1 Overview

Sisters Day Out brings Aboriginal women together for a day of pampering and relaxation. The atmosphere is warm, welcoming and fun and provides a break from day-to-day concerns and worries. In addition to activities designed to enhance and promote self-esteem and well-being, participants have access to local legal and support services and are provided with information about family violence and its many guises.

The fun, pampering and social aspects of *Sisters Day Out* are deliberate design elements that make the atmosphere informal, relaxed and non-threatening. The environment may be 'light hearted' but there is an understanding from participants that the underlying reason for the day is to raise awareness of family violence. That *Sisters Day Out* is able to balance the casual and fun atmosphere with such a serious and sensitive topic shows the great skill and expertise of the program designers and FVPLS Victoria. It also makes the program unique.

The relaxed environment also provides an appropriate backdrop for the introduction of legal and support services that Aboriginal women may not have previously considered because of negative community and/or personal experience. Again, *Sisters Day Out* successfully achieves the right balance; the program designers and FVPLS Victoria carefully select the services providers based on relevance to participants and the subject matter, and give women the choice to decide which service best meets their needs. There is no pressure on participants and they are free to talk with service providers only if they choose to do so.

Sisters Day Out has four main components:

- **Access to services**

A range of service providers, both mainstream and Aboriginal specific, are represented at *Sisters Day Out*. Participants are able to speak to agencies in a casual and relaxed environment and receive immediate advice and/or make arrangements for a meeting in the future. In addition, participants may also have a consultation with a FVPLS Victoria lawyer and/or counsellor. These consultations are private and confidential and offer women immediate access to legal and counselling services.

- **Self-care and well-being**

Participants may receive a variety of beauty and relaxation therapies from 'pamperers' at *Sisters Day Out*. All therapies are provided free of charge to participants. A dance session is also conducted as an informal and fun group activity to promote physical well-being and health.

- **Access to information**

Service providers are available to provide information to participants. Many agencies also provide written material with key information and contact details.

- **Education**

FVPLS Victoria delivers an information session which includes a presentation on the meaning of family violence, what assistance is available, who to contact for assistance and explanations of common legal terms e.g. intervention order.

Sisters Day Out is the important first step which brings Aboriginal women together to talk about family violence and introduce relevant legal and support services. The intention is to attract as many participants as possible and the program achieves this by promoting the day as fun-filled and community focussed. Word of mouth and personal recommendations from participants ensure that participant numbers increase when *Sisters Day Out* returns to the same location.

The next level of engagement is achieved through the *Dilly Bag* or *Dilly Bag: The Journey* programs. These programs are more intensive and the participation groups are significantly smaller than *Sisters Day Out* due to the nature of the programs' activities. These programs are described on the following pages.

2.1.2 Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes⁴ of *Sisters Day Out* are:

- improved family violence identification & prevention capacity
- improved knowledge & understanding of family violence related law and justice processes
- increased access to legal advice & counselling
- increased access to services, including mainstream services
- reduced isolation; improved community networks
- enhanced self-esteem
- enhanced decision making capacity
- enhanced connection to culture
- improved health and well-being

2.2 Dilly Bag and Dilly Bag: The Journey

2.2.1 Overview – Dilly Bag Programs

The *Dilly Bag* programs encourage personal development through a range of activities which are specially designed by, and for, Aboriginal women. The programs address deeply personal matters. Therefore, the number of participants is restricted to ensure that women feel comfortable to talk freely and openly about their experiences, worries and concerns.

From the outset, the program is different from mainstream personal development workshops. There are no uncomfortable or awkward introduction activities designed to take women out of their comfort zone. Instead, the first activity at *Dilly Bag* encourages participants to introduce themselves and begin talking and sharing through relaxing group activities such as games and/or creative crafts like beading or weaving. Through these activities participants are able to begin the process of sharing stories and experiences. At first, the conversation may be 'light' but it is not forced or judgemental. After the initial introductions, the group may go on to watch a family violence short film to encourage more conversation and storytelling. The individual needs of participants are respected and women are able to contribute by listening and/or by sharing their stories.

The cultural elements incorporated into the design of *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* touch all aspects of the programs' design including:

- the choice of program facilitators
- physical environment (venue and location)
- atmosphere and mood
- topics addressed through program activities.

4 FVPLS Victoria, *EIP Program Evaluation Project, Request for Offer*, 2013

The *Dilly Bag* programs acknowledge the anger, grief, mistrust and fear caused by historic events and current government policies in Australia. Program activities seek to begin the healing process by focussing on the positive traits of participants and the richness of, and traditional values found within, Aboriginal society and culture. The strengths and roles of Aboriginal women are reaffirmed and celebrated as positive and strong. These are important truths that 200+ years of European settlement and domination has sought to erode and silence through an unjust system of rules bought about by false or misguided beliefs.

From a design perspective, the structure of the *Dilly Bag* programs is flexible and allows delivery to be tailored to the needs of the participants. A follow up activity is held approximately one month after the program to provide participants with support and encouragement and the opportunity to reflect on the program.

2.2.2 Overview – Dilly Bag: The Journey

Dilly Bag: The Journey is an adaption of the *Dilly Bag* workshop which incorporates overnight accommodation for participants in a calm, relaxing and culturally significant location for the duration of the program. The daytime activities of both *Dilly Bag* programs are similar, but the inclusion of overnight accommodation gives the participants additional time to focus on relaxation and self-care. It removes participants from their usual environment and shifts their focus away from day-to-day concerns and worries. The addition of overnight accommodation also gives participants more time to build and strengthen their friendships with other women in peaceful and idyllic surrounds.

2.2.3 Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes⁵ of the *Dilly Bag* programs are:

- improved family violence identification & prevention capacity
- improved knowledge & understanding of family violence related law and justice processes
- increased access to support services &/or legal services
- reduced isolation; improved community networks
- enhanced self-esteem
- enhanced decision making capacity
- enhanced connection to culture
- improved health and well-being
- demonstrated family violence leadership capacity

Dilly Bag: The Journey has an additional expected outcome⁶:

- participants empowered and with renewed strength to address life stressors for themselves, families and communities.

5 FVPLS Victoria, *EIP Program Evaluation Project, Request for Offer*, 2013

6 Ibid

3 Evaluation Approach

3.1 Evaluation Questions

The project was guided by and sought to answer the following questions:

- Question 1: Have the expected outcomes of the EIP activities⁷: *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* been met?
- Question 2: What qualitative data is available to support the evaluation of the EIP activities and how can it be used to measure the achievement of outcomes?
- Question 3: What quantitative data is available to support the evaluation of the EIP activities and how can it be used to measure the achievement of outcomes?

During the development of the project's Evaluation Framework FVPLS Victoria agreed that for the purposes of the evaluation the expected outcomes for each EIP activity would be grouped and assessed under the following broad headings:

- Individual knowledge and understanding
- Individual development and well-being

Table 1 identifies the expected outcomes for each EIP activity and maps these to the broad headings listed above.

Table 1: Expected Outcomes – Sisters Day Out, Dilly Bag and Dilly Bag: The Journey

Heading	Expected outcomes (for <i>Sisters Day Out</i> , <i>Dilly Bag</i> and <i>Dilly Bag: The Journey</i>)
Individual knowledge and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved family violence identification & prevention capacity• Improved knowledge & understanding of family violence related law and justice processes• Increased access to support services & / or legal services, including mainstream services• Reduced isolation; improved community networks
Individual development and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhanced self esteem• Enhanced decision making capacity• Enhanced connection to culture• Improved health and well-being• Demonstrated family violence leadership capacity• Empowered and with renewed strength to address life stressors for self, family and community

Source: FVPLS Victoria, *EIP Program Evaluation Project, Request for Offer*, 2013

⁷ The evaluator notes that FVPLS Victoria's *EIP Program Evaluation Project, Request for Offer*, 2013 refers to the evaluation of a broader EIP program but understands from discussion with FVPLS Victoria staff that the project scope only requires the study of the following EIP activities: *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* and the extent to which the expected outcomes align with the actual outcomes for Aboriginal women.

3.2 Information and Data

The project considered qualitative and quantitative data.

3.2.1 Qualitative data

Qualitative data was obtained from:

- Face-to-face and telephone conversations with program participants at:
 - *Sisters Day Out* workshops held in Broadmeadows and Swan Hill (February 2014)
 - *Dilly Bag: The Journey – Follow Up* held in Dandenong and Ballarat (February 2014).
- Face-to-face conversations with service providers and pamperers at *Sisters Day Out* held in Broadmeadows and Swan Hill (February 2014)
- Telephone conversations with a representative sample of participants who had attended *Sisters Day Out*
- FVPLS Victoria provided results from Participant Satisfaction Surveys completed by participants of *Sisters Day Out* and *Dilly Bag* workshops held in 2013.

The evaluator spoke with approximately 35 *Sisters Day Out* participants and 20 *Dilly Bag* participants during the research phase of the project to gain an understanding of the impact of the programs and whether the expected outcomes of the programs had been achieved. Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face except for a small number which were conducted by telephone.

In addition, the evaluator spoke with the facilitators of *Sisters Day Out* and *Dilly Bag*, FVPLS Victoria staff and service providers and pamperers at *Sisters Day Out* (Broadmeadows and Swan Hill, February 2014).

The qualitative data was used to assess the short, medium and long term impacts of EIP activities and whether participation had changed behaviour, raised awareness of family violence and legal and other support services and/or influenced participant's decision making. It also provided insight into the benefits of *Sisters Day Out* from the perspective of the service providers and pamperers.

FVPLS Victoria staff and the program facilitators also provided valuable and important information about the background and context of the programs and the culturally safe design elements which make the programs important and unique.

More formal evaluation approaches such as written questionnaires, surveys and control and sample groups were considered but were deemed inappropriate for the following reasons:

- the project timeframe
- the scale of the project, and
- data collection through formal methods would

represent 'white system' tools which carry negative associations e.g. invasive and impersonal.

Taking the above into consideration, the evaluator together with FVPLS Victoria staff agreed that the most effective way of evaluating the EIP programs was to talk face-to-face with participants and ask them to share their thoughts and experiences through informal conversation. A small number of participants were contacted by phone by the evaluator to give the project a wide range of views to consider.

The evaluator guided the participant conversations / interviews with the following questions:

- Is this the first time you've attended <insert program name>?
- If yes, how many times have you attended the <insert program name> and have you travelled to locations outside your 'local' area?
- What would you like to get out of today (prompt with ...fun, catch up with friends, other things?)
- Do you think <insert program name> is a good way of getting women together to talk about family violence? Why?
- What have you liked about <insert program name> today?
- Is there anything you don't like or would change?
- Have you had a chance to speak with any of the service providers today? If so, which ones?
- Have you had your nails or hair done or maybe a massage? Do you like having these treatments at *Sisters Day Out*?
- If you were writing the final report, what would you say is the most important thing about <insert program name>?

The evaluator used these questions as a guide but did not ask them exactly as written in every interview. Participants were encouraged to express their opinions and share their stories to the extent to which they were comfortable. Participants were not asked direct questions about their personal circumstances or if they had experienced family violence. In spite of this, many participants spoke openly about their personal experiences and these conversations were managed with tact, respect and sensitivity. The evaluator did not seek to draw out personal information but allowed participants to choose how much detail they were comfortable speaking about.

Participants were advised that no individual would be highlighted within the report i.e. no case studies and that the purpose of the interviews / conversations was to determine common themes and general impressions and draw conclusions from these.

The evaluator considers that the common themes extracted from the opinions and experiences of participants are more compelling than individual

stories or case studies. The evaluator was also mindful that the conversations were as relaxed as possible to avoid participants from feeling interrogated or uncomfortable about their participation in the interview process.

The evaluator was particularly careful in the phrasing of interview questions and how the project was described to reduce anxieties or nervousness about the evaluation. At all times, the evaluator sought to reassure participants that the project did not represent or seek to endorse any form of mainstream 'system' authority but instead was guided and informed by their contributions and input.

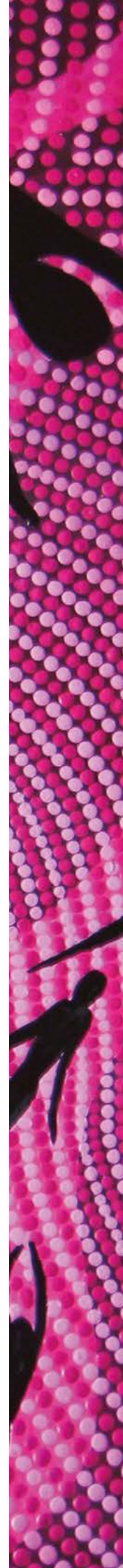
The evaluator appreciates the trust and openness of the women that provided information for this report.

3.2.2 Quantitative data

Quantitative data was obtained from FVPLS Victoria. It provided statistical information on the EIP activities held since 2007.

Financial data for *Sisters Day Out* and *Dilly Bag* was not provided to the evaluator as a cost analysis was not within the scope of the project.

Additional statistic information was obtained from sources as identified within the report.



4 Evaluation Findings

The evaluation findings for *Dilly Bag: The Journey* apply to *Dilly Bag* unless otherwise stated.

Findings are presented in two broad topic areas as described below:

FINDINGS: CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- *Context and program design*
- *Policy background*
- *Program funding*

FINDINGS: EIP PROGRAMS

- *Overview*
- ***Sisters Day Out***
 - *workshop and participant data*
 - *participant feedback*
 - *service provider feedback*
 - *challenges and opportunities*
- ***Dilly Bag***
 - *workshop and participant data*
 - *participant feedback*
 - *challenges and opportunities*

4.1 Findings: Context and Background

4.1.1 Context and culturally safe program design

The evaluation of FVPLS Victoria's early intervention and prevention activities must be considered within the context of Australian political and historical events. Notwithstanding that it is more than 200 years since first contact between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans, it is still relevant and important for this project to recognise the complex interplay of issues between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Australians and:

- the impact of these issues in the past, and also today, and
- how these issues influence and shape the design and delivery of the EIP programs under review.

For Aboriginal people the early colonisation of Australia was characterised by violent oppression, dispossession, destruction of culture and the establishment of management practices which controlled every element of Aboriginal life. Subsequent policies of segregation, integration and assimilation were designed to break down Aboriginal society and culture. Many of these policies, attitudes and values (now in different guises) remain today and continue to impact negatively upon the health and well-being of Aboriginal communities.

The policy settings of successive governments determined that the best way forward for the nation was to remove Aboriginal children from their Aboriginal families and communities. The agents of the state who implemented these policies were most often police, teachers, doctors, welfare officers, church ministers and their wives, and a raft of other non-Aboriginal professionals. Aboriginal people to this day are wary of government officials, programs and other mainstream services. This unease and mistrust stems from years of trauma, racism, systemic violence and mistreatment and exclusion from mainstream Australian life. It has had particular and specific effects on Aboriginal women in their diverse roles as mothers, partners, aunties and grandmothers, community leaders and more.

It is unrealistic to consider that a topic as sensitive and complex as family violence could be addressed without acknowledging historical and present day wrongs, and the effect these have had on Aboriginal communities. Likewise, the best chance of tackling family violence within the Aboriginal community will be through programs that understand its causes and the relationship between these and the experiences of Aboriginal people since European settlement. Furthermore, the programs will only have a true chance of tackling family violence if they are designed, delivered and led by the Aboriginal community to ensure that mainstream program design is not imposed on the community and add further to the feelings of exclusion, mistrust and fear⁸.

The Victorian Government's *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, 10 year plan provides the following overview of the causes of family violence⁹:

- Dispossession of land and traditional culture
- Breakdown of community kinship systems and Indigenous law
- Racism and vilification
- Economic exclusion and entrenched poverty
- Alcohol and other drug abuse
- The effects of institutionalisation and child removal policies
- Inherited grief and trauma, and
- Loss of traditional roles and status.

The *10 year plan* goes further to state that these factors contribute to the high levels of distress within the Aboriginal community, which is often demonstrated through destructive behaviours such as self-harm and

⁸ Victorian Government, *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, 2nd Edition, 2008, p10

⁹ Ibid, p12

violence. Programs that seek to address family violence must consider all of these complex issues.

Sisters Day Out, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* are examples of programs that have been designed, delivered and led by the community. The programs were created by, and for, Aboriginal women. The programs, by their design, demonstrate that FVPLS Victoria and the program developers acknowledge and understand the complex issues surrounding family violence within Aboriginal communities. As a result, the programs have cultural elements incorporated into their design which make the programs unique, appropriate, relevant and important.

Throughout this report, these cultural elements will be referred to as 'culturally safe' or 'culturally welcoming'.

FVPLS Victoria defines 'culturally safe' as 'an environment where Aboriginal people feel safe and draw strength in their identity, culture and community and where there is a top level down approach to embedding particular practices across all aspects of service delivery.'¹⁰

This report draws on this definition to highlight the skill and expertise of FVPLS Victoria and the program developers and provides support for community led development and delivery of these and similar programs. The examples on the following pages illustrate the ways in which the EIP programs incorporate cultural elements to inform program design and create culturally safe programs.

The incorporation of cultural elements to facilitate cultural safety within program design

The following examples show how cultural elements are incorporated into the design of *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* and why this is relevant and important:

Welcoming environment

- Participants of *Sisters Day Out* and *Dilly Bag* programs said that they felt safe, relaxed and comfortable while participating in the programs. This is a result of the skill and care of the program developers in carefully managing the promotion of the event, the language used in program materials, the venue and its physical location and the program activities. For example:
 - invitations to *Sisters Day Out* are distributed through local community networks, i.e. through trusted sources
 - language used to promote the programs is stripped of bureaucratic terminology
 - venues are selected based on ease of access to the community, natural (not built up) views or surrounds
 - venues used for *Dilly Bag: The Journey* are chosen for their peaceful and serene surroundings
 - *Sisters Day Out* venues are decorated with pink balloons, pink tablecloths and candles to create a feminine and fun atmosphere. Background music also promotes the sense of fun and relaxation.

Trust

- As a result of historical and present day events, trust is central to the success of *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey*.
 - FVPLS Victoria is a trusted Aboriginal community controlled organisation
 - the program facilitators are Aboriginal women with 20+ years' experience working in Victorian Aboriginal communities who are known and trusted by the community members who participate
 - participants can speak with mainstream and Aboriginal specific service providers at *Sisters Day Out* as a first step in developing trust.

Program Activities

- Pampering, whether it be a haircut, massage or manicure, at *Sisters Day Out* has many benefits and is a highlight for many attending the day. It is relaxing, enhances self-esteem and provides a new view of self. It serves to restore aspects of self-confidence and a belief in self-worth.
- FVPLS Victoria's presentation on family violence (at *Sisters Day Out*) occurs just before lunch, a time when most women are sitting down with friends and family. It is a critical part of the day's events but is presented in a relaxed way. FVPLS staff, with care and respect, inject humour into the presentation to reduce anxiety and/or discomfort relating to the subject matter.
- Program activities at *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* change throughout the program. At the beginning, participants are encouraged to get to know each other through group activities such as beading or weaving. These activities help participants to relax and begin sharing stories and experiences. Other activities bring a renewed or reinforced sense of pride in the strengths of Aboriginal traditions and culture, especially seen through the lens of women's experience.

¹⁰ FVPLS, March 2014



The incorporation of cultural elements to facilitate cultural safety within program design

Language

- *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* are referred to as 'programs', 'activities' and 'workshops' throughout this report. These words are familiar to government, service providers and other bureaucrats but are not used to describe the programs in material distributed to Aboriginal women. These standard 'system' words are deliberately omitted by the program designers, not because the audience would find it difficult to understand, but because it is not the language used by the community. There is real warmth and personal appeal in an invitation to a 'day out with sisters' or talking with Aboriginal women about a dilly bag, a term rich with cultural connotations.

Mainstream service providers

- As a result of past and present events Aboriginal communities are often wary or fearful of government officials, programs and other mainstream services. The consequences of this fear may include reluctance on the part of Aboriginal women to report family violence to the police or seek assistance from mainstream support and legal services. *Sisters Day Out* addresses this issue by inviting mainstream service providers to participate in the event. It is not lost on the Aboriginal women at *Sisters Day Out* that the mainstream providers are there at the invitation of the FVPLS Victoria; the power relationships which for 200 years have ensured that Aboriginal people are disempowered in their dealings with white authoritarian systems are inverted at *Sisters Day Out*. Participants are able to speak to the service providers in a relaxed environment which may be the first step in easing anxiety associated with mainstream providers.

These design elements alone, or combined, give meaning to the term 'culturally safe' in this report. They are what make *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* unique, relevant, appropriate and important for Aboriginal women.

4.1.2 Policy Background

The project found that *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* which form FVPLS Victoria's early intervention and prevention program aligns with objectives, strategies and actions outlined in *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 10 year plan* published by the Victorian Government. Of particular relevance are¹¹:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Objective 3 | Education, Awareness, Prevention:
Intervene early to improve education, awareness and prevention of family violence. |
| Strategy 3.2 | Improve the capacity of Regional Action Groups, organisations and Indigenous community groups to implement local prevention programs. |
| Action 3.2.2 | Empower Indigenous women, build their self-esteem, cultural identity, solidarity with other Indigenous women and belief in their right to live free from violence. |

The participant feedback provided on the following pages illustrates the success of *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* in achieving the specific actions outlined above.

The continued need for early intervention programs such as *Sisters Day Out* and *Dilly Bag* is highlighted in the following extract from the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services' *Submission to the Productivity Commission*¹² which states:

'It is the experience of FVPLSs that there is very limited knowledge within the Aboriginal communities about the legal system, legal rights and services that are available to provide support. This can lead to people not recognising their problems are of a legal nature, and not accessing support until the situation reaches a crisis point. Aboriginal people may also equate the legal system with only criminal justice and child protection and be unwilling to engage as a result of negative experiences with these parts of the system. Culturally appropriate community legal education that engages local communities to discuss issues, inform people of their rights and options and identify local responses is critical to address the legal needs of Aboriginal communities.'

The extent to which FVPLS Victoria's programs meet the needs of Aboriginal women is outlined in the detailed evaluation findings presented on the following pages.

¹¹ Victorian Government, *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, 2nd Edition, 2008, p39

¹² National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, *Submission to the Productivity Commission, Access to Justice Arrangements*, 2013, p10–11

4.1.3 Program funding

FVPLS Victoria received funding from federal and state government departments and other agencies (refer Appendix B: EIP Program Funding Bodies) which has enabled it to develop and deliver *Sisters Day Out* and the *Dilly Bag* programs.

Prior to May 2012 the Commonwealth Government provided recurrent funding for the *Sisters Day Out* program within the funded regions of Mildura, Barwon South West, and Gippsland. Funding for activities in other regions was sourced through one-off grants.

In the May 2012 budget, the Commonwealth cut \$4.5 million nationally from the Attorney General's Department Early Intervention Program. In Victoria this translated into the removal of \$150,000 that was used to fund the *Sisters Day Out* program. Since these cuts, FVPLS Victoria has been solely reliant upon ad hoc limited grants.

FVPLS Victoria reports that an insecure funding environment drains considerable resources from the organisation due to the time required to identify funding opportunities and to prepare and submit applications for funding that may or may not be successful. It also significantly impacts upon planning processes and resource allocation as the agency can never be sure of exactly how much funding will be available from one year to the next.

Data on the following pages show the broad appeal of the programs indicated by high participation levels for a sustained period. The data also shows the impact of funding cuts in 2012 and 2013 with lower participant rates and reduced program delivery during the period.

FVPLS Victoria continues to seek funding which will enable it to continue to deliver *Sisters Day Out* and the *Dilly Bag* programs in the second half of 2014 and beyond.

The project did not analyse the cost of delivering the programs as it was outside the scope of the evaluation. However, it is valuable to consider the cost of family violence to the Australian economy to gain perspective on the comparatively small cost of delivering *Sisters Day Out* and *Dilly Bag*.

For example, in 2002–2003 the total cost of domestic violence in Australia, to victims, perpetrators, friends and families, communities, government and the private sector was estimated to be in excess of \$8b.¹³ In 2008–2009, the total cost of all violence against women and children (including non-domestic violence) was estimated to have cost the Australian economy \$13.6b

and was set to increase to \$15.6b in 2021–22 if no action were taken to address the issue¹⁴.

These are alarming figures that confirm the prevalence of violence against women and children and its cost to the economy. While there are many ways in which the issue may be tackled by government and other agencies there should be little argument that a sound and robust approach will include early intervention and prevention programs. Likewise, there should be no argument to include funding for early intervention and prevention programs that are culturally safe and address the particular needs of Aboriginal women, given that statistics show that in Victoria in 2007–2008 the rate of domestic related assault for Aboriginal women was six times as high as for non-Aboriginal women.¹⁵

Effective family violence early intervention and prevention programs for Aboriginal women, such as *Sisters Day Out* and *Dilly Bag* are investments which have financial and social dividends. While these benefits were not 'measured' as part of the project¹⁶, the evaluator considers that program funding is a prudent investment by government. This claim is made in light of the success of the programs in achieving the expected outcomes. Aboriginal women are informed and empowered through their participation in FVPLS Victoria's early intervention and prevention programs and while this may in the short term mean that family violence statistics and legal and community support needs increase, it brings promise that family violence will be appropriately addressed and may decline in future years.

4.2 Findings: EIP Programs

4.2.1 Overview

In February 2014, FVPLS Victoria commissioned an independent evaluation of the outcomes of *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey*. The evaluation found that *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* were successful in bringing Aboriginal women together and achieved the following outcomes:

- enhanced participant's self-esteem and well-being
- strengthened friendships/relationships/connections within the community and increased community networks, and
- strengthened individual participant's resilience and the community's ability to address family violence
- increased participant's knowledge and understanding of family violence
- increased participant's awareness of support and legal services, both Aboriginal specific and mainstream.


13 Access Economics, *The cost of domestic violence to the Australian economy*, 2004

14 KPMG Management Consulting, *The cost of violence against women and their children*, 2009

15 The Australian Government Productivity Commission, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage – Key Indicators*, 2009

16 Budgeted and actual program costs were not analysed as they were outside the scope of the project.





The programs had an immediate effect on the well-being of participants, with women reporting that they felt confident, positive and empowered by their participation. Medium and longer term benefits were also noted, with participants providing examples of significant changes to lifestyle, living arrangements, matters relating to custody of children and personal care. Additional detail is provided in the 'Participant Feedback' sections on the following pages.

Sisters Day Out is an important program in which Aboriginal women can take the first steps to:

- regain and/or enhance confidence and well-being
- raise awareness and understanding of family violence, and
- learn and get information about legal and support services in the local community.

Sisters Day Out participants said that they felt 'beautiful', 'good' and 'relaxed' after being pampered. They said the atmosphere was fun and welcoming and provided the ideal backdrop for the community to come together and share stories and laughter. FVPLS Victoria's presentation on family violence and the availability of legal advice and support was well-received with one participant saying she liked it because it provided important information without 'ramming it down her throat'. Others said that the relaxed presentation style made them feel comfortable in approaching FVPLS Victoria for assistance.

The *Dilly Bag* programs take participants on a more intensive journey of self-discovery. The facilitators set the program's mood to ensure it is warm, encouraging and welcoming. This is achieved, in part, by the reaffirmation of the strengths of Aboriginal culture and pride in identity. The impact of European settlement in Australia and its continuing effect on the health and well-being of Aboriginal people is acknowledged in an effort to reduce feelings of guilt or shame and shift responsibility for hurt and trauma to its rightful place. From this supportive and understanding environment, participants are encouraged to share their stories, reflect on past choices and think positively about themselves and their future. Participants said they felt empowered and energised by the *Dilly Bag* programs and examples on the following pages illustrate the short, medium and long term effects of the programs.

In summary, the participant feedback for *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* was overwhelming positive. The incorporation of cultural elements into program design shows great skill, care and understanding and contributes to the success of the programs. Feedback is provided on the following pages to illustrate the benefits of the programs from the participants' perspective.

4.2.2 Sisters Day Out

Workshop & Participant Data

Eighty-four workshops have been held and 6,078 Aboriginal women have participated in *Sisters Day Out* since it began in Morwell in July 2007.

Table 2 (right) shows the number of workshops held in each region (metropolitan, regional and other) for the period July 2007–February 2014.

In Table 2 'Other' refers to workshops held in Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (two workshops) and Worawa Aboriginal College (one workshop). The majority of workshops (60 of 84) were held in regional locations.

Table 2: Sisters Day Out – No. of workshops per region (July 2007–Feb 2014)

Source: FVPLS Victoria

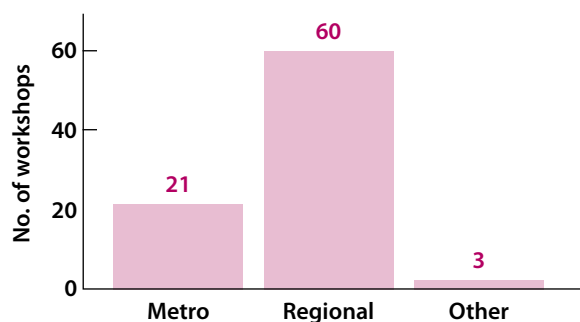


Table 3 shows the number of workshops held each calendar year since the workshops commenced in July 2007 to February 2014 (inclusive). The number of *Sisters Day Out* workshops held each year declined in 2012 and 2013 due to significant funding reductions¹⁶.

Table 3: Sisters Day Out – No. of workshops by year (July 2007–Feb 2014) Source: FVPLS Victoria

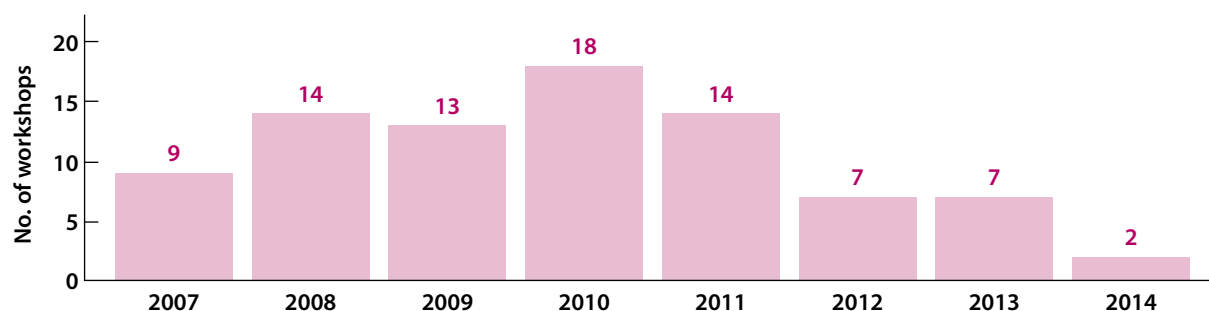
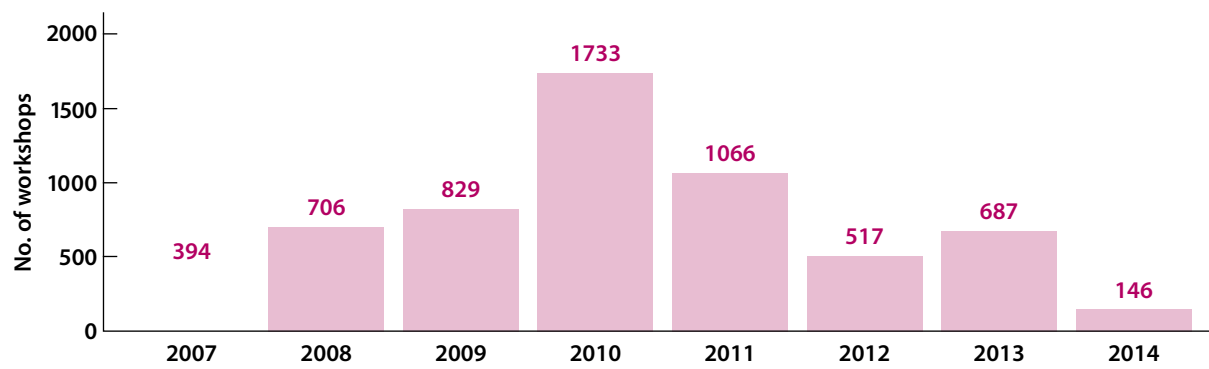


Table 4 shows the number of *Sisters Day Out* participants by calendar year since the workshops commenced in July 2007 to February 2014 (inclusive). The highest number of participants was recorded in 2010.

While there were seven workshops in both 2012 and 2013, the number of participants showed a sharp increase in 2013. This is mainly due to the large number of participants attending the Mildura workshop (253 participants) in August 2013.

Table 4: Sisters Day Out – No. of participants by year (July 2007–Feb 2014) Source: FVPLS Victoria



16 FVPLS Victoria

Table 5 shows the number of participants at each metropolitan and 'other' location. One workshop has been held at each location unless otherwise marked. In Table 5 'other' refers to workshops held in Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (two workshops) and Worawa Aboriginal College (one workshop).

Since *Sisters Day Out* commenced in July 2007, workshops have been held in 15 metropolitan and two 'other' locations and 1,771 Aboriginal women have participated in these sessions.

The workshop held in Collingwood in October 2010 attracted the largest number of participants (229 participants) at a metropolitan location.

Data provided by FVPLS Victoria indicates that participant numbers *increase* when *Sisters Day Out* returns to the same metropolitan location.

Table 5: Sisters Day Out – No. of participants per location (metro & other)
(July 2007–Feb 2014) Source: FVPLS Victoria

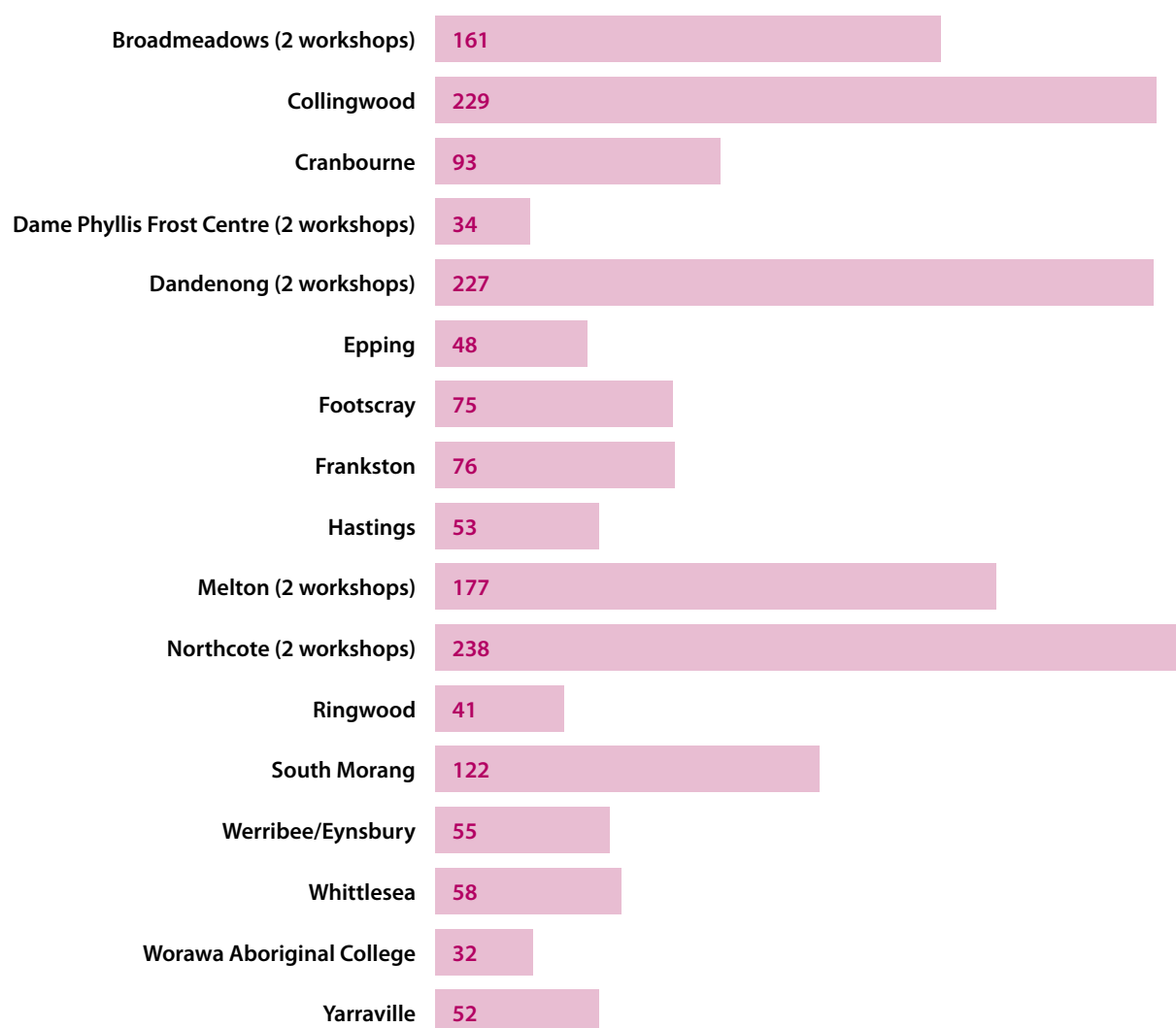


Table 6 shows the number of participants at each regional location. One workshop has been held at each location unless otherwise marked.

Since *Sisters Day Out* commenced in July 2007, workshops have been held in 23 regional locations and 4,307 Aboriginal women have participated in these sessions.

Mildura hosted the largest number of workshops (5) and had the most participants (862). More than 160 women attended each *Sisters Day Out* in Mildura, except for the 2011 workshop which had less than 100 participants. The workshop held in Mildura in August 2013 recorded the highest number of participants (253 participants) at a regional location.

Data provided by FVPLS Victoria indicates that participant numbers generally remain *stable or increase* when *Sisters Day Out* returns to the same regional location.

Table 6: Sisters Day Out – No. of participants per location (regional) (July 2007–Feb 2014) Source: FVPLS Victoria

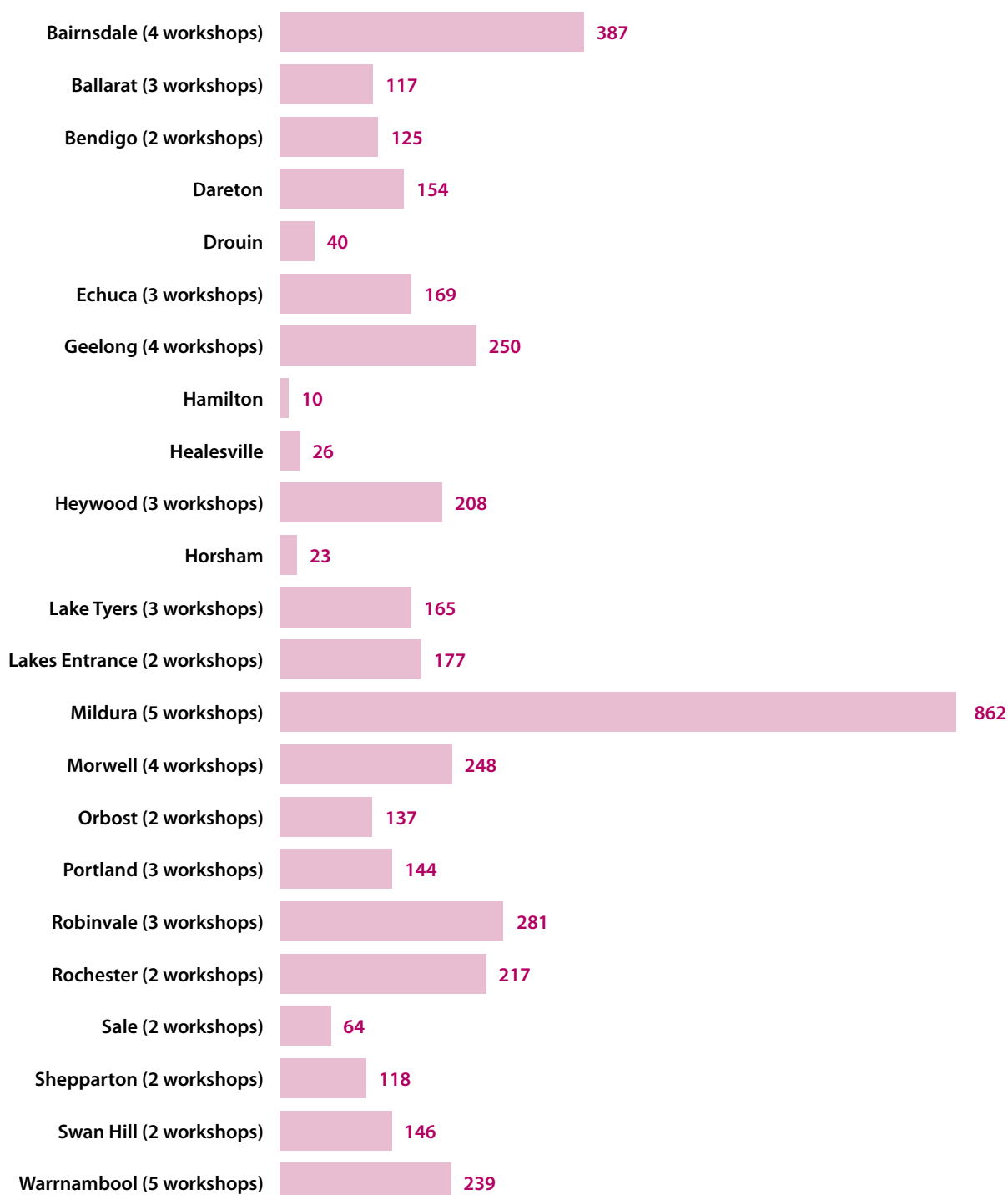
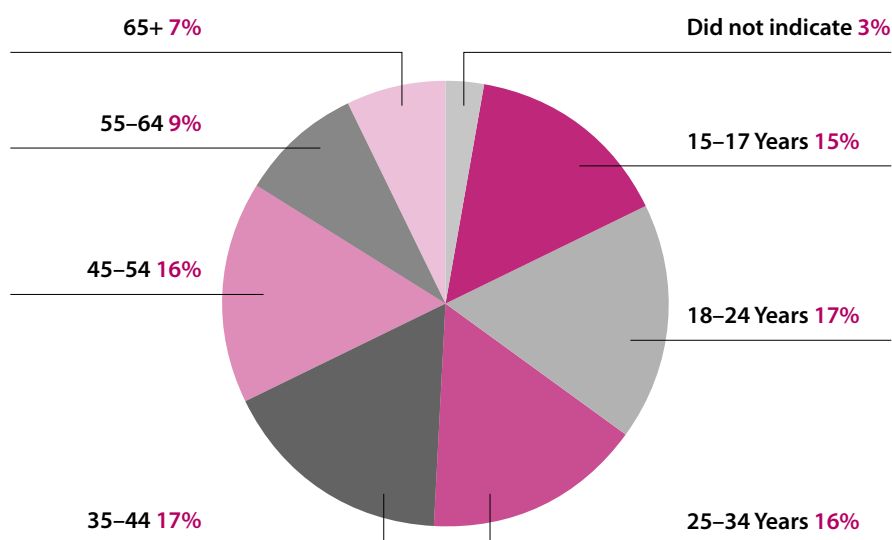


Table 7 contains data from a representative sample of workshops held in 2013 and 2014. It shows that *Sisters Day Out* attracts participants of all ages.

Women in the 55–64 year and 65+ year age categories have a lower rate of participation than other age groups.

Table 7: Sisters Day Out – % Participant Age Source: FVPLS Victoria

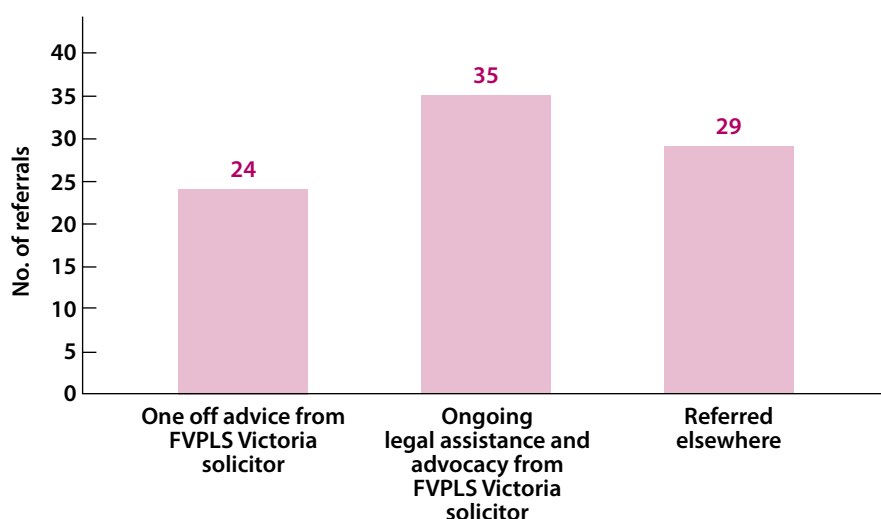


Post workshop referrals

FVPLS Victoria records a referral source for clients of its legal service. The data indicates that since *Sisters Day Out* began 88 participants were referred to the legal service from the program.

Of these referrals, 24 participants received one off advice from a solicitor, 35 received ongoing legal assistance and advocacy, and 29 were referred elsewhere¹⁸.

Table 8: Sisters Day Out post workshop referrals Source: FVPLS Victoria



FVPLS Victoria reports that the referral data is likely to be under-representative of the true number of clients referred to the legal service. FVPLS Victoria aims to strengthen its data collection practices to collect referral data more consistently in the future.

¹⁸ FVPLS Victoria advises that the most likely reason for referral elsewhere is that the client did not meet the funding guidelines for FVPLS Victoria legal services.

Participant Feedback

Sisters Day Out brings Aboriginal women of all ages together to:

- share a day of relaxation and pampering away from day-to-day concerns and worries
- raise awareness of family violence, and
- provide access and information about legal and local community support services.

The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive and highlighted the extent to which Aboriginal women welcomed the opportunity to come together in a culturally safe and relaxed environment to raise awareness of family violence, share stories, laughter

and experiences and find out more about legal and other support services.

Sisters Day Out has an immediate positive impact on the health and well-being of participants which is demonstrated through their feedback to the evaluator and in *Participant Satisfaction Surveys* collected by FVPLS Victoria. The program also has medium-long term impacts as demonstrated by participants who have gone on to become clients of FVPLS Victoria and made life-changing decisions to ensure safety for themselves and their families.

Theme: Reduced isolation and improved community networks

Participants said they enjoyed the opportunity to catch up with friends and family in a safe and relaxed environment. Many said that it 'felt good' to see the community come together, support each other and share an enjoyable day. *Participant Feedback Surveys* collected by FVPLS Victoria supported the feedback received by the evaluator as shown by the following statements:

'How healing it is to be around great women and friends'

'I am not alone'

'Sharing problems with other women can really help'

'It's great to mix with other Koorie ladies'

'Thank you for running these special days – A great day for myself and my daughters – A sense of belonging'

Theme: Increased knowledge & understanding of support &/or legal services, including mainstream services

As well as feeling supported by the community, participants said it was good to have service providers on hand to provide information and advice. They also said that FVPLS Victoria's session was informative and they felt reassured that help was available from a community led agency. They liked that the session was free from legalistic jargon and was presented in a casual, relaxed and non-threatening manner. One participant said that learning about the legal services and support available was the most important aspect of *Sisters Day Out* and while FVPLS Victoria continues to offer support to her and her family, she wished that she had known about the services earlier as she had ended a violent relationship without the support and advice that she now knew was available. She said that through *Sisters Day Out* and meeting FVPLS Victoria staff she felt supported, safe and well informed of her rights and was using their assistance to help her with ongoing issues. Several other participants said they had received advice and support from FVPLS Victoria after learning about the service at *Sisters Day Out* and/or were encouraging family members to contact FVPLS Victoria for their support. *Participant Feedback Surveys* contained similar comments, such as:

'Help is out there'

'Plenty of non-legal, informal support available, very encouraging'

'What to do when in need of legal help'

'The assistance that is available to women fleeing domestic violence'



Theme: Enhanced self-esteem and improved health & wellbeing

The pampering treatments were a highlight for many participants. A number of women said that their family commitments and/or limited finances meant that hair-cuts and manicures were things that they could not always make time for, or afford and it was only their attendance at *Sisters Day Out* that gave them the opportunity to 'indulge' in these services.

A number of participants said that family violence had a negative effect on their confidence and self-esteem and the pampering at *Sisters Day Out*, in the company of friends and relatives, was an important part of the healing process for them. One participant explained that she rarely left her home as a long abusive relationship had left her with physical injuries and depression. She said that she looked forward to *Sisters Day Out* as she felt safe in the company of other Aboriginal women who understood and did not judge her. She enjoyed the beauty and relaxation treatments as these were not things she could typically afford and they made her feel great. *Sisters Day Out* was an important day in her calendar, it lifted her spirits and connected her with other women who had experienced similar things and/or understood the difficulties she had endured.

Theme: Improved knowledge & understanding of family violence

Sisters Day Out successfully combines many different elements. At the fore is fun and relaxation which is highlighted by the feedback noted above. In the background, however, is the very strong presence of the purpose for the workshop – raising understanding and awareness of family violence and the support and legal services available for women in the community. A number of participants highlighted this as the most important aspect of *Sisters Day Out* and the one which had a lasting effect on their lives. The definition of family violence described during FVPLS Victoria's presentation outlines that family violence is much broader than physical violence. This message resonates with participants who explained that their physical scars had healed but the psychological effects were long lasting and often more difficult to heal. It is reassuring for them to have their experience validated by FVPLS Victoria and know that others understand their experience. Feedback from the *Participant Satisfaction Surveys* supports the evaluation findings:

'What a wonderful day for us to be able to talk safely about family violence'

'... there are many different meanings of family violence'

'... violence isn't always physical'

'You don't have to put up with violence'

'What family violence actually covers, interesting'

Service Provider Feedback

Sisters Day Out gives local service providers, Aboriginal specific and mainstream, an opportunity to meet and talk with participants in a relaxed environment. This is a thoughtful addition to the event, with benefits for participants and service providers. Participants are able to talk to service providers in an environment which is comfortable, safe and free of the formality of a 'typical office' setting. It may be the first step in getting to know a service which previously seemed intimidating or unsafe. Likewise, service providers benefit from attending as they are able to engage with the community and promote their service. It gives the service provider the opportunity to demonstrate that they understand the barriers which may have prevented participants from accessing their service in the past and are sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal women.

Each service provider is represented by one or more staff members. Some have information stands and brochures available for participants whilst others have less formal arrangements.

All of the service providers consulted for the purpose of the evaluation expressed their support for *Sisters Day Out*. Many of the agencies had attended *Sisters Day Out* previously and welcomed the chance to continue their engagement. They thought that raising awareness of family violence and providing access and knowledge about local services was an important part of empowering women. Many of the agencies said it was important that women knew about the range of options available if/when they required assistance or support and that *Sisters Day Out* was a good way of promoting their services.

The service providers also said they enjoyed the opportunity to meet up with women in the community that they knew as friends or clients.

A list of service agencies attending *Sisters Day Out* in 2013 is available in Appendix A: Service Providers attending *Sisters Day Out* – 2013.

One service provider said that her agency received an increase in referrals after *Sisters Day Out*. She said the fun and relaxed atmosphere made it more likely for participants to approach her and begin conversations with her about the health service she represented.

Another service provider said that her organisation did not keep statistical data on referrals from *Sisters Day Out* but the promotion of safe sex and women's sexual health at the workshop was in itself a positive.

Challenges and Opportunities

- i) Participant and service provider feedback was very positive. One opportunity for improvement was identified by participants:
 - Provision of child care at *Sisters Day Out*.
- ii) FVPLS Victoria may wish to strengthen its data collection practices to ensure post workshop referral data is recorded more consistently.
- iii) FVPLS Victoria may wish to undertake further analysis of data which will provide information about referrals to other services following their participation at *Sisters Day Out* and *Dilly Bag* programs.
- iv) FVPLS Victoria has recently developed a 'Legal Needs Survey' which will be distributed amongst participants at *Sisters Day Out*. The survey development is in its early stages but initial results indicate that it will provide valuable information for FVPLS Victoria.
- v) There is further scope for a separate and additional project which would allow continuation of the review of service provision of mainstream service providers to ensure they have an awareness and understanding of barriers that prevent Aboriginal women from accessing services. Depending on the outcomes of the project, service providers may benefit from cultural awareness training arranged through FVPLS Victoria.



4.2.3 Dilly Bag and Dilly Bag: The Journey

Workshop & Participant Data

The first *Dilly Bag* workshop was held in Gippsland in September 2010. Since this time, 16 workshops have been conducted and 166 Aboriginal women have participated in the program.

Table 9 (below) shows the number of workshops held in each region. Mildura held the highest number of workshops (4), followed by Barwon South Western Region and Gippsland which have held two workshops each.

Table 9: Dilly Bag and Dilly Bag: The Journey – No. of workshops per region
(Sept 2010–Mar 2014) Source: FVPLS Victoria

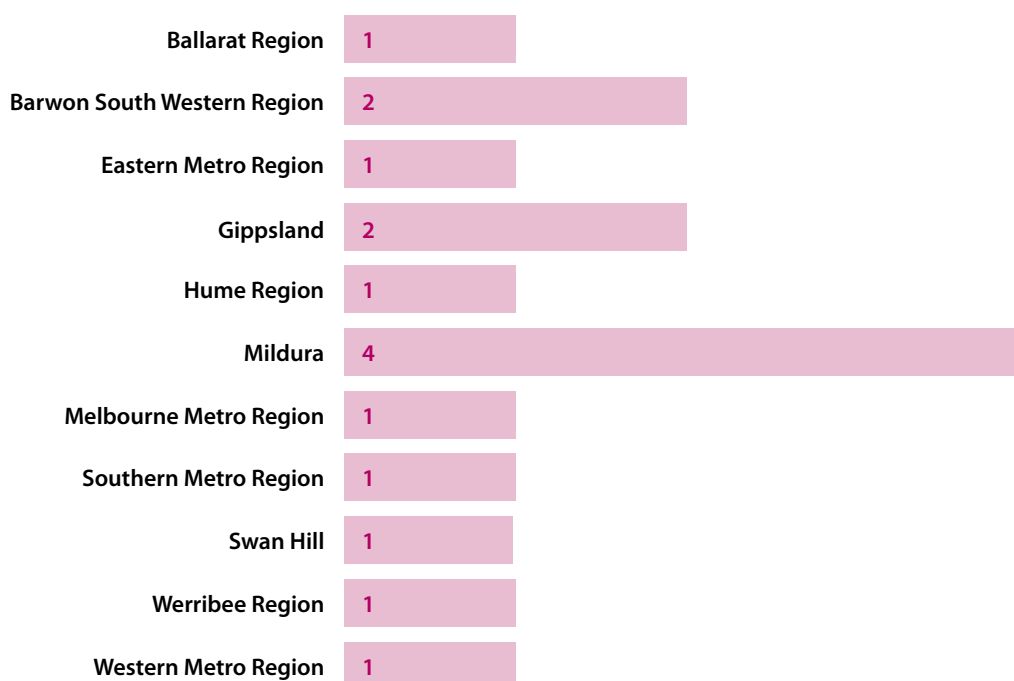


Table 10 shows the number of participants per region. The largest number of participants came from the Mildura region, followed closely by the Gippsland and Southern Metro region

Table 10: Dilly Bag and Dilly Bag: The Journey – No. of participants per region (Sept 2010–Mar 2014) Source: FVPLS Victoria

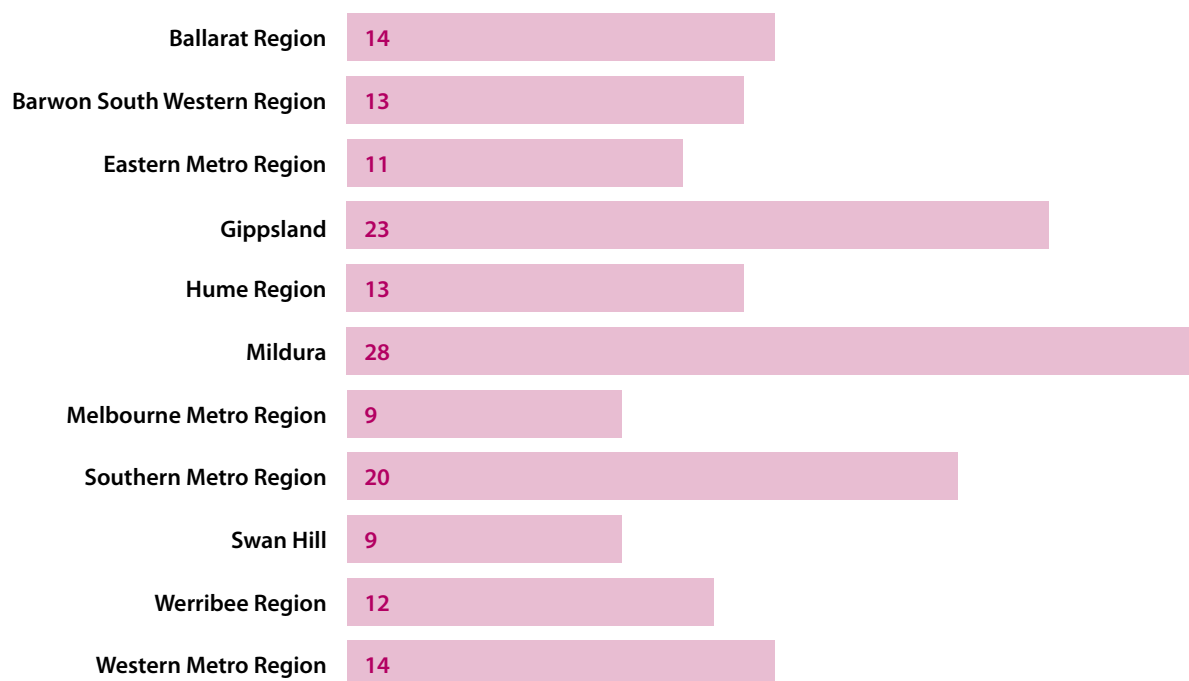
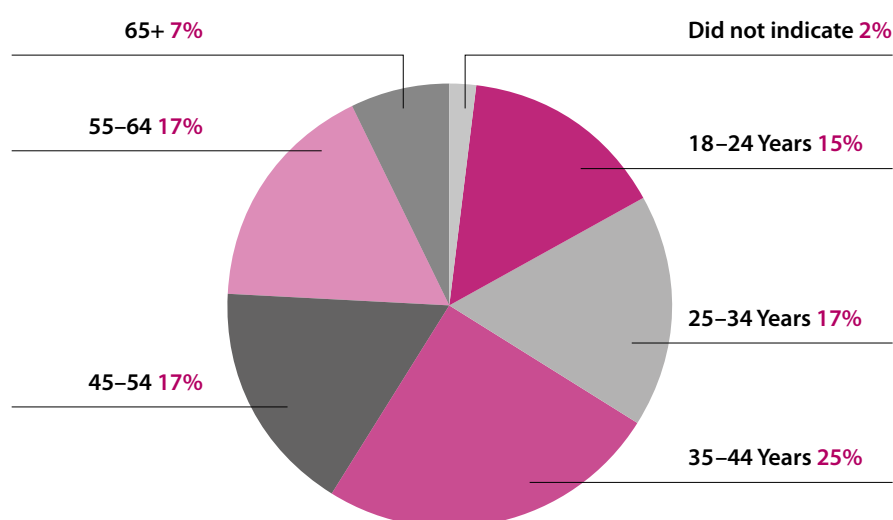


Table 11 contains data from *Dilly Bag* programs held in 2013 to March 2014. It shows that women of all ages participate in the programs.

One quarter (25%) of participants are in the 35–44 year age category and the 65+ year category has the lowest participation rate of 7%.

Table 11: Dilly Bag & Dilly Bag: The Journey – % Participant Age Source: FVPLS Victoria



Participant Feedback

Many participants said that they enjoyed taking part in *Dilly Bag: The Journey* and sharing stories and experiences with other Aboriginal women. They said the workshop facilitators made them feel comfortable and relaxed and encouraged them to participate throughout the program. While some difficult and deeply personal experiences were shared, participants said that the intensely emotional stories were balanced by laughter and fun, leaving them energised, invigorated and

empowered by their participation in the program.

Participant feedback confirmed that *Dilly Bag* programs had a significant impact on the lives of participants. Women who had attended the program described renewed confidence and courage to make difficult and important decisions and provided examples of how their choices had led to positive outcomes for them and their families.

Theme: Culturally appropriate program design and reduced isolation and improved community networks

One participant of *Dilly Bag: The Journey* said that the program was different to others she had attended because it incorporated cultural elements into the program. She said this, along with the support of the facilitators and other participants, made her feel safe and relaxed and willing to share personal stories. This was a common theme in the responses throughout the evaluation and is also present in the *Participant Satisfaction Surveys* collected by FVPLS Victoria. The following are examples of feedback from the Surveys:

- 'A cultural experience in a safe environment'
- 'Being able to open up and feeling safe to do so'
- 'Relaxing, laughing and yarning with other women and sharing our knowledge wisdom'

Theme: Improved health and well-being and renewed strength

The residential component of *Dilly Bag: The Journey* was another positive aspect of the program highlighted by participants. They said that being away from home provided the opportunity for them to focus on themselves and the workshop without distraction. Some said that they initially felt uncomfortable about being away from family but through the course of the workshop came to appreciate that 'time-out' was an important element of self-care and well-being. Feedback from the *Participant Satisfaction Surveys* reiterated this as shown by the following statements:

- 'We need time out as women together, away from our everyday life.'
- 'We need to rejuvenate our spirit together'
- 'To take some time out for myself to recharge because I cannot perform to the best of my ability when I am stressed'

Themes: Demonstrated family violence leadership capacity and empowered and with renewed strength

The participation of Elders at *Dilly Bag: The Journey* was another highly valued part of the program. One participant said that she felt inspired, reassured and comforted to hear Elders speak of their experiences and learn that they had lived through difficult times and were 'ok'. Other participants spoke of the wisdom and leadership of the Elders and the value of listening to their stories. Again, the *Participant Satisfaction Surveys* confirmed the evaluation feedback as shown by the following:

- 'Listening to other women's stories of survival'
- 'Listening to others tell what they have been through'
- 'The coming together of other women, hearing and listening to others. Learning about their experiences and about our culture. I loved this program'

Themes: Enhanced self-esteem and improved health & well-being/Enhanced decision making capacity/Empowered and with renewed strength

Many participants of *Dilly Bag: The Journey* said that the workshop had a significant effect including how they viewed themselves and the issues affecting their lives. They said that after the program they had a positive outlook and felt good about themselves. One participant said that she had found it difficult to assert herself but had felt empowered and more confident after participating in *Dilly Bag: The Journey*. With her renewed confidence she spoke out about her concerns to friends and case worker and as a result she and her children had moved to alternative safe accommodation and she was feeling more positive about her and her family's future. This is a significant achievement. The participant stepped outside her 'comfort zone' and made a fundamental and positive change to her and her children's lives. The continued support of friends who had also attended the program was evident throughout the conversation. Another woman said that after returning home she felt a renewed sense of hope and had changed her lifestyle. She also said she felt stronger and motivated by the program and was taking steps to re-establish connections with family. She said this was very different to her state of mind prior to the program where she felt unmotivated and unable to tackle her problems.

Themes: Enhanced connection to culture/Enhanced self-esteem

Participants also spoke of a renewed or enhanced feeling of pride and their enjoyment in focussing on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and tradition throughout the program. This is echoed by comments in the *Participant Satisfaction Surveys*:

'That as an Aboriginal woman, we are an important part of our community'

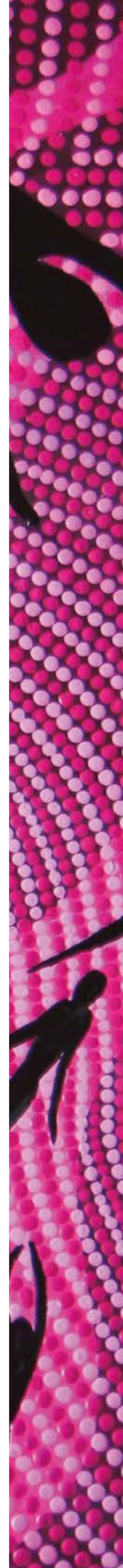
'..it gave me hope and strength to carry on in life's journey as an Aboriginal woman'

'Encouraged to stand up and be proud of myself as an Aboriginal woman'

Challenges and Opportunities

Participant and service provider feedback was very positive.

It is noted from the participant satisfaction surveys that a number of participants were enthusiastic about an 'extension' to the *Dilly Bag* program which would bring past participants of the workshop from across Victoria together.



5 Conclusion

Family violence is an issue of serious concern to Aboriginal communities in Victoria, and throughout Australia. The most appropriate way of tackling this complex issue is through a response which acknowledges the experience of Aboriginal people and the trauma, grief and suffering associated with European invasion, settlement and 200+ years of imposed authority. Mainstream 'solutions' will not meet the needs of the Aboriginal community for a multitude of reasons noted previously in this report.

Sisters Day Out, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* were developed by, and for, Aboriginal women. The program developers together with FVPLS Victoria show their deep understanding of Aboriginal communities through the inclusion of cultural elements into the programs' design. These design elements focus on the positive attributes of Aboriginal women, tradition and culture and acknowledge the complex issues which must be tackled to reduce and eliminate family violence in Aboriginal communities. The cultural elements of the programs are indicators of the skill, care and expertise of the program developers and FVPLS Victoria staff.

Sisters Day Out and the *Dilly Bag* programs challenge the negative messages of white settlement and European imposed rule by asserting the strength of Aboriginal women, traditions and culture. The programs nurture participants' feelings of pride and self-acceptance and acknowledge the obstacles and extreme hardships experienced by generations of Aboriginal families.

In a safe, relaxing and culturally welcoming environment, *Sisters Day Out* successfully combines raising awareness and understanding of family violence with activities that enhance community connection and personal well-being. This is a significant achievement.

The high participation numbers at *Sisters Day Out* are a good indicator of the program's credibility within the community. The statistics show that participation numbers generally increase when *Sisters Day Out* returns to the same location. This is one of the best endorsements for a program and confirms the positive feedback received during the project.

Similarly, the *Dilly Bag* programs combine activities that restore confidence and self-esteem and reaffirm pride in Aboriginal culture. Participants feel motivated and empowered to make real and significant changes to their lives.

The follow up gatherings of participants from *Dilly Bag: The Journey* also illustrated the lasting effect of the program. It was evident that the program had established and/or strengthened friendships between participants and that the friendships were supportive and enduring. Conversations with participants also revealed the impact of *Dilly Bag* and how women had made significant changes to their lives after attending the program. Participants expressed a renewed sense of hope, increased confidence and a positive outlook and had used these attributes to move to safer living arrangements, to re-establish contact with family, assert themselves and begin to take 'time out' and focus on self-care.

A small number of opportunities and challenges are identified within the report which FVPLS Victoria may wish to consider¹⁹, if it has not done so already, these are:

- availability of child care at *Sisters Day Out*
- enhancement of technological systems which would enhance data collection and analysis
- continue to review provision of services from mainstream agencies and extend the provision of cultural awareness training to address gaps in knowledge and understanding
- continue development and analysis of data collected from the 'Legal Needs Survey'
- State-wide *Dilly Bag* program bringing together participants from across Victoria.

Enhanced data collection would make further analysis possible and this could be used to validate and expand on the findings of this report.

A continued challenge to the program is the lack of sustainable funding. Currently FVPLS Victoria utilises one-off community grants to fund these programs however this creates excessive administrative and reporting burdens, as well as impacting on future planning processes. It is noted that continuity of service provision is key to maintaining community trust and the absence of recurrent funding remains the most significant threat to the high standard of cultural safety that is a core feature of FVPLS Victoria's programs. Considering the extensive and transformative benefits of these programs to the Aboriginal women that participate, continued advocacy for recurrent sustained funding across regional and urban areas is imperative.

In closing, the evaluator asked participants what the key message of this report should be and these are summarised as follows:

¹⁹ The project understands that FVPLS Victoria may require additional funding if it wishes to pursue these opportunities.

- recognition of the impact of European settlement and domination and how this has affected Aboriginal communities
- the importance and value of Aboriginal women coming together at *Sisters Day Out* and *Dilly Bag* and the positive impact this has on the community and its ability to address family violence
- participation in *Sisters Day Out* with family and friends is an important first step in raising awareness of family violence and bringing the topic to the fore, it begins the conversation in a non-threatening way and provides information about FVPLS Victoria and other support services
- recognition that family violence is a deeply personal matter that erodes confidence and self-esteem and that for some women it takes time and gentle encouragement before they are able or willing to address the issue – *Sisters Day Out* is seen as the important first step
- the ongoing need for *Sisters Day Out* and *Dilly Bag* to reinforce the message that family violence:
 - should not be tolerated
 - is not part of Aboriginal culture, and
 - that Aboriginal community led services like FVPLS Victoria and other mainstream services can provide legal and other support services to victims of violence.



Appendices

Appendix A: Service Providers attending Sisters Day Out – 2013

Location & Date	Service Providers	
Ringwood, 26 February 2013	Centrelink Quit Victoria / Cancer Council Monash Indigenous Centre – Yulendji Eastern Domestic Violence Service Indigenous Young People's Sexual & Reproductive Health Project	Hepatitis Victoria Victoria Legal Aid Greensborough Family Relationships Centre Boorndawan William Aboriginal Healing Service
Shepparton, 26 March 2013	Victoria Legal Aid Quit Victoria Dept. of Early Education and Development	Relationships Australia Centre for Non Violence Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative
Ballarat, 10 December 2013	Ballarat Centre Against Sexual Assault Victoria Legal Aid WRISC Family Violence Support Gamblers Help Service Ballarat & VACSAL Department of Human Services	Central Highlands community Legal Centre Inc. Grampians Medicare Local Melbourne Magistrates' Court Koori Unit Ballarat & District Aboriginal Cooperative
Mildura, 20 August 2013	Mallee Family Care Melbourne Magistrates' Court Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Gambling Awareness Service Gamblers Help Mildura Sunraysia Community Health Service	Quit Victoria Centrelink Dispute Settlement Centre Meminar Ngangg Gimba Lower Murray Medicare Healthy Lifestyle Program MDAS
Dandenong, 10 September 2013	Anglicare Victoria Dandenong & District Aboriginal Cooperative Centrelink Department of Human Services Relationships Australia Aboriginal Health Services	Victoria Legal Aid Melbourne Magistrates' Court Quit Victoria Medicare Aboriginal Gamblers Help – Southern WAYSS
Werribee/ Eynesbury, 16 December 2013	Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Relationships Australia (Vic) VACSAL – Aboriginal Gambling Awareness Service Djerriwarrh Health Service, Melton Community Health Centre	Winja Ulupna Gamblers Help Western – ISIS Primary Care Uniting Care Werribee Support & Housing Melbourne Magistrates' Court Koori Unit

Appendix B: EIP Program Funding Bodies

Sisters Day Out workshops have been held in metropolitan and regional locations in Victoria since 2007 with the assistance of funding from:

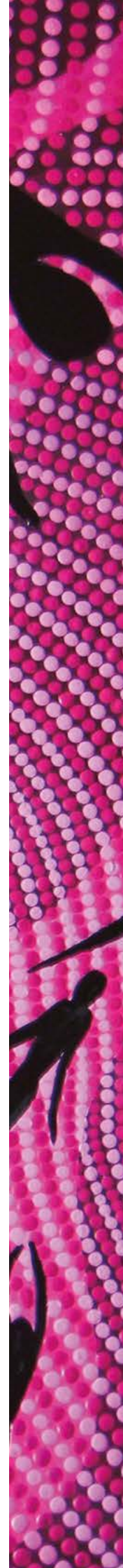
- Mallee District Aboriginal Services
- Commonwealth Department of Social Services (formerly Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)
- Department of Justice Victoria
- Department of Human Services Victoria
- Relationships Australia.

The number of workshops held in 2012 and 2013 is less than in previous years due to significantly reduced funding.

Dilly Bag programs have been held in metropolitan and regional locations in Victoria since 2010 with the assistance of funding from:

- Mallee District Aboriginal Services
- Commonwealth Department of Social Services (formerly Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)
- Department of Human Services Victoria

FVPLS Victoria continues to seek commitment from funding bodies which will allow it to continue to deliver *Sisters Day Out*, *Dilly Bag* and *Dilly Bag: The Journey* programs in the second half of 2014 and beyond.



Notes





Aboriginal Family
Violence Prevention
& Legal Service Victoria
**Standing Firm Against
Family Violence**

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