

“At the Cutting Edge of Community Safety” Community Safety Month 2004 and VSCN Conference

The Victorian Safe Communities Network (VSCN), in partnership with, Department of Justice, and many other agencies, local governments and business, proudly reports yet another very successful Community Safety Month during October 2004.

“There were thousands of people participating in hundreds of safety promotion events across all areas of Victoria”, said Michael Bourne, Co-Chair of the VSCN. “Because injuries can affect anyone, anywhere, anytime – our vision is for people to have the information they need to reduce risks and prevent injuries wherever they go in their daily lives.”

This year there were concurrent Community Safety Month activities in Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales as well as Victoria. “We are on the verge of a nation-wide community safety month in 2005, a concept which is being promoted through partnerships across the community networks and service agencies involved.”

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Community Safety Month was no sooner over than the Victorian Safe Communities Network (VSCN) in partnership with AquaMax Hot Water Heaters, VicHealth, Department of Human Services, Office of Emergency Services Commissioner, Department of Justice, and Metropolitan Fire Brigade, VicPolice, and other Agencies held its Second Annual Conference on Wednesday 17 November with the theme “At the Cutting Edge of Community Safety”. Over 150 registrants gathered at the Darebin Community Centre in Melbourne, Australia, to share a day of learning, with presentations by local, interstate and international speakers on community action to reduce risk and injury, improve safety and the perceptions of safety.



Picture 1 – some of the conference delegates at the VSCN 2nd Annual Conference, Melbourne Australia, 17 November 2004.

A keynote address on the health and injury burden resulting from family violence set the theme for the day and underlined the need for a community approach to reducing intentional and unintentional injury.

There was plenty of options for participants with over 30 papers presented on the day on such topics as - sexual assault, safer built environments, capacity building in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, perceptions of safety, emergency management, walking school bus, building corporate relationships, and integrated planning - to name only a few.

In closing the Conference, VSCN Co Chair, Michael Bourne said that the major “take aways” from the day related to –

- **The importance of tackling violence in the home** - going beyond individual responses to specific incidents, to take a population wide or systemic approach to “breaking the cycles” that are causing death and injury from preventable situations – to work on the settings and the environment at the population level.
- **The need for a prevention culture** - our service systems are geared to respond to symptoms at an individual level after the injury event – bringing the tag “symptom society” as you have to individually have the right symptoms before you can access defined services, and even then these may not provide the assistance really required to combat the root causes of injuries and harm
- **We can and must do more to reduce and manage community risk** – to alleviate the pressure inherent in some communities by working at a systemic level, across whole communities – **with national and state injury prevention plans to target the key causes of death and injury**
- **Community safety workers are not alone** – we may be in sole positions in our own area, but there is a network with lots of wide ranging experience – ask the people around you and use the VSCN list serve to get the information you need and find someone who can help out with your issue.
- **Build a local coalition of interested people** - it is through asking around that you will find other local people also concerned about safety issues – and from these contacts grows a local coalition ready to tackle the major community safety problems – that is the community safety approach in a nutshell – leveraging from each other to do more than any single agency or service can achieve alone.
- **When developing a community safety plan** there are a few key points to remember –
 - The overall community safety plan is not simply a collection of the items in each agency or service plan – but is aimed at the things that collectively will make the impact greater in each of these areas or to tackle some issues that are not on the plans of any agency or service
 - We need to use the data to identify 3 or 4 major issues – do not try to do it all at once
 - Endorsement of the plan usually means agreement to proceed but be careful whether it means that resources are also allocated – some times it will not and separate resourcing decisions will have to be made.

After the conference closed 80 participants and guests gathered outdoors in the late afternoon sun to share ideas over cocktails. The networking continued into the evening as we shared a meal and got

to know each other better as friends as well as colleagues. And the night was well supported with music by local “band” REWIND bringing friends and guests alike to the dance floor.



Picture 2 - Michael Bourne, Co Chair of the VSCN (far right) thanked the Conference Organising Committee – (from R to L) Ian Danahay, Tim Hardiman, Norm Free, Barbara Minuzzo, and Mark Hennessey, commenting that “they had done such a professional job that we are already keenly looking forward to our third annual conference in 2005.”

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For further information contact:

Michael Bourne, Co Chair, VSCN on Tel +61 0418 369 380 or e-mail
Michael.Bourne@justice.vic.gov.au

Or Barbara Minuzzo, VSCN Secretariat, Safety Centre, Royal Children’s Hospital on
Tel + 61 9345 5193 , Fax + 61 9345 5086, or email vscn.vscn@rch.org.au

Or go to the VSCN website www.vscn.org.au