

Take the First Step

Mitchell Shire

Final Evaluation Report

2024 - 2025



NORTHERN
COMMUNITY
LEGAL CENTRE

MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL



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Acknowledgements:

We gratefully acknowledge the peer-educators who have stepped forward as community leaders in the prevention of family violence. Their dedication, compassion, and courage are the foundation of meaningful change. Some of our peer-educators are also survivors of family violence, and their willingness to share their personal stories and lived experiences has been instrumental in fostering understanding, empathy, and resilience within our communities.

Northern Community Legal Centre would like to acknowledge and thank Mitchell Shire Council for supporting this project.

Northern Community Legal Centre would like to acknowledge the Gunung-Willam Balluk clan of the Wurundjeri people, part of the Kulin Nation, the traditional owners of the land on which our Broadmeadows office stands. Our catchment extends from Seymour on Taungurung Country all the way to Brunswick on Wurundjeri Country. We acknowledge the legacy of colonial resistance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

About Northern Community Legal Centre

Northern Community Legal Centre's (CLC's) purpose is to ensure equal access to justice for all in Melbourne's North- West region through the provision of legal services, community legal education and law reform initiatives. We prioritise the legal needs of people living with multiple forms of disadvantage and marginalisation, including refugees and newly arrived people, victim-survivors of family violence, people with mental illness and other forms of disability, young people, people experiencing homelessness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Northern CLC formed in 2016. In our short lifetime, Northern CLC has been able to respond to both emerging and escalating community needs. Our catchment of Merri-bek, Hume and Mitchell is home to communities who experience the most structural and systemic disadvantage in Victoria. A keystone to our success has been working closely with our communities to identify barriers in access to justice and engaging in advocacy to achieve systemic change that is effective and responsive. Our vision is that the people of Melbourne's North-West region have access to justice through the provision of free legal information, advice, duty lawyer services, casework assistance, education and community development activities.

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1. Introduction

This report has been developed for Mitchell Shire Council, the project's funding body. The Mitchell Shire Take the First Step Program was funded under the Free from Violence Local Government Grant Program (FFVLGGP) 2022-2025. The FFVLGGP contributes to the Victorian Government's vision to create a Victoria where everyone experiences equality, respect and lives free from violence. The funding supported Mitchell Shire Council to promote positive attitudes, behaviours and cultural change through initiatives and activities to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls.

In addition to project reporting, this evaluation informs Northern CLC's continuous improvement processes, while providing the opportunity to share project learnings with funders and the broader community sector.

Overview of the Take the First Step Project

Many newly arrived women are isolated, have limited English language skills, and are unaware of Australian laws and programs. Reaching these women is a challenge, and often, their first point of community contact will be with other women of the same cultural background who speak the same language.

Northern CLC's Take the First Step (TTFS) project trains local women from diverse cultural backgrounds to be family violence peer-educators and leaders within their community. The women meet regularly to learn about the causes of family violence and how to support someone experiencing family violence, including where they can go for help. In this way, they are supported to share accurate information in their community networks, enabling women at risk of experiencing family violence to take the first step towards safety for themselves and their children.

In addition, peer-educators co-design culturally appropriate messaging on family violence and distribute this messaging to places where women frequent and through their community networks. Peer-educators participate in co-designing events for their broader communities to raise awareness about family violence and to dispel common myths.

Northern CLC's TTFS project has evolved, having been run with three different groups in Merri-bek, Hume, and Mitchell Shire before the commencement of this iteration. The project has been continually adapted to meet the needs of the participants and the local community. Further information about the history of the project is available at: [Take the First Step](#).
[northernclc](#)

Aim of the Project

The aim of the Take the First Step (TTFS) Program is to build the knowledge of the peer-educators by receiving family violence and facilitation training to learn the causes and how to support someone experiencing family violence, including where to go for help. The peer-educators co-design culturally appropriate messaging on family violence and assist with distributing messaging to places where newly arrived women frequent (e.g. GP waiting rooms, specialist grocers, local libraries) and through their own community networks. Peer-educators participate in hosting events for their broader communities and conduct education activities for culturally specific groups to raise awareness about family violence and break down common myths while raising awareness of pathways to safety. Further aims of the project include:

- A reduction of family violence in our community
- Increased knowledge on supports available for community experiencing/have experienced family violence
- Provision of educational opportunities for women
- Increase in social connections in community
- Inclusion of a primary prevention lens on community resources developed
- Improved health outcomes

Key deliverables

The deliverables of this project include:

- Provide participants with an understanding of the primary prevention of violence against women.
- Strengthen the understanding of family violence and available legal and non-legal supports among newly arrived women in Mitchell Shire.
- Increase the capability of local women to share their knowledge about family violence
- Increase access to family violence legal support for newly arrived, non-English speaking and culturally diverse women.
- Increase the cultural responsiveness of the community sector's engagement with newly arrived, non-English speaking and culturally diverse women.
- Provide opportunities for migrant women to strengthen their community development skills and have their cultural experience expertise recognised by the community sector (leading to potential employment opportunities).

2. Evaluation Methodology

This report presents the evaluation of the TTFS project for the period 2024-2025. The review of the project has been guided by the program logic developed at the commencement of the project, as well as the responsibilities and deliverables stated within the MOU between Mitchell Shire Council and Northern CLC.

Project activities

The program logic for this project includes four core activities:

Recruit, educate, and train peer-educators to deliver family violence education within their support networks.

Train peer-educators in facilitation skills when discussing sensitive topics to build their capacity to participate in community education activities.

Participation of peer-educators in the co-design and delivery of community awareness-raising events to enhance community engagement and cultural safety and to build the confidence of peer-educators in speaking out about family violence.

Development and distribution of family violence education resources to isolated women in the community.

Process evaluation questions:

- To what extent was the project implemented in line with the project plan?
- What was the reach of the project?
- What amendments were made to the project logic or processes to enhance impact?
- What challenges were experienced in implementing the project?
- What other barriers and facilitators influenced the delivery of the program?

Impact evaluation questions:

- Has the project achieved its intended outcomes?
- To what extent has the project reached its target audience?
- What would build on the current impact of the project?

The evaluation draws upon a range of data sources, including:

- Administrative data recorded by the Northern CLC Community Engagement Worker
- Pre, mid, and post-project surveys completed by peer-educators (impact surveys)
- Intake surveys completed by Northern CLC Community Engagement Worker with prospective peer-educators.
- Reflections from the Northern CLC Community Engagement Worker captured by Northern CLC Community Engagement Worker using a Reflection Log Template
- Reflections from the Northern CLC Community Engagement Worker captured by the Northern CLC Strategy and Advocacy Manager officer during an evaluation interview.
- Reflections of the peer-educators captured by Northern CLC's Deputy Ceo at their final session attended.

3. Process Evaluation Findings

The project commenced on September 3, 2024, and was completed on August 22, 2025. All activities were delivered in accordance with the project logic developed at the project's commencement, as outlined below.

Recruitment of peer-educators

Northern CLC implemented a recruitment strategy that involved social media, posters, and information sharing with key stakeholders. The Community Engagement Worker spoke with more than 10 organisations/groups about the project and recruitment process. Mitchell Shire Council used their collaborative stakeholders and connections to promote the recruitment of peer-educators, including sharing flyers internally with Customer & Library Services, Community Centres, Neighbourhood Houses and externally through the Lower Hume Collaborative Group which holds 25 partner organisations from across Mitchell, Murrindindi and Strathbogie Shires.

The project initially received 18 Expressions of Interest from community members to join the project. Each person was contacted by the Community Engagement Worker to provide further information about the project and to assess any risks or barriers to participation. Contact could not be made with three people who had expressed interest, and five people decided not to proceed before the program commenced.

Of those who completed an intake interview (15), 31% heard about the project through Facebook, others heard about the project through the Mitchell Shire Council Newsletter, The SEED Project, Beveridge Library, Beveridge Indian Play Group, Kindergarten and Go Tafe.

Ten peer-educators commenced the program, and five remained engaged until its conclusion. The peer-educators who disengaged did so for different reasons. Two peer-educators informed the Community Engagement Worker that they were unable to continue with the project due to physical health reasons that prevented them from making their ongoing time commitment. One peer-educator disengaged due to currently being in a family violence relationship and needing to prioritise spending time and energy addressing the impacts of this. This person became a client of Northern CLC so that we could further assist with family violence-related legal issues. One peer-educator had previous experience of family violence and decided it wasn't the right time for them to engage with family violence materials and discussions.



Figure 3 Recruitment Flyer

About the participants

The project successfully recruited ten women who live in Mitchell Shire. Of those who commenced the project, seven completed our pre-project survey. Those who completed the survey speak seven languages, including English, French, Hindi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Urdu and Vietnamese. Three participants were from India, one participant was from the UK, and three participants were born in Australia. One participant identified as living with a disability.

Training and capability building

The project delivered family violence training commencing in October 2024 and completed on 21 August 2025. Training sessions were held monthly for two hours at the Greater Beveridge Community Center, as the preferred location for participants. Training sessions were designed to increase peer-educators' understanding of family violence and enhance their ability to share their learning with others. A WhatsApp group was established to support communication between the peer-educators and the Community Engagement Worker between sessions.

The training content was developed by the Community Engagement Worker, following the establishment of rapport with the group and an assessment of the group's level of knowledge, interests, and capacity to engage with their communities. Adaptations to previously used content were applied in response to the learning needs of the group.

The training topics included:

- An introduction to Northern CLC and the TTFS Program
- The role of a peer-educator
- Introduction to family violence and the forms of family violence
- Family violence in different cultural settings
- Coercive control
- Drivers of family violence
- Family violence and gender inequality
- Family violence and the law
- The impact of community attitudes
- Family violence and workplace rights
- Setting boundaries
- Family violence risk and impact upon children

A participant survey conducted at the end of the training program assessed its success.

100% of participants strongly agreed with the following statements:

- I feel confident in identifying family violence
- I understand what legal rights and remedies exist to protect people from family violence
- I feel confident providing support to someone I know
- I understand who to contact if I or someone in my community experiences family violence
- I feel confident in talking to others about family violence
- I understand the impact of family violence upon children

Participants noted that both formal training and peer sharing within the group contributed to their learning. Many expressed feeling not only more capable of initiating support conversations about family violence, but felt empowered by their experience of participating in the program.

"As a result of the program, I am more confident. If I didn't have the resources shared here, I wouldn't know what to say - I now know how to take the first step. I feel very empowered and confident."

"I could feel the empowerment of women in the group coming together from diverse cultural backgrounds and sharing stories of family violence. This is so different from what we experience in our community. DV can be in so many different forms. Our community has perception that white women don't experience it but listening to everyone's stories we understand we are not alone."

"This is where the learning happened, it helped us to understand. [Peer-educator] came up with a lot of experiences that otherwise we wouldn't have understood."

Maintaining participant safety

Recognising that several of our peer-educators had their own lived experiences of family violence, care and concern was exercised by the Community Engagement Worker to ensure that participants felt comfortable, and that the risk of traumatization was mitigated. This was achieved through developing group agreements that promoted group safety, implementing activities that built connections within the group, and carefully considering how the training topics could be balanced with lighter, empowering activities to ensure that, despite the heavy topic, participants left meetings feeling uplifted.

The comments provided by participants during the evaluation process confirmed the success of these strategies.

"Rem is a fantastic facilitator, she has created a warm and caring environment, she is very engaging and knows what she is teaching."

"There was one session where it felt heavy with the topic, but we had a break and then I was able to work through it in the room. It helped me to exercise the ghost. The way that Rem does the tough stuff and then the fun stuff. That night she gave me an affirmation card and it was so apt, it really helped me."

Sharing empowering messaging with the community

At a session co-facilitated by Abby Eager, Gender Equality Officer, Mitchell Shire Council, peer-educators were provided with the opportunity to develop a design that could be printed onto a Tote Bag, and distributed to the community at the community forum (the Economic Justice Forum).

The objectives of this session were to:

- Understand the link between gender inequality and family violence
- Build awareness of powerful personal qualities.
- Encourage personal reflection to recognise individual strengths.
- Discuss the broader systems that can impact women experiencing family violence and how personal strengths play a role in navigating them.
- Reflect on the barriers they faced and highlight the personal qualities that helped them persist and overcome them.

Peer-educators found the activity of designing messaging for the community particularly meaningful as it sparked conversations regarding how identifying strengths contributes to resiliency. Once the design was established, peer-educators would not see the final product until the day of a community forum that was being planned (The Economic Justice Forum). They commented:

"this will be amazing to see our experiences represented"

"lets make an impact"

"I love our handprints underneath, it's something we put together".

In addition to training, the peer-educators participated in other project activities, including designing community legal education resources, promoting their work in the media, and co-designing and delivering two significant community events. These activities will be described further in the impact evaluation findings below.



Figure 2: Tote bags designed by peer-educators

4. Impact Evaluation Findings

The impact evaluation findings highlight the significant impact of the peer education program not only on the women who participated, but also on the broader community's understanding and response to family violence. The program successfully empowered culturally diverse women to become community leaders, increased access to legal services, and strengthened sector collaboration.

Enhanced community support for victims-survivors of family violence

At the end of the project survey, each peer-educator estimated that they had provided support to between 10 and 15 people in their role as a peer-educator.

One participant shared how hearing others' stories of helping others inspired her to continue in the peer-education program.

"There was a powerful story from one of the women – she called police overseas to go assist her sister; she didn't want her to make that call but she did it out of love and care. That story made me want to come back."

Increased access to legal assistance

While it is difficult to directly link the project activities upon access to legal assistance, during the project period, Northern CLC saw a notable rise in clients born outside Australia accessing family violence legal support in Mitchell Shire—66 clients compared to 19 in the previous year, an increase of almost 250 per cent.

Enhanced community awareness of family violence

On 10 December 2024, Northern CLC hosted a workshop for peer-educators, community partners, and community members, coinciding with the final day of the 16 Days of Activism campaign. The 'Speak Up' event aimed to raise awareness about the impact of family violence, provide a space for community members to share their experiences of gendered violence, and highlight available support services and pathways to safety for victim-survivors.

The event was co-designed with peer-educators, who advised on promotional materials, event content, and their willingness to share their own stories during art activities.



Figure 3: Speak up event promotional flyer

The workshop featured a presentation by Northern CLC staff about the role of legal services in keeping victims-survivors safe and ensuring that legal rights are pursued. Participants shared a meal and participated in a creative art activity where they painted words and images on white t-shirts. These t-shirts will be used as displays at future violence prevention events.

Although attendance at the event was significantly lower than expected based upon registrations, participants noted the critical conversations that took place during the art activity. One peer-educator shared her own lived experience of family violence with a police officer and others at her table, and other participants also spoke about their own experiences of gendered violence. Discussions included the impact of social media upon young people's attitudes, and strategies for addressing family violence within families, schools, and the broader community.

Photos from the 'Speak up' Event:



*"I thought painting the t-shirts was very powerful, the colours and the stories."
(peer-educator)*

Strengthened sector collaboration, responsiveness, and enhanced community knowledge

Economic Justice Forum

A co-designed community forum was planned for delivery towards the end of the program, once the peer-educators had completed the program's capacity-building activities and had the opportunity to participate in discussions about what is most needed in their community.

Following a presentation from Northern CLC lawyers regarding financial abuse, financial inequity following relationship separation, and the legal and financial remedies available, the peer-educators decided that this was significant information that most women were not aware of. This was agreed as a knowledge gap and concern across all cultural groups, and the peer-educators further decided that this knowledge could make a substantial positive impact on the stability and security of families recovering from their family violence experience. The peer-educators agreed on the event title, "Economic Justice Forum", and the event was planned for delivery on 13 May 2025.

The event was held at the Greater Beveridge Community Centre, and attended by 34 people. The program featured a presentation from Northern CLC, followed by a panel discussion with representatives from Northern CLC's Wallan office, The SEED Project, Good Shepherd, Nexus and The Orange Door. Service providers also attended from PRACE, Family Care, and Victoria Police as well as a local newspaper.

The forum provided an opportunity for a community conversation regarding the financial inequity and financial abuse that women experience. Discussion explored the financial supports women can access through legal assistance and other community supports, such as crisis payments, debt redress schemes, child support

victims of crime assistance, property division and other financial pathways to economic security.

Prior to proceedings commencing, local service providers that assist victims-survivors of family violence set up stalls in the forum space, with information and staff available. This allowed for the mutual exchange of information between service providers and participants regarding programs available and the barriers experienced by community members when accessing assistance.

Audience questions were thoughtful and sparked meaningful conversations and open dialogue about key issues important to the community and service providers. These questions reflected real concerns of those navigating support systems and highlighted key issues such as accessibility, safety, and service demand.

They also helped drive meaningful conversations on the importance of inclusive and safe services in the Mitchell Shire region. Some examples were captured below using a live Q&A software during the event.

Figure 4: Economic Justice Forum event flyer



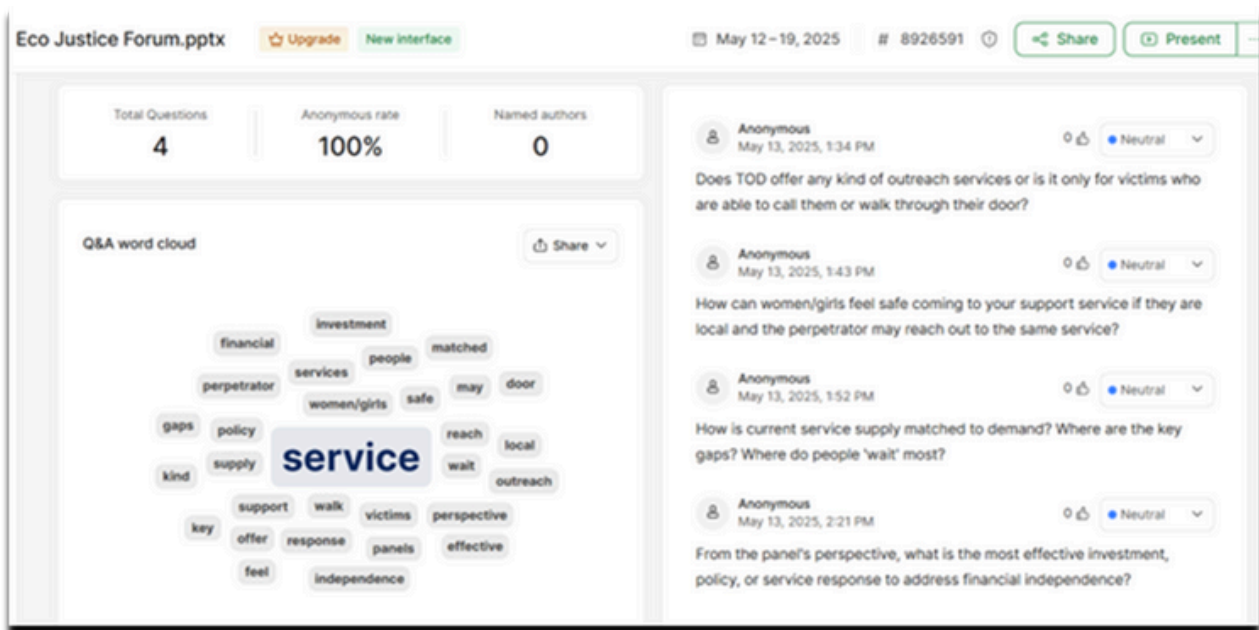


Figure 5: Economic Justice Forum live Q&A

Following the presentations and panel discussions, the Northern CLC's peer-educators were acknowledged and introduced. Two peer-educators spoke about their experiences and motivations for participating in the project. All event participants were given a tote bag featuring the design created by the peer-educators in Session 7. As one peer-educator commented during evaluation reflections:

"I loved it when we made the bag - it was so good to know that the bag was out there in the community having impact. I loved in the forum when they were hanging off all the chairs. I feel proud wearing it."

The Economic Justice Forum outcomes evidenced enhanced sector collaboration. Two participating agencies approached northern CLC to deliver further legal education activities to the women's groups they host, and has since received multiple requests to replicate the Economic Justice Forum in other locations and contexts. In response, Northern CLC has scheduled a webinar for the broader community sector on this topic. Another organisation that participated in the Economic Justice forum has since approached Northern CLC to partner in delivering a community forum for the 16 Days of Activism.

While only five attendees completed a participant feedback form following the Economic Justice Forum event, each respondent stated that as a result of participating in the event they had a better understanding of their legal rights, they could identify at least one legal right that they weren't aware of before the forum, they feel more confident to seek legal help if they need it, and they know more about the services that can help if they need it.

The educational impact of the forum was extended beyond those who participated when the local newspaper, the North Central Review, reported on the forum activities and the Take the First Step peer education program. Peer-educators were interviewed for the article and featured in the newspaper.

During reflections, captured as part of the evaluation process, peer-educators commented:

"Having the experience of being at the economic justice forum was very impactful for me personally. I felt like a celebrity being in the newspaper."

"Being in the paper - my family saw me as a strong woman being out leading the community and challenging norms."



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Legal education resources available to the broader community

In addition to co-designing two community forums, the peer-educators participated in developing a poster for local women, aligned to the objectives of the Economic Justice Forum.

The poster provided a link to educational content on the Northern CLC website to support women's financial sustainability post relationship separation. The peer-educators assisted with disseminating the poster to places where they work and frequent, and also shared social media posts promoting the poster.

Website analytic data for Northern CLC's Legal Support page, where the educational content located, showed that 499 people visited the 'Legal Support' page in the last 90 days. Unfortunately, due to limited data analysis capability, a more detailed breakdown of the data is not available to show the direct number of hits on specific content.



Figure 6: Poster designed by peer-educators

Improved community engagement and responsiveness of Northern CLC's service delivery

Northern CLC also benefited directly from our engagement with local and culturally diverse women. The TTFS project aligned with the opening of Northern CLC's Wallan Office in 2024, and the community engagement opportunity afforded by this project significantly enhanced our understanding of the experiences of women living in the region and the barriers they face in accessing information and services.

For example, through our engagement with peer-educators, we deepened our understanding of the isolation that victims-survivors experience post-separation, which is magnified in regional locations with limited community infrastructure. Many peer-educators commented on the sense of belonging they gained through participation in this project, as well as the essential connections they established and will continue to build upon. Through numerous conversations and engagement activities, we gained insight into the areas of family violence education that would have the most significant local impact. We enhanced our understanding of the impact of cultural norms on women's experiences and were able to explore with the peer-educators the intersections between cultural dynamics and regional isolation. These learning will continue to inform Northern CLC's service delivery into the future.

Empowerment, inclusion and skill development for culturally diverse women

Northern CLC has long been aware of the power this program can have on women's lives. The Community Engagement Worker, who coordinated this project, was herself a former Northern CLC peer-educator from a previous iteration of the project. The program develops women's leadership skills and confidence that will benefit them in the future. During monthly sessions, the peer-educators are trained to facilitate conversations about sensitive topics. They practice role-play activities to ensure they are confident in responding to challenging questions. They are also invited to participate in the community forums in whatever way they feel comfortable. For some, this involves sharing their personal stories informally during activities. Others asked questions from the audience to the forum panel, and two peer-educators presented at the Forum on their experiences of participating in the program. One of the culturally diverse peer-educators directly attributed her recent employment at a local community housing organisation to her participation in the project.

"I used this experience when going for job interviews and now I have employment. It added to my resume, and I was able to talk about my experience of being in the program during the interview."

For others, the experience of participating in the group helped them to build connection in the community which had enabled them to build confidence in participating further in community networks.

"I didn't know what it was like to have a community here - I don't want to let those tentacles get cut off....As a result of this program, I've now joined lots of community networks."

All of the participants expressed that they wanted to continue to build upon the skills they have developed through participation in the program. When asked about what resources or activities they would like to see offered after the program ends, they responded:

“Continuing connections”

“Information about similar workshops and projects that I can be a part of to upskill my knowledge”

“More events or more classes or more workshops”

“For us to stay connected”



Figure 7: Peer-educators receiving their certificates

5. Project Challenges, Learnings, and Variations

Challenges were identified and addressed across the delivery program through project adaptations.

Recruitment

Participating in a family violence peer-education project requires significant courage and coordination from women who are already balancing work and family commitments. For those living in regional areas, access to the program is further complicated by factors such as geographic isolation, limited public transport, and difficulties securing childcare. Although the program was initially designed to engage women from culturally diverse backgrounds, recruitment challenges led to a more inclusive approach. All women who expressed interest were welcomed, regardless of their country of birth. As a result, the peer-educator group comprised a diverse mix of women born in both Australia and overseas.

In light of participants' motivations for joining the project, it is recommended that future iterations place greater emphasis on skill development, including enhancing communication abilities, building sector-specific knowledge, and fostering confidence to lead groups and present on sensitive topics.

It is also recommended that Northern CLC utilise its collaboration with local partner agencies to ensure their clients are actively invited to participate. During the initial recruitment phase, this was less feasible due to Northern CLC's recent establishment of a new office in the region and being at the early stage of relationship-building with local stakeholders.

Participant retention

Competing work schedules and family responsibilities made it difficult for some participants to attend regularly. It was essential to create a welcoming, supportive group culture that encouraged the peer-educators to overcome their barriers to participation. Northern CLC provided practical support, such as food, session reminders, and regular check-ins with participants who were experiencing difficulties, while also understanding that some participants would require flexibility regarding their participation and not placing undue pressure upon them. Session content and information were shared via a WhatsApp group after each session to ensure that participants who could not attend remained engaged and informed. Consideration would be given to delivering hybrid sessions (a combination of in-person and online) in the future to enhance accessibility for all participants.

In consideration of the barriers to participation, every effort was made to ensure the program was as accessible as possible. The Community Engagement Worker adjusted her standard working hours to accommodate the monthly workshops, which were conducted in the evenings when participants had finished work. One participant brought her two children to the meeting briefly, until her partner could pick them up. Participants noted that these accessibility measures were very important to them.

"Hat's off to Rem for letting me participate even though I had to bring my children briefly for some of the time. Rem created such a beautiful atmosphere. Those little barriers didn't stop me from participating. All the other participants are so accepting and sharing. "

"It was good to have it start at 6pm so we could attend after work."

Project design

It was essential to design the program to be culturally relevant and inclusive of peer-educators from different backgrounds. This was achieved by setting up a group agreement early to ensure safety, respect, and confidentiality. The peer-educators were in control of the information that they shared, and they drew on each other's lived experiences for shared learning. Participant safety was maintained through regular check-ins with the group to discuss pace and content, and careful consideration was given to ensuring that the amount of content covered was not overwhelming.

Maintaining safety and well-being.

Recognising the potential for traumatisation, creating a safe space was critical to ensure that this risk was mitigated. The group agreement was revised to reinforce boundaries around the disclosure of traumatic experiences. At the end of each session, self-care would be discussed, and participants were reminded of support options such as the 1800RESPECT hotline. The use of positive affirmation cards, meditation, and breathing exercises was also employed to balance the weight of the topics and encourage participants to adopt self-care strategies. Some peer-educators commented that these breathing techniques were now something they had incorporated into their daily lives.

Supporting the Community Engagement Worker in her role

The Community Engagement Worker was employed two days per week for this project. However, maintaining the WhatsApp group, responding to participants, and conducting pre-session activities at times made it difficult for her to confine her work time to these specific days. While the Community Engagement Worker stated that she felt supported and encouraged in her role, greater dedicated work time would have provided her with the opportunity to engage further in reflective practice, participate in debriefing activities, access professional development opportunities regarding trauma-informed practice, and connect with other facilitators running group activities both internally and externally to share ideas and strategies. This could be achieved by combining the project coordination role with a broader role within Northern CLC's community development team.

Responding to varying participant objectives

Women chose to participate in this program for various reasons, including recovering from experiences of family violence, seeking social connection, wanting to make a difference in the lives of other women, and developing skills that could be applied to employment opportunities in the community sector. Many of the women were supporting a family member or friend with experiences of family violence.

While the core objective of the TTFS program is peer education, to some extent, the project was able to meet all of these varied objectives. One victim-survivor commented that the project had helped her “work through her demons” and develop a support network that hadn’t existed for her before. All participants commented on how important it had been to come together and build friendships and community connections. These findings highlight the need for localised support networks for women, and particularly for women who are experiencing isolation following family violence and living in regional areas. Consideration should be given to how this need could be met through targeted and sustained therapeutic programs for isolated victims-survivors.

Next steps

The Mitchell Shire Take the First Step (TTFS) program in 2024-2025 successfully met the diverse goals of its peer-educators. Participants joined the initiative to reconnect with their community, heal from their personal experiences of family violence, build skills for future employment in community development, and support friends and loved ones affected by family violence. These goals were not only achieved, but the program also delivered broader benefits to the community, including enhanced access to legal and community services, improved sector collaboration, and more effective sector responses to local needs.

However, the short-term nature of program funding presents a significant challenge. The intensive schedule required to recruit, train, and build capacity within a limited timeframe often means that just as momentum builds, the program concludes. By the end of the funding cycle, we have a group of motivated, skilled, and passionate women ready to continue their work—yet without ongoing support, their progress risks being lost. Peer-educators have voiced a strong desire for the program to continue:

“The only problem is that this program is not running again.”

“I would want to recommend it to friends but can’t because it’s not running.”

“More projects like this would be very good.”

Northern CLC and Mitchell Shire Council have explored ways to sustain engagement with peer-educators, including involving them in community forums, policy consultations, and using social media platforms to maintain communication. However, without continued funding, these opportunities are limited to a small cohort of community women, and funds are not available to cover participants’ expenses or to provide gratuity payments in recognition of their contributions.

To truly maximise the impact of TTFS, consideration should be given to embedding and expanding the program. This would allow more local women to participate, grow their skill base as community leaders, and contribute meaningfully to the prevention of family violence.

Mitchell Shire faces some of the highest rates of family violence in Victoria, compounded by social isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and rapid population growth. This project offers a vital pathway to address these challenges. It fosters social connection among isolated women, empowers victims-survivors to educate others within their communities, and supports community-led service delivery. Just as importantly, it builds confidence, leadership, and employment readiness among women—laying the foundation for long-term change.

Project Key Contact:
Jenni Smith, CEO
jsmith@northernclc.org.au

Appendix A: Pre-Project Survey Questions

1. Your name
2. Country of birth
3. Languages spoken
4. What is your gender?
5. How old are you?
6. Do you have any disabilities?
7. Would you like to tell us anything about these disability/disabilities to ensure we can make the project as accessible as possible for you?
8. I understand what legal rights and remedies exist to protect people from family violence
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
9. I feel confident providing support to someone experiencing family violence
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
10. I understand who to contact if I or someone in my community experiences family violence
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
11. I feel engaged and connected to my community
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
12. I feel confident in talking to others in my community about family violence
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
13. I understand the impact of family violence on children
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
14. I would like to learn more about...
15. Why are you interested in participating in this project?
16. Do you want to tell us anything else?

Appendix B: Mid-Project Survey Questions

1. Is the location easy to get to?
2. How satisfied are you with the knowledge you have gained from the sessions?
 - a. Very Satisfied
 - b. Satisfied
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Dissatisfied
 - e. Very Dissatisfied
3. Do you feel the information in the sessions so far, will be useful in your role as Peer Educator?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not sure
4. How would you rate the information that has been presented so far in the sessions? (1-10, 1= Poor and 10= Excellent)
5. How do you agree with the following statements (Yes, Neutral or No)
 - a. The facilitator communicated clearly sessions expectations and information
 - b. The sessions have been delivered in a clear and easy-to-understand approach
 - c. The facilitator encourages Peer Educator participation
 - d. The facilitator has good time management skills
 - e. Are you happy with the time for discussion during the sessions?
- f. Would you use the information you learnt in these sessions in your daily life?

Appendix C: End-Project Survey Questions

1. Your name
2. Country of birth
3. Languages spoken
4. What is your gender?
5. How old are you?
6. I understand what legal rights and remedies exist to protect people from family violence
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
7. I feel confident providing support to someone experiencing family violence
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
8. I understand who to contact if I or someone in my community experiences family violence
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
9. I feel engaged and connected to my community
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
10. I feel confident in talking to others in my community about family violence
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
11. I understand the impact of family violence on children
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
12. Is there anything you wish you had learnt through the project but didn't?
13. Do you have any suggestions as to how we might improve the project in the future?