
Leading the Proactive Prevention of Violence Against Women

White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation in Tasmania

ANYONE WHO HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT TASMANIA WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED. It is a magnificent island state of just 525,000 residents situated 240 km south of the mainland Australia coast. The climate is temperate, and the coastline's beauty is second to none. Tasmania has vast regions of picturesque wilderness, including areas believed to have been undisturbed for more than 10,500 years. One-fifth of the island (1.58 billion hectares) is World Heritage protected land. Much of this protected area is still accessible via more than 2,000 km of walking trails that provide access to a variety of wilderness environments. In Tasmania, visitors and residents breathe some of the cleanest air in the world that has been carried by the westerly winds of the Roaring Forties across thousands of kilometers of untouched ocean.

However, despite its beauty, Tasmania shares an unfortunate similarity with most countries across the globe—the existence of appalling behavior that often takes place within the privacy of people's homes. Often, when this behavior spills out into public view, people tend to turn a blind eye. Family violence has previously been one of those taboo subjects that was gossiped about in secret but never properly addressed.

Recent national statistics tell us that in Australia:

- One in four women has experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner, boyfriend, girlfriend, or date since the age of 15.

- Almost 17 percent of women have experienced violence by a partner.
- The estimated overall economic cost of violence against women and their children is a staggering \$22 to \$26 billion a year.
- Intimate partner violence contributes to more illness, disability, and premature death than any other risk factor for women aged 18–44.
- On average, eight women are hospitalized each day due to family and domestic violence.
- One in two women have experienced sexual harassment during their lifetime.
- One in four children are exposed to domestic violence.
- Adults who as children were exposed to domestic violence are between two and four times more likely to be in violent relationships than those who were not.
- Over 60 percent of women experiencing violence from a current partner are in the workforce.
- Police in Australia respond to a report of a family violence incident every two minutes. From July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2018, Tasmania Police responded to 5,630 family violence incidents, which is the equivalent of 15.4 incidents per day. The number of family violence incidents reported in Tasmania have increased in recent years, which is actually seen as a positive anecdotal sign of cultural change that results in more reporting, rather than a sign of more instances of family violence.

BY
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WHITE RIBBON PROGRAM

White Ribbon was formed in 1991 following a tragic 1989 incident at the Ecole Polytechnique engineering school in Montreal, Canada, where a 25-year-old male armed with a rifle and knife murdered 14 women and injured a further 10 women and 4 men. It was a hate crime in which the perpetrator ordered women and men to opposite sides of a classroom, announced he was fighting feminism, instructed the men to leave, and then killed six women. The male killed a further eight women before fatally shooting himself.

White Ribbon is active in more than 60 countries including Australia. Their workplace program's key objectives are to

- increase the knowledge and skills of staff and managers to address issues of violence against women (VAW) in the workplace,
- enhance the capacity of workplaces to respond to the issue of VAW,
- accredit workplaces taking active and effective steps to stop VAW, and
- change the attitudes and behaviors that allow VAW to occur.

TASMANIA'S WHITE RIBBON WORKPLACE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The Tasmanian state government introduced workplace accreditation as part of its *Safe Homes, Safe Families: Tasmanian Family Violence Action Plan 2015–2020*. Strategy 5 of that plan committed the government to rolling out the workplace accreditation program across all Tasmania's government agencies. The reason for engaging White Ribbon was to support government employees experiencing family violence and provide the skills and tools to employees that would enable them to recognize and respond appropriately to family violence. A number of factors led to Strategy 5 and some are worth mentioning to provide context.

Australia, as a member of the United Nations (UN) and together with 192 other member sovereign states, must report yearly upon how the government is working to address 30 criteria drafted half a century ago within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One of the key roles of the UN is to protect human rights and address VAW. The UN describes VAW as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or

psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is the peak intergovernmental forum within Australia. COAG manages matters of national significance and matters that need coordination across all Australian state and territory governments. (Tasmania is one of six states and two territories that make up the nation of Australia.) Over a number of years, Australia's justice systems, health systems, national and state advocacy groups, public and privately commissioned surveys, and general public opinion have all pointed to the fact that family violence continues to be a significant issue. It was clear that attitudes and behaviors toward women and the notion of what was acceptable behavior needed to change in Australia. There had been numerous state and territory initiatives implemented to address aspects of VAW, but more work needed to be done. In 2010, COAG introduced the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children*. That plan focused squarely on the two gender crime categories of family violence and sexual assault. As Strategy 2.3 of the plan, COAG decided to fund White Ribbon to assist with promoting positive male attitudes and behaviors.

Tasmania Police Commissioner Darren Hine leads the state's Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management (DPFEM) as both the commissioner of police and secretary across the whole of DPFEM. He has been an active White Ribbon Ambassador since December 2008 and could see the value in White Ribbon being utilized as a resource to address VAW. Commissioner Hine's broad understanding of the issues surrounding family violence is complemented by his involvement in a number of state and commonwealth forums including chairing the Australia-New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency and serving on the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission. It was an easy decision for Tasmanian government to include DPFEM as one of the first three government agencies to seek White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation.

Accreditation requires a workplace to fulfill the following requirements:

- Acknowledge VAW as a serious, prevalent, and preventable issue.
- Demonstrate a culture of zero tolerance of VAW.

- Embed messaging within the organization's leadership, procedures, and training that is responsive to the program's standards and criteria.
- Be proactive in preventing gender-based violence and promoting respectful relationships within the workplace, strengthening the organization's stance in relation to anti-bullying (equity and diversity and antidiscrimination) legislation.
- Equip staff with the knowledge and skills to address issues of VAW whether they occur inside or outside the workplace.

White Ribbon Accreditation Standards and Criteria

Accreditation requires that an agency meets 15 criteria that fit within three accreditation standards. Accreditation is still achievable where a small number of criteria have not yet been fully achieved, as long as the workplace is satisfactorily demonstrated to be on a path to fully achieving those criteria within a specified time frame.

The DPFEM Accreditation Experience

Achieving accreditation was challenging. DPFEM is a large agency made up of police officers, firefighters, state emergency service members, scientists, tradespersons, and state service employees. It is a 24-7 emergency service whose diversity of roles and core functions made accreditation more complex than it would have been for a workplace that performed a singular function. DPFEM's services operate under different acts of parliament, with differing and sometimes competing regulatory requirements and practices. Embedding White Ribbon into the whole of the agency required considerable commitment and resources.

The success of this process would not have been possible without strong leadership, a dedicated White Ribbon manager, and the support of an active and broadly skilled accreditation committee. The true cost of accreditation is difficult to quantify; it may well take a generation before it can be determined whether White Ribbon Accreditation achieved significant change. DPFEM invested significant human resources toward achieving initial accreditation with bodies of accreditation work allocated to the appropriately skilled work areas for implementation. The DPFEM accreditation committee met frequently and included representation from the four operational services and the agency's support areas including Education and Training, Employee Services (People and Culture), and Strategy and Support. Post-accreditation work has proved slightly less demanding and required a smaller restructured committee with less frequent meetings. Post-accreditation requires ongoing work toward improving the workplace's capacity to combat VAW, and this work is more than simply maintaining the status quo achieved at accreditation.

Training has proved challenging for DPFEM. Emergency services have a wide range of competing training requirements, and, at times, the training competes with the ability to provide frontline service. The associated training is not the same across all White Ribbon Accredited Workplaces. An accredited workforce must be *offered* expert-influenced training on the recognition and prevention of VAW and behaviors that lead to VAW. DPFEM provide continuous access to training for staff via an online e-learning package. All DPFEM managers, supervisors, and key contact people must complete online manager training, which helps equip them to appropriately respond to workplace VAW and behaviors that lead to VAW.

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TABLE 1: WHITE RIBBON ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

Standard One: Leadership and Commitment					
1.1 Leadership Commitment	1.2 Commitment of Resources	1.3 Internal Communication	1.4 External Communication	1.5 Collaboration	1.6 Demonstrated Engagement with the issue of VAW
Standard Two: Prevention of Violence against Women					
2.1 Policies, Procedures and Documentation	2.2 Communication of Policies and Procedures	2.3 Manager and Supervisor Training	2.4 Staff Training	2.5 Risk Assessment	2.6 Expectations of Contractors
Standard Three: Response to Violence against Women					
3.1 Response to Victims	3.2 Response to Perpetrators	3.3 Evaluation and Continuous Improvement			

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE DPFEM EXPERIENCE

The first piece of advice when considering accreditation is, if possible, do not “go it alone.” Tasmania’s whole of government commitment to White Ribbon Accreditation allowed the formation of an interagency working group where accreditation questions were able to be assessed from various agency perspectives before action was taken. A problem shared is a problem halved, and collaboration is a strong contributor to successful accreditation. For instance, when it came to informing the public, Tasmania Police has relied on its significant following via social media with just over 180,000 people following the agency’s Facebook page. Some agencies do not have a public face, but were able to achieve external communication through Facebook by partnering with DPFEM.

Accreditation requires a clear focus on violence by men against women and making VAW a man’s issue, and this messaging can be offensive to men (of all sexual orientations) who are not violent. In promoting White Ribbon values, it is advisable to ensure that messaging is not too narrowly focused and is inclusive of the whole workforce or there is a risk of damaging the effectiveness of the message. While White Ribbon is about making violence against women a man’s issue, aspects of the program such as the calling out of behaviors that lead to VAW—like sexist jokes or derogatory comments—is something that ought to be practiced by all employees. DPFEM adopted the position that “we do not tolerate violence, especially violence against women and children.” This statement is sufficiently wide to encompass White Ribbon and all other strategies that work toward equity, diversity, and inclusion.

It was difficult to find material that assisted with challenges that were specific to emergency services. White Ribbon provides reference material to assist accreditation and that material is periodically updated. The body of reference material continues to grow as more workplaces enroll. If White Ribbon is experiencing growth in an agency’s country, then that growth period might potentially create unavoidable delays in providing updated reference materials. White Ribbon Australia was forced to expand quickly to accommodate the growing number of accredited workplaces.

Successful accreditation requires active engagement by senior management, including continued support to the White Ribbon implementation team. DPFEM was fortunate to have senior police officers committed to White Ribbon, and their support was invaluable. The provision of appropriate, dedicated human resources—backed by the right mix of senior leadership providing support—allowed the agency to achieve accreditation with all but two criteria fully achieved. DPFEM submitted more than 700 pieces of evidence across the 15 criteria. The evidence submitted for accreditation was a mixture of emails, media releases, social media posts, social media comments, media articles, speaking notes, video footage, amended policies and practices, new policies and practices, instructions, intranet posts, meeting agendas, and meeting minutes. The department is currently working toward reaccreditation later in 2019 and experience and advice so far indicates that this will be achieved by submitting around 300 pieces of evidence.

The Tasmania Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management has stepped up to meet the White Ribbon’s challenge to create a workplace culture that does not tolerate or overlook violence against women, instead proactively addressing it both within the agency and in the community it serves. While it is too early to see the long-term effects of the White Ribbon accreditation, the agency is committed to staying the course and continually improving its response to family violence and violence against women. ☺