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MEDIA RELEASE

BCHS vows to play role in family violence culture change

Bendigo Community Health Services has vowed to play a role in ensuring the Royal Commission into Family Violence leads to a culture change and better outcomes for families.

BCHS CEO Kim Sykes said the 227 recommendations and the state government's determination to achieve real reform were important steps in addressing family violence.

"Changing the culture around family violence is everyone's responsibility but change needs strong leadership and it's encouraging to see a state government taking on that role through adopting all the commission's recommendations and ensuring victims of violence are at the forefront of reform," she said.

BCHS executive director programs Andie West said the organisation would work with all recommendations that could be supported by services, programs and staff.

"BCHS has taken a keen interest in the Royal Commission inquiry by taking part in consultations and advocating for the rights of those affected by family violence," Ms West said.

"We must keep working on improving outcomes for those impacted by family violence through effective and respectful early identification, responding appropriately to clients wishing to disclose their experiences of family violence and providing ongoing support over time."

Ms West welcomed the focus on early years intervention with the organisation's new \$2.6 million kidzspace centre at Kangaroo Flat to play a key role in supporting children and families in the region.

"Children 'witnessing' or having exposure to domestic violence has been increasingly recognised as a form of child abuse, both in Australia and internationally," Ms West said.

“Children who live in homes where family violence occurs grow up with unpredictability - a home filled with tension and unrest, where living in fear is ‘normal’. This can lead to significant emotional and psychological trauma, similar to that experienced by children who are direct victims of child abuse.

“The impact of this exposure can be significant – impacting on children’s ability to reach their developmental milestones as they grow, cognitive development and very often maladaptive behaviour patterns, as they try to deal with the trauma they have witnessed.

“The latest research shows traumatic experiences in the early years have a long-lasting impact on a young person’s life. This is the chance to effect real change – we must take it.”

Ms West said BCHS had implemented Take A Stand family violence training across the organisation in 2015.

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