

Stopped in its tracks

PHILLIPPA BUTT

Rotary Club races to thwart domestic violence

A COUNTRY town is taking the campaign against family violence to the racetrack.

In an unorthodox move, the Rotary Club of Maryborough has worked with the local harness racing club to turn Monday's race meeting into a platform to campaign against domestic violence.

All eight races will be named to promote awareness, with titles such as the "Respect Your Partner Pace".

The race caller will also provide statistics and information ahead of the race, and a 10m sign will be seen on the track.

Maryborough Rotary Club past president Garry Higgins

said the race day's aim was to engage people from all over Australia and internationally.

"Each race normally has around four million views from across Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong," he said.

Around 3600 TABs will put the titles on the boards, and the telecast will include information about family violence as each race is run.

"All we want to do is start the conversation," Mr Higgins said. The ex-Carlton footballer suggested launching the #Say-No2FamilyViolence Rotary campaign in 2013, to a frosty

reception. "Even within our own club, quite a number of our members were reluctant to get involved as they felt they would have to be involved in public interventions," he said.

"But that's not what it's about."

The Rotary Club has taken on family violence as its main community safety project in Maryborough and surrounding areas.

It made the bold decision to do so after a meeting of 200 Rotarians and their partners revealed not a single woman in the room believed that they

had total equality in their relationship.

Starting with a poster campaign, the club has produced wallet cards identifying what family violence is, and has worked with the local football club for two family violence rounds where players wore white armbands.

There has been an increase of 15.7 per cent in reporting of family violence crimes within the Central Goldfields area but, according to Mr Higgins, that's a good thing.

"It's not that the incidents have gone up, it's that people

are reporting them," he said. There were 288 incidents reported in the region over the 2014-15 period, up from 249 the year before.

Mr Higgins believes around eight were self-reporters.

"When people are reporting themselves as perpetrators of domestic violence, that is when you know your campaign is definitely having an impact," he said.

Other reports came from victims and third parties.

"In a country town, there used to be a culture of closing your windows when the neigh-

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WHERE TO FIND HELP
 National Domestic
 Violence and Sexual
 Assault Hotline: 1800
 RESPECT or 1800 737 732
 In emergency: call 000
 Men's Referral Service:
 1300 766 491
 Women's Domestic
 Violence Crisis Service:
 1800 015 188

bours had a barney," Mr Higgins said.

"But people are no longer saying, 'It's got nothing to do with me.'"

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