One of the main offence categories reported by Bendigo Police and trending upwards is Assaults; Family Violence and Non-family Violence. It is widely accepted that the violence that men inflict on women in its many forms (sexual violence, physical violence, verbal violence, emotional abuse, harassment and stalking, financial abuse and control, family and social network isolation and spiritual abuse) violence has its origins in a desire to exert power and control over women and extends beyond physical violence. To address the issue of violence against women and make positive change, relationships between men and women must be underpinned by respect and equality.

There are a number of preconditions for people to feel safe in their communities. Perceptions of safety are shaped by the possibility of harm as much as the likelihood of actual harm, and there is evidence that perceived levels of safety, rather than actual levels of crime are most likely to influence activity levels in a neighbourhood.

Being and feeling safe is influenced by the presence of crime or anti-social behaviour; the incidence of racial and religious discrimination; the appearance and amenity of local areas; the cleanliness and maintenance of public spaces; the safety of our roads and transport systems; the reputation of an area and personal experience of a place.

The structure of the built and the natural environment and the way that neighbourhoods and retail precincts are designed and maintained impact greatly on perceptions of safety. People’s sense of safety will also be influenced by a range of factors including their gender, age, ethnicity and physical ability. The time of day or night, the presence and the behaviour of others and the appearance and amenity of the area are also important.
What is community safety?
A simple definition of community safety is the right of people to go about their daily activities without fear, or risk of harm or injury.

Community safety is experienced in a range of settings and in all aspects of daily life: where we live, socialise, learn and work. Perceived levels of safety are as important as the actual levels of crime and risk of harm in communities.

The Goal of the Bendigo Community Safety Framework and Plan
A safer Bendigo region through collaboration, action and capacity building.

Role of the Bendigo Safe Community Forum
The role of the Forum is to advocate, advise, refer and act on matters identified as priorities by the Forum or considered of relevance to the vision and purpose of the Forum. Any matter brought before the Forum will need to be considered in terms of the capacity the Forum to respond and the role and responsibility of other agencies.

Membership
Membership will be drawn from relevant agencies within the City of Greater Bendigo. Members shall be agency representatives with the authority to speak on behalf of their organisation and the capacity to influence the work of their organisation to help achieve the agreed community safety outcomes of the Forum. Membership will include a mechanism to include representation from outlying townships. Membership may change from time to time depending on the key issues confronting the Forum.

Guiding principles
The work of the Forum is underpinned by the following principles:
• A commitment to work collaboratively and across multiple agencies
• Strong leadership from the Forum
• A proactive problem-solving approach
• Application of evidence and best practice in strategy and actions
• A focus on communities where there is the greatest need and potential benefits
• Integration and alignment with relevant local, state and national strategies and policies
• Positive and responsive engagement with the community
• Respect and equality for all members of the community

Objectives
The creation of a safe environment is a shared responsibility of all sectors of the community. The Forum aims to maximise the benefits of a collective approach to concerns for community safety. The objectives of the Forum are:
• To develop and implement a whole of community approach to improving community safety
• To strengthen opportunities to work in partnership and build collaborative learnings and outcomes
• To support evidence based approaches to community safety initiatives
• To advocate on behalf of the community agencies and all levels of government regarding community safety priorities
• To facilitate the development of partnerships and working groups to develop and implement initiatives that address community safety

This framework underpins the collective effort of a network of agencies in Greater Bendigo to identify and respond to important local community safety issues. The network comes together as an incorporated body called the Bendigo Safe Community Forum.

Priority areas for action areas
Priority areas for action build on the previous work of the Bendigo Safe Community Forum. These priorities have been developed to respond to local issues and align with work being done at the regional, state and national level. The five key priority areas for action are:

1. Reducing harm related to alcohol and other drug misuse
2. Improving the safety of young people and children
3. Preventing violence against women and children
4. Supporting community strengthening and capacity building activities
5. Creating and maintaining safe physical environments

Reducing harm related to alcohol and other drug misuse
The cost to the community of the harm associated with alcohol and other drug misuse is significant. Illicit drug use and pharmaceutical drug misuse are growing concerns within our community. Lessons need to be learned from the research and the experience of others in relations to the introduction of community interventions designed to reduce harmful impacts of alcohol misuse.

Improving the safety of young people and children
The safety of young people and children requires particular attention for a number of reasons. They are more vulnerable, the likelihood of them being victims or perpetrators of crime is higher than in other groups in the community. An investment in preventative and protective measures for young people can have long term benefits for the whole community and the issue of safety has been identified as an area of key concern for young people in the Greater Bendigo community.