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Teachers learn how to respond to forced marriage of students

Teachers from the Melbourne and Ballarat Dioceses will be trained to understand and respond to young people, particularly young women, who are at risk of a forced marriage, at a workshop auspiced by Catholic Education, Melbourne. The one-day workshop on Friday, October 27, will be run by ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans)

Hundreds of teachers in Victoria and Western Australia have, this year, been trained to understand and respond to young people, particularly young women, who are at risk of a forced marriage. It is one of the key slavery issues confronting Australia today and ACRATH believes more and more schools are wanting to know how to respond when a student discloses to a teacher.

“The numbers of young people facing forced marriage in Australia are hard to gauge, but it is believed that at least one case is reported to Federal Police each week. This might be a young person who is being forced to marry in Australia or who is being sent overseas to marry,” said Liz Payne, ACRATH’s forced marriage educator.

Thirty Catholic schools and one Independent school across the two states have this year committed to the professional learning for teachers on forced marriage. Last year 40 schools in South Australia participated in training.

“We give teachers an understanding of slavery in the modern world and forced marriage in Australia. For many teachers this is a new reality. The teachers across Australia who come to our training have young people from vulnerable communities in their schools and they want to be prepared,” Liz said. “There are very clear procedures and protocols teachers need to follow if there is a disclosure by students and we want them to be equipped.”

Catholic schools in Victoria and Western Australia have been keen to learn about human trafficking. Two Catholic colleges in metropolitan Melbourne involved their entire staff of more than 200 teachers in the training this year. Most schools nominate their student welfare or pastoral care staff to do the training. ACRATH will continue to work in both Catholic and government schools across Australia. Discussions with the Victorian Education Department’s south western metro region officials are underway.

ACRATH began the forced marriage program across Australia after running a nine school pilot project across three states in 2015. It has developed, **My Rights – My Future forced marriage**, a kit of learning and teaching materials for Australian secondary schools. The kit should be accompanied by training.

Liz said the forced marriage training aimed to help teachers in three areas:

- To be aware that forced marriage happens to young people in Australia.
- To recognise the indicators of forced marriage.
- To know how to respond appropriately to those in, or at risk of, forced marriage.

If your school would like more information or to arrange a training session contact Liz Payne on 0400 627 060 or at fm@acrath.org.au.