



PAT CRONIN  
FOUNDATION

# IMPACT REPORT

## 2024



*Be Wise*

LET'S END THE COWARD PUNCH





# Contents

A year of growth **3**

Pat's story ... **4**

Real work, real results **5**

A key milestone **6**

What teachers are saying **6**

What students are saying **7**

The Be Wise Education program **8**

Support for push to fix flawed laws **9**

Unveiled: A 'brutal' legal journey **10**

50,000 players, one cause ... **11**

The Be Wise Walk **13**

The Be Wise Ball **14**

The ticket to safer communities **15**







# A year of growth

**A quarter of a million young people have now seen a Be Wise presentation—a milestone to cap a year of remarkable growth for the Foundation.**

In 2024 alone, we delivered 512 presentations, engaging almost 85,000 young minds – a 20 per cent increase from 2023.

At the Pat Cronin Foundation, our mission is to drive a generational shift in attitudes to violence, creating safer communities.

Our 2024 Impact Report highlights our extensive efforts.

In addition to our work in schools around the country, our violence-prevention messages are reaching the wider community.

The success of the annual Pat Cronin Foundation Round, which almost doubled in size in 2024, is an example of that.

Involving 50,000 players, 2000 teams, five Victorian football/netball leagues, and the equivalent of a capacity MCG crowd of family members and supporters, the Round has evolved into one of Melbourne's premier weekend sporting events.

This year we've also taken a strong stance on legislative reform.

Our push to overhaul Victoria's flawed Coward Punch laws (which have only been used once in a decade) gained widespread attention including prominent TV and radio coverage along with front-page headlines and editorial support in the Melbourne Herald Sun.

The push reinforced the public release of our new hour-long documentary, From the Foundation Up, earlier this year and providing a very personal account of the shortcomings of the justice system.

These are just some of the stories in this report, of which we're very proud.

While we hope you enjoy reading them, we also encourage you to discover more about us at: [patcroninfoundation.org.au](http://patcroninfoundation.org.au)

## Matt and Robyn Cronin

DIRECTORS  
PAT CRONIN FOUNDATION



*Hear from our directors >*



## Pat's story ...

**He will never have another birthday, or play another footy game, or finish studying health science and physiotherapy under the scholarship he was awarded.**

### **Pat will always be 19.**

He went out on Saturday, April 16, 2016 for a few quiet drinks with mates after playing his first senior football match alongside his big brother.

He wasn't a fighter—it just wasn't his scene. But when a brawl started to build outside the pub—being a loyal and caring mate—Pat stepped in to pull a friend away.

It was then that Pat was punched in the head from behind. He stayed on his feet, checking all his mates were OK.

Soon after however he started to develop symptoms, had a seizure and was taken to hospital unconscious. Two days later we made the agonising decision to turn off his life support.

**Pat's death has left a gaping hole in our lives and devastated his friends and the broader community. If this can happen to us, it can happen to anyone.**

We are here to honour Pat's life by helping young Australians make wise decisions so we can end the senseless violence that devastates families and communities.

Eight years later, in 2024, we are here to end the Coward Punch. Be Wise. Think Carefully. Act Kindly.

**Robyn, Matt, Emma and Lucas Cronin**

“

We are here to honour Pat's life by helping young Australians make wise decisions so we can end the senseless violence that devastates families and communities.





# Real work, real results

Almost half of all Australian high school students believe that “some things need to be solved by force”.

The Foundation's own research—based on a survey of 30,000 students—also reveals that 34% like to watch fights at school while almost 32% think that fighting can be a way to have fun.

Violence in schools isn't a new phenomenon, but it has been intensifying. The Foundation has partnered with over 400 schools nationwide and the good news is that our evidence-based Be Wise Education Program is having a positive effect, with a measurable change in attitudes.

In particular, we've expanded our presence in Queensland, where the State Government has introduced a No Excuse for School Abuse Campaign. Since February 2024, we've reached more than 7500 students across the state's south east.

While the Government's campaign focuses primarily on parents and caregivers, we stress the importance of engaging students early.

In generating conversations that are then being taken back into their homes and the community, we believe we can make a difference in how families address conflict and aggression.



**Where to next?** A Foundation interview with Australian educator Dr Paul Kidson. Watch the video >

## 'It takes a village'

The Foundation video above offers an insight into schoolyard violence today.

According to director Matt Cronin: “We absolutely believe in the adage that it takes a village to raise a child. We know that we haven't got all of the solutions, but we've definitely got part of it.

“The feedback we're getting is amazing, and it's changing attitudes towards violence.”

## Survey Data



I'd fight to help a friend

72.9%

60.7%

12.2%

Violence is OK to defend yourself

82.1%

69.1%

13%

Some things need to be solved by force

45.2%

30.3%

14.9%

## Pre and post survey data All time responses (2022-2024) 30,000 students



I like to watch fights at school

34.2%

25.9%

8.3%

Fighting can be a way to have fun

31.9%

22.2%

9.7%

Using physical force gets peoples' respect  
(M only)

31.3%

18.3%

13%

PRE SURVEY

POST SURVEY

CHANGE





## OUR REACH

# A key milestone



Eltham High School played a key role in helping the Pat Cronin Foundation achieve an incredible milestone in 2024—reaching 250,000 young people with our Be Wise presentations.

According to the school's principal, Vincent Sicari: "The Foundation's presentations have opened the ears, eyes, and hearts of many young people."

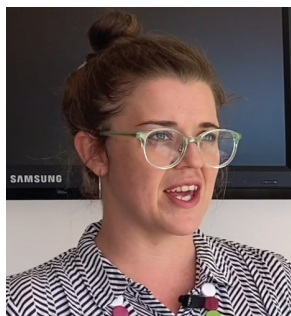
"We commend the Foundation on its work. We are not just proud of the work but very grateful for the support that the Foundation has provided to us."

"In Senior School, the Be Wise Education Program run by the Pat Cronin Foundation is embedded in our Respectful Relationships repertoire."

# What teachers are saying



“Even though it (the presentation) was emotional and raw at times, it really hit home for a lot of our kids.



“Book the program. Put them all through it. It's just such a powerful and meaningful learning experience.



“A friend of mine told me about this presentation and that's why we wanted to get onboard with it.

## 85,000 teenagers, 320 schools and 512 presentations

In 2024—our biggest year yet—we delivered 512 presentations, visited 320 schools and reached around 85,000 teenagers.

We've consolidated our reach into every state and territory of Australia as well throughout our home state of Victoria.

Our signature presentation, Violence is Never OK, has been delivered in 80 per cent of Victorian high schools.

Eight regional Victorian road trips included 110 presentations across 84 schools, attracting significant media attention.

This year, our reach, state by state, amounted to:

- ▶ **Victoria:** 58,962 students
- ▶ **Queensland:** 6088
- ▶ **Northern Territory:** 2451
- ▶ **New South Wales:** 4746
- ▶ **ACT:** 2665
- ▶ **South Australia:** 100
- ▶ **Tasmania:** 1850
- ▶ **Western Australia:** 2498





# What students are saying

Eltham High, Victoria:



*It shows that such small actions can have such large consequences.*



*I would definitely recommend this presentation. It was eye-opening!*



*It's so important because you realise it could happen to anyone.*

**In a first for the Foundation, students from Melbourne's Balwyn High took the initiative to organise their own version of the Be Wise Walk fundraiser in 2024.**

One of the organisers (pictured right) shared their motivation: "I remember hearing about Pat's story in primary school and it had a profound impact on me, my family and our local community."

"The importance of the cause has really stuck with me."

"This year's presentation was very impactful. What we got out of it were strategies to defuse conflict and really, just how to make wise choices."

"I've come to realise that Pat could have been in anyone's community—and that's the importance of spreading the word."

Balwyn High, Victoria



Merbein P10 College, Victoria:

## Anti-violence message hits home for students

By Wade Stephens  
wstephens@merbein.p10.vic.edu.au

HEARTFELT pleas to end unnecessary violence appear to have struck a chord with the students of Merbein.

The Pat Cronin Foundation has spent the week sharing the story of teenager coward punch victim Pat Cronin with students at eight local schools, in the hope that no one will meet the same fate in future.

Presenter Aidan Phelan said it was overwhelming to see the amount of students who were receptive to the message of thinking before acting, in light of hearing Pat Cronin's story.

"I definitely got the sense that the message is getting through and that it was really landing with a lot of the students," he said.

"Understanding how these actions can affect other people, not just the person that you're hitting or that is being hit, but everyone around them as well."

At Merbein P-10 College, five of the school's leaders, Eliah Weinert, Neveah Davis, Elissa Dochiera, Samuel Longini and Ruby Dunn, said the discussion had a big impact on them.

"It was a pretty sad story to hear about," Mr Weinert said.

"You can definitely take a step back when something like that comes up and evaluate your choices," Ms Davis said.

"Hopefully everyone will realise



that it's not okay to do something like this and there's always a better option that can save someone's life and stop someone else from getting in trouble," Ms Dochiera said.

"It just shows you people don't think some bad things can happen and it just ruins their life, even if they're intoxicated or they're not, they're just got to think before they do," Samuel said.

"I found it really eye opening and it really proves how much of an impact just one punch can take on someone's life," Ms Dunn said.

Assistant Principal Rob Morgan said the visit of the Pat Cronin Foundation was really timely, and he was impressed at the empathy and understanding shown by the students.

“

I found it really eye opening. It proves just how much of an impact one punch can have.

“

Hopefully everyone will realise that it's not OK to do something like this and there's always a better option.

“

It just shows you people don't think bad things can happen and it just ruins their life.





# The Be Wise Education program



Melbourne's 7 News interviews Foundation director Matt Cronin about the launch of the Act Kindly Activity Kit and presentation.

## Our evidence-based Prep-Year 12 Be Wise Education Program is aligned to the Australian Curriculum.

Our approach is one of empowerment—an optimistic voice that helps young people to make wise decisions and prevent violence.

At the heart of the program are two, hour-long presentations—Violence is Never OK and a follow-on Rethinking Anger session for large groups of Years 7-12.

In 2024, we began introducing our Act Kindly Activity Kit into primary schools, reaching almost 2,000 children.

Incorporating an age-appropriate presentation, storybooks, role-playing and teacher-led modules that foster safety and respect in the playground, the kit is aimed at children as young as five.

The early years provide the building blocks for lifelong behaviours and attitudes.

The kit harnesses the power of storytelling to help students understand anger and aggression, as well as giving them tools to reduce physical incidents.

By March 2025, the kit will have been introduced into schools in Victoria, Tasmania, WA, the Northern Territory and Canberra.



## A conversation starter

At Melbourne's Our Lady of Help Christians school, the Act Kindly Activity Kit has become a vital part of the Respectful Relationships studies.

"I absolutely recommend it to other schools," says Principal Mark Pinkerton.

"The Activity Kit has been especially helpful in generating conversations around the fact that violence is never the answer. Students are also taking those conversations back into their homes and the community."





Melbourne's Herald Sun supported our call for an overhaul of the laws, devoting the daily editorial to the issue as well as front-page treatment.

# Support for push to fix flawed laws

The Foundation is leading a push for Victoria's flawed Coward Punch laws—used only once in 10 years—to be fixed.

Following meetings with three successive State Attorneys-General, we joined forces with Danny Green's Stop the Coward Punch Campaign in a very public campaign calling for an overhaul of loopholes in the legislation.

Gaining the support of major media outlets including newspaper, TV and talkback radio, we used the 10th anniversary of the laws to highlight the fact they have fallen far short of community expectations when introduced by the Napthine Government in September, 2014.

The fight is far from over as we believe that stronger legal penalties are needed to support educational efforts in ending the Coward Punch.



The story as covered by Ten News. Watch the video >



## The loophole for offenders

Victoria's Coward Punch laws require prosecutors to prove four key elements.

The major loophole is a clause stating: "The offender intended that the punch or strike be delivered to the victim's head or neck" – a condition that has proven very difficult to prove.



# Unveiled: A ‘brutal’ legal journey



Deeply moving ... a trailer for the documentary *From the Foundation Up*.

**Our push for changes to the Coward Punch laws was bolstered with the release of our deeply moving documentary, *From the Foundation Up*.**

The hour-long film goes further than that however—drawing attention to the often appalling treatment of victims within the justice system.

Produced by Melbourne filmmaker Reuben Street, of Blueprint Studios, *From the Foundation Up* follows the Cronin family through a rollercoaster of raw emotions as they grapple with multiple court hearings as well as appeals by the defendant in Pat's case over three years.

A key takeaway from the film is the need for victims of crime to

be assigned an advocate to guide them through the legal system.

In a timely unveiling at a packed Palace Theatre at Balwyn, the hour-long film backed up a report by the Victorian Victims of Crime Commissioner—also calling for an overhaul of the system.



The then Commissioner Fiona McCormack (pictured above), who attended and spoke at the launch, said: “It’s cruel what victims go through. This film is so important for challenging the culture.

**“This is what changes minds and hearts.”**

**‘We didn’t expect it to be pretty, but ...’**

“I remember how naive we were. As soon as we lost Pat we didn’t even consider looking at the law side of it.

“We knew there was CCTV footage. We thought this guy would be charged and convicted.

“We had no concept of the path it would go down and all the kicks we would get along the way. We didn’t expect it to be easy or pretty, but it was far worse than we even imagined it could be.”

*Pat’s mother Robyn, speaking about the family’s experiences with the justice system after Pat’s death*



## TACKLING VIOLENCE AT THE 'GRASSROOTS'



### Pat Cronin Foundation Round 3-5 May, 2024

### A game-changing approach to safer communities

We provide violence-prevention education to more than 70,000 young Australians every year.



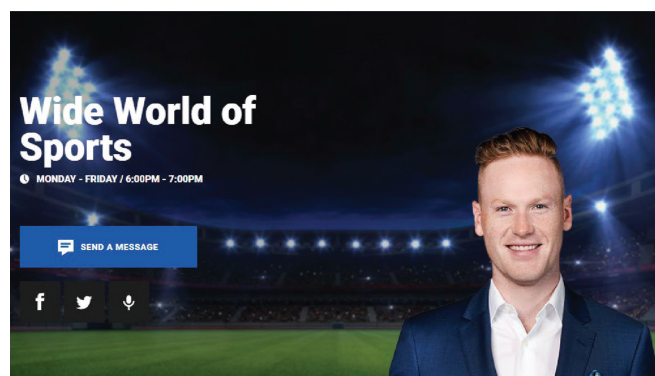
## 50,000 players, one cause ...

Doubling in size in 2024, the eighth annual Pat Cronin Foundation Round featured 50,000 players in five Victorian football/netball leagues—coming together to end all forms of violence.

The Round, held over three days in May, is a centrepiece of the Foundation's outreach into the community—garnering national media exposure due to a new prominence on the Melbourne sporting calendar.

With 2000 teams in action across 80 locations throughout the city and regional Victoria—as well as around 100,000 spectators—the Round has been enormously successful in conveying our messages at the grassroots.

Speaking on 3AW Melbourne's Wide World of Sports, Richmond great (and proud Foundation ambassador) Matthew Richardson said, "We need to stop violence in all forms and the Pat Cronin Foundation is doing that and educating young people."



Melbourne 3AW's Wide World of Sports helped us promote the 2024 Round.

Two new leagues—the Eastern Football Netball League and Western Football Netball League—joined the Round in 2024.

The other three are: Essendon District Football League, Northern Football Netball League and Bendigo Football Netball League.



# Bendigo Advertiser

## Pat Cronin Foundation Round: Why it's a powerful message for BFNL to share



By Luke West

Updated May 3 2024 - 3:33pm, first published 3:22pm



📷 All BFNL players will wear yellow armbands in support of the Pat Cronin Foundation Round on Saturday.

“

The father of the late Pat Cronin is encouraging all players in the Bendigo Football Netball League to shake hands with each other pre-game on Saturday as a sign of respect for each other before going into battle.

Rich in symbolism, the round emphasises the importance of all players shaking hands with their opponents as a sign of respect, as well as wearing yellow armbands to remind them of the need to end violence.

As Foundation director Matt Cronin told the Bendigo Advertiser, above: “We will have coaches, presidents and clubs talking about the issue of needing to stop violence.

“Shaking your opponent’s hand before the game is a real show of respect ... you are less likely to do something really stupid on the field.”

**Wide exposure:** High profile football identities helped promote the Round, including Matthew Richardson and ‘Razor’ Ray Chamberlain.





# The Be Wise Walk



The annual Be Wise Walk plays a key role in spreading our violence-prevention message beyond schools and into the broader community, including the corporate sector—all while raising awareness of the Foundation.

This year's 8.4km walk from Banyule to Montmorency involved hundreds of dedicated supporters pushing through heavy rain to help raise over \$110,000. These funds will directly support the expansion of our education programs.

More than just a fundraiser, the event was a true team effort, made possible by 30 dedicated volunteers and media coverage across Melbourne's TV stations, Radio 3AW, and social channels.

The involvement of a diverse range of sponsors and high-profile identities included: Retreat Caravans, Barry Plant Real Estate, Le Pine Funerals, YVE, Eltham Leisure Centre, Dyson Buses, Trafman, Camprint, Raven Scaffolds, Bendigo Bank Eltham, Max Kirwan Mazda, Underworks, Bakers Delight, Light & Sound Solutions, Optimal Health Lab, Lower Plentry Cricket Club, Heidelberg Cricket Club, Tony Leonard,



Matthew Richardson, Matthew Keenan, Anthony and Jayden Wilson, Eltham Gourmet Poultry & Game, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, Nillumbik Lions Club, Blueprint Studio, and Monty Studio.

Along with the Be Wise Ball (Page 14), The Be Wise Walk has become a flagship event, cementing the Foundation's reputation as a leader in specialist education.





# The Be Wise Ball



**A highlight of the social calendar, the annual Be Wise Ball consistently raises in excess of \$70,000.**

It has also proven to be an invaluable networking opportunity, unearthing enthusiastic community fundraising support.

This year was no different, with Retreat Caravans getting behind the Foundation for our single-biggest fundraising initiative yet (see next page).

The Ball is known for unveiling our latest high-profile ambassadors, including 3AW host and Channel Nine reporter Heidi Murphy (pictured right) in 2024.

This raises the total number of ambassadors to 10.

"I've always admired the work of the Foundation and what Matt and Robyn are trying to achieve," Heidi says. "I'm delighted to be part of it and I'm looking forward to doing what I can to promote the cause."







## The ticket to safer communities

Thanks to a highly successful venture with Retreat Caravans in 2024, we enjoyed our best single fundraising initiative yet—securing an incredible \$187,000 in just six months for our violence-prevention programs.

Retreat Caravans generously donated a new Whitsunday XE caravan—valued at \$116,000—for an exciting raffle drawn at the Be Wise Walk.

Widely promoted on social media through pages outside our normal scope, it also gave us valuable national exposure.

Along with Retreat, caravan and camping TV show, What's Up Down Under, provided extensive coverage.

According to Retreat General Manager Tilly Rexhepi: "About 18,790 people are going to be educated as a result, so that's a massive achievement."

To continue making a meaningful difference, we invite other corporate partners to join us in this journey. Please reach out to our General Manager Geoff Smith ([gsmith@patcroninfoundation.org](mailto:gsmith@patcroninfoundation.org))



**Happy winners:** Rhonda and Peter accept the keys to the Retreat Whitsunday caravan from Tilly Rexhepi left and Foundation Partnerships Manager Steve Layt.

### Every \$10 provides vital life skills

**\$10—the cost of each ticket in the raffle—holds special significance.**

It represents the amount the Foundation requires to educate each young person.

This made every contribution to the raffle directly impactful.





## Our approach to wiser choices and saving lives.

We use Pat's story as an illustration of what can happen when young people are faced with violence, and how wiser choices can be made.

Using this approach we know we have saved lives, prevented incidents and helped young people to reflect on and change their attitudes to violence.



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