



Women's Services Network WESNET Inc

Australia's peak women's organisation working to eliminate domestic and family violence

WESNET IN 2008

2008 has been both a busy and an exciting year for WESNET.

During the last 12 months of the Rudd Government we have seen some real cause for optimism with the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the Minister for Housing and the Status of Women, Tanya Plibersek speaking out very strongly on both Homelessness and Domestic and Family Violence. WESNET has been involved through submissions, media releases and participation in a range of government consultations.

Throughout 2008 and on the behalf of members, WESNET used several opportunities to have input into the moulding of future responses, services and policies in relation to women and children who become homeless or are at risk of homelessness because of domestic and family violence. The connections between having a home too unsafe to live in and having to leave and become homeless was one of the main issues raised.

With the release of the Rudd Government's "Which Way Home?" 'Green Paper on Homelessness' in May, a submission "A Safe Way Home" was prepared by WESNET - supporting Homelessness Australia's proposed 4th option, along with recommendations to increase the safety of women and children and to enhance the service sector, an issue well overdue. WESNET also gave warning about unintended outcomes if policy ideas were not adequately funded and if the perpetrators were not constrained and their violence curtailed.

WESNET is now involved in the national campaign around homelessness, with a representative on the 'Australians for Ending Homelessness' campaign.

With the release of the White Paper "The Road Home" in December, WESNET developed a media release "The Road Home to a Safe Home" which resulted in several interviews with radio stations across the country.

This has helped to increase WESNET's profile as the peak body for women and children who have experienced domestic or family violence, and to highlight the issues of the largest group of homeless – women and children escaping domestic & family violence.

A further important and positive initiative of the Rudd Government has been the formation of the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. From the beginning WESNET has been involved in this with the National Chair, Pauline Woodbridge invited to be one of the 11 members. Pauline brings a grass roots service provision perspective on behalf of WESNET members to the discussions. The Council are working on the development of a National Plan to provide direction on a range of responses until 2021. The plan will soon be released by Minister Plibersek.

For further information see www.ofw.fahcsia.gov.au

Exciting events for WESNET during the year, with the securing of funding for two projects through the Commonwealth Office For Women. The first is funds from the Womens Leadership & Development Programme. We were successful with our application for a grant for a project called **Virtual WESNET**. The funding will enable WESNET to completely overhaul the website. The new website will not only provide information, and resources, but also interactive forums and will be a useful tool for workers, particularly in rural and remote areas, to access support as well as information.

It is planned that the new WESNET website will be fully functional by the middle of this year (2009).

During the WESNET Grants process (below) the current WESNET website received 3,982 visits.

Also in 2008, WESNET was approached by the Office for Women, to tender for a **Capacity Building Grants** to deliver grants to services. This happened successfully and WESNET developed a granting process. We invited community based organisations, including WESNET members, to apply for funds to carry out Domestic & Family Violence Early Intervention and Prevention projects. The results of the projects will flow through to the National Plan and inform practice. The response from the community sector was huge, with a total of 640 registrations of interest, resulting in 157 submissions being received. After reading all the submissions, the WESNET Grants Assessment Team short listed 22 organisations nationwide who received a total of \$500,000 to carry out a variety innovative and creative projects. A summary of the grants shows the spread of projects across 2 National, 11 Metropolitan and 9 Rural/Remote/Regional areas. Most of the applications were highly worthy of funding, but the requests amounted to over \$4 million. This is an indication of the lack of resource and project funding in the sector and an indication of the creative and innovative focus of the sector. WESNET reps are supporting the services involved. WESNET successfully met all of the FAHCSIA funding agreement requirements in implementing this program.

In November 2008, WESNET held its AGM, and in keeping with the normal process of a half spill election, the positions of Qld. Rep., Indigenous Rep., WA, NSW, & SA Rep. were all up for re-election. There was also a casual vacancy for the NESB representative. These were all filled and the following is the current WESNET Committee:

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|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Chair | Pauline Woodbridge 07 47212888 |
| Indigenous Rep. | Shirley Slann 07 47430946 |
| NESB Rep. | Jane Corpus –Brock 02 96358022 |
| ACT Rep. | Biljana Petrova 02 62783544 |
| Qld. Rep. | Lindy Edwards 07 47211799 |
| SA Rep. | Vicki Lachlan 08 83494460 |
| Tas. Rep. | Sandra Nichols 03 62292942 |
| WA Rep. | Kedy Kristal 08 93000340 |
| Victorian Rep. | Julie Oberin 03 54413024 |
| NSW Rep. | Cat Gander 02 96989777 |

In its role as a founding Council of Homelessness Australia (formerly AFHO) WESNET was involved in the very successful Homelessness Conference in Adelaide in May 2008, through representation on the Conference organising committee. WESNET held a Talking Circle with members and other interested service providers, presented papers and was represented on the final closing Panel. In addition throughout the Conference WESNET had an information and display table and are pleased to report a high number of sales of WESNET's publication "Making Children Count"

WESNET believes that it is well overdue for a National Domestic Violence Conference to be held in Australia, and as the Peak body for domestic and family violence, will be well placed to seek funding to put on such a conference. It is anticipated that this will be an important part of WESNET's work plan for 2009 and we will keep the sector advised of further developments.

WESNET continues to provide three members to the board of Homelessness Australia and along with representatives from other Councils, CHPA and NYCH manages the organisation.

WESNET would like to acknowledge the commitment throughout the year, of the representatives and their alternates, and would like to thank all the financial members for their continued support.

Watch out for your AGM Report coming soon.

Special thanks to our Secretariat Co-ordinator Lis Cameron, who keeps the office in Canberra running smoothly and to Karen Bentley for her great work as our Project Co-coordinator.

We encourage members to keep in touch with their reps., keep checking out the website, and for contact with the WESNET office the phone number is 02 62471616.

WESNET National Secretariat

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