



Partnerships against Domestic Violence

BULLETIN FIVE –

INDIGENOUS PROJECTS

Indigenous Projects funded by *Partnerships against Domestic Violence*

There are now a considerable number of indigenous projects being conducted across Australia with funding through *Partnerships against Domestic Violence*. This Bulletin summarises these projects, discusses some of the key findings from the literature and describes some initial outcomes from the various projects.

Definitions of violence

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders do not believe that the term 'domestic' violence adequately describes what is happening within their families and communities and have indicated they prefer to use the term 'family violence' ¹ to bring into focus "the trauma of the inter-connecting and trans-generational experiences of individuals within families, to show the continuity between how we have been acted upon, and how, in turn, we may then act upon ourselves and others".² Family violence as defined in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission report - *Tjunparni: Family Violence in Indigenous Australia* - are the behaviours and experiences of:

*"beating of a wife or other family members, homicide, suicide and other self-inflicted injury, rape, child abuse and child sexual abuse. ... When we talk of family violence we need to remember that we are not talking about serious physical injury alone but also verbal harassment, psychological and emotional abuse, and economic deprivation, which although as devastating are even more difficult to quantify than physical abuse."*³

Judy Atkinson⁴ expands on this definition by including social, cultural and spiritual forms of violence. She quotes a Tasmanian Aboriginal survivor of family violence.

*"People get hurt physically - you can see the bruises and black eyes. A person gets hurt emotionally - you can see the tears and the distressed face - but when you've been hurt spiritually like that - it's a real deep hurt and nobody, unless you're a victim yourself, could ever understand because you've been hurt by someone that you hold in trust."*⁵

Carlie Atkinson⁶ reports that many Aboriginal women who are married to non-Aboriginal partners experience continual 'put-downs' about their cultural identity and beliefs, especially in regard to

¹ *Ibid.*

² Atkinson, J. (1995), p.233..

³ Mow, K. E. (1992), *Tjunparni: Family Violence in Indigenous Australia*. A Report and Literature Review for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Canberra.

⁴ Atkinson, J. (1990a), Atkinson, J. (1996b) "We Al-Li - Past Present Future: The Changing Cultural Face of Indigenous Healing Process". *Mapping Regional Cultures Conference*, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton.

⁵ Atkinson J., (1990c), p. 7

⁶ Atkinson, C. (1998).

the differences in child rearing practices. They also experience a negation of a cultural and spiritual sense of self which is different to that of an Anglo-Australian.

Literature Overview

The incidence of family violence in Aboriginal communities in Australia

Open discussion of family violence in Australian Indigenous communities is relatively new. Discussion of the issue in this report relies heavily on the views of Indigenous authors and on recent reports. One report has stated that in some Aboriginal communities, violence is so high that it is said to effect up to 90% of families.⁷ Another report indicated that Aboriginal men are four times more likely to die a violent death than non-Aboriginal men, and women are six and half times more likely to die a violent death than non-Aboriginal women⁸.

There is considerable evidence that Indigenous women are much more likely to be victims of domestic violence than non-Indigenous women and to sustain more serious injuries. Judy Atkinson⁹ in referring to the *Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody* reports that in some areas in Australia the rate of family violence involving Aboriginal women is 45 times higher than non-Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women are more likely to be killed as a result of domestic violence - their rate of homicide victimisation is ten times the figure for all Australian women¹⁰. South Australian government statistics suggest that incidences of domestic violence are "likely to be between 7 and 16 times higher than rates among non-Aboriginal people"¹¹. Domestic violence may not just involve the spouse but a larger group of relatives - "brothers, cousins, fathers and other Aboriginal men in the vicinity"¹². Bolger¹³ notes that Aboriginal women are more likely to be attacked with a weapon than non-Aboriginal women and in a large number of cases the women are not alone at the time of the assault.

In some communities [family violence] has reached a level that women expect to be bashed and, in fact, do not think that their "bloke" loves them unless he belts them. Children are also being abused - something so foreign to Aboriginal culture that it reveals the extent to which communities are in total social crisis"¹⁴

⁷ Report of the Queensland Domestic Violence Taskforce, (1988), p. 256

⁸ Keys Young (1995)

⁹ Atkinson, J. (1996a) "A Nation is Not Conquered", *Law Bulletin*, vol. 3, No. 80, pp. 4 - 9.

¹⁰ Astor, H. (1996) "Mediation Initiatives and the Needs of Aboriginal Women". In Dale Bagshaw (Editor) Conference Proceedings. *Second International Mediation Conference: Mediation and Cultural Diversity*, University of South Australia.

¹¹ Quoted in Jarrett, Stephanie, (1997) *"We Have Left it in Their Hands": A Critical Assessment of Principles Underlying Legal and Policy Responses to Aboriginal Domestic Violence: a Location Study*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Adelaide, p. 1.

¹² Lucashenko, M. (1990) "Violence Against Indigenous Women. Public and Private Dimensions". In S. Cook & J. Bessant (eds) *Women's Encounters With Violence. Australian Experiences*. Sage Publications: California, p. 153.

¹³ Bolger, A. (1991) *Aboriginal Women and Violence*. Australian National University, North Australia Research Unit, Darwin.

¹⁴ Atkinson, (1990d), cited in Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991, p..76

Barriers to reporting family violence

The literature consistently states there is considerable under reporting of the rates of violence in Indigenous communities. There are complex reasons why women from Indigenous communities do not report domestic violence in Australia¹⁵. The role of police and other government employees in the history of intervention in Indigenous families, and the racist attitudes and behaviour of many police officers and welfare officers, is well documented and reflected strongly in the writings of Aboriginal women about violence¹⁶. There is considerable support for Professor Hilary Astor's view that:

*The law has been an instrument in the oppression of Aboriginal people far more than it has been a resource for them.*¹⁷

There are suggestions that domestic violence legislation increases the intervention of a brutalising police force in Aboriginal lives and in fact has resulted in increasing incarceration of both Aboriginal men and women.¹⁸ Carlie Atkinson¹⁹ notes that:

Aboriginal women say that when their men go to jail, they emerge more violent, and their [the women's] voices are ignored. They are given no real option apart from the criminal justice response and because of this they are hesitant to use the legislation to its full intent.

Women from Indigenous communities may have feelings of shame, or concerns about racism, which are likely to impact on their willingness to discuss issues of violence against them with people from outside their communities.²⁰ There may also be strong pressure from within the extended family or community to "put up with" the violence so as not to shame the family or the community, or to deal with the problem with or without the support of family or friends. In Aboriginal communities the boundary between self and family is not as clearly defined as in Western society which some authors suggest creates an important link between domestic violence and self-inflicted injury and suicide.²¹

Aboriginal perspectives and approaches to family violence

Aboriginal people are currently exploring new approaches to family violence based on customary law practices and principles of restorative justice, with a philosophical base of reconciliation. It is

¹⁵ *Ibid*; Ralph, S. (1997), "Practice Issues and Guidelines for Family and Child Counsellors Working with Aboriginal Families". Unpublished paper produced for the Family Court of Australia.

¹⁶ Atkinson, J.,(1990a) "Violence Against Aboriginal Women: Reconstitution of Community Law - the Way Forward". *Aboriginal Law Bulletin* 6, 2 (46); Atkinson, J. (1990b) "Violence in Aboriginal Australia: Colonisation and Gender", *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker*, Parts 1 & 2.; Atkinson, J., (1990) c *Beyond Violence - Finding the Dream*. National Domestic Violence Education program, Office of the Status of the Status of Women, Canberra.

¹⁷ Astor, H., (1996), p. 13

¹⁸ Atkinson, J. (1995), "Aboriginal People, Domestic Violence and the Law: Indigenous Alternative Justice Strategies, Future Directions". *Proceedings of the Queensland Domestic Violence Conference*, p. 233.

¹⁹ Atkinson, C. (1998), *Submission in Response to the Model Domestic Violence Laws Discussion Paper*, Domestic Violence Legislation Working Group, Attorney-General's Department: ACT.

²⁰ *Ibid*. Bagshaw, D. (1996) "Whose Idea of Fairness? Examining the Impact of Culture on the Mediation Process". In D. Bagshaw (ed.) *Conference Proceedings - Second International Mediation Conference, Mediation and Cultural Diversity*, University of South Australia, Adelaide.

²¹ Atkinson, C., (1998).

hoped that new approaches will return to Indigenous Australians the right to define what is, and is not, violence within their families and communities and to determine appropriate sentencing options for destructive behaviour in a way that promotes healing of the community.²² Proposals have suggested that more culturally appropriate processes, such as the circle courts in the Canadian system, be made available to Aboriginal communities.²³

When considering the perpetrators of family violence, Carlie Atkinson²⁴ highlights a key issue for Indigenous people -

While it is important to acknowledge that a domestic assault is an offence against a victim, the question that needs to be asked in relation to Aboriginal offenders is, how can we also recognise that their behaviours have largely been determined by the violence of the State in Aboriginal lives, while at the same time holding the offender accountable and providing programs whereby the offender is enabled to change their behaviour.

She notes that part of government responsibility is to provide resources for workshops so elders are enabled to heal their own pain by providing information about the trans-generational transmission of trauma and trauma behaviours, and healing from trauma. "Beginning at this level would allow levels of responsibility to return to the community for healing and changing destructive behaviours."²⁵ She also suggests that governments must accept responsibility for the proper resourcing of Indigenous organisations to develop and present culturally relevant educational programs and to provide culturally appropriate services to men and women (separately and together) to assist the healing process.

Finding a response to Aboriginal family violence

Many Aboriginal writers identify ownership and control of the issue of family violence as an imperative for Indigenous people in Australia at this point in time, and favour restorative approaches to justice. It is clear that approaches to family violence in Indigenous communities in Australia need culturally sensitive strategies that are directly linked to enhancing support from informal community networks and resources, and that take into account the collectivist orientation of the culture. Heise notes:

Rightly or wrongly, feminist anti-violence groups are widely perceived in many cultures as anti-male and anti-family" ... especially in cultures "where family and community are valued and recognized far above individual rights."²⁶

Lacashenko²⁷ cautions, however, that the "politics of victimhood," which is the dominant focus in Aboriginal literature about domestic violence, overlooks the "hierarchies of oppression" in

²² Bennett, B. (1997) "Domestic Violence". *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal*, vo.21, no. 4, pp. 11-14; Atkinson, (1995).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Atkinson, C. (1998).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Heise, L. (1996) "Violence Against Women. Global Organising for Change". In Edleson, J. & Eisikozits, Z. (Eds) *Future Interventions With Battered Women and Their Families*. Sage Publications Inc: California, pp. 23-24; Bagshaw, D. (1996).

²⁷ Lashenko, pp. 157-158.

Aboriginal society, which clearly privilege Aboriginal males and mask the sexist oppression of Aboriginal women, and the adult oppression of Aboriginal children.

Non-Aboriginal researcher Stephanie Jarrett²⁸ identifies the need for an integrated response that recognises both Aboriginal cultural rights and victim's rights and suggests that

“viable, optimal Aboriginal domestic violence intervention programs require a back-drop of government Aboriginal policy-making that encourages more Aboriginal integration with, rather than more differentiation and distance from, the white population”.

Memmott et al ²⁹ identified the following aspects of 'best practice' for addressing Indigenous family violence:

- *An understanding of the complex social and psychological factors related to various forms of violence in Indigenous communities.*
- *An understanding that the approach must be holistic and have its roots in the community.*
- *A community focus on providing culturally sensitive treatment to those who use violence.*
- *The involvement of communities in control of judicial and other matters to increase cohesion so communities can learn how mainstream systems operate such as Police and Courts.*
- *Collaborative approach involving Police, judiciary, local councils and corrective services.*
- *Responses to alcohol misuse must be integrated into models to address family violence.*

The Importance of History and Context

Prior to colonisation Aboriginal women had considerable power and status. This has changed considerably since colonisation. Family violence within Indigenous communities is thought to be intrinsically linked to the legacy of colonialism, which represents “collective suffering of a people, rather than simply identifying a discrete social problem or one specific set of power relationships”.

Mainstream theorists on domestic violence claim that domestic violence and alcohol and drug misuse are unrelated. However, research in Aboriginal communities indicates a direct correlation between the two, with between 70 percent to 90 percent of all assaults being committed while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Overview of Funded Projects

1. **Rural and Remote Domestic Violence Initiative:** Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. In addition to the five pilot projects which are now fully established, twenty new services have been approved under this Initiative. The five existing services operate in:

²⁸ Jarrett, (1997) ,p. 310

²⁹ Memmott, P., Stacey, R. and Aboriginal Environments Research Centre (1999) *Indigenous Family Violence Summary Research Report*, Unpublished Report.

Huon (TAS), Derby (WA), Coober Pedy (SA), the Pitjantjatjara lands of Central Australia (NT/SA/WA) and an integrated 'NT Project' which has outlets in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. The twenty new services approved under this initiative to date are in the following regions/townships as follows: NT (information/early intervention service for young indigenous women in a remote community); SA (Kangaroo Island and a rural website); NSW (Orana Far West; Riverina-Murray); TAS (NW Tasmania); WA (Balgo, Oombulgurri, Jigalong, Beagle Bay, Looma and Kalumbaru); QLD (Townsville, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Palm Island, Yarrabah, Hopevale, Pormpuraaw, Arukuun and the Torres Strait Islands). Details on these new projects can be found later in the Bulletin.

- 2. Support Services for Indigenous Australians:** Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. These projects are designed to deliver counselling, relationship education and intervention services to indigenous communities around Australia. Projects are being conducted by Anglicare WA; Family Life Movt, NSW; Cenatacare Townsville; Newcastle Family Support; Adelaide Central Mission; Anglicare, SA. Reports on these projects can be found later in the Bulletin.
- 3. Family Violence Advocacy Project:** ATSI established two Family Violence Advocacy Projects under this Initiative. One run by the Apunipima Cape York Health Council, in Cairns, Far North Queensland; the second run by the Bega Garbirungu Health Service, in Kalgoorlie, WA. These projects aim to facilitate and assist agencies to develop and implement appropriate strategies to address family violence in Indigenous communities, with the eventual aim of developing and implementing a Best Practice model of service delivery which may be replicated in other areas of Australia.
- 4. Training for Agencies Working with Indigenous Women:** ATSI: Far North Indigenous Consortium for Social and Emotional Health, Cairns; Top End Women's Legal Service. Following an analysis of existing training options, the Consortium has now been funded to develop a targeted course for mainstream service providers in the area of Indigenous family violence.
- 5. Rural Crisis Intervention Partnerships Projects:** NSW Attorney General's Department: Broken Hill and Menindee. Details also later on in this Bulletin.
- 6. Koori Family Strengthening:** Department of Human Services, Vic.
- 7. Torres Strait Islander Domestic Violence Community Education/Training Strategy:** Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, Qld.
- 8. Violence in Indigenous Communities:** Qld, National Crime Prevention. Aboriginal Environment Research Centre, Queensland University.
- 9. Models of Intervention at the Point of Crisis in Aboriginal Family Violence:** WA, DV Prevention Unit: Crime Research Centre.
- 10. Pilot Counselling Program for Aboriginal Men Responsible for Family Violence:** DV Prevention Unit, WA: Perth metropolitan area; and Pilbara (Port Hedland).
- 11. Resources for Aboriginal Communities – Young People's Resource:** Department of Human Services, SA: Delivered by Port Youth Theatre Workshop.

12. **Pilot Court-Mandated and Court-Referred Program for Offenders of Domestic and Aboriginal Family Violence:** Office of Women's Policy, NT: Delivered through the Department of Correctional Services.
13. **Community Awareness Activities for Indigenous and NESB Communities:** OSW.
14. **Attitudes to Domestic and Family Violence in the Diverse Australian Community:** Report by *Cultural Perspectives* for OSW.
15. **Domestic Violence Prevention:** WA, National Crime Prevention. Crime Research Centre, Northam & Derby ('associated' project).

Key Information and Findings from Projects

Domestic Violence – Rural and Remote Initiatives, Family and Community Services

Family and Community Services have funded a range of services in all States and Territories, focusing on rural and remote initiatives, the majority of which are targeting Aboriginal communities. While funding was formally allocated in mid-1999, many projects are still in the establishment phase. Details of the projects follow.

A. New South Wales

- **Riverina Murray Area:** This project will target the Aboriginal communities of Balranald and Wentworth Shires. The project aims to develop an education package to raise awareness about the nature of domestic violence and how to relate in non-violent ways amongst young Aboriginal people, through the local school system. There will also be educational material about family violence for the general community, detailing responses to acts of violence, how to deal with perpetrators and the options that exist for men and women in violent situations.
- **Orana Far West:** A package of service options will be developed in Orana Far West. 24 hour telephone access through a domestic violence hotline; increasing and formalising already established women's networks; consolidation of linkages to existing service providers; use of brokerage funds to purchase such services as transport and safe crisis accommodation; co-ordination via the employment of one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal worker.

B. Victoria

Final Project proposals are still being developed in Victoria.

C. Queensland

PADV funding is being used to enhance existing SAAP-funded services, focusing on the provision of office equipment, staff training, service development and external evaluation. The services funded are as follows:

- North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service, Townsville.
- Lena Passi Domestic Violence Outreach Service.
- Kowanyama Aboriginal Community Council (Women's Group).
- Hopevale Aboriginal Community Council (Women's Shelter).
- Pormpur Paanth Aboriginal Corporation (Women's Shelter).

- MaÁathan Women's Shelter Aboriginal Corporation.
- Yarrabah Aboriginal Corporation for Women (Women's Shelter).
- Lockhart River Aboriginal Council.
- Kootana Women's Centre, Palm Island.

D. Western Australia

Six services have been funded in Western Australia under this Initiative. The services have both a preventative foci as well as a crisis response and aim to build on existing services and networks. They will target, in order of priority, women and children experiencing violence, communities and families, and family members responsible for violence. They will provide specific service options as well as community education, and information on family violence. The services are based at the following locations:

- Balgo Community, south of Halls Creek (linking in with the development of a Community Safe House).
- Beagle Bay Community (two and a half hours drive from Broome).
- Kalumburu Community (far north Kimberley).
- Jigalong Community (190km north east of Newman - linking in with the development of a Community Safe House).
- Looma Community (two and a half hours drive from Derby).
- Oombulgurri Community (15 minutes flight time from Wyndham).

E. South Australia

South Australia has developed a project on Kangaroo Island, based on the identification of the locational disadvantage experienced by women and children escaping domestic violence and family abuse. No domestic violence services are available on the Island. The new service will provide a direct case management function as well as a preventative role through training, community education and awareness of the issues of domestic violence in the community.

F. Tasmania

A project in the north and north west of Tasmania will see workers based in Launceston and Devonport, providing a support and information service for families escaping domestic violence.

G. Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Initiative aims to educate young women in rural and remote communities about issues of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Projects funded by FaCS Indigenous Family Relationships Pilots)

(a) *Talking Women's Business - Anglicare WA*

Women in the Kununurra area of Western Australia have developed a project aimed at breaking the cycle of family violence in the Indigenous community. Anglicare WA conceived the two-year project in conjunction with the Gawooleng Yawoodeng Aboriginal Corporation's Kununurra women's refuge. The project aims to empower women, support them in developing strategies to respond non-violently to violent behaviour from their partners, and help them become more

confident and skilled as parents and carers. It has been developed with the recognition that Indigenous women in abusive relationships may also be victimised by extended family members and that ongoing relationships can be put at risk when women leave. Designed to provide continuity and ongoing support for women attending the refuge, the concept became *Talking Women's Business*, in which residents meet weekly to discuss the issues relevant to them.

The program reflects an holistic sense of a person through looking individually at aspects such as physical, emotional and social well being. Although the structure is designed to cover all aspects over a six-session cycle, this is adapted freely to suit the group present at individual sessions. Discussions cover violence and its effects on women and children, the healing process, and material issues such as money and housing. The project providers themselves model respectful, non-violent behaviour, and teach skills in listening and positive parenting.

The project providers use a series of approaches to improve accessibility, including:

- flexibility in planning and adapting program structure, content and meeting times;
- organising transport and access to childcare;
- using accessible and innovative teaching resources and catering to clients with low literacy skills;
- using craft to build group cohesion, self-esteem and mutual respect;
- teaching a skill or conducting a self-esteem exercise at every meeting;
- meeting clients on their terms while modelling respectful behaviour.

The development of trust during the project was aided by the strong relationship existing between the two organisations prior to the inception of the project. The Law and Culture Women who make up the management committee of the refuge formed the first group, and now attend the meetings and have input into the planning of each session. In addition, project providers engage in regular meetings at the refuge to build trust with the client group and allay their fears of attending. As a result of these meetings, women are growing in self-esteem, and have begun to plan and identify their options. A number of women have successfully left the violent partner, and others choosing to stay with their partner are seeking refuge during the "beware" stage in the cycle of violence, when the chance of violence increases prior to its occurrence. Several women are making material decisions for self-provision, such as obtaining housing in their own name. In this way, women are beginning to intervene for their own and their children's well being outside the immediate context of the refuge.

As the project has unfolded, demand for this service continues to be high. Longer-term members have begun to participate more in discussions and show good understanding of issues surrounding violence. In some cases, these women also encourage and teach newer members, demonstrating development of a culture of mutual support. The program takes a broad view of the social environment of women experiencing violence, and attendance is encouraged from women who have previously been in violent relationships and older women with children and grandchildren exposed to violence. More recent phases of the program have been run for other members of the community, including professional community workers and adolescents affected by family violence. These are all signs of hope in a community where family violence is extremely common.

This pilot is one of six such projects around Australia funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. These projects are aimed at developing and piloting appropriate approaches to assist indigenous families to build healthier family relationships. Although they were diverse in setting, methodology and specific goals, these projects highlighted several consistently important aspects of service delivery to indigenous clients:

- *Building strong partnerships with community representatives and indigenous organisations.*
- *Ensuring visibility of service providers, for example through attendance at community-run events.*
- *Taking flexible approaches to service delivery – one provider in particular delivers the majority of its services through discussions in a social environment rather than at formal counselling sessions.*
- *Providing cultural safety and sensitivity, including awareness of the impact of colonisation, loss of culture, and the stolen generation.*
- *Addressing material concerns – the need for material assistance was frequently found to be a pressing concern among presenting clients, and may often be the initial reason for seeking assistance. One provider is looking to address client needs through working cooperatively with agencies that provide emergency assistance.*

Because of the importance of establishing personal trust, many service providers rely heavily upon a single worker to maintain links with the indigenous community. In some cases, this has presented severe difficulties with the worker resigning. This seems to be a critical issue in service provision to indigenous communities, and established programs may need to look at ways of managing service delivery through natural staff transitions, for example through maintaining a pool of trusted workers who can provide continuity.

(b) Newcastle Family Support Service

This project, in collaboration with the Warlga Ngurra Aboriginal Women's Refuge, has been well guided by its advisory group and is now at the point of commissioning a project evaluation by Umilliko, the Indigenous Research Centre located at Newcastle University. The project worker has been strengthening agency links and conducting a focused community consultation. Over 20 families have now been involved with the project since its inception.

Key learnings to date include:

- Connections with mainstream services are vital.
- Group programs have proved particularly valuable.
- Women have a strong desire to meet together, for discussion, information dissemination and planning around community and personal problems, especially the impact of violence and poverty.
- The value of visual identifiers of the Indigenous nature of the service, which has led to casual use of the service by young people.
- The effectiveness of a mix of practical assistance, such as information, advocacy, occasional transport, assistance with material aid. The latter is crucial for the disadvantaged families in the area.

- The need to respond at appropriate times and in the most appropriate manner, to crisis, which seems ever present in the Indigenous community.
- The benefit of more directive counselling - non-directive counselling and more established western styles are seen as too 'wishy-washy'. The act of telling and advising is seen as 'planting' a service delivery for the client to develop.
- The practicalities of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worker working in tandem meant that this was not achievable.
- The worker needs to be mindful of transient persons who do not regard themselves as part of the local community.
- Access to an Indigenous worker is clearly of great benefit for the local community.

(c) *Indigerelate Lismore – Bugalma Byhin “Safe Healing Place”*

Two year funding was provided to Interrelate, to establish a service (named “Indigerelate”), which in the service’s own words, did the following:

Indigerelate ‘yarners’ offer other Indigenous people and families the opportunity of working on personal Indigenous issues with professional Indigenous workers in a safe environment. This mode of delivery offers many advantages in that the Indigenous families and clients can feel free to express themselves honestly, without fear of being misunderstood through cultural diversity. Less time is spent with filling in the past, as there is an understood ‘shared history.’ Clients can feel free to talk in community ‘lingo’, creating a comfortable and honest space. These factors make a significant difference to Indigenous clients who are generally too afraid to access mainstream health services.

In the conclusions to their June 2000 Report, the project workers state the following:

Indigerelate is holistic in its outlook with a vision of honesty, trust, communication and accountability.....people perceive Indigerelate’s service as befitting their cultural norms and as such can strongly identify with it. Indigenous people are holistic in their healing processes. Healing for Indigenous people differs, in that, where mainstream medical practices deal with the psychological, physiological and emotional, Indigenous people’s self healing....extends to a cultural and spirit aspect. Indigerelate’s service encapsulates all four quadrants of self healing.....Indigerelate is focused on accommodation and self determination rather than assimilation. Indigenous people are saying that they want to talk to ‘yarners’...in a culturally safe environment.

The service has established a clear need and is looking to expand what it can offer to Indigenous people in the local community and beyond.

**(d) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Counsellor Training Program :
Anglicare/Top End - Resolve***

A training program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers was jointly designed by Anglicare’s Senior Family Counsellor and the Aboriginal Family Skills Worker. The aim was to

undertake a culturally appropriate family counsellor training course for all staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Numbers in the course varied between five and ten participants. The course consisted of 12 sessions, combining information on systems theory, the family structural and emotional system, issues for Aboriginal communities and families, and presentation of case studies with a group supervision context.

The program, while successful in terms of content, struggled to attract full support from the Aboriginal community. This points to the need for considerable work to be done when developing a program such as this, and the need for it to be encompassed in a broader community development framework.

(e) *Indigenous Families Project Nunkunwarrin Yunti; Adelaide Central Mission; Centre of Personal Education*

This collaborative approach between three agencies identified a key learning outcome right at the outset. The short time allowed for the development of proposals can be counter productive to the development of productive partnerships with Indigenous organisations, the creation of which need time for consultation and discussion. Thus, the very way in which Government tenders are established can be regarded as inappropriate for a culturally sensitive approach.

Several initiatives then emerged from an extensive consultation and orientation process and a revised submission to OSW:

- Family Support, complementing existing counselling services provided by Nunkunwarrin Yunti. This service assisted families to access services, provided volunteers for further support and generally aimed to empower Indigenous families through increased knowledge of rights and increased access to services.
- Extension of the ACM 'Good Beginnings Project' to Aboriginal families. This process aimed to develop a culturally appropriate response for the 'Strengthening Families' program and aimed to enhance the links between ACM staff and those from Nunkunwarrin Yunti. Key factors here included access to the service by Aboriginal families, and identification of key agencies that can provide appropriate support and resources.
- Indigenous Relationship Education at the Centre for Personal Education (COPE). The aim was to develop a pool of Indigenous educators to provide community education services for COPE. A collaborative model was developed for the working relationship between the various parties involved, including a number of other Aboriginal agencies.

A separate paper developed for the project by Richard Young, has focused on a collaborative strategy for the development of Aboriginal educators. He specified that any collaborative approach requires a framework, including the following principles:

- **Structure:** Working arrangements are needed that will allow for co-operation, information, sharing co-ordination and accountability.
- **Ownership:** This must be fostered among the participating parties, with extensive consultation as a key factor. Control and management of issues are essential in creating a sense of ownership.

- **Co-ordination:** This is essential where several parties are involved and needs to be a dedicated position.
- **Leadership:** This has to be done within a collaborative approach.
- **Linkages:** Especially with funding agencies, industry groups, government departments and other agencies.
- **Resources:** Adequate resources must be available.
- **Measurement:** Measuring effectiveness and the impact of an collaborative approach needs to be carefully considered from the outset.
- **Group Size and Functioning:** The size of the group needs to be managed to allow for achievement of the intended purpose, using a highly participative, problem-solving approach.
- **Key Stakeholders:** Key stakeholders must be involved at all stages.
- **Timelines:** These must be realistic, yet flexible.

Projects funded by ATSIC:

Family Violence Advocacy Project

Apunipima Cape York Health Council is funded by PADV to undertake the Family Violence Advocacy Project. The aim of the project is to develop a model of “best practice” service provider responses to family violence.

The Model:

The project is now in its final year of funding and staff are confident that the three-pronged approach taken over the past 18 months will be a successful model.

The three-pronged approach involves working with:-

- i. Regional Cairns-based service providers
 - ii. Community women
 - iii. Cape York community service providers
- (i) Very early in the project the IFVAG (Indigenous Family Violence Action Group) was established which is a group of Cairns-based service providers, who in some way respond to family violence in the Cape. A Memorandum of Understanding was drawn between members of IFVAG and this group also developed an Action Plan. Team members have facilitated the meetings of IFVAG and provided secretariat services. Very recently, to encourage group ownership, a decision was made to rotate the Chair and venue of monthly IFVAG meetings. It is hoped that following the completion of the Family Violence Advocacy Project, IFVAG will remain an entity of its own and service delivery to the Cape Communities will be coordinated, efficient, effective and in line with community values.
- (ii) Upon request from the communities, “Healing Our Families” workshops are conducted by the Project Team. Information is given on: the Project, the forms of violence, some causes

for the violence (historical and cultural perspective) and referral agencies. The workshop focuses on encouraging individual development and gives women perspective in their own lives. Information is gathered from the women about what services they access locally and how well these services cater for them. The workshop ends by discussing options they may take for their own lives.

- (iii) As a follow-up to the community workshops, a meeting between community service providers and community women ("Building Bridges") is organized and facilitated by the Team. This meeting is to encourage interaction between community women and service providers as well as develop coordinated protocols for the service providers. Community women are informed about the services available, what services can and can't do, who is first point of contact and how the services interact and support each other. From these meetings, local protocols are developed and documented.

Any gaps in services or concerns raised at either the "Healing Our Families" workshop or the "Building Bridges" meeting are reported back to IFVAG where members collectively decide what action, if any, is to be taken.

Resource Development:

Resources have been developed for both Cape York communities and for service providers. These include posters, pamphlets, information sheets, message posters, stickers, newsletter and a resource book.

"We believe that working through the model we have developed will give an extensive picture and analysis of service responses to family violence in Cape York. Its success depends on community willingness to be part of the process and the ability of government and non-government services to adopt a collaborative approach to family violence."

A National Partnerships Project:

Attitudes to Domestic and Family Violence in the Diverse Australian Community

This major research project undertaken by Donovan Research for the Crime Research Centre in Perth, involved both a comprehensive literature review and consultations with more than 280 people from various backgrounds through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and community meetings. Participants included the general community, Indigenous Australians and people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Responses from the Indigenous participants are reported in this Bulletin.

When is domestic violence considered serious?

All participants stated that domestic violence is 'always serious'. Some Indigenous participants considered verbal and emotional abuse to be more serious because of their hidden nature and the difficulty of healing 'mental scars'. For these people, the seriousness of the violence was perceived to be linked to a person or a community's prior experience of violence, i.e. the violence would be less serious if it were prevalent in the community and people had 'grown up with it.' Most

Indigenous participants felt that family violence is very prevalent and 'found all over', to the extent that it was regarded as having become institutionalised in communities across generations.

Perceived causes of domestic violence

The key factors reported by respondents as causing domestic violence were:

- Financial pressures and economic difficulties.
- Drug and alcohol abuse.
- Gambling.
- Male behaviour – their 'aggressive nature' and 'images of violence in masculinity.'
- Learned behaviour – previous experience of domestic violence.

A significant number of Indigenous participants perceived that cultural values or practices were wrongly used to justify domestic violence; and that high rates of domestic violence meant that it was accepted as 'normal' in many communities. There was also considerable discussion about the perpetrator also being a victim, i.e. their actions/violence resulting from a sense of powerlessness, stemming from the ongoing effects of colonisation. Shame and fear were regarded as two major obstacles to the disclosure of domestic violence by victims, as well a lack of appropriate services, concern about using Police services, and a lack of financial support and services.

Rural Crisis Intervention Project, Broken Hill and Menindee, NSW (Project funded through NSW Attorney-General's Department)

Annemarie Kelly – Born 28 March 1956 Passed Away 14 May 2000

Annemarie Kelly took up the Aboriginal Domestic Violence Project Officer position with the Menindee Rural Crisis Intervention Project in June 1999. Annemarie was a local, well-respected Aboriginal woman who had held a number of positions within the community. The knowledge and skills she had developed from positions she had held with Juvenile Justice, Department of Community Services, Nyampa Aboriginal Housing Company, ATSIIC, Office of Aboriginal Affairs and Menindee Aboriginal Lands Council enabled her to establish the service very quickly and effectively. Sadly Annemarie passed away on 4 May 2000 at the age of 44. Her death has been an enormous blow to both the Menindee and Broken Hill Projects and the local communities for whom she worked tirelessly throughout her life. Her strength, intelligence, commitment and belief in her people has, and continues to be an inspiration to us all.

The NSW government developed a project to develop trial best practice interventions in rural and remote communities in Far West NSW. Two project officers were employed in each of these communities, to carry out the project aims:

- Provide crisis intervention and support to victims of domestic violence.
- Build and maintain partnerships between local services.
- Provide outreach to women and children who may not access local services.
- Develop and publish a model of Best Practice for rural domestic violence crisis intervention.
- Identify possible strategies for continued implementation of the model of Best Practice.

In evaluating the project, a number of key factors were identified in regard to evaluating Indigenous projects including:

- Ownership of the evaluation should be in the hands of the local project and community.
- The primary purpose of evaluation should be to assist communities to work towards positive change.
- Data collection should be compatible with Indigenous experience (story telling and use of oral experience).
- Verification of data should be in the hands of the local community.
- The style of presentation should be in the hands of the local workers and community as much as possible.

Both of the projects have been underway for approximately twelve months and a number of key learnings have been identified to date:

- The community needs to set the project parameters, not the bureaucrats.
- Single workers in small communities experience considerable difficulties living and working in the same location. Stress levels are thus very high for these workers – their support is a key factor.
- A Women-only committee is crucial to the success of the project being able to address 'women's-only business'.
- A holistic cultural approach can work, but it is a slow and difficult process.
- Worker concern for men's welfare has increased community acceptance of the project.
- Relocating women out of the community is not a solution as it punishes the whole community. In general, women do not want to end their relationships, they just want the violence to stop.
- Agencies need to take a firm stand – that violence is not acceptable. This is particularly true for the auspice agency.
- Strong partnerships are crucial and need strengthening. Interagency rules often work counter to the creation of such partnerships.
- An interagency Aboriginal worker support process is vitally needed.
- Services specifically for men are needed.

Best Practice Approach

Experience in these two projects have identified the following Best Practice elements:

- The need to build on the skills of people in the local community.
- A clear belief that any form of violence is unacceptable.
- Protocols and guidelines for effective service delivery are needed, across agency boundaries.
- Sound appropriate training is essential for workers, backed up by effective support.
- The safety of victims of violence is the key priority.
- Projects need to recognise and validate the importance of community healing.
- There needs to be a recognition of the importance of a family approach to dealing with violence in communities.
- Solutions need to be found which do not require women to leave their communities.
- Inter-agency collaboration is a crucial element.
- A broad based reference group of key stakeholders is vital.

Western Australian project:

Models of Intervention at the Point of Crisis in Aboriginal Families

Models of Intervention at the Point of Crisis in Aboriginal Families was a project conducted across Western Australia by the Crime Research Centre in Perth. The report proposes a number of intervention models for urban, rural and remote communities.

Central to the intervention models proposed is the establishment of Family Crisis Intervention Teams to provide a 24 hour response, taking on a different shape in different localities. Within the Metropolitan area it is proposed that members of the team include a Team leader, Aboriginal Police Liaison Officer (Women), Aboriginal Women Advocate, and Aboriginal Counsellor. In rural areas, inclusion of existing Street Patrols and women's refuges and shelters are considered essential. In remote areas the proposed team would consist of: The Community Council, Women's Safety Council, Warden's Scheme, and Community Health Worker.

The diverse nature of Indigenous family violence requires an "across government approach", including Commonwealth, State and Territory governments in the areas of health, mental health, housing, police and justice, and family and children services. It is proposed that the Crisis Intervention Teams be managed within a new Aboriginal Family Violence Unit, auspiced by the DVPU and overseen by a reference group comprising key Aboriginal representatives from the area listed above.

The has found that the notions of family violence and domestic violence represent different models of practice or paradigms in conceptualising and responding to the problem. With a family violence model among Indigenous communities there is:

- a rejection of "criminalisation" as the main strategy to deal with family violence;
- less reliance on an explicitly feminist analysis and explanation of violence within intimate relationships;
- a greater stress on the impact of colonialism, trauma, family dysfunction and alcoholism as primary causes;
- a view which sees male violence, less as an expression of patriarchal power than as a compensation for lack of status, esteem and value;
- a greater stress on the impact of family violence on family as a whole, rather than just women and children;
- an emphasis on a range of potential perpetrators, rather than just husbands, including sons, grandsons and other male kin.

Aboriginal family violence:

- is fed by and feeds broader community conflict;
- impacts on a wide range of kin and community members

- has multiple causes;
- includes a range of abusive, degrading and violent behaviours; and
- needs to be situated within dynamics of community violence, feuds and conflicts;
-

Recent PADV consultations support project findings that Indigenous women:

- are more likely to fight back and so experience more injury, or cause the perpetrator harm themselves;
- do not use support services for fear of what will happen to the perpetrator once in custody;
- are more likely to use refuges as respite and then return, rather than as a place to move on from;
- lack information about legal process and are unwilling to seek legal advice.

South Australian project: *The Port Youth Theatre Workshop*

The Port Youth Theatre Workshop (Yipti - fun with feelings) project involved two programs. Warritti one involved the production of a series of workshop resources for Indigenous children including four booklets: 'feeling happy', 'feeling sad', 'feeling scared', and 'feeling angry'. The booklets provide a creative, fun and non threatening way for Indigenous children to explore feelings through the use of cartoons and their own drawings.

The booklets are written in English and three other indigenous languages; Ngarrindjeri, Kaurna, and Pitjantjajara. Fourteen boys and ten girls attended the workshops regularly where the booklets were trialed

Due to the success of Warritti one, a second workshop was facilitated, which involved teaching children how to deal with conflict through puppet making and working together to create puppet plays and role plays to act out emotions. During the workshop, participants received expert tuition in making puppets and support from five Aboriginal Workers over a five week period. A steady group of eighteen children attended the workshop regularly, with numbers sometimes going up to twenty. The workshops were professionally filmed by PEE Wee productions.

The final outcome of the workshops was the production of a video, facilitators workbook and booklet forms to form a resource kit. This enables the workshops to be replicated in other settings, and also with non indigenous children. Approximately 300 of the 500 Kits produced have been distributed.

Anecdotal evidence shows that the project has had a very positive response, with a number of groups commenting on the timelessness and uniqueness of the kit. Children have been reported to be responding very well to the kits.

Key learnings from the program include:

- Don't underestimate or assume what children are experiencing or have knowledge and

opinions about.

- Work on the best way to have fun and take time with children throughout all processes
- Be committed to providing the people children need to support them, as well as food and transport to ensure the project success and the participants well being.

A Northern Territory Project:

The Pilot Court-Mandated and Court Referred Program for Offenders of Domestic and Aboriginal Family Violence

The Pilot Court-Mandated and Court Referred Program for Offenders of Domestic and Aboriginal Family Violence which was developed by the NT Office of Women's Policy and implemented by the Department of Corrections involved the production of a best practice program guide. The program guide is accompanied by a background paper informing program development and providing a theoretical base.

This initiative is first of its kind, both nationally and internationally; that is considered suitable to offenders of domestic and Aboriginal family violence. The program was a behaviour change model and is conducted over 26 weeks with 2.5 hour sessions. The Program Model:

- reinforces the criminal nature of the violence to the offender and the community;
- enforces the attendance of offenders in programs;
- exposes offenders to different attitudes and ways of behaving;
- offers survivors and child witnesses support

The development of the program guide was informed from consultation with Indigenous men and women, service providers, and review of existing research. Key findings from this preliminary research includes:

- Programs for offenders should not be based on models of support or therapy, but must result instead in complete behavioural and attitudinal changes in the offenders.
- Program topics for Indigenous offenders need to be culturally sensitive. Program topics were developed to include information on the cultural context of Indigenous family violence, change motivators relevant to Indigenous offenders and an exploration of Aboriginal spiritual healing.
- Programs need to have the flexibility to be undertaken in a range of settings for Indigenous groups and be facilitated by Elders within Indigenous communities.
- Education sessions need to be included for offenders on the problems of excessive alcohol consumption.
- Offering support to children exposed to domestic violence as a crucial component of the program.

- Offering optional individual and group support sessions, safety planning and referrals for an offender's partner in conjunction with the offender's participation.
- The court-mandated offender program works from the premise that offenders are unlikely to self-refer, and an offender's consent is not required prior to the making of an offender program order.

Features in providing a successful community response

From the literature, project findings and consultation responses, the common themes to emerge in successful features of a community response are those that:

- Are holistic, encompassing initiatives directed at health, drug and alcohol misuse and linked to community and family healing.
- Are focused on community development models emphasising models of self determination and community ownership, as shown in night patrols initiated by Indigenous women.
- Respond to local needs.
- Provide a safe environment for respite for potential perpetrators such as Sobering up Centres and for victims such as Safe Houses.
- Use a multi-disciplinary approach.
- Respect traditional law and customs.
- Employ local people where possible.
- Focus on partnerships between agencies, community groups, and police.
- Provide crisis care and practical support.
- Involve community Justice Groups, emphasising the authority of elders, including women.
- Add value to existing structures where possible.