

# WESNET

Women's Services Network



# Annual Report

2010-2011

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# Our Members

Our members, Australia's domestic and family violence services, are a service system of complex service delivery organisations that are specialists in assisting women experiencing or escaping domestic and family violence. Our members include:

- Women's refuges/shelters
- Halfway houses
- Safe houses
- Women's medium-term housing schemes
- Information and referral services
- Sexual assault services
- Outreach services.
- Counselling services
- Advocacy services
- Indigenous services
- Immigrant, refugee and non-English speaking background services
- Other women's services

The models of domestic and family violence services in Australia are diverse. They range from single communal shelters to multi-building cluster models of self-contained units with counselling rooms, children's resource buildings, playgrounds, and group or training rooms; to shop fronts in busy shopping centres servicing dispersed houses throughout the community; to large purpose built facilities in remote areas; to lone outreach workers working out of other organisations. They may be a crisis phone service that also provides crisis accommodation, a community development worker, a counsellor, a networker, a children's worker, or a worker in an isolated community with little support. They may specialise in certain disadvantaged groups of women and children in their community.

# Vision

That all women and children live free from domestic and family violence and its consequences.

# Purpose

WESNET is a national women's peak advocacy body that facilitates and promotes policy, legislative and programmatic responses relevant to women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence.

WESNET advances responses which:

- ensure the safety of women and children,
- empower them to live free of violence, and
- improve the social, political and economic status of women.

WESNET works within a feminist framework which promotes an understanding of domestic and family violence as gendered violence.

In addition, WESNET acknowledges that women and children's experiences are also intrinsically shaped by their ethnicity, culture, ability, age, sexuality and class.

# Goals

1. Membership Services.
2. Promotion of the prevention of domestic and family violence.
3. Continue to strengthen our viability and relevance as a peak body.
4. Contribute to and monitor policies, legislation and programs which impact on women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

# Committee Members 2010-11

## **Chairperson**

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The WESNET National Committee is comprised of twelve women who volunteer their time and expertise to further our work in our sector to eliminate violence against women. Drawn from every State and Territory in Australia, they are grassroots service managers, direct service workers, counsellors, trainers, peer educators, researchers and expert advisers. These women, along with women in the domestic and family violence sector across the country, are Australian experts in various aspects of domestic and family violence. They are experts in policy and legislative frameworks, evaluation and what constitutes 'good practice'. They are fully conversant with 'good practice' discourse and programs in each of their States and Territories. On the Committee there are also delegates for immigrant, refugee and non-English speaking background women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and older women.

# Committee Reports

## National Chair

*Julie Oberin*

Established in 1992, the Women's Services Network (WESNET) is the peak body for domestic and family violence services across Australia.

It has been another significant year for the women's domestic and family violence sector in Australia.

At a national level, WESNET has been busy working behind the scenes on a range of activities.

### **Sydney Symposium**

In November 2010, WESNET hosted its first Symposium in Sydney, with much welcomed assistance from our NSW Representative's organisation, the NSW Women's Refuge Movement. At the symposium, our evaluator Karen Bentley gave an overview of the findings from the many projects that WESNET funded through our 2009 Capacity Building Grants Program and we were also able to have women from three of the projects come and present their findings. More information about the Capacity Building Project and the evaluation can be found on our website.

The three projects presented were:

- The Older Women's Network "Pathways for Referral" Reducing Violence Against Older Women.
- ACTCOSS "Entering the Prison Kits"
- Women's Centre for Health Matters "Access and Respite for Women with Disabilities Experiencing Domestic Violence by the ACT DV Sector"

### **Safety Net Training**

In March 2011, WESNET brought out two trainers from our sister organisation in the US

National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) to conduct technology safety training for the domestic and family violence sector in four locations across Victoria and one in Tasmania. The Victorian Government provided some additional funds so that extra training days could be provided while the trainers were here. The two-day training workshop covered how perpetrators can use technology to abuse and coerce their victims and covered all manner of technology from fax machines through to social networking. The trainers also conducted a one-day advanced workshop for those wanting to gain a deeper understanding of the issue.

The training was well received and there have been calls for more training to be conducted. To this end, WESNET sent four women to Washington DC in August 2011 to be trained as technology advocates. Next financial year, WESNET hopes to be able to establish Australian-based training with the mentorship and partnership of the NNEDV.

### **Global Women's Shelter Movement – Global Network of Women's Shelter**

The Global Network of Women's Shelters was founded in 2009. WESNET is a member of the founding Board. The GNWS is an active and rapidly evolving global network. The GNWS Interim Governing Board is composed of 20 networks and programs from 17 countries. [www.gnws.org](http://www.gnws.org)

Planning is underway for the 2nd World Conference on Women's Shelters to be held in Washington DC USA from 27 February to 1 March 2011.

The 2nd World Shelter Conference will be hosted by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) which is the US-equivalent of WESNET. We encourage Australians working in the domestic and family violence field to attend if they can. It will be an exciting conference. The 1st World Shelter Conference held in Alberta Canada was a huge success.

Later in the year the GNWS will hold its 2nd annual Global Shelter Data Count. We hope a lot of services participate in this important activity.

### **Managing the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA)**

AWAVA was established in 2010 after successfully becoming one of the new National Women's Alliances (NWA's) funded by the Australian Government.

The National Women's Alliances were funded to "support women's involvement in government policy development", and were one of the 'immediate national initiatives' to be funded under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. The other five National Women's Alliances are National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA), Australian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Alliance (AIRWA), National Rural Women's Coalition and Network (NRWC&N), Economic Security for Women (ES4W), and Equality Rights Alliance (ERA).

AWAVA's vision is to ensure that all women and children are able to live free from all forms of violence and abuse. AWAVA recognises that gender violence is both a consequence and cause of gender inequality embedded structurally throughout our society.

WESNET tendered for, and successfully won the contract to be lead agency for the new alliance and help it get established. This has meant a busy additional workload for WESNET during the year, with some fantastic achievements.

### **Australian Women's Timeline**

As part of the centenary of International Women's Day in March 2011, AWAVA set up an Australian Women's Timeline – an online resource for schools and the general community about the progress with women's equality, but how violence against women still occurs at unacceptable levels. You can visit the timeline at <http://timeline.awava.org.au>. The Timeline has been noted by the International Women's Development Agency, who undertook an independent evaluation of AWAVA, as "an impressive and engaging set of web-based resources for schools and the wider community that locates action on violence against women within the history of

broader efforts to progress gender equality. The Timeline has been very positively received, with steady website traffic. It may prove a valuable long-term platform for AWAVA's message about the interdependence between ending violence and empowering women". The International Women's Development Agency also found that "Through its work on the Australian Women's Timeline, AWAVA has contributed to greater awareness of the relationship between violence and gender equality, and the priority that needs to be accorded ending violence against women given the relatively limited progress compared with other areas of gender equality".

### **Family Violence Bill**

AWAVA worked with Women's Legal Services Australia to prepare a submission on the Family Violence Bill (also available on the AWAVA website). The joint submission strongly supported the Federal Government's moves to provide better protections within the Family Law System for people who have experienced family violence and the proposed amendment to remove the objective test of "reasonableness" so that family violence can be properly considered whenever a victim actually fears for their safety.

That said, the submission went on to point out that further amendments are still needed to the concept and presumption of equal shared parental responsibility and the link between this and equal time/substantial and significant time arrangements; and the "one-size fits all" approach in which it is presumed that these arrangements are best for children.

### **The National Plan**

The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children was launched by the returning federal government in a small event held on 15 February 2011.

The single most important element of the Council of Australian Governments National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children is that it locates violence against women as a consequence of gender inequality. Where we as a society have made many gains on other aspects of redressing gender inequality, we have not made sufficient ground to significantly reduce this gender-based violence (GBV) against women and their children. The National Plan recognises that gender inequalities pervasive throughout

our society are fundamental to why and how Australian women experience violence against them as gender-based violence, simply because they are women. The National Plan recognises that creating equality for women will reduce the development of and sustainment of violence supporting attitudes and beliefs. We still have a bit of a task in front of us.

The Road Home homelessness framework explicitly states that domestic and family violence is the main structural driver of homelessness in Australia and that it is the main cause of homelessness for women and their children. However, The Road Home as the overarching policy framework to reduce homelessness only pays lip service to addressing violence against women and their children. There is a complete anomaly between the acknowledgement in The Road Home that domestic and family violence is the main structural driver of homelessness in Australia and not providing significant resources to try and redress the problem.

Specialist domestic and family violence services have not seen any real growth funds for the last two decades. This stands in direct contradiction to the fact that already our data tells us that one in two people seeking shelter on any given night are turned away. That most of these are women with accompanying children fleeing domestic or family violence. That most of these children are under four years old.

Ironically the good work of the National Plan and The Road Home in improving some services and systems and raising community awareness about domestic violence, about women's rights and about available services, also raises reporting of domestic violence, improves service responses and increases demand for services. Raised demand for services with no growth funds or additional resources results in increased turn away. Tragically in Australia in 2011 we should not be increasing the turn away of women and children fleeing violence because our services are full or our case loads overflowing. Women are most at risk in the first couple of months after separation and up to 18 months later.

Governments may argue that The Road Home did not inject resources into the specialist domestic and family violence sector because

the National Plan would do that. Unfortunately the National Plan has not strengthened the specialist domestic and family violence sector either. This is despite:

Strategy 4.2:

- Support specialist domestic violence and sexual assault services to deliver responses that meet needs.
- Build the capacity of domestic violence services to respond to the needs of children who are exposed to domestic violence.
- Extend sexual assault services and domestic violence services' work with other agencies to provide flexible, innovative, inclusive and integrated services which recognise diversity.
- Provide survivors of sexual assault with access to timely, best practice forensic medical and crisis response/counselling services.
- Support the specialist domestic violence and sexual assault workforces.  
Support culturally responsive services for Aboriginal children and young people impacted by the experience of family violence.

Violence against women is a travesty, a breach of human rights, and it not acceptable that the front line which is dealing with increased demand is neglected by both The Road Home policy framework and the all of government National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. This omission will directly impact on the lives of women and children who will continue to be turned away on a daily basis because the services are full or already working to capacity.

When all elements of government address violence against women as an issue arising from gender inequality then we will begin to make headway. In the meantime, as community awareness increases it is important to invest into the specialist front line domestic and family violence sector so that women and their children are not turned away and so that these grass roots community based organisations are resourced appropriately to undertake longer term support work where needed along with their community education activities.

Meanwhile, AWAVA has been actively trying to engage with the Safety Taskforce throughout

the year and eventually had some success.

### **National Plan Community Engagement Roadshow**

While the National Plan specifically states that “This strategy focuses on encouraging people throughout Australia—from individuals and families, to community, health and education organisations, to businesses and governments – to embrace their responsibility as a community member and take a role in preventing and reducing violence against women” (p14) for many communities and individuals, it is a fairly big leap to get from the National Plan to implementing prevention activities in their own communities.

In May 2011, AWAVA was awarded a contract with the Safety Taskforce in the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, to deliver six community engagement events on the National Plan in regional and remote Australia. These “roadshows” will give local communities an overview of the National Plan and provide them with an opportunity to share information within their community on what is already being done in prevention of violence against women and their children, and what else they might be able to do. These events will be held in Katherine NT, Bendigo Victoria, Launceston Tasmania, Broome WA and Wilcannia NSW.

At the end of this project, AWAVA will be able to share some of the prevention activities planned and already taking place in remote and regional Australia and, hopefully, provide inspiration and guidance to other individuals and communities wanting to reduce violence against women and children in their own community.

### **Representation Activities**

WESNET is on more committees, working groups and advisory groups than ever. During 2010-11 WESNET had members on the following:

- the 1800 RESPECT Advisory Group
- the National Perpetrators Roundtable,
- the National Child Support Agency Reference Group
- the Australian DV Clearinghouse Reference Group
- the ABS Reference Group on homelessness
- the SHIP data users advisory group

- the Personal Safety Survey Reference Group.

WESNET was also instrumental in testing the final Personal Safety Survey instruments.

### **Emerging Issues**

Major reviews of the homelessness sectors are happening or about to happen in Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia. For many of us that have been in this sector for decades, it is a case of *déjà vu*.

The landmark ruling on wages in Queensland is probably a glimpse into the future for the remaining states and territories if the Australian Services Union pay equity case gets through and governments fail to come to the party on topping up funding to meet the increased costs. Without it, many organisations in the sector are going to have to reduce operational hours with potentially dire consequences for women and their children.

Immigrant and women from non-English speaking backgrounds continue to experience violence in ways which further marginalise them from full participation in society. Along with domestic and family violence, they also experience violence and bullying in the work place and discrimination in the community and from the service sector. Often their stories are not believed as there is an assumption that they are queue jumping or just trying to stop the country from deporting them. These women often face extreme financial hardship and often have limited supports they can draw on. Community workers assisting these women are often under high levels of stress. The extensive time needed to support these women is not properly funded in government funding formulas. Please refer to Jane Corpus Brocks report for important recommendations.

The year has seen the end of the MINCO (Commonwealth, State, Territory and New Zealand Ministers Conference on the Status of Women). This meant that the MINCO's subgroups including NATSIWG (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gathering) were also disbanded. In 2010 the Australian Government funded a new National Women's Alliance to focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Issues. The new alliance is called NATSIWA (National Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance).

Work is continuing on developing options to recognise Indigenous people in the Australian Constitution with an Expert Panel on Indigenous Constitution Recognition appointed.

Indigenous women in Australia continue to experience violence at a higher rate and with more injuries than non-Indigenous women and much more needs to be done.

Older single women are going to increasingly face homelessness and poverty over the next decades. This is due to the ongoing financial, emotional and physical impact of violence and abuse they have suffered and poverty that they have accrued over their life span. It is important to start planning for this. These women will often be separated, single or widowed, have little superannuation if any, and often have poor health. WESNET has identified this as a serious and continuing issue and has co-opted Pauline Woodbridge to the Committee as the Older Women's representative to keep these issues front and centre.

# Indigenous Women

*Shirley Slann*

It has been a very busy year and there have been a lot of new developments, issues and events that have impacted not only in our communities but in society in general. Domestic & Family Violence Prevention Month (Queensland) was a huge month with a range of activities happening across the state. It was also good to see the "National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children" (First 3 year action plan being launched across Australia). In Queensland the Domestic & Family Violence Protection Act 1989 is currently being reviewed.

## **MINCO & NATSIWG no longer in existence**

On 13 February 2011, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a plan to reform its ministerial council system. This followed a review that was conducted in 2009-10. As a

result of these reforms, the Commonwealth, State, Territory and New Zealand Ministers' Conference (MINCO) on the Status of Women will cease to operate from 30 June 2011.

MINCO's discontinuation has implications for its subcommittees, including NATSIWG. At MINCO 2010 Women's Ministers advised NATSIWG Working Group members that, given MINCO's uncertain future, they could not commit to continuing NATSIWG (the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gathering) in its current form.

The decisions made by COAG about the ministerial council system reform confirm this. NATSIWG have since therefore been advised that when MINCO ceases in June 2011, NATSIWG will cease to be an official subcommittee of MINCO. COAG has decided to establish a time-limited Select Council on Women's Issues under the new system. Women's Ministers have been advised that this Select Council is not being established to replace MINCO and has little capacity to take on MINCO's existing work. The Select Council will be tightly scoped with a focus on some key reform tasks, which have not yet been determined by COAG.

NATSIWG was established in 2002 and was put in place to ensure that the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from the grass roots level from communities around Australia were heard by governments. NATSIWG has been an important opportunity for women to engage and discuss issues of national significance that affect them, their families and their communities. The recommendations that NATSIWG has presented over the years has resulted in practical outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women on the ground, including the release of a "Business Toolkit for Indigenous Women" in May 2010, which has been well received across Australia.

At MINCO 2010, Women's Ministers acknowledged the importance of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Women's agenda being recognised as a priority at the Commonwealth, State and Territory level. Women's Ministers are committed to an ongoing dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, both within their own jurisdictions and nationally.

## Indigenous Constitutional Recognition

On 23 December 2010, the Australian Government appointed members to the Expert Panel on Indigenous Constitutional Recognition, who will be responsible for developing options to recognise Indigenous peoples in the Constitution and helping to generate community support for the proposal. Over a 6 month period, public consultations and meetings will be held in all states and territories to engage directly with Australians. The Expert Panel will be receiving submissions in writing, through emails or via an interactive website. Further information about the Expert Panel or the community consultations can be found at the Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians website: [www.youmeunity.org.au/](http://www.youmeunity.org.au/).

## National Congress

The National Congress will provide a central mechanism with which governments, the corporate and community sectors can engage and partner on reform initiatives of interest and concern to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and will be a strong voice for their aspirations, interests and values at a national level. It will set a high benchmark for strong responsible and strategic leadership, and will support gender equality, youth leadership, and uphold the highest ethical principles for public office holders. If you have any questions or would like to know more about the National Congress, please visit the National Congress website: [www.nationalcongress.com.au/](http://www.nationalcongress.com.au/).

## NATSIWA

One of the National Women's Alliances is made up of Indigenous women and their organisations from across the country. This alliance helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to share information, identify issues from their own communities and raise concerns, in their own words, with their own solutions. If you are interested in finding out more about NATSIWA or have an interest in joining the Alliance please email [natsiwa.admin@ywca.org.au](mailto:natsiwa.admin@ywca.org.au)

## Global Network of Women's Shelters

I was lucky enough to attend the Global Network of Women's Shelters in Amsterdam in March 2011 and was the first Indigenous woman that was appointed to the network. I was overwhelmed by seeing many women from different countries coming together to discuss the issue of Domestic

Violence on a global level.

It was also an excellent opportunity to meet and network with other women from different countries and discuss the many issues surrounding Domestic Violence. A major topic of the Network was to discuss the "2nd World Conference of Women's Shelters (which will be held in Washington, DC from 27 Feb - 1 Mar 2012). During the visit we visited the American Embassy and met with a number of officials and service providers and also discussed the difference in the Domestic Violence Laws as compared to Australia. As women, if we can all come together and stand together to stop Domestic & Violence across the globe, surely we will be a stronger voice and can lobby together to address the issue that impacts on women and children across the globe.

Let's keep Domestic & Family Violence on the agenda and continue to ensure that the safety of women and children is paramount.

# Immigrant, Refugee and Non-English Speaking Background Women

*Jane Corpus-Brock*

This year immigrant and refugee women from CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) or NESB (Non-English Speaking Background) marked the 100 years of celebrating the International Women's Day. NESB women focused on violence in workplaces. Harassment and bullying are very common forms of violence that are experienced by many immigrant and refugee women. In other states most CALD women's groups and organizations have presented

major achievements of immigrant and refugee women in their settlement in Australia including overcoming the impact of family and domestic family experiences. Major women's services and CALD women's network of organizations in some states like Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales had participated in law reform on family violence and commonwealth laws consultations.

### **Law Reform in Family Violence and Commonwealth legislation**

The Immigrant Women's Speakout Association in New South Wales held a roundtable on 15 March 2011 held at the premises of the Australian Human Rights Commission. The participants were: United Muslims Women's Association, St George Migrant Resource Centre, Sydney West Multicultural Support, Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association, Samaritan Accommodation - The Salvation Army, PACSI (Philippines-Australia Community Services, Inc.), Asian Women at Work, Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme, Women's Legal Services, Greenvalley Liverpool Domestic Violence Service, PAWA (Philippines-Australia Women's Association), two observers, staff members from the AHRC (Australian Human Rights Commission) and Lara Palambo from the Macquarie University.

The roundtable participants have discussed the following:

### **The challenges faced by women who have accessed or made attempts to access the Family Violence Provisions (FVP)**

**Accommodation:** All those who are accessing FVP said that they are expected to separate from the partner/sponsor immediately. In cases where there is no vacancy in a women's refuge, this CALD woman becomes homeless. The refuge can only provide accommodation for three weeks. In many cases CALD women accessing FVP are part-time and casual workers. They cannot afford private rental. Some of them are able to access some brokerage money but it only amounts to few nights of accommodation. After these few nights the CALD woman has to beg acquaintances to allow her to stay with them. The CALD woman moves from one acquaintance to another until she is granted permanent residency, regular paid employment and save money for bond in

a private rental accommodation.

**Financial hardship:** Almost all of the women who have accessed FVP and who are not employed are dependents on their sponsor for income before they have left the relationship. Even though they have Medicare and seek assistance from competent persons such as medical doctors, psychologists and other competent persons they still have to pay the difference in all medical services.

### **CALD women preparing evidence and proving one's experience of DV/FV as requirement in accessing FVP have the following issues -**

**Isolation:** Newly-arrived NESB marriage migrant women, who do not have relatives, no capacity to speak, understand and read in English language and no local knowledge of where to seek assistance often become deeply isolated, in particular those who live in the rural areas. These are the marriage migrant women who often do not have information about the FVP.

**Stigma:** The process of preparing written evidence that is required by the FVP is very intense. The steps they have to do in retelling their stories to community workers and other professionals cause distress and eventually, stigma. It is also very difficult for them to disclose their experience to anyone. They have been traumatized again and again as they have to disclose make an account of their story from one competence person to another, from one community worker, to the police, and others. Those who cases have been sent to Centrelink social workers who are independent experts for re-assessment have expressed that they felt been re-traumatized again.

**Assurance of support:** Those who have left their husband-sponsor worry about receiving crisis payment from Centrelink because they think that the assurance of support from the husband sponsor will be used for the crisis payment Centrelink. The CALD woman accessing FVP will hesitate to access crisis payment if the money will be sourced from the assurance of support paid by their partner sponsor when she applied for partner residency visa.

**The challenges faced by community workers who have provided support for CALD women accessing FVP -**

**Assisting CALD women whose case have to re-assess by Centrelink social workers who are independent experts:**

Based on the concerns presented by CALD women who have lodged their evidence with DIAC (Department of Immigration and Citizenship) there are some DIAC caseworkers who have not fully assessed DV/FV experience presented on the written evidence. Applicants think that DIAC case officers do not fully understand the context and forms of family violence that CALD women have endured. Especially when the partner-sponsor send writes DIAC and claim that the applicant has lied and is accessing FVP to fast track their visa status to permanent resident. The following are the summary of comments and observations by community workers who have assisted and supported applicants who were re-assessed by Centrelink social workers (independent experts):

- Assessment session with Centrelink social worker (independent expert) is too long. The average duration is from 3-4 hours. This long drawn out process of telling personal experience of FV is very draining and applicants always have sought support-counseling sessions with community workers after the assessment.
- The thought that a government agency have assessed their claim of FV as fraudulent distress victims. All CALD women who have been required to have assessment session with the independent expert said that they have experienced high level of distress before, during and after assessment session.

**Comments that have been presented at the consultation with the Australian Law Reform Commission:**

- DIAC and Centrelink social workers (independent experts) have to review the independent expert arrangement and process. This review have to cover the following points:
  - Improvement on their practice and appropriateness of Centrelink as independent expert
  - Centrelink is not an independent assessor because it is a government service agency

- Welfare Act covers Centrelink mandate as provider of welfare services but does not cover the mandate as an independent expert that assess the FV experience CALD women who are accessing FVP
- Lack of clarity when there are complaints against Centrelink social workers (independent expert). No one among the Roundtable participants have a clue the name of the government agency who receives and acts on a complaint against an independent expert. One example is a case against a male social worker that had interviewed CALD woman applicant about her sexual abuse experience. The client did not pursue further her complaint for fear of having to disclose again her experience and undergo distress and further trauma. This CALD woman also fears that someday this same social worker might be the Centrelink social worker that would be assessing application for Centrelink welfare payment. She thinks that the social worker might be negative on her application because of her complaint.

This CALD woman who had been interviewed by in detail of her experience of sexual abuse by a male Centrelink social worker (independent expert) had recommended that:

- There should be guideline for lodging complaints against this type of error and guideline should be must be made public
- The applicant may be able to access the draft assessment result written by the Centrelink social worker (independent expert) under freedom of information after the assessment session and applicant should be allowed to comment on the review report.

**Other issues for community workers assisting CALD women accessing FVP:**

- Community workers who provide assistance to CALD women accessing FVP are under high level of stress
- Most community workers have to build very support system, which is appears to be very complex and difficult for a victim to navigate through
- Community workers have not enough time

to have debriefing in between sessions of support and funding allocation is not enough to cover the cost of a proper debriefing and external counselling

- Community workers need to understand the context of FV and how to assist a CALD woman in completing the DIAC prescribed Statutory Form 1040
- Community workers are concerned about competent person's understanding of their role. The competent persons need information about their role and training in completing the DIAC Statutory Declaration Form 1040.
- There are institutions and service provider organizer who have members of staff who can be competent persons. These community workers have to be trained as well in their role as competent person.

#### **Recommended actions to address the challenges -**

1. Broadened the term from domestic 'violence' to 'abuse' to take into account all forms of violence. Refer to the 'Family law, on the family violence bill'. Broadening definition of abuse will strengthen the way domestic violence is dealt with.
2. Violence perpetrated by extended families such as parents-in-law and others have to be included in the Migration Regulations. At present, the Migration Regulations definition of family violence, the Violence perpetrated by in-laws is not included.
3. Prospective Partner Visa holders should be eligible to access FVP. CALD women who are prospective visa holders have many difficulties and experience hardships while on prospective spouse visa. Most of them are dependent on their prospective partner (the sponsor of their visa) for their upkeep such as accommodation, food, transport and other needs. If they get employed, the pay is very low, part-time casual, Many of them had disclosed that the prospective sponsor require them to give all their wages. If FV happened, the prospective partner visa holder does not have money to support herself.
4. FVP reform: The DIAC Statutory Declaration Form 1040 should be simplified and in plain language. The process of providing evidence should also made in simple steps. The applicant provides written evidence through Form 1040 or a revised form that is easy to understand. If the case officer

needs more information or not satisfied with the evidence provided by the applicant on the form, then the applicant goes to one of the independent assessor panel. Migration regulations should include the rights and responsibilities of assessor and the applicant.

5. Information session on FVP for police officers: Applicants have disclosed that sometimes police had given them misleading information on immigration.
6. DIAC must review the role of Migration Agent's in partner visa holder's access to FVP. Most of Migration Agents charge a fee of \$6,600 from those who are accessing FVP who they assist in preparing the evidence of family violence by the applicants. Most applicants think that Migrant agents who are commercially operating and charge \$6,600 are not considering the financial hardships that CALD women experience in situation of family violence.

All the points that had discussed and recommendation at the Roundtable were presented at the ALRC Consultation organised by the Immigrant Women's Speakout Association on the 4th of May 2011. ALRC Legal officers Mr Khan Hoang and Amanda Alford facilitated the consultation. There was a strong support for the cancellation of competent persons in providing evidence on FVP. Participants said that competent persons replaced by a panel of independent assessors panel.

The Immigrant Women's Speakout Association had lodged a submission on the public inquiry ran by the ALRC, on Family Violence and Commonwealth Law.

The Immigrant Women's Support Services had done a joint submission with the Refugee and Immigrant Legal Services on family violence and Commonwealth Laws.

#### **Comparative research on marriage migrants in selected countries in Asia**

The Immigrant Women's Speakout Association has done a research on marriage migrants in Australia as part of a Comparative Research by the AMMORE (Action Network of Marriage Migrants Rights and Empowerment). The report has been published on a book format and has been launched in Hong Kong. The title of the research report is "For better or for worse - Equity and access for marriage migrants".

One of the recommendations is to lobby for a UN convention that would ensure equity and access to services for marriage migrants in all countries. Next year, Speakout IWSA will do the book launch in Sydney.

# Older Women

*Pauline Woodbridge*

## Overview of changes and reforms since last year

I believe the work on Older Women's disadvantage by OWN and the Ludo McFerran report "*It could be you: female, single, older and homeless*" has highlighted the increasing number of women facing poverty and homelessness as a result of experiences of domestic violence and poverty that has accrued over their lifetime. This developing focus has led to a range of research and other responses and the issue is in front of politicians and Federal and State departments.

The connection between the domestic and family violence sector and the elder abuse sector needs strengthening at all levels. The principles of prevention and intervention in the elder abuse sector run parallel with those in the violence against women sector. There is much we can learn from each other. The Queensland Elder Abuse Prevention Unit estimates that the cost of elder abuse to the Queensland community is up to \$5.8 billion per year. It will be similar in each State and Territory. However this is just indicative because like domestic and family violence there is under-reporting of the issue. The World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on 15 June helps to get our communities focused on the issues.

## Highlights of 2010-11

I had the opportunity to represent WESNET at the Victorian workshop Equal and Different: family violence, sexual assault and elder abuse. Some elder abuse against women can be characterised as 'spouse abuse grown old'. DV can be experienced by younger women and it continues into their later life. Most of the abuse

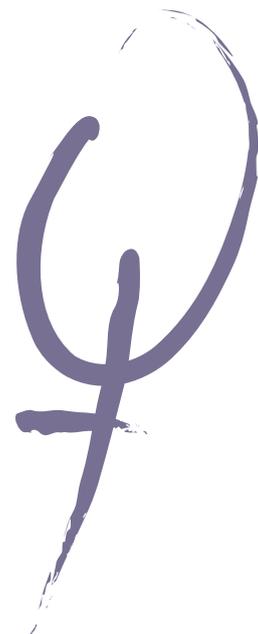
of older women is carried out by either younger or older men. One in four women who have experienced domestic violence are aged over 45 years. However studies show that the most common acts are financial abuse carried out by sons or daughters. Among the findings during the day was the need to add an understanding that as in domestic violence and sexual assault, the abuse of elders is underpinned by a feeling of entitlement and the use of power and control. Elder abuse sector has largely not connected the power and control analysis. It is also important to keep a gendered lens on the issue of elder abuse and at the same time find ways to deal with the issue that both men and women perpetrate elder abuse.

## Future Direction

WESNET can ensure that the connections between the two sectors are enhanced and members can consider doing joint events and activities in their own areas. WESNET will continue to support Homelessness Australia to have a policy platform and to lobby around the issues. The members of HA can make opportunities to partner around the issue, each bringing their own sector knowledge and skills to work for the prevention of violence in all its forms.

## Other

I will continue to find opportunities to connect and link the D&FV sector to the Elder Abuse sector and focus on the effects and best responses to women.



# Australian Capital Territory

*Richel Malouf*

## Overview of changes and reforms since last year

The largest number of homeless people in the ACT continues to be women with children.

The major change impacting on community services in the ACT this year has been the release of the social housing stimulus project. For the first time in many years there has been a greater number of properties available to people on the priority housing list. This has meant crisis and medium term accommodation services have been able to move long waiting people through their services, and begin assisting new families. Projects of this type instigated every few years would begin to address the chronic lack of affordable housing available to people on low to medium incomes in Australia.

One of the reforms introduced both as a response to the White Paper on homelessness and to the new data coming from our centralised intake service (CIS) called First Point, is to work in more of a 'housing first' model. This is an attempt to make the provision of housing the first response to a crisis. This model has much merit; however, due to low vacancy rates, the pressure on all housing stock in the ACT, whether public or private, is really impacting on the quality of the stock that is being provided as well as the affordability of private housing.

It has been an interesting six months adjusting to a centralised intake service. First Point is capturing the numbers of people who are seeking crisis accommodation, and this figure has become more politicised as the real pressure that needs addressing, which is a good thing. However, there have been unintended consequences, yet to be worked through. These include the interruption of relationships between services and the community, particularly in relation to the

indigenous population in the ACT. For instance, one women's and children's service, Inanna, has specific indigenous funding for a crisis service and boarding house. Their relationships with key indigenous people in the community have been the source of referral, and having the referral process change has not felt easy.

## Highlights of 2010-11

The ACT Women's Services Network held its annual International Women's Day breakfast, this year celebrating 100 years of IWD. The keynote speaker was Elizabeth Broderick, Australian Human Rights Commissioner, Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Commissioner responsible for Age Discrimination. Governor-General, Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, was guest of honour. Special guests included Joy Burch, member of the ACT Legislative Assembly, and Dr Helen Watchirs, ACT Human Rights and Discrimination Commissioner. Virginia Haussegger, ABC TV News presenter, emceed the event. A copy of the keynote speech can be downloaded at [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/speeches/sex\\_discrim/2011/20110308\\_IWD.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/speeches/sex_discrim/2011/20110308_IWD.html) or obtained by emailing [coordinator@womenslegalact.org](mailto:coordinator@womenslegalact.org).

This year, the Coming Home Program was developed by an alliance between Toora Women Inc., Beryl Women Inc. and Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, to support women exiting the prison system. The project provides advocacy and case management for women with complex needs who are exiting corrections facilities, to help them reintegrate into the community. This is assisted by the provision of housing, transitional support and outreach support.

Heira Immigration House is a residential service that provides supported accommodation for immigrant women escaping domestic violence and seeking safe accommodation. Many immigrant women arrive in Australia on visas that are granted through family sponsorship: partner, spouse, fiancé visas. Some of these women experience domestic violence and then become homeless. The program provides safe accommodation, court support, residency application support, and encouragement to make positive life changes.

Doris Women's Refuge Inc. and the Australian Institute of Criminology began collaboration on a research project looking at the different types of marriage that may increase vulnerability to human trafficking, and what can be done to mitigate this vulnerability. This is a complex research area, as Australian law doesn't address this form of trafficking, and often the women themselves don't think they have been trafficked (e.g. they may have voluntarily come to Australia to enter into an arranged marriage, but then found themselves the victims of violence or trapped in a servile relationship).

### Future Directions

The ACT Government Community Services and Justice and Community Safety Directorates have been developing a strategy for the prevention of violence against women and children called Our Responsibility: Ending Violence Against Women and Children. It aligns with the national plan and will be released in early 2011–12.

New funding of \$424,000 over four years has been allocated in the 2011–12 ACT Budget for a Family Violence Prevention Program, which aims to establish a specialist accommodation and counselling intervention service for individual adult males who use violence. The aim of the service is to provide effective services to sustain long-term behavioural change and reduce re-offending.

New funding of \$607,000 over four years has also been allocated for the employment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Guidance Partner for the ACT Restorative Justice program and funding to strengthen the ACT Galambany Circle Sentencing Court. Both the Restorative Justice and Circle Sentencing are specific justice processes designed to address the underlying causes of offender behaviour.

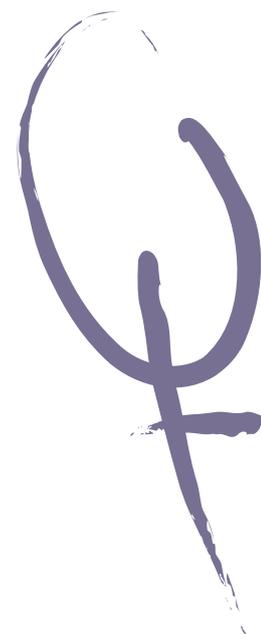
### Other Happenings

Many of our services made submissions to the Family Law Amendment Bill 2011, in general support of it. We have seen women who are subjected to violence and abuse now becoming too fearful of the shared care provision to even attempt going to the family court for assistance. The disputes between separating families where violence and abuse have occurred are now taking place in a range of unsuitable places including at child care

centres, after school care services, schools and places where children are witnessing the ongoing conflict between their parents.

The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre's (CRCC) submission highlighted that there are issues where there is a disclosure of child sexual assault or adult sexual assault within a family, where there are also Family Law proceedings. This complicates the matter of addressing the imminent crisis of a disclosure of sexual assault within the family. It also makes more complex the ability to provide support and counselling to families where the mother has made a disclosure of intimate partner sexual violence, or received a disclosure of child sexual assault from a child within the family. CRCC has been able to provide advocacy and court support for these families but unable to address the impacts of trauma within a counselling process, until the Family Law proceedings have been finalised.

CRCC has also been asked to provide comments on the 2011 Evidence Amendment Bill that is seeking to introduce a Commonwealth Journalist Privilege. The new privilege establishes a presumption against the disclosure of evidence that would reveal the identity of a journalist's source. The presumption can be rebutted where the court is satisfied that the public interest in revealing the source's identity outweighs both the likely harm to the source or another person and the public interest in reporting the news.



# New South Wales

*Catherine Gander*

## Overview of changes and reforms since last year

The New South Wales Government has had a change of colour and the incoming government is still familiarising itself with the current NSW DV&FV Plan and the NSW Homelessness Action Plan.

The previous NSW Government committed to the following target by 2013:

- 7% reduction in overall homelessness
- 25% reduction in rough sleeping
- a reduction of one third in the number of Aboriginal people who are homeless.

Like most states and territories the majority of the investment has not been directed into existing Specialist Homelessness Services, but has instead been invested in pilots for a three-year period with no guarantee of ongoing funding.

There are approximately 34 pilots funded. Of the 34 pilots, only four were DV specific. When questioned on the low number the department stated that most of the pilots included DV clients that this was implicit but not stated in the pilot briefs. This lack of description has resulted in agencies that do not specialise in DV providing inappropriate support to families where DV is a major issue. There have been cases where the focus on maintaining tenancies has unintentionally over ridden the safety of women and children.

## Women and children continue to be turned away

In addition to the AIHW data that shows one in two women and children seeking accommodation continue to be turned away, a snap shot survey undertaken by the NSW Women's Refuge Movement found that throughout the 16 days of activism that 20 refuges were forced to turn away 205 women and 298 children in two weeks. Only two women's refuges from the sample of 22 refuges

were able to accommodate all requests.

## Staying Home Leaving Violence

In NSW the major investment into domestic violence related homelessness has been in the Safe at Home models with each service receiving annual funding of \$150K.

There was an expansion of the 10 services during the year bringing the total of Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) projects funded through out NSW to 18 however, not all are at the operational stage.

An emerging issue with SHLV services that have been operating for a period is that some of the services have to make the tough decision not take on new clients because of funding restraints. As the newly funded services establish and market themselves we predicate that many of them will face the same challenge.

## Start Safely

Start Safely is a subsidy targeted at women and children escaping domestic violence it provides financial help to assist women to secure and maintain private rental accommodation.

Currently the subsidy is for a period of 12 months. However we are finding that 12 months is not long enough and are recommending that the subsidy be increased to two years. The criterion for the subsidy is based on the women's ability to maintain the rent after one year. The Government is undertaking a mini review of the program and there is speculation that the period of the subsidy may be increased.

## Long term accommodation and support for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence

This project aims to improve women and children's safety and reduce the length of time that these families spend in crisis accommodation services. The project provides integrated housing and support for women and children to assist them to maintain their tenancies. The program provides increased housing options within social housing and private rental markets and a wide range of support services.

## Information and Engagement Forums

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement

partnered with the Y Foundations and Homelessness NSW and the Department of Human Services to develop and deliver 13 Engagement and Information Forums across the State.

The forums provided the sector with information about the National Affordable Housing Agreement and Homelessness Action Plans. The forums ran for a full day and gave each sub sector e.g. Domestic Violence, Youth and generalist services the opportunity to identify issues, strengths and challenges in progressing the new NAHA directions.

The forums were designed to maximise sector input and to capture the work they are currently undertaking and the challenges and barriers they face under the new reforms. A report has been collated from each forum.

While there was strong evidence that services were undertaking activities to meet the NAHA directions there was a recurring theme from the forums that many services are struggling to participate in early intervention and prevention work at the level they want to due to resource constraints.

Integration of the service system to meet the government's homeless reduction targets requires a quantum shift in mainstream's ability to work across the government and non-government sector. There was little evidence of improvement in this area from the forums. Participants were asked to give examples of the partnerships their service is currently involved in. When asked who initiates or drives the partnerships in a majority of incidents it was the Specialist Homelessness Service that was working to achieve a joined up response.

### **Stop the Violence End the Silence: NSW Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan**

The NSW Action Plan will be supported by the provision of an extra \$50 million in funding. Some the additional funding will be used for<sup>1</sup>:

- \$2.2 million to support the five existing DVPASS services in Sutherland,

Wollongong, Inner West, Redfern and Canterbury;

- \$1.5 million to establish 5 new DVPASS services in Coffs Harbour, Rockdale, Parramatta, Eastern Suburbs and Armidale
- \$2.4 million for the expansion of the Domestic Violence Duty Solicitor Scheme to 15 court regions with a focus on rural and regional locations
- \$1.3 million to expand the Rural Women's Outreach program for the provision of Legal Aid services to women in isolated communities with a focus on Aboriginal communities in remote NSW

There are five strategic directions included in the plan, these are:

#### 1. Prevention and Early Intervention<sup>2</sup>

Some of the new actions under this strategic priority include:

- Establishment of a NSW Domestic and Family Violence website and a young person specific website that deals with domestic and family violence
- Conduct forums with Aboriginal, CALD and religious leaders to enhance the identification of domestic violence and develop local solutions
- Work with the Commonwealth to develop appropriate information strategies to assist refugees and newly arrived immigrants to become familiar with NSW laws regarding domestic violence, the legal system and the focus on respectful relationships
- Extend NSW Health's DV Routine Screening to community health centres
- Conduct an audit of men's counselling and support services

#### 2. Protection, Safety and Justice<sup>3</sup>

Some of the new actions under this strategic priority include:

- Review of the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal) Violence Act 2007* to consider the following:
  - The Act captures all forms of abuse
  - Whether there should be an express presumption (which can be displaced) "in favour of the protected person"

<sup>1</sup> NSW Government - Premier, 2010, '\$50 million action plan to combat domestic violence: Budget 2010-2011: Building for NSW's Future', <http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/data/portal/00000005/public/13766001276044798903.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2010, *Stop The Violence End the Silence: NSW Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan*, NSW Government, pp.34-8

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 43-46

remaining in their place of residence”<sup>4</sup>

- Allowing courts to consider to make voluntary referral orders to perpetrator programs for defendants
- Development of Police bail risk assessment checklist
- Consider developing minimum standards for perpetrator programs, consider the development of culturally competent perpetrator programs for Aboriginal communities; and examine the appropriateness of perpetrator programs
- Consider in collaboration with Aboriginal Communities the development of a healing centre model

### 3. Provision of services and support

Some of the new actions under this strategic priority include<sup>5</sup>:

- Evaluate the roles, responsibilities and outcomes of the DV Police Regional Coordinators
- Engage Local Governments to ensure the inclusion of measures to prevent and respond to domestic and family violence
- Explore the option of local brokerage funding to local service providers to ensure early access to emergency services to women and children
- Improve access to specialist trauma and recovery counselling for female inmates that have experienced domestic violence
- Work with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners to implement referral system between GPs and domestic and family violence services
- Include education about domestic and family violence in interpreters training

### 4. Building capacity

Some of the new actions under this strategic priority include<sup>6</sup>:

- Support the development of community based advocacy networks to work with and inform the work government agencies through regional Justice and Human Services governance structures
- Provide pathways for domestic violence committees to inform the work of Government agencies
- Convene a DV Committee forum to facilitate the exchange of information and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.44

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp.51-4

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp.58-63

ideas explore delivering social housing options for large Aboriginal families who are experiencing domestic and family violence

- Conduct a needs analysis to identify the information required by judges and magistrates to improve consistency in managing DV matters; sentencing for DV matters and to have greater understanding of the impact of decisions on victims
- Identify and develop training and resources to meet the needs of Judicial Officers
- Incorporate core DV subjects into Vocational Education and training courses including child care, aged care, health services and community services conduct an audit on existing Domestic and family violence workforce training
- Build on existing training packages for Aboriginal workers and community members
- Ensure Community Services Caseworkers receive domestic violence specific training, jointly with other agencies
- Develop a media strategy for victims of crime to engage and influence media portrayal of victims of crime
- Liaise with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners on ways to encourage best practice and consistent training on domestic and family violence particularly related to violence against older women.

### 5. Data collection and research

Some of the new actions under this strategic priority include<sup>7</sup>:

- Deliver regular comprehensive overviews of patterns and trends, with a particular focus on intimate partner violence, the first overview to be delivered by 2011 followed by 2015
- Support research into breaking the “inter-generational transmission of violence”
- Support research into the understanding of service providers about older women’s needs
- Development of key performance indicators to monitor the implementation of plan, through a subcommittee of the DV Senior Officers Group

### Governance of the Plan

State Government governance structures are as follows<sup>8</sup>:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp.68-70

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp.71-2

1. The Human Services and Justice Cabinet Committee—made up of Ministers from Police, Community Services, Health, Housing, Corrective Services, Attorney General's, Aboriginal Affairs, Disability and Ageing, and Women.
2. The Human Services and Justice CEOs —Chief Executives of the agencies named above
3. Domestic and Family Violence Senior Officers Group—this is the key inter-agency body for domestic and family violence. It is chaired by the Violence Prevention Coordination Unit
4. Justice and Human Services Regional Manager Network

#### Community bodies<sup>9</sup>

1. The Premier's Council on Preventing Violence Against Women
2. Regional Domestic and Family Violence Committees—These committees will oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of the Plan at a regional level. The committee will be made up of Government and NGO's and will be chaired by the Police regional coordinators. These committees will report to the regional manager clusters, who will then report to the DV Senior Officers Group.
3. Local domestic violence committees
4. Local Council's community safety plan committees

#### Residential Tenancy Act 2010 and Domestic and Family violence

NSW Parliament passed this Act in 2010. The Act makes provision for:

- Landlords and tenants to change locks and undertake security upgrades if a co-tenant has been excluded from the premises by AVO (Section 71 (2d));
- Termination of a Residential Tenancy agreement of a tenant who has been excluded from a premise by a final ADVO (Section 79(1))
- An occupant who was not previously the tenant may make application to tribunal to become the tenant after the existing tenant is excluded from the premises (Section 79(2))
- A tenant may terminate an tenancy earlier without compensation to the Landlord when another tenant or occupant is excluded from the premises by a final AVO (Section 100 (1d))
- A tenant is not required to pay a co-tenant

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp.72-3

their rental bond when the co-tenant has been excluded from the premises (Section 174 (4))

#### The NSW WRM Women's Family Law Support Service (WFLSS)

The Women's Family Law Support Service continued operations three days a week this year on shoestring budget. The service was original funded as a pilot through the NSW Office for Women's Policy. This year the service attracted the support of two very committed lawyers to provide regular pro bono services.

During the project funding period the service has provided 720 support periods to 435 women. Of the women supported by the WFLSS the vast majority (95%) had children under 18 years of age. The total number of children under 18 who had mothers supported by the WFLSS was 695. The majority (81%) of women supported by the WFLSS reported experiencing domestic and family violence, in most (89%) of these cases, the matters being considered by the courts involved parenting arrangements.

Whilst the service is located in the Goulbourn Street Registry, Sydney it has a large catchment and many women from outside of Sydney have their matters heard in the court. The service provides an important referral point for women's refuges in NSW and other services.

During the funded period the WFLSS has been able to enhance access to the service and support provided to women engaged in family law processes through the development of a guide to WRM seconded refuge workers to the WFLSS; facilitation of training to incoming WRM seconded workers on court processes; increased promotion of the services through conferences, forums and journals; and increased access to legal practitioners able to offer pro bono legal advice and support to clients of the service.

It was initially envisaged that the WFLSS would provide one-off support to women, however it became evident through the funded period that many of the women supported by the service required ongoing support due to the complex and protracted family law processes. The positive value of the service to be able to offer support women in a flexible manner that responded to their individual needs is reflected in the independent evaluation of the service.

Despite the grant period ending, the WRM remains committed to both providing and promoting the WFLSS, therefore we will actively be seeking additional funding sources for this program. The value of a service that contributes to better outcomes for women and children facing a critical, life changing crossroad that can determine their safety and well-being, long into the future can not be understated.

The final evaluation of the service has been completed by Dr Lesley Lange and will be launched in NSW Parliament House in November 2011.

## Highlights of 2010-11

### Establishment of a Homelessness Policy Unit

After a campaign of letters and meetings NSW Government has agreed to the establishment of a Homelessness Policy Unit within Department of Human Services. The new Unit will have responsibility for coordinating advice and input from across Department of Human Services which includes, Community Services; Housing NSW; Ageing, Disability and Home Care; Juvenile Justice; Aboriginal Housing; and Aboriginal Affairs. It will also play a key role in building strong links with other Government Departments in relation to domestic and family violence, young people, mental health and drug and alcohol services. The Unit will report to the Director General. Since the change of Government there has been no further action taken by the Department to implement this change.

### Action On Family Law: Rally for Children's Safety

For many years we have been acutely aware of the family law changes, and the interpretations of the law by legal practitioners have acted as an enormous barrier for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence and other abuse to live a life free from ongoing violence and abuse. In addition to the family law system placing women and children at further risk of violence and abuse, costly and protracted family law hearings can exacerbate women and children's homeless or risk of homelessness.

Through out the year the NSW WRM maintained a consistent presence at Parliament House to lobby for improved changes to the Family

Law Act. This included regular meetings with politicians and the presence of a group of our members holding banners and giving out pamphlets. The action culminated with a Rally in Canberra on the 25th May to coincide with the proposed Family Violence Bills debate in the House of Representatives. On the 30th May the Attorney General announced the passage of the Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill through the House of Representatives.

The Rally for Children's Safety was an initiative of an Alliance formed between the NSW Women's Refuge Movement, The Benevolent Society, the National Council for Children Post-Separation and Justice for Children.

The Rally for Children's Safety alliance called for a Family Law Act that:

1. puts children's safety first
2. assesses children's safety on a case-by-case basis
3. protects the safety of primary carers to make children safer

The Alliance received well over 100 organisational endorsements to its key messages. The organisations that endorsed the key message were diverse, indicating that the current failings in the Family Law legislation have had a far-reaching effect on many children and their families and the services that support them. There continues to be an overwhelmingly demonstration of support for the Alliance's Key Messages and the need to take further action to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and their carers through the Family Law Legislation.

The Rally was promoted through a range of networks, a website and a Face book page.

The NSW WRM also engaged a media consultant to assist with media during the campaign. This resulted in broad coverage including radio, newspaper and television coverage of the Rally itself. The Alliance for Children's Safety continues to advocate for improvements in family law.

### Future Direction

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement's major objective over the next 3 year's is to reduce the number of women and children being turned away from our services by 20%.

# Northern Territory

*Dale Wakefield*

It has been another busy year in the sector in the Territory. Rates of reported domestic and family violence continue to rise and demand has increased for services.

Within the Government there has been a focus on implementing the recommendation from the Board of Inquiry into Child Protection Services 2010. This has led to a major restructure with the Department and the Domestic and Family Violence policy unit sitting within the Social Inclusion Unit along with the Homelessness Policy Unit.

However with the restructure the NT Government has also yet to announce how it is going to respond to the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women. It is understood that this is the priority of the Government for next six months.

It has been two years since the implementation of the Mandatory Reporting of Domestic and Family Violence which requires all adults to report to police if they are aware of someone who is at risk of serious harm from domestic and family violence. KPMG has been appointed to complete the evaluation and this will be made available to Government in early 2012.

As a sector we are continuing to work together to improve outcomes for women and children. Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Shelter coordinated a meeting in 2011 for the whole sector which was the first specialist domestic and family violence focussed meeting in some time. There is funding from the NT Government for another meeting to occur in 2012. This is a positive step forward for the whole sector.

# Queensland

*Lindy Edwards*

## Overview of changes and reforms since last year

In Queensland, the landmark ruling on wages for the community Sector, whilst welcomed by all, has resulted in many organisations in the sector struggling to meet an increased wages bill. The Queensland government did make available funding to assist organisations to meet the increased costs, but for many services this was not 100% of their expense. This has seen organisations having to look at ways to manage within their budgets but still meet their obligations to staff, with the only response from the funding body, a suggestion that hours may have to be reduced. This has been the outcome for some organisations who have had to reduce workers hours and consequently the hours that the service is available, with obvious negative consequences for the women and children.

Following the launch of the Queensland Strategy to reduce Domestic Violence, "For our Sons and Daughters", three pilot projects were rolled out across the State, working with women to enable them to stay safely in their homes following domestic violence. These projects have proved successful and been viewed positively and the Government has now announced, in the budget, an increase of \$12.9m over four years for Domestic and Family Violence initiatives, which includes additional resources to expand the Safety Upgrades (Staying Safe at Home) trial to more locations across the state.

The review of the current domestic violence legislation continues, there have been some consultations with the sector, but it is still unclear exactly what changes will be made, or when the new legislation will be implemented, however, the sector is hopeful that changes will improve the process and safety for women accessing the Courts.

A review is being undertaken by the Department of communities into the existing model for crisis accommodation and associated support responses that are currently available for

women and children experiencing domestic violence. This came about as an action under the Government's five-year Strategy to Reduce Domestic and Family Violence. It is proposed that the review will recommend models that are flexible, client-centred and provide integrated responses, and that the review will inform future policy and program development.

### Highlights of 2010-11

May, in Queensland, is Domestic & Family Violence Prevention month, and once again this year activities were held across the State, raising awareness of the issues for women and children.

On the first Wednesday of May a Candlelight Ceremony was held in the various regions, remembering the women and children who have died as a result of domestic violence. This year the event was held across the country, at the same time, in each State except WA.

Planning has begun on a State Violence against Women Conference, and funding has been sought from the Department. It was hoped that this would happen before the end of the year, but it is now more likely that it will be next year.

### Future Direction

Services across Queensland are due to move to Output based funding and reporting from the end of this year, as services sign their new service Agreements. There is some uncertainty and concern about how this will impact on services, as the department moves to reporting on outputs/hours spent with clients, but services are not able to report on a lot of the other work that is done. It is also unclear how this will fit in with the new AIHW data that is being brought in for specialist Homelessness services.

The Department of Communities is working on the development of a Vacancy Capacity Management system for all Specialist Homelessness services, which is due to be brought in, in a limited capacity, in September with approximately 44 services. Refuges, understandably have expressed concern about information contained in this on-line system, but there have been reassurances that for DV Refuges, referrals will still go through the State wide DV line, and homelessness services will not be able to access the information and vacancy capacity of the refuges. Obviously the Refuge Sector will be closely monitoring how this rolls out, to ensure that the safety of refuges and in particular the women and children is not in any way jeopardised.



# South Australia

*Vicki Lachlan*

## New Structure for SA Domestic Violence Services

At the beginning of the financial year it was still unknown as to which services would continue into the next round of Service Agreements – December 2010 to December 2013. For the first six months of the financial year services across the state were adjusting – some closing, others taking on more services. The ‘new’ services had to be set up and operating as of 1 December 2010.

Organisations had to sign new ‘Service Agreements’ that include a number of new Key Performance Indicators which are listed below:

- 70% of clients per year are assisted to sustain their tenancies or exit into sustainable housing
- 100% of clients who require interpreters will be supported to access appropriate services
- No more than 5% will exit into primary homelessness
- 70% are engaged with family if it is appropriate and safe to do so
- 70% of people are connected with education/training or employment opportunities
- 95% of people presented to a specialist homelessness service will undergo an assessment which identifies immediate risk, accommodation and health and welfare issues
- 20% of people assessed are ATSI
- 80% have a case management plan in place
- 8% of people assessed as CALD

Some of the above make sense and recognise the work done by Domestic Violence Services – however the ATSI percentage in particular does not take into account the regional differences in ATSI populations across SA which therefore affords services less opportunities to offer or fulfil requests for ATSI women and children,

and the other KPI for Domestic Violence Services is that 70 percent of clients have to be ‘engaged with family – if it is appropriate and safe to do so’ given a very large percentage of D&FV clients would not be. Additionally in some regions the percentage of CALD women far outweighs the percentage of ATSI women and therefore the case load may be much higher than would be recognised.

Other changes include the introduction of a new SA specific database for the whole homelessness sector called h2H (homeless to Home) – which services have been consulted on, partially trained and have to implement and go live with on 4 July 2011. Also all services have been ‘regionalised’ to fit with departmental regional boundaries – and services in specific regions are expected to network and work together on ‘Roundtables’ which are still being operationalised as at 30 June 2011.

Another aspect of the new Service Agreements is that all services will be subject to what is called a ‘Core Monitoring’ process, whereby departmental officials will visit sites and assess them against quite a list of criteria, and out of that ‘Performance Improvement Plans’ will be developed for each service to work on and be subject to further monitoring.

Stimulus Housing packages: have been developed and are meant to create exit points from crisis services – although outreach support is expected of nominated Domestic Violence Services – which may or may not be ‘your’ original client depending on regions required by the client.

There has been a decrease in the level of direct service delivery to CALD women and children – the specialist CALD Domestic Violence Service no longer accommodates women and children, with no direct service delivery – the service is now contracted to offer support and training to the D&FV sector in order for them all service CALD women and children. There is also now no longer a specific CALD feedback mechanism to the Department.

Overall there has been an erosion of connections and communication, as services have been internally focussed on understanding and implementing the changes expected and ensuring staff can fulfil their new roles. Hence

there is a sense of lack of cohesion overall, the D&FV sector feels somewhat fragmented and services protecting their patch.

Since the implementation of the 'new' sector Domestic Violence Services as a whole have had no formal or direct voice to the Department – the previous strong mechanism that enabled specialist input to the government has been disbanded.

### **Family Safety Framework**

The Family Safety Framework is still not implemented across all regions, with the Family Safety Meetings & Risk and Safety Assessments for high risk families not used right across SA as yet. Domestic Violence Services have however increased the use of the Risk and Safety Assessments to ensure their skilled assessments are used by SAPol and the Family Law Court for safer outcomes for women and children.

### **SA's Domestic Violence Legislation**

Although passed by parliament in late 2009 is still not implemented – a plan for its implementation was developed but from the D&FV sector's perspective they have not been any part of action to enable it.

### **Highlights of 10-11**

Only one – The Coalition members and their various staff teams have had a strong

presence in the Pay Equity Case rallies and actions, as has the rest of the homelessness sector, and our State government has recently committed to ASU members on June 8th to 'paying their share' – what that means is yet to be determined.

### **Future Direction**

Gateway Services: as per my 2009-10 report all services are expected to operate a 'gateway' service with the official 'gateway' only contracted to offer initial information and referrals. In general this had created some confusion for services waiting list management and who should refer where – I would anticipate that in the future this will become clearer for the entire homelessness sector, as a part of the database reporting will pick up who is referred on, and whether they will be actually 'picked up' by that referral.

### **Aboriginal Consultants**

The department have appointed two Aboriginal Consultants that will work with services on staff development, cultural competencies, links and networks to obtain the best outcomes for Aboriginal clients. As it is only a new innovation services are yet to fully utilise them for their clients benefit.



# Tasmania

*Jacinta Atkins*

## Overview of changes and reforms since last year

All Tasmanian SHS's are being reviewed. KPMG have been engaged to compile the review. In scope are the Transitional Services. In Tasmania for the past ten years the SHS's have been using a Continuum of Support model where everyone entering into an IEA will, within 28 hours, be referred to a Transitional Support Service. This includes victims and survivors of Domestic and Family Violence. The transitional support Service provider will then work with the family while they are housed in the IEA and continue the work through any transitional housing and into the housing of choice by the client, the support service will stay engaged until such a time as the family/client is settled in the home and the community. Transitional support services make referrals to required services and support and advocate for clients to Social Housing providers as well as Public Housing and Real Estate agents. A report of the review will be available in September 2011 with recommendations being given by KPMG in February 2012. Any changes made will have considerable impact on the sector in Tasmania so watch this space.

## Highlights of 10-11

May 4th saw Hobart's third Candle Light Vigil. This year's vigil was well attended and is now an event on the sectors calendar. During the past year Relationship Australia has held a collection of Family Law Pathways forums for service providers, during which Legal Aid gave presentations on Safe at Home and the judicial approach- The Safe at Home Program being a whole of government initiative to break the cycle of family violence and protect both adult and children from risk of harm. The program involves an integrated response including a pro arrest and pro prosecution work frame. The main Government organisations involved are the Department of Justice (including the Legal aid Commission) the Department of Health and Human Services (CFS, FVCSS, Chypp's-Children and young Persons Program, counselling for young people affected by family violence), The Department of Police and Emergency Services, The Department of Education.

## Future Direction

As Mentioned above the recommendations from the SHS review could potentially make changes for Women's housing outcomes.

WESP who were formally known as Women's Emergency Service Providers are opening up their membership for all women's service providers and will be hence forth known as Women's Essential Service Providers.



# Victoria

## Margaret Augerinos

### Current Victorian Context

November 2010 saw a change of government in Victoria. The Baillieu Liberal Government was elected largely on a "law and order" platform, and was unfortunately silent on issues impacting our sector, namely policy statements around domestic and family violence, addressing homelessness and lack of affordable housing and a shaky commitment to the pay equity case being run by the Australian Services Union.

Prior to its election defeat, the Brumby Government had, in addition to its ongoing commitment to the Integrated Family Violence Strategy also committed to a renewed Victorian Homelessness Strategy.

Since the election, we have not had any success in getting firm assurances by the State government about its commitment and position on these issues. There has however been continued work on the following key projects.

### Strengthening Risk Management

The aim of the Strengthening Risk Management Project is to develop a framework and practice guidelines for service providers, agencies, policy and justice workers responding directly and indirectly to women, children and men who are experiencing and/or perpetrating family violence.

A consultant was appointed to work with Government and the funded sector to develop a detailed framework and practice guidelines document outlining a minimum set of expectations for all parts of the Integrated Family Violence Strategy. It is hoped the document will provide the basis for consistent multi agency risk management responses aimed at increasing safety and reducing short and long term risks to women and their children experiencing family violence. It will include responses that hold perpetrators accountable for their violence.

The guidelines document will provide practical guidance to agencies, police and courts. The document will identify and embed existing regional or state-wide good practice models and tools, for example, information sharing protocol and defining risk levels in order to achieve consistent risk management responses. The guidelines will build on the Common Risk Assessment Framework, with an aim to provide a sound and consistent basis for risk assessment and management across the state. It should also provide a baseline from which agencies and regions have scope to innovate to respond to local issues.

This project has yet to be completed, however, DHS has pushed ahead with the funding of two demonstration projects under this program, despite the program not yet being completed.

In April 2011, DHS announced the two projects and stated that they will "test the implementation and delivery of coordinated multi agency approaches to strengthen family violence risk management. The demonstration projects will trial new integrated governance arrangements and new roles and responsibilities as well as ways of working collaboratively to ensure an integrated response to the needs and situations of women and children. The projects will be funded from May 2011 until 30 June 2013. Positions funded include a project coordinator, a women's case manager, a children's case manager and a case manager to work with men to challenge their use of family violence. The two projects align with whole-of-government priorities to improve responses to women and children who experience family violence and to men who use violence against family members. The projects will implement a multi agency approach to strengthen risk management as further detailed in the strengthening risk management framework and practice guidelines currently being developed by KPMG in consultation with the specialist sector and stakeholders of the integrated family violence system (IFVS). The framework and practice guidelines are due for broader release in the second half of 2011." (DHS Information sheet April 2011)

Whilst these projects are welcome, the sector has expressed concern at the way in which they were implemented, particularly given that

the framework has yet to be finalised. Further, the funded projects are for a significant amount – around \$2 million per project – and yet they did not go to open tender, rather they were directly allocated. This denied the sector the opportunity to apply for these funds in an open and transparent way.

### **A Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women 2010-2020**

The key piece of work that was finalised this financial year was the selection of the 3 local government cluster sites to deliver the Preventing Violence against Women in our Community Pilot. The three cluster sites selected were:

- City of Greater Bendigo, Mt Alexander and Macedon Ranges
- Maribyrnong, Brimbank and Wyndham
- Knox City, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges

The program, run through local councils, aims to bring together the community, schools, workplaces, sporting organisations and local media to deliver initiatives and educational resources tailored to local needs.

### **Accreditation and Standards**

The sector continues its ongoing efforts in gaining or maintaining accreditation under the Homelessness Assistance Standards and other external standards such as the Quality Improvement Council. Most domestic and family violence and housing/homelessness services have undergone and completed their first cycle of accreditation – some are on to their second accreditation.

A key achievement has been the ongoing support and sector resourcing roles by our state peaks such as Domestic Violence Victoria and Council to Homeless Persons.

DHS is now undertaking work in streamlining the standards that funded programs need to work to with its “One DHS Standards” project. The department has established the project to reduce the regulatory burden on service providers by integrating standards and accreditation processes across its program divisions: disability services, children youth and families, and housing and community building.

### **Eliminating Violence against Women Media Awards (EVAs)**

The EVA's were first awarded in 2008 with much

enthusiasm and were again awarded in June 2011. The project was funded by the Victorian Government and managed by Domestic Violence Victoria in conjunction with No To Violence and CASA Forum, and supported by an advisory committee of key agencies. The EVAs recognise media reporting on violence against women including family violence or sexual assault. Awards are given over a number of categories: best overall, print, online, radio and television. Further details can be found on the EVA website at <http://www.evas.org.au/>.

### **Gender-based violence prevention/respectful relationships education in secondary schools (DEECD)**

A pilot project was funded by the Victorian Government in 2009 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development) to develop and implement a ‘Prevention of Gender-based Violence Demonstration Project’ in four government secondary schools. CASA House in Melbourne was engaged to deliver this pilot focusing on professional development for teachers, classroom programs for years 8 to 9 on healthy relationships, development of curriculum resources etc. The pilot will be evaluated and it is still in its service delivery phase. This pilot program is in addition to any of the Commonwealth funded projects being developed under the national “respectful relationships” banner.

### **Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Framework**

A new Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework is currently being developed by the Victorian Government, in partnership with the Indigenous Family Violence Partnership Forum and Regional Action Groups. The framework is expected to be completed in mid-2011.

### **Privacy and Information Sharing**

Much to the relief of many of us in the service system, the Victorian Privacy Commissioner has provided clear guidelines to service providers in relation to their roles and responsibilities regarding information sharing. A fact sheet was developed and distributed which provides assurance to services that where risk and safety is identified, information about clients can be shared across systems.

Information from the fact sheet states: This fact sheet is based on current objectives of

information sharing, which are:

- Information is shared within the Integrated Family Violence System in ways that comply with relevant legislation and codes of practice
- The safety of victims is central to any decision about whether and how information is to be shared
- Perpetrators are held accountable for their use of violence.

However, in all circumstances, as articulated in the *Information Privacy Act 2000*, information can be shared or disclosed when the disclosure is for the primary purpose for which it was collected, regardless of whether you have explicit consent from the victim or perpetrator. In addition, information can be disclosed for a purpose related to the primary purpose, where the individual would reasonably expect the disclosure.

#### **Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management**

The Family Violence Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (previously known as CRAF) was introduced in Victoria in around 2009. At that time, training was delivered across Victoria on three levels: Introduction, Comprehensive and a Train the Trainer program. At the time the training was a once-off, but fortunately new funding has been found for additional training and further development of the framework. A three-year contract has been awarded to a consortium comprising the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, No To Violence and Swinburne University of Technology.

#### **Living Free from Violence – Upholding the Right: Victoria Police Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2009-2014**

Launched in November 2009, Victoria Police's five-year violence against women and children strategy builds on the original Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) Strategy released in 2002. Development of a Year 2 Action Plan for the Strategy is currently under way. The first annual report for the VAWC Strategy will be produced after Year One data is received (post 30 June 2011). A scorecard enabling Family Violence Advisors to monitor performance against the Strategy's measures at the police station level is being finalised.

#### **Coroners Court: Systemic review of family violence related deaths**

As reported in last year's report, the Coroners Court has established the Systemic Review of Family Violence Deaths (SRFVD) with the Investigative Framework finalised. This contains five main areas of inquiry: Deceased and Offender Demographic Information; Victim and Offender Risk and Vulnerability Indicators; Record of Family Violence; Service Contact and Response; and the Justice Response. The Investigative Framework will be applied to all family violence-related deaths identified from 2009 onwards.

Domestic and family violence death reviews have recently been established in the coronial jurisdictions of three other Australian states: South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. According to information provided by government, "The first teleconference with project representatives from each state was held on 8 March 2011, with monthly network meetings to follow. These meetings provide an opportunity to share information and identify common priorities for family violence death reviews in Australia. Participation from representatives in Western Australia and Northern Territory will occur, where similar reviews are currently being considered."

#### **Aboriginal women's refuge support and accommodation services**

Funding was made available under the National Partnership Agreement – Housing to establish Aboriginal Women's Refuges and Support Programs. This funding including capital establishment grants and support programs. These services will be located in Gippsland and in the Loddon Mallee Region (Mildura).

#### **Future Direction**

There has been significant development in Victoria in 2010-11, but this has not resulted in significant funding opportunities for our member services. The only real increase in funding was the establishment of the Safe At Home programs funded under the National Partnership Agreement – Housing. In many regions this only amounted to a small EFT staffing increase with limited brokerage funds. Most of the increased funding reported by the Victorian Government in 2010-11 appears to have been targeted to other sectors such as justice and police.

# Western Australia

*Kedy Kristal*

## Overview of changes/reforms since last year

### Six Safe at Home and five Domestic Violence outreach services newly funded under the National Partnership Agreement

The Safe at Home (SAH) program aims to keep the victims of domestic and family violence, primarily women and children, in the family home and remove the perpetrators of violence, providing it is safe to do so.

All clients referred to Safe at Home receive information and support to enable them to make choices that enhance their safety and wellbeing, women, with or without children, are supported to remain in their homes where it is safe to do so.

Four metro Safe at Home services and two regional SAH services, five regional and remote outreach services were started 1st July 2010.

Breathing Space the men's perpetrator service will provide a response across the whole state to those perpetrators who are willing to engage.

## Highlights of 10/11

### International Women's Day

One of many celebrations in West Australia was the inaugural Hall of Fame with one hundred WA women selected from a wide field of nominations to be the first inductees. Angela Hartwig the EO for the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services was a successful nomination. Each year at IWD more talented and amazing women will be added to the Hall of Fame.

### Funds for Freedom launched

On the Centenary of International Women's Day, 8 March 2011, the Funds for Freedom (FFF) was launched by founding member and advocate, Angela Russo in partnership with the Women's Council for DFV Services. The FFF aims to assist women and children to make a fresh start,

after fleeing their homes because of domestic and family violence. The funds will be used to purchase white goods for families setting up new homes again after violence.

### Training

The Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services delivered a two day workshop *Reframing practices: Building our strengths: Breaking down barriers*. Response-based practice, the connection between language and violence and social responses to violence.

The keynote speakers: Adjunct Associate Professor, Allan Wade, Professor Cath Richardson, and Dr Linda Coates, from the Centre for Response-Based Practice, Canada were excellent. The three presenters were informative, challenging, entertaining and inspiring.

The Safe After Separation (SAS) Project assists women and children to remain safety in their own home after separation from their violent partner/father by providing financial support to have security options that include the installment and/or replacement of: Door Deadlock(s); Security Window Lock(s); Security Alarm(s)/Monitor(s); Audio/Visual Intercom(s); Security Light(s); or Security Window Screen(s) and a purchase of Security Mobile Phone.

The Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA) in partnership with the West Coast Institute of Training and the Department for Child Protection provided funding to assist 25 Refuge Staff the opportunity to gain skills recognition in Community Service Work Certificate III, IV and Diploma.

### Future Direction

WA State budget. \$600 million in funding over the next four years was allocated in order to address the not-for-profit sector's immediate financial needs, funding in this year's Budget has been allocated to fund an up front across-the-board percentage price adjustment of 15% for eligible not-for-profit human services contracts.

Community services are those services intended to address physical or social disadvantage and/or that promote the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

The big question in the community sector is why were Homelessness services excluded from this increase?

Refuge staff have had to wait until the Equal Remuneration decision is made, this decision has been delayed twice already, by eighteen months. While staff in other community service work will be covered by the decision when it is made have already received a much need and deserved wage rise.

The state government has said the joint Commonwealth/State homelessness contracts currently in place or under review will be addressed following the outcome of the Fair Work Australia Social and Community Services Equal Remuneration Case.

An increase will be determined following consultation with the Commonwealth.

The Residential Tenancies Amendment Bill 2011 was introduced into State Parliament in May and the first and second stages are complete. This is the first time amendments have been proposed to the RTA since 1987. The proposed amendments have an emphasis on tackling anti-social behaviour by social housing tenants. If adopted the Bill will expand the grounds on which social housing providers (public and community housing providers) can terminate tenancy agreements.

The Bill also proposes to introduce plain language lease agreements, make property condition reports compulsory (at both the beginning and end of a lease), provide greater security for tenants over the handling of their bond money, and improve the quality of information available on tenancy databases.

The Bill has not fully addressed the needs of women experiencing DV who are in private rental housing and need to change the locks after gaining a Violence Restraining Order.

The Government has introduced changes to the Restraining Orders legislation to impose a prison sentence for a third breach of a restraining order, to allow 72 hour Police Orders without victim consent, to class a breach of a restraining order as a serious offence making it harder for an offender to get bail.

Last year 9,100 VRO's were issued and 2,700 breaches were recorded. While the DV sector has long called for improved responses to

VRO breaches as with any legislation unless the police response is grounded in a clear understanding of Domestic violence as a gendered crime we may see more women charged and locked up as a consequence.

## Treasurer's Report

WESNET is in an active growth phase in its activities and planning for the future. To this end, for the 2009-10 financial year the WESNET Committee made a deliberate decision to invest some of its reserves towards activities for the membership.

Our income for the 2010-11 year increased by around \$200,000 due to our winning and taking on the contract to be the lead agency for the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA). After all accruals have been applied, we showed a loss of \$53,872 for the year. This planned deficit is largely due to the expenditure and investment WESNET is making in the area of Technology Safety.

The current liabilities largely reflect revenue in advance and the auditors have provided an unqualified audit and note that WESNET will be able to pay its bills as they fall due.

# Financials 2010-11

Below is a summary of our audited financial statement. A full copy of the 2010-11 audit is available on request. The audit of our financial records was completed in October 2011 by Richmond Sinnott & Delahunty Chartered Accountants, Bendigo.

<b>CASH FLOW STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 30 JUNE 2011</b>	2011	2010
Revenue	319,350	121,943
Other Expenses	(370,438)	(76,331)
Audit Fees	(2,784)	(1,697)
<b>PROFIT FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>(53,872)</b>	<b>43,915</b>
Other comprehensive income	-	-
Total Comprehensive Income for the year	(58,872)	43,915
<b>BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 JUNE 2011</b>	2011	2010
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	333,439	257,457
Trade and other receivables	30,353	39,160
Other current assets	-	1,100
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>363,792</b>	<b>297,717</b>
<b>Non-Current Assets</b>		
Plant and equipment	-	-
<b>TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>363,792</b>	<b>297,717</b>
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other payables	272,099	152,152
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>272,099</b>	<b>152,152</b>
<b>Non-Current Liabilities</b>		
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>272,099</b>	<b>152,152</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>91,693</b>	<b>145,565</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>		
Retained earnings	91,693	145,565
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>91,693</b>	<b>145,565</b>