



WESNET Inc

Women's Services Network

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

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Telstra and WESNET to give safe phones to women experiencing domestic violence

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Telstra and the Women's Services Network (WESNET) are launching a new program to provide women escaping domestic violence with a secure smartphone, pre-paid credit and information on the safe use of technology.

"Technological advancements are presenting a whole new set of issues for women affected by domestic violence," says WESNET Chair, Julie Oberin. "Telstra's *Safe Connections* Program couldn't be more strongly welcomed."

Under the program, WESNET and its partner agencies will distribute 5000 smartphones a year, along with \$30 pre-paid recharge cards and technology safety tips.

WESNET is Australia's national women's peak body for domestic and family violence services. Its SafetyNet Australia project works with communities, police, technologists, and agencies to address how technology affects the safety, privacy and accessibility rights of victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking.

"Workers are telling us that almost all women presenting to domestic violence crisis services are experiencing some form of technology abuse in addition to the other forms of control and power that are commonly used by perpetrators," Ms Oberin said.

The *Safe Connections* program each year will help 5000 women using domestic violence services or refuges remain a bit safer, she said.

According to WESNET senior technology safety specialist Karen Bentley, a woman leaving a violent situation should not have to give up technology in order to avoid being stalked or harassed.

"Having access to a safe smartphone will keep her in touch with supportive friends and family, as well as connecting to essential services and other information," Ms Bentley said.

A 2012 US surveyⁱ showed that 89 per cent of local domestic violence programs report that victims are experiencing intimidation and threats by their abusers via technology, including mobile phones, texts, and email. Australian studies reflect the trendⁱⁱ.

WESNET represents about 400 organisations—including women's refuges, shelters, safe houses and information/ referral services—that work to help women experiencing and escaping domestic violence.

"Through our SafetyNet Australia project, we educate a wide range of community agencies who work with women experiencing all forms of violence on ways to use technology strategically to help find safety and escape domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, stalking and abuse," Karen Bentley says.

For more information visit <http://wesnet.org.au/safetynet/>

[ENDS]

Note to editors: All stories about domestic violence and sexual assault should include safety and contact information.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence:

- In an emergency call the police on 000
- Call 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) to speak with a trained counsellor from the National Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Counselling Service
- Access online counselling at 1800respect.org.au

For additional information about *Safety Net Australia*: wesnet.org.au/safetynet/

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Established in 1992, the Women's Services Network (WESNET) is the Australian national women's peak advocacy body which works on behalf of women and children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic or family violence. With almost 400 members across Australia, WESNET represents a range of organisations and individuals including women's refuges, shelters, safe houses and information/ referral services. Since 2010, WESNET has been the contract manager and lead agency for the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (www.awava.org.au). To learn more about WESNET's Safety Net Australia Project, please visit: wesnet.org.au/safetynet.



*The SafetyNet Australia project is based on pioneering work of the US National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV). NNEDV, a nonprofit charitable organization, is the leading voice for domestic violence victims and their advocates. NNEDV members include all 56 of the state and territorial coalitions against domestic violence, which have over 2,000 local programs. NNEDV has been a premiere national organization advancing the movement against domestic violence for over 20 years, having led efforts to pass the landmark Violence Against Women Act of 1994 and to reauthorize and strengthen countless laws and regulations to increase safety and end violence. To learn more about NNEDV, please visit www.nnedv.org. To learn more about **NNEDV's Safety Net Project**, please visit nnedv.org/safetynet*



WESNET acknowledges and is very appreciative of prior support of Homelessness Australia in establishing the SafetyNet Australia project.

ⁱ <http://techsafety.org/blog/2014/4/29/new-survey-technology-abuse-experiences-of-survivors-and-victim-services>

ⁱⁱ <http://smartsafe.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/SmartSafe-Findings-Summary.pdf>