

ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18



WESNET

The Women's Services Network

 1800WESNET
National Toll Free 1800 937 638
 wesnet.org.au
 WesnetAustralia
 @WESNETAustralia



GPO Box 1579
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601
AUSTRALIA
ABN: 16 068 548 631
ACN: ACT A 02400

The Safety Net Team fish tank has had a very productive year with a population surge in guppies, bronze catfish and bristlenose tropical fish.





WESNET Annual Report 2017-18

WESNET Chair Report

Julie Oberin



It is with pleasure that we present the 2017-18 Annual Report to our members and supporters.

It has been another year where we have seen almost two women a week murdered, usually by someone they know, and overwhelmingly by men. Gendered-based violence against women is a national emergency and we continue to publicly voice our dismay and lobby for real investment into supporting front line services as well as real prevention work.

We are still failing to see the appropriate resourcing put into front line services and we will continue to lobby for this.

It is good to see the momentum continue with good work by ANROWS, Our Watch, the National Community Attitudes Survey and the ABS Personal Safety Survey. However governments must treat the epidemic of violence against women with the seriousness it deserves. In Australia, more women and children are killed, maimed and harmed by someone they know, than those harmed by terrorists or sharks. There remains a societal reluctance to properly respond to what Natasha Stott-Despoja, Chair of Our Watch, says

is the slaughter of women and children in our suburbs.

It is time for all leaders to make the elimination of violence against women a priority issue, supported by proper resourcing, including better resourcing for front line services. There has been some new and improved legislation enacted or in the pipeline. However, we are seeing worrying trends across the country where women are having court orders taken out against them and services are under stress due to increased demand in the midst of massive sector reforms. We are still seeking security from NAHA for social housing at the same time we are

“Until we redress gender inequality and how it intersects with other social inequalities we will not prevent gender-based violence against women and their children”

seeing a tsunami of older women facing homelessness.

You can all take great pride in the work you have been doing to help women and their children impacted by domestic and family violence. But we can't keep struggling along.

As the peak body for domestic and family violence services across Australia, WESNET acts as the conduit between the front-line services and government and other key stakeholders. This positions WESNET in a critical and key position to provide high level and practical advice to government and policy influencers on issues impacting the response to, and prevention of domestic and family violence. We do this the best we can. However, sometimes it is ignored or falls on deaf ears. We need proper leadership in this country where the Prime Minister makes redressing violence against women his or her priority.

WESNET draws on the expertise of skilled and experienced staff, front-line practitioners, policy specialists, managers and researchers to provide key advice that WESNET can formulate and articulate through key advisory mechanisms.

There remains a lot of work to be done in Australia around gendered-based violence against women and their children and it is critical that the front-line sector represented by WESNET remains as strong and in touch as it can.

During 2018-19 WESNET will continue to focus on advocating for increasing support for frontline services to respond to victim/survivors of violence along with continuing to work towards the prevention of this gender-based violence.

I thank all the WESNET staff from both the Safety Net Australia and AWAVA teams for all their work during the year. I can't commend high enough the work coming out of these teams under the strong feminist leadership of Karen Bentley, our Interim National Director and Dr Merrindah Andrew, AWAVA Program Manager.

We are also grateful for the ongoing partnership and support from Telstra for our work in technology safety and for donating thousands of smartphones to victim/survivors. We also held another amazing tech summit and thank our sponsors, supporters and participants.

On behalf of the National WESNET Committee and staff I thank our members for your continued support of WESNET's work. Our advocacy for, support of and capacity building of the anti-violence against women sector remains front and centre as we try to support the social change gaining momentum across Australia: in the community, media and government around what continues to be a violence against women epidemic.

As always your financial membership is vital in this environment to help WESNET continue the fight to improve national policy, legislation and responses to women and their

children who experience domestic and family violence. WESNET, with your support, advice and contribution of real life de-identified case studies, along with you working at the grass-roots level, are making a real difference as we chisel away challenging myths and stereotyping, violence supporting attitudes, and beliefs which blame victims and which excuse, justify or have empathy with perpetrators. Victims/survivors are never to blame for the abuse inflicted on them, and perpetrators are always accountable for their actions

Until we redress gender inequality and how it intersects with other social inequalities we will not prevent gender-based violence against women and their children. Simultaneously we need to challenge gender stereotypes, sexism and misogyny and other oppressions which underpin and reinforce these inequalities. Social change requires a sustained and coordinated effort. Stay connected with WESNET as we continue to work towards our vision “that all women and children live free of domestic and family violence and its consequences”.



Julie Oberin
National Chair

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.

VISION

That all women and children live free from domestic and family violence

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.

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.

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, we acknowledge that women and children's experiences are also intrinsically shaped by their ethnicity, culture, ability, age, gender identity and class.

Our Committee



The WESNET National Committee is comprised of 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, community educators, policy officers, 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 or area of expertise.

On the Committee there are also delegates for immigrant, refugee and non-English speaking background women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and older women.

OFFICE BEARERS

Chairperson

Julie Oberin
Annie North Inc (VIC REP)

Vice Chair

Lindy Edwards

Treasurer

Kedy Kristal

Secretary

Vicki Lachlan

Public Officer

Mirjana Wilson

STATE & TERRITORY REPRESENTATIVES

ACT

Frances Crimmins
YWCA ACT Family Violence Programs

New South Wales

Hayley Foster
Northern Rivers Women's Domestic
Violence Services

Northern Territory

Di Gipey
Alice Springs Women's Shelter

Queensland

Lindy Edwards
Sera's Women's Shelter

South Australia

Vicki Lachlan
Louise Place

Tasmania

Jacinta Atkins
Safe Choices

Victoria

Margaret Augerinos (alternate)
Centre for Non-Violence

Western Australia

Kedy Kristal
Women's Council for Domestic and
Family Violence Services

INTERSECTION & DIVERSITY REPRESENTATIVES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women

Vacant

Immigrant, non-English speaking background and Refugee Women

Vacant

Older Women

Pauline Woodbridge
North Queensland Domestic Violence
Resource Service

Our work

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

Our National Committee is comprised of women who volunteer their time and expertise to further our work as a sector and in the elimination of 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 are also 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. There is also a representative for immigrant and

refugee women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and older women.

We participate in key national policy debates and consultative processes, research and develop publications, and present at national and international conferences.

The WESNET Committee and members continue to hold positions on a number of key advisory mechanisms including the ANROWS Practitioner Engagement Group (an advisory group to assist in the translation of research to practice), the Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey Specialist Advisory Group, the 1800 RESPECT Advisory Group, the National Community Attitudes Survey Advisory Group, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Data Users Group, and Our Watch Awards Technical Advisory Group. WESNET also contributes to various other national consultations and Round Tables as they occur, along with

high level State and Territory advisory mechanisms.

WESNET remains a founding member of Homelessness Australia, providing advice on women's and children's homelessness.

We recognise domestic and family violence is only one form of violence against women. WESNET works with other organisations in Australia and internationally.

In addition to our advocacy work we have two main programs. We are the contract manager for the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA). We also have the Safety Net Australia project, which has continued to flourish this financial year with the support of Telstra and funding from the Commonwealth Government. The Safety Net Australia program works at the intersection of technology and violence against women. You can read more about our two programs later in this Annual Report.

Our staff

Interim National Director

Karen Bentley (from 1 November)

Safety Net Australia Team

Karen Bentley
Kaofeng Lee
Heidi Guldbaek
Ella B
Diana H
Natalie M
Elly S
June W

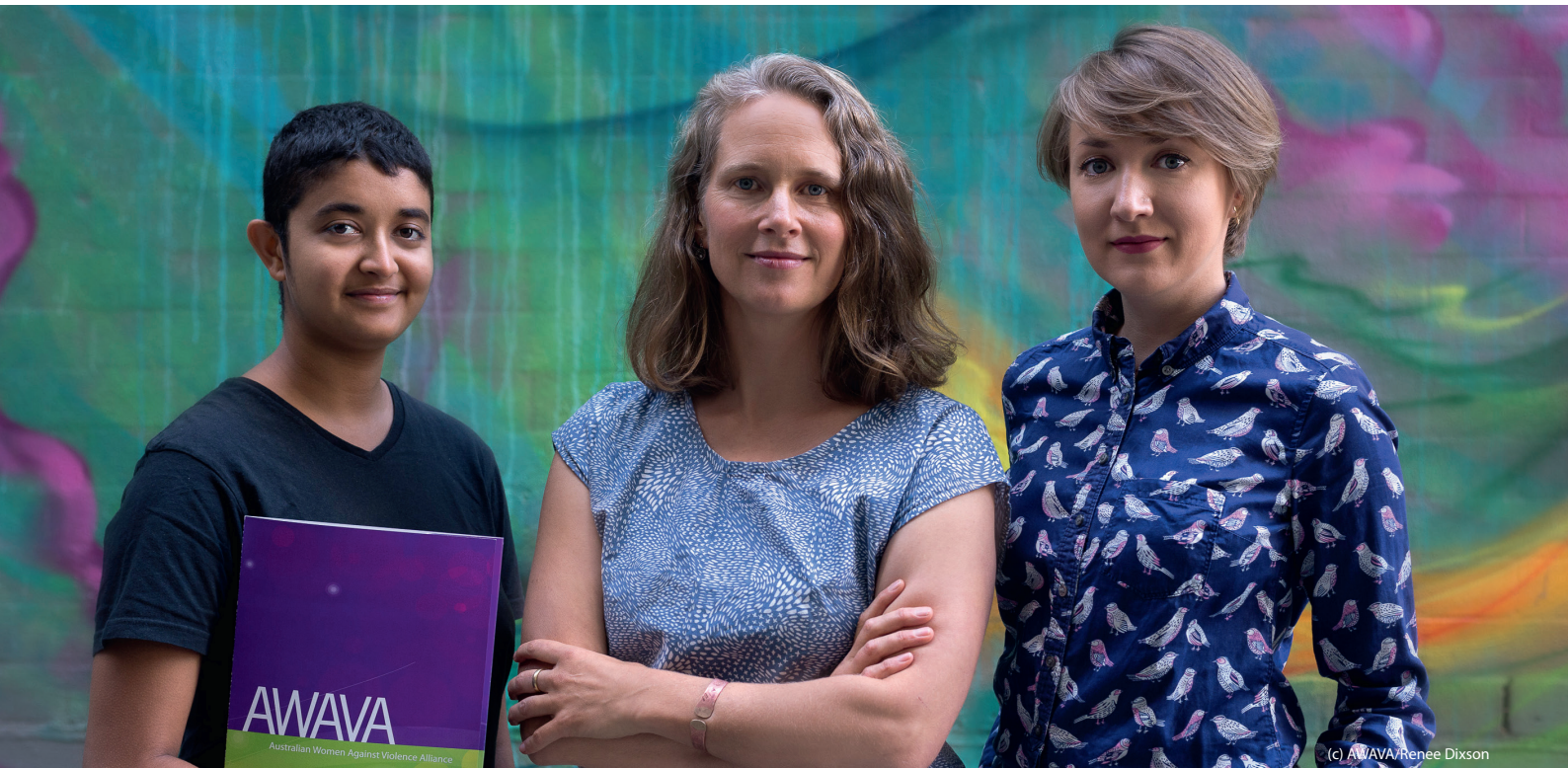
AWAVA Team

Dr Merrindah Andrew
Tina Dixon
Sumithri Venketasubramanian
(commenced Feb 2018)



Australian Women Against Violence Alliance

The Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) was established in March 2010 as one of six National Women's Alliances funded by the Australian Government. WESNET is the contract manager of AWAVA.



AWAVA's focus is addressing all forms of violence against women, to work towards a world where all women and children are able to live free from all forms of violence and abuse. AWAVA makes a contribution through policy advocacy, bringing the voices of women and women's organisations together and amplifying them to influence policy-making on VAW issues.

AWAVA provides opportunities for people across the country who are working to end violence against women to share information with each other about positive steps, as well as the challenges they are facing in their geographic area and/or specific focus area (e.g. sexual violence, violence against women and gender diverse people at universities, violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women).

AWAVA works through principles of human rights, an intersectional feminist framework and lenses of equity, diversity and inclusivity. AWAVA recognises that gender-based violence against women needs to be understood

in the context of oppression and privilege arising from the intersection of race, class, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, religion, disability, age and the impact of colonisation.

AWAVA's advocacy efforts over the year have been focused on five main areas of work. On the following pages are some of the highlights of its work.

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE ALLIANCE

All women and their children must be able to live free from all forms of violence and abuse.

WE AIM

to bring together women's organisations and individuals across Australia to **share information**, **identify** issues and their **solutions**, and to respond to and **prevent violence** against women and their children.

to ensure that **women's voices** and particularly marginalised women's voices **are heard**.

WE VALUE & ARE GUIDED BY

HUMAN RIGHTS

gender-based violence against women is one of the most serious and widespread violations of fundamental human rights.

FEMINIST FRAMEWORK

gender-based violence against women is both a consequence and cause of gender inequity.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSIVITY

gender-based violence against women needs to be understood in the context of oppression and privilege arising from the intersection of race, class, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, religion, dis/ability, age and impact of colonisation.

Efforts to end gender-based violence against women must be accountable to women, promote women's empowerment and social and gender equality, and be inclusive of all women in their diversity and based on their self-identification as women.

www.awava.org.au



Strategic engagement and representation



One of AWAVA's priorities is supporting the implementation of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children (National Plan). As a part of this work, AWAVA conducted a major survey on the development of the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan. The survey collected responses from 243 respondents (157 individuals, 79 service providers and 7 peaks) and identified 15 major findings.

Findings include some positive progress such as greater community awareness, as well as some current gaps in relation to systems and services, and approaches to reduce violence against women that need to be strengthened. The full survey report is now available on the AWAVA's website.

AWAVA attended an NGO Federal Budget lock-up and produced an analysis and a video explaining how 2018-19 Federal budget delivers to address violence against women.

AWAVA Influenced cross-jurisdictional policy development on women's

housing and homelessness through participation in the Working Group on Housing and Homelessness established under the Third Action Plan (led by SA Government), giving written and verbal advice to the secretariat and other Working Group members, amplifying the voices of AWAVA members across Australia and informing them about policy in the area.

AWAVA resourced community members to help end violence against women by creating, publishing and disseminating the 'Steps you can take to help end violence against women' pamphlet, in both hard and digital copies.

AWAVA's Program Manager Dr Merrindah Andrew appeared before the Senate Committee inquiry on cyberbullying, following AWAVA's submission to the same inquiry, leading to the inclusion of gender- and diversity-responsive language in the inquiry report.

AWAVA engaged with a number of stakeholders in its policy work.

AWAVA held a National Plan partners' meeting with representatives from Our Watch, 1800RESPECT, DV Alert and White Ribbon. AWAVA established a closed Facebook group for its Friends and Supporters to provide a space of communication, consultation and networking. AWAVA also held regular meetings with a broad range of government departments and parliamentarians.

AWAVA also held regular online consultations, bimonthly teleconferences and an annual face to face meeting with its Advisory Group members.

Enhancing equal access to justice and accountability



Dr Merrindahl Andrew

In its work, AWAVA focuses on improving access to justice for diverse groups of women in the family law system, migration system, criminal and civil law systems.

AWAVA made a submission in relation to the ban on direct cross-examination of victims/survivors by their abuser in family law cases and contributed to the consultation on the parent management hearings. AWAVA also participated to the consultation and made a written submission to the Justice Project led by the Law Council of Australia.

In partnership with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance and Harmony Alliance: Migrant and Refugee Women for Change, AWAVA made a submission to the comprehensive review of the family law system led by the Australian Law Reform Commission.

AWAVA developed a body of work, made submissions, and advocated to ensure that women on temporary visas experiencing violence have access to justice and services regardless their

migration status. In June 2018, AWAVA helped to found a National Advocacy Group working on these issues.

AWAVA engaged with policies and legislation aiming to prevent and respond to different manifestations of technology-facilitated abuse. AWAVA made submissions on the civil penalties regime to tackle non-consensual sharing of intimate images and to proposed amendments of the Criminal Code in relation to cyberbullying offences.

AWAVA also hosted an Australian National University intern working with AWAVA to research the main patterns of child protection services' interventions, and family outcomes, in cases of family violence.

Promoting effective responses to improve women's safety and recovery

AWAVA resourced specialist women's services and their peak bodies to make evidence-based claims for the unique role and value of specialist women's services in responding to violence against women, by creating, publishing and disseminating the 'Role of Specialist Women's Services' brochure in both hard and digital copies.

AWAVA worked collaboratively with Equality Rights Alliance on housing and homelessness policy including publishing an article 'Homelessness Policy with Women at the Centre: Surveying the Connections between Housing, Gender, Violence and Money' in the Parity magazine. AWAVA also made a joint submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into Human Services.

In partnership with Domestic Violence NSW, AWAVA hosted a national teleconference looking at the intersection of family violence with migration status.

AWAVA also collaborated with Harmony Alliance: Migrant and Refugee Women for Change, making a pre-budget submission focusing on migration and family violence, including emerging issues relating to service provision.

Primary prevention and institutional change



AWAVA established a new national-level Violence Prevention Working Group with membership from AWAVA Advisory Group members and other organisations and individuals working in primary prevention, including Our Watch. The Working Group is currently developing a mapping survey to identify primary prevention programs and projects of all sizes across the country, and create an online platform to put practitioners in touch with others working in the area.

AWAVA also held meetings with a broad range of stakeholders such as young women's organisations and organisations working in the area of sexual and reproductive health, reproductive coercion and health policy with a focus on the health of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Development of an international agenda



AWAVA worked to develop an international agenda and participated in a number of processes. This engagement is captured in a fact sheet that was produced collaboratively with other National Women's Alliances.

AWAVA prepared a shadow report focusing on Australia's progress in reducing violence against women and submitted it for the 70th session of the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

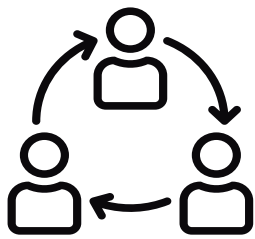
AWAVA made a submission to the consultation run by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women about the issue of technology-facilitated abuse of women.

In March, representatives of the National Women's Alliances attended the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) in New York focused on the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

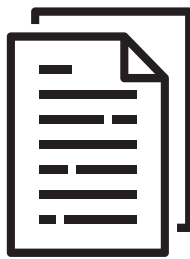
AWAVA's policy officer Tina Dixon participated in the Gender Audit of the Global Compact for Refugees in UNHCR in Geneva. The Global Compact on Refugees is aimed at strengthening the international response to large movements, reception, hosting and resettlement of people fleeing persecution, war and violence. The role of the gender audit team was to analyse existing documents from a gender lens perspective, and to advocate for gender-responsiveness of the Global Compact both on the level of policy and practice.

This advocacy contributed to the Global Compact on Refugees delivering a strong commitment to mainstreaming age, gender and diversity sensitive approaches to humanitarian work and, for the first time, to collect age, gender, diversity and disability disaggregated data.

AWAVA Annual Snapshot



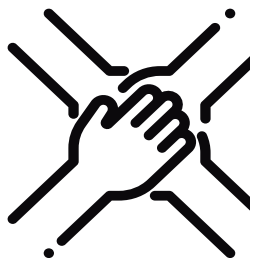
20 peak bodies and organisations are members of AWAVA's Advisory group



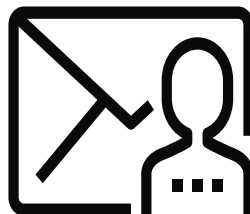
18 policy submissions were made



9,619 individuals follow AWAVA on social media, including 60 individuals who joined a closed Facebook group



232 individuals are Friends and Supporters of AWAVA



1,427 individuals are receiving a Weekly Round Up



44 Weekly Round Ups were distributed

Visit www.awava.org.au to learn more and become a Friend and Supporter of AWAVA



WESNET hosted the second Technology Safety Summit Australia in Melbourne on 26-27 October 2017

Thankyou to our sponsors Telstra, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, Facebook, Google and Uber, and all our delegates.



Safety Net Australia Report

Technology safety for women

2017-18 has been a great year for the Safety Net Australia Project, with WESNET growing the reach and impact of Safe Connections, delivering more training events, and hosting its second Technology Safety Summit.



The SafetyNet Australia project is about the intersection of technology and violence against women. Based on the US National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) Safety Net Project, it focuses on how technology is misused to exert power and control over women and how support services and women can effectively respond.

Training

Safety Net offers training for front-line workers on technology safety topics

Support

Safety Net provides support to front-line workers working with women experiencing technology facilitated abuse

Advice

Safety Net advises policy makers and technology companies on safety and privacy issues

Access to Tech

Safe Connections program offers women experiencing violence free smartphones so they can have a safe way to connect

We work with government, corporate partners and front line services to address the impacts of technology misuse, provide training and educational resources, and advocate for strong policies that further the safety, privacy and rights of women who have experienced gender-based violence.

We believe all women have the right to benefit from the digital revolution. Too often, we hear of victim-blaming responses to technology facilitated abuse, which minimise the harm it causes and/or fails to hold perpetrators of violence accountable for their actions.

Telling women to stop using technology because they are being abused compounds their isolation and reduces access to personal and

professional support networks. Having access to a new mobile phone is a good first step, however a new phone alone, isn't enough to create safety. It's by connecting with a worker who has learned the skills to identify how an abuser is misusing technology, and work with a victim to create a technology safety strategy, that gains in women's safety and inclusion are made.

Growing Safe Connections

Safe Connections is a partnership between Telstra and WESNET which provides new smartphones and pre-paid credit to women affected by family and domestic violence, via a national network of frontline organisations.

With funding from the Australian Government

Department of Social Services, WESNET also delivers a two-hour curriculum about Smartphones and Safety to participating frontline agencies and other interested stakeholders, as well as providing public resources on techsafety.org.au.

In 2017-18, WESNET increased the number of frontline agencies participating in Safe Connections from 181 to 272, making free smartphones far more widely available to victim-survivors across the country. The growth in the network of participating agencies has also amplified impact of the program for victim-survivors. In the twelve months to June 2018, there were 5,954 victim-survivors who received a free smartphone, a 180 per cent increase on the previous financial year. Since the beginning of the program in 2015, the number of phones provided to victim-survivors has increased more than 10-fold. In addition to phones already given to victim-survivors, at the end of June 2018 there were a further 2,502 phones with participating agencies, ready to be provided to the next woman who needs a phone.

(cont...)

**“Remember three key points:
what does he know,
where does the information live,
what does he have access to?”**

---Frontline worker, post training

(continued from previous page.)

We have continued to improve our capacity to serve the most marginalised women, working with Telstra to implement a new regulatory exemption¹ to allow victims of family violence to activate a Safe Connections pre-paid phone without ID for a 30 day period (in certain circumstances). On 16 February 2018, Telstra introduced a dedicated 1800 number for Safe Connections customers, to implement access to the ID exemption and to make Telstra services easier to navigate for family violence workers

and survivors. A brief survey of SC agencies post implementation showed that the new service is working well and assisting women with activating and troubleshooting their new phones. It has also enabled women with no-identification to get access to pre-paid phone service while they obtain their identification.

Education and training

Funded by the Department of Social Services as part of the Federal Government's \$100m Women's Safety

Package, WESNET's national trainers developed a two-hour curriculum Smartphones and Safety, which focuses on how smartphones can be misused to abuse, stalk, or harass another person and strategies for responding. Participants learn the different ways that abusers misuse smartphone technology, how to identify which phone technology is being misused, and assist clients in developing safety and evidence-collection strategies to address phone technology-facilitated abuse.



In a survey of training participants
97% of respondents
said they felt
more confident in
assisting their clients
experiencing tech
abuse



**8 new
resources**



**30 Day ID
exemption**



**6,887 views
of the main
dashboard by
frontline
workers**

**1 tech
summit**

We train workers to think about how women can use technology to minimise her risks and maximise her opportunities to connect with supportive people.



During 2017-18, WESNET delivered 112 sessions of training to 1034 frontline workers, covering every State and Territory across Australia. Of 549 attendees (53%) who completed a post-training survey collected by WESNET, 256 respondents (97%) said they felt more confident in assisting their clients experiencing technology facilitated violence. We have also created three online modules for participating agencies, supporting workers to continue learning.

In addition to the training events we have delivered, we provided advice and support to frontline workers via 1800 WESNET. Between July 2017 and June 2018, we received 2,266 calls, or around 190 calls per month. Of these, 736 were recorded as requiring follow up or support. Of these cases, 24 per cent required technical advice about responding to technology facilitated abuse, demonstrating that there is significant demand in the sector for specialised technology safety advice.

¹Telecommunications (Service Provider — Identity Checks for Prepaid Mobile Carriage Services) Determination 2017



WESNET-Telstra Safe Connections Statistical Snapshot 2017-18

Telstra and WESNET have been partnering since 2014 to provide pre-paid smartphones with \$30 credit to women impacted by domestic and family violence. With funding support from the Commonwealth Government through the Women's Safety Package, WESNET has been able to significantly grow the program's reach and impact during the financial year. The program now also involves upskilling frontline workers through face-to-face technology safety training.

Demographics

31%



Aboriginal and/
or Torres Strait
Islander

10%



Immigrant,
refugee & non-
English speaking
background

9%



women with
disability

Many of the women accessing the phones identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, of immigrant refugee and/or from a non-English speaking background or as a woman with a disability.

Frontline Agencies



276 Agencies
+53%

The number of frontline agencies with the program increased by half during 2017-18. There has been a 3-fold increase in the number of participating agencies in the network since May 2016.

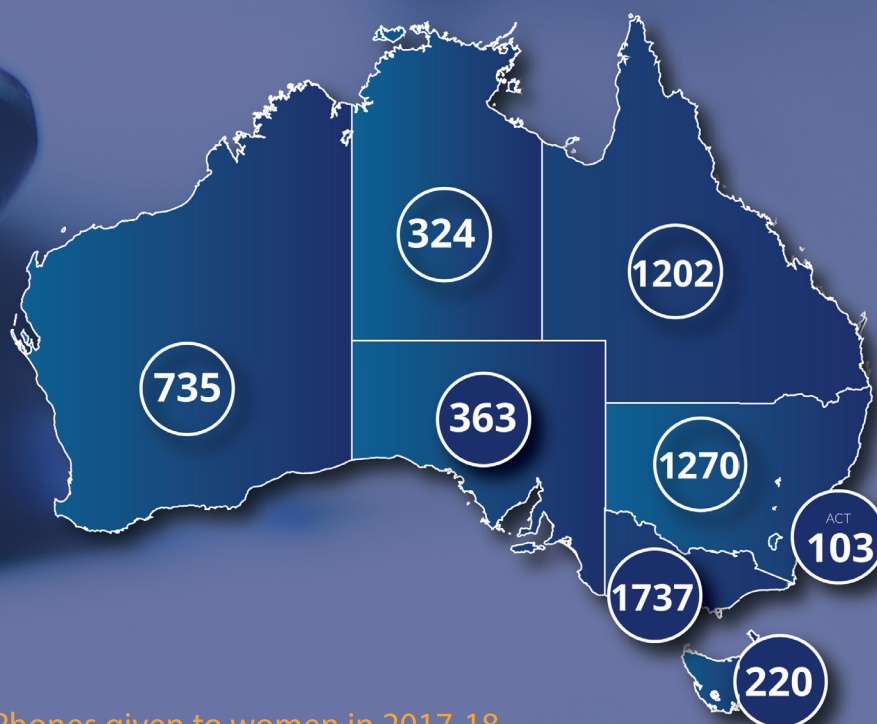
A total of 9,240 phones have been handed out since the program began.

Women in all States and Territories of Australia have received phones through one of the 276 frontline agencies who are a part of the program.

Phones given out since commencement

9,240 phones

Phones given to women by State and Territory



Phones given to women in 2017-18

In the twelve months to June 2017, 5,954 survivors have received phones. There are another 2,502 phones with 276 frontline agencies ready to be provided to the next woman who needs one.

5,954 phones

Gender Demographics

Most survivors have been female. Some phones have also been provided to male dependents.



1%



99%

The issue of older women's homelessness has not been distinguished from the broader homelessness discourse, a discourse often confused by stereotypes of men or young people being on the street affected by drugs or alcohol misuse.

Older Women

Pauline Woodbridge

Many years ago, I was in Canberra working in the Homelessness Australia office and staying in Garema Place. In the evenings as I passed through the mall area on my way to my lodging I would see the food vans arrive to seemingly empty streets, but as I watched women would silently appear, muffled in clothing against the cold - shadowy, closed in on themselves. They seemed to speak little to the helpers, not at all to each other; they gathered the coffee cup, the sandwich packet and shuffle off into the dark again. I witnessed versions of this night after night. It was hard to get a measure of what these women needed and what were the circumstances that bought them out into the night for food.

At the time I thought it was poverty, hard to understand in this vibrant city, but the reality is far more complex than that. The causes are not rooted in the decisions of the women, but in the social

and economic systems decisions that affect the environment around them.

The issue of older women's homelessness has not been distinguished from the broader homelessness discourse, a discourse often confused by stereotypes of men or young people being on the street affected by drugs or alcohol misuse. Peak bodies and homelessness service providers have attempted to dispel these myths but still, the realities of older women and homelessness have been very slow to emerge. There has been some research such as the work by Ludo McFerran but perhaps the information and recommendations of this and similar research did not make it to the general population who had no new information to help them to a broader understanding.

In the 2018 National Homelessness Week the theme of "Ending Homelessness Together" describes the purpose of the recent Homelessness

Australia conference covering all aspects of homelessness and the solutions needed across Australia. Older women's homelessness was a focus and it is good to see the media pick up the issue to some extent.

During the Homeless Awareness week the stark reality from some homeless women was revealed in a short documentary made in Canberra about older women and housing stress. Called Hidden Women: Older Women and Housing Stress, the name of the production clearly names the nature of the problem. The mini documentary starkly outlines the pathways to homelessness of the women interviewed.

In the introductory speech by Frances from the YWCA we heard that we are facing a tsunami of older women, as they increasingly find themselves living on the edge, below the poverty line. This is the result of poor policy and no action on the issue of homelessness over a



long time frame. Frances asked “How much longer do we tell women to wait for affordable appropriate accommodation on a single age pension?”

Inequality in wages and superannuation, unpaid caring roles, deaths, housing insecurity, breakdown in family relationships and domestic violence, all contribute to women falling into the cracks.

Older women don't fit the common stereotype of homelessness. They hide their homelessness for a range of reasons with only unsafe solutions available to them: they sleep in cars, they couch surf, moving about to not be a problem by overstaying with family. Always trying to find ways to keep themselves as safe as possible in the face of difficult circumstances.

One of the older women in the film said “After my husband died I needed help, it is frightening when you can't afford your housing. Older women need a sense

of safety”. Another woman talks about needing a place of safety and going to a women's shelter, but that is short term, it doesn't solve your housing problem. Another woman said “it is never just one thing, one problem after another eventually becoming overwhelming. Couldn't afford the rents – had to keep moving, each house was so much more decrepit than the last. I felt myself disappearing, with each move I lost more and more of my possessions. When you are young, you don't worry about what could happen”.

A women involved with the documentary said “These women have raised their children, done insecure work, and find themselves in this situation through no fault of their own. They may have developed a mental illness, anxiety and depression as a result of their experiences, had an injury, suffer from a chronic illness and lost their job, and are then faced with a housing system that does not take their needs into account.

We all deserve a place to call home, older women are not identified in the data collections, often overlooked in the census counts, adding to the hidden nature of older women's homelessness. We need to talk more about housing as a Human Right, not as we have now as a charitable issue. We need a gender specific whole of government response, we need affordable housing and a range of housing programs that meet the true need of the homeless women.

Activists and peak bodies have been giving advice and solutions to governments in this country for a very long time warning that the current trajectory was not working, but to date the response has been funding cuts, short term funding and no long term policy. Australia can and must do better.

Pauline Woodbridge is WESNET's Representative for Older Women

Treasurer's report

Kedy Kristal

The last financial year has seen stable financial outlook for WESNET, with revenue of \$1,510,590 compared to \$1,600,369 the previous financial year. This is mainly due to our continued partnership with Telstra and funding from the Commonwealth Government focusing on training front-line workers and supporting women impacted by domestic violence to stay safely connected.

Membership revenue has remained fairly stable, however, a key part of our next strategic plan will be working on increasing the membership of

WESNET, as these fees are essential to WESNET's continuing activities.

WESNET ended the year with an overall profit of \$95,580.

Our assets at 30 June 2018 were \$1,136,071, with liabilities of \$994,713. Most of these liabilities relate to payments/grants in advance and associated end of financial year liabilities. Our equity at 30 June 2018 was \$191,358.

The 2017/18 audit was an unqualified audit, and on behalf of the Committee I would like to thank Mark Fitzpatrick,

Diana Hookey, and Trudy McNaught for their work in taking over the finance role part way through the year and taking the finances through to audit. On behalf of the Committee, I would also like to thank Lisa Thomas, Bree Cox and the team at Annie North for their work during this and previous years in managing the finances for WESNET as we bid them a fond farewell. Thanks to both teams for ensuring a relatively painless transfer of the finance role.

Kedy Kristal
Treasurer

Another strong year for the Women's Services Network



Financial Summary

2017-18

Below is a summary of our audited financial statements. A full copy of the 2017-2018 audit is available on request. The audit of our financial records was completed in November 2018 by RSD Audit Pty Ltd.

	2018 \$	2017 \$
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STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

Cash Flows From Operating Activities

Net cash provided by operating activities	137,461	231,035
Net increase in cash held	137,461	231,035
Cash on hand at the end of financial year	1,075,114	937,653

INCOME STATEMENT

Revenue	1,510,590	1,600,369
Expenses	1,415,010	1,546,229
Net current year surplus	95,580	54,140

BALANCE SHEET

Assets

Current Assets	1,136,076	961,006
Non-Current Assets	0	0
Total Assets	1,136,076	961,006

Liabilities

Current Liabilities	994,713	865,228
Non-current Liabilities	0	0
Total Liabilities	994,713	865,228

Net Assets	191,358	95,778
Total Equity	191,358	95,778

