

Indigenous Women's Justice Forum Wednesday 3rd December 2003 at VACSAL

Present: Vicki Heal (Northern Family Violence Prevention), Julianne James (Office of Women's Policy) Susan Geraghty (Office of Women's Policy), Mary Makdesi (Darebin Community Legal Centre), Arati Vidyasagar (Darebin Community Legal Centre), Salina Bernard (EMS Consulting), Kathy Nicholls (VACCHO), Jan Muir (Indigenous Family Violence Task Force - DHS), Whitney Solomon (Reichstein Foundation), Terrie Lehmann (Indigenous Family Violence Task Force - DHS), Kylie Kinsela (Consumer Affairs Vic.), Sharon Bamblett (Gurwidj Neighbourhood House), Poppy Fotiadis (Ombudsman of Victoria), Sharon Berry (Gurwidj Neighbourhood House), Shirley Firebrace (Darebin Community Health Centre) Maureen McNeece (VAHS - Family Counselling Services), Marg Taylor (DHS)

Apologise: Flora Culpan (Broadmeadows Community Legal Centre), Jacqui Marion (Western Indigenous Gathering Place / DHS), Colleen Marion (Western Indigenous Gathering Place / ATSIIS Tumbukka Regional Counsellor) Antoinette Braybrook (Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service), Teresa Zerella (Dispute Settlement Centre), Rosi Lever (Children's Protection Society), Melinda Nicholls, (Northern Domestic Violence Outreach), Murie Murfat (Consumer Affairs Vic.)

Discussions:

Kylie Kinsela - Consumer Affairs Vic.

Consumer Affairs currently have 3 staff employed 2 of which are indigenous; the unit is set up for referral to specific agencies and, conciliation, liquor licensing and trade measurement. The contact number is 1300 661 551 if out of hours you will get an answering machine so leave a message and all calls are returned.

Kylie informed us that Community Education is working on seminars and presentations on credit to deliver to the community along with fact sheets for indigenous people in debt. A partnership was made with NMG Water Ombudsman DHS whom are currently around the state promoting service presentations.

Two grants are available through Consumer Affairs; one is an estate agent grant with \$30m available and the other is a community grant each is considered once a year usually in February.

Terry Lehman - DHS

Southern and Eastern regions, identifying community in a Regional Action Group. Eastern is not as strong in numbers as the Southern due to lack of community. Action group meeting in Feb will be meeting with local service providers- mapping services. All mainstream services will have a stall where they are to provide the community with information as to what services are out in the East / South and what they provide for the Indigenous Community. Guest speakers will attend and talk about the positives of the region

Peninsula has no transport or gathering place which seems to be a problem for them accessing services.

Funding \$650,000 per annum minor - \$150,000 and major \$500,000.

Nine Co-ordinators of the project one in each of the following regions: Wodonga, Seymour, Echuca and Wangaratta.

Whitney Solomon – Reichstein Foundation

Whitney has been a volunteer at Reichstein for a couple of months and is still working her way around the organisation. She informed us of two funding sources for the year. (Not sure of finer details). Previously in November the funding has been moved to December and there is money Indigenous specific.

Salina Bernard – EMS Consulting

Salina explained that her consulting group are currently reviewing the Community Initiative Programs over the state. There are 3 in Loddon, 4 in Gippsland, 2 in Melbourne including the Indigenous Women's Justice Forum, and 1 in Shepparton. She then went on to say that the CIP funding can be anything addressing Indigenous issue and that is a pilot program. Salina requested to arrange a day in which EMS consulting can gather feedback from participants.

After a discussion it was decided that the date will be Monday 15th December at VACSAL.

Michael – Children's Protection Society

Michael is the Senior Counsellor at the Protection Society in the Northern region; they are currently running 2 family support programs and have an outreach service. Michael mentioned that the Children's Protection Society does not have a close working relationship with any Indigenous Community organisations and was interested in doing so. Cross cultural training is not provided to the workers of CPS and is needed; Michael was given VACCHO's details along with for VAHS. CPS has a close working relationship with CASA as they work with adolescence who displays signs of sexual conduct.

Arati Vidyasagar - Darebin Community Legal Centre

Darebin Community Legal Centre has 3 priorities Corrections of Women in prison, Women in violence and Indigenous Services. They have just developed an Advocacy Kit 'Get out of my face' and an Adult Aboriginal Diversionary Program which is a half –way house in Shepparton and Broadmeadows.

Mary – Student at RMIT

Mary is a research student from RMIT and has been placed at the Darebin Community Legal Centre for 392 hours placement. She has been liaising with Rose Solomon from Elizabeth Hoffman House on direction for research

Vicki Heal - Northern Family Violence Prevention

Three linkages have been made – Cultural training for Indigenous Services in the Northern region, Community Education, Women's forum in the Northern region working along with CASA. Vicki told us an issue which they are tackling at the moment is the Health impact Family Violence has on Women in certain stages of their life cycle and Men accepting responsibility.

Sharon Berry - Gurwidj Neighbourhood House

Gurwidj is currently trying to get some funding for a part time counsellor to work in the house. They are also looking to establish an Advisory Committee especially for youth and early next year they will be working with Phil Cooper on workshops for young men &

women to complement the 'Hear Me Now' kit. In & out information to be followed up by Mel

Poppy Fotiadis - Ombudsman of Victoria

Poppy said that a priority is to link with organisations and bring in an investigator with more Koorie specific stuff. In the past when a complaint has come in the 'high ranking' officer deal with this but it is currently being reviewed and Brett is dealing with all the complaints. Brett encourages complainants to do it anonymously so that no charges are added by the police later. No faith in the process Harassment a hard case to argue. Policy paper went into VALS annual report.

A Indigenous unit is needed they have 12 Koori's in the unit in Sydney.

Attitudinal changes – education.

Power- who makes the decisions to employ kooris, where do we as a group voice and support to make changes?

Funding is an issue. Policy Level need input (Jan) Meeting with Police to establish Police Practice model. Independent / Local member link in with Koori Orgs. Story telling of success – Advocacy for Indigenous People, let the community hear this.

Shirley Firebrace – Darebin Community Health

Shirley showed is the Health Kit that has been developed for Board of Management, All Management & All Workers. It is broken down in sectors:

Kookaburra

Counselling

Eye-Optometrist

Diabetes

Planned Activity

How to make an appointment

Healthy Eating

Needle exchange

Men's health

Physiotherapy

Speech

Rights as a client

Dental

Confidentiality

They along with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service have also developed an Aboriginal Access card to make it easier for Koori patients. On the back it has the patient name and number and all they have to do is hand the card over to reception and they will point them in the right direction.

Shirley also indicated that the staff at the DHC was in need of Cross Cultural training and Occupational Therapy – How to build a respectful relationship.

Annual trip to police academy

SUSAN GERAGHTY & JULIANNE JAMES – WOMEN'S SAFETY POLICY

30 years of advocacy for women and it is interesting to see how many women are still living in fear from FV. Victoria Police attend 20,000 Incidents each year and has recorded more than 4,000 Vic women & girls have been either raped or sexually assaulted with 80% not reported to police and / or relevant agencies.

80% is not reported.

Violence against women is most likely to be an ex or current than a stranger and more likely to be in the home than public.

Family violence, sexual assault, stalking, harassment, workplace bullying, violence in public places, racial and religious violence against women, trafficking in women and girls and female genital mutilation are all forms of violence against women in Victoria.

The Principals are:

- ❖ Protect & Justice
- ❖ Options for women – improving crisis response
- ❖ Violence prevention & Education
- ❖ Community action & co-ordination

It was difficult to get government to agree but eventually it was signed off by 12 ministers.



Melissa mentioned the launch of Koori Court Warrnambool on the 18th December 2003 if people are interested in attending.

National Association of Community Legal Centres National conference National Network of Indigenous Women's Legal Services Annual Network meeting

Background on the National Network of Indigenous Women's Legal Services (NNIWLS)

The National Network of Indigenous Women's Legal Services was established in September 1998 when a meeting for National Association of Community Legal Centres conference was held in Sydney. The network consists of members from Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, Aboriginal Women's Legal Services, Community Legal Service and any individual women employed in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service.

The aim of the NNIWLS is to empower and promote social Justice for all Indigenous women and Indigenous people with particular emphasis on law and justice:

- Provide a network for organisations, services and programs that have the primary purpose of providing legal assistance, legal advice or legal information to Indigenous women,
- Promote the availability of legal and related services for Indigenous women that respect principals of Indigenous cultures,
- Improve the responsiveness of the legal system to Indigenous women and promote full exploration of opportunities for the recognition of customary cultures,
- Build partnerships and social coalitions to address the legal and related disadvantage of Indigenous women,
- Provide input to government policy, reform bodies and inquiries on issues relating to Indigenous women and the law,
- Provide training for members and others to empower Indigenous women and promote quality legal services for Indigenous women,
- Mentor and promote peer mentoring of workers providing legal and related support assistance to Indigenous women,
- Provide representation or participants for advisory bodies, reference groups and project management groups,
- Facilitate consultation and input about legal and related issues by and with Indigenous women,
- Develop and advise on the above matters,
- Co-ordinate and advice on the above matters.

The conference was held at in Hobart Tasmania in a local area called Risdon Cove which is Aboriginal owned land with 21 Indigenous Women attending from across the nation, 3 of which were also from Victoria.

The first day was a set up as a networking and reporting day with reports from network members some big achievements reported are by:

- The network had become incorporated in January of the year.
- A communications officer was appointed (has now resigned) to facilitate networking and communication between members of the network on a system

- that is called “Our Ways” in which 80% of the Network members are now accessing.
- Setting up of a contact point in WA so that it is more effective to distribute information requests.
 - With funding from the Office of Women’s Status and a partnership with Public Interest Advocacy Centre Our Strong Women’s – Indigenous Women, Law & Leadership project was a success. It was delivered over 2 days with over 200 Indigenous women completing the training and receiving a certificate in Work the system: An Introduction to Advocacy.
 - A working partnership with the National Women’s Justice Coalition.
 - The production of “Know Your Rights Game Kit” with the NSW Women’s Legal Resource Centre. This game is aimed to empower and educate young Indigenous women when faced with the Justice system. The kit consists of 3 games Trista’s Twister played with a mat and arrow, Go Help played with cards and Tidda which is an outlined drawing of the participant and discussion in the effects of Family Violence.
 - The set-up of 9 Independent Women Project (IWP) over the nation with over \$300,000 in funding.

Intellectual copyright was an issue brought up a number of times and the difficulties faced when ideas on tenders and submissions are plagiarised. With a number of women raising their concerns this issue has now become of urgent nature and will be looked into thoroughly.

Later in the evening the women participated in a healing session which included boat ride on the harbour and was told about local aboriginal history.

On day 2 the AGM was held, questions rose about the electing process which turned into frustration for some of the members and took some time but the following members were elected:

Convenor – Dianne Gray
Treasurer – Hazel Illan
Secretary – Melissa Stubbings
Committee member – Brenda Garstone
Committee member – Ellen Johnson

Victoria Police Codes of Practice for Family Violence

The aims of the new codes of practice in relation to family violence are to be transparent and consistent and to have accountability and for the following:

- Co-ordinated response by Police and other relevant agencies
- Breaking the cycle
- Transparent
- Accountability and Best Practice
- Police must when making a decision be sensitive to the individual circumstances.

The workshop consists of 7 members from the Victoria Police:

Jim Mulholland

Snr Srgt Paul Mallock

Tania Farha

Srgt Peter Benjamin

Kylie Flannigan

Wendy Steendam

Three main functions:

- Provide Safety and support
- Investigate criminal offences
- Present offenders before the court

Police must investigate all phone calls in regards to FV.

The police seem to be pro-arrest and pro-prosecutions with the new code of practice, if the police feel that they have enough evidence to arrest the perpetrator and present him before court especially if that particular home has a history of FV. They feel this is one of the keys to the disruption to the cycle of FV, I raised the question to how this will be measured and was told by future incidents (reduction), if this doesn't work the police will raise the bar e.g. more jail time.

Susan – Pro arrest & Pro prosecution meaning to train the police so that they know how to look at evidence and make decisions.