

## Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-op Ltd Indigenous Women's Justice Forum

**Minutes:** 20<sup>th</sup> June 2003 Meeting

**Present:** Kate Hairsine (VALS), Christa Momot and Pat (Reichstein Foundation), Arati Vidyasagar (Darebin Community Legal Service), Muriel Cadd (VACCA), Marie Murfet (CAV), Pam Aplin (VACCSAL), Rosemary Lovett (VALS), Catie Pitman (VALS), Poppy Fotiadis and student Lena (State/Police Ombudsman's office), Helen Kennedy (VACCSAL), Maureen McNeece (VAHS), Colleen Marion (DHS), Melissa Morgan.

**Apologies:** Jan Muir, Antoinette Braybrook, Lorraine Forrester, Alyson Foster, Susan Gerharty, Monique Hain, Eva Hudson, Karen Milgrom, Julieanne James, Antoinette Gentile

Chaired by **Melissa Morgan**.

Melissa presented the minutes of the last meeting (March 2003) there was no changes or comments made.

The issue of men attending the meeting was raised by Krista as she had asked Russell Smith (a co-worker) to attend with her and speak about Reichstein's review of philanthropic funding providers for Indigenous projects, identifying which give priority to family violence etc. In the past men have been welcome to the meetings with permission from the women. Nobody had an issue with Russell attending.

Kate presented the forum with a print out of the current "mapping of resources" database which has a family violence focus, and there was an open discussion as to what fields should be included. The following concerns were raised:

- Who does this database belong to? The IWJF/ community or VALS?
- Who is it aimed at?
- Who will be accessing it, government / non-government or community organisations, workers or general community etc?
- What is the information they want? (eg. Counselling, accommodation, courses etc available?)
- What are the main categories? What do they do?
- How will people access the information? Will it be distributed?
- If it is on the internet will it be useful to the community as not everybody has access or knows how to use a computer?
- How can it be used effectively?
- Just because it is useful to VALS, will it be useful to other organisations?

It was also pointed out that the community are sick of mapping exercises, everybody is doing them and they are often not useful to the community as they often not maintained and become out of date too quickly.

DHS is currently conducting a mapping exercise in the northern region. Marie pointed out that there is a website in which you can gain access to all Indigenous services. It was also suggested that it would be good as a website with links to all of the organisations so it can be accessed then and there. Office of Status of Women has a website which identifies what funding has been approved.

It was mentioned that the purpose of mapping resources for the IWJF was so that information about what was happening was available and regularly added to - services, research and program piloting, Indigenous community models and initiatives already developed, mainstream services and models working for community, and where gaps in providing for community needs exist. It was suggested that Jan Muir be asked to provide any further explanation of the purpose of the "IWJF mapping of resources" document and how it can be regularly up-dated.

### **Round table Introductions**

#### **Christa Momot and Patricia – Reichstein Foundation**

Reichstein Foundation fund programmes that are up to \$60,000 per year. They have funded things such as EEH sexual assault programme. Pat also informed us that she is there to help community based organisations with proposals for the grants. They also provide ongoing support through-out projects. She also bought up the issue of an Indigenous Women's legal Service that they have in every other state. Christa informed us that Reichstein would not fund an actual service but will fund a lobbying group to get one set up in Victoria if a business plan was to be presented, funding up to \$80,000 would be available.

#### **Arati Vidyasagar – Darebin Community Legal Centre**

Arati spoke about the Indigenous Justice Network they wish to establish at Darebin. So far, they have a drop in service every Wednesday for Indigenous women. They have applied for funding for a position for an Indigenous woman to work lobbying the law reform agenda. Arati also mentioned the DV Intervention Order services they ran through the Heidelberg court every Thursday from 9.30am – 3.00pm, contact Bridgette From Darebin Community Legal Centre on 9489 2948 for further details.

#### **Muriel Cadd – Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)**

Muriel spoke about VACCA's extended residential care programme and the task of VACCA obtaining a solicitor to act on the child's behalf at court. She also stressed the importance of primary care and community support saying that 489 children were in child protection and that 43% of those are in non-indigenous care.

Muriel then went on to inform us of the therapeutic response to family violence programme they are currently putting together. This programme involves a crisis team, 3 workers per family - one for the mother, one for the child and one for the father. Police would contact the crisis team who would address the conflict when it is happening, so that tension / conflict doesn't continue into the next day. Mediation/conflict resolution has always been a Koorie way of dealing with problems. VACCA is aware that once a

child is removed, it is difficult to get them back home, and then there is another Koorie broken family.

Muriel said VACCA receives short-term funding for programs which prevents them from addressing the problems for families in a continuous way. The media rarely cover the long-term problems for Indigenous children and the need for strengthening Koorie families through preventative program work. Services are usually prescriptive rather than therapeutic.

VACCA is currently developing kits for families to assist them to make better decisions at court.

The question was raised - How can the IWJF help VACCA to get the funding needed to fund their therapeutic response to family violence?

### **Pam Alpin - VACSAL**

Pam spoke about VACSAL's "Best Start" programme which they are working on in conjunction with VACCHO and VAEAI. This programme was set up due to the issue of Indigenous people accessing universal services and asks questions such as what are they, and what are the barriers to accessing them? A report will be written.

The programme involves the setting up of 2 demonstration sites and focussing on partnership with 2 mainstream services, making sure that the Indigenous community are accessing these services, if not why not. Reference groups from DHS and DEET. What is the best way to make sure children get the best start in life – health, nutrition, education, emotional and spiritual wellbeing etc?

The programme was initially 3 months now looking to change that to 12 months. They have identified providers and barriers and are now looking to implement the programme.

### **Rosemary Lovett – VALS**

Rosemary is a Client Service Officer at VALS assisting clients whilst in custody at police stations and following through on court dates and representation.

### **Catie Pitman – VALS**

Catie informed the group of the local agreement VALS has with the Shepparton police and community and looking to implement this into other regional areas. The agreement involves the police making sure their operating procedures meet the needs of their local Indigenous community, when they are in contact with the police.

### **Marie Murfet – Indigenous Support Officer - DOJ/Consumer Affairs, Indigenous Consumer Unit.**

Consumer Affairs have buckets of money for short-term community consumer education programmes. E.g. the life skills credit programme - Rights as a tenant. Kylie Kinsela is the person to talk to in regard to this; she will also help with submissions. There are 3 Indigenous workers at CAV and it is not a pilot but is up and running. Marie urged the group to get the word out and to get more Indigenous consumers to use their service. Phone: 1300 661 511.

### **Poppy Fotiadis – State Ombudsman’s Office (including Police Ombudsman)**

Brett Cunningham has just been appointed as the *Indigenous Investigation Officer* to improve community access to the assistance of the Ombudsman’s office, and to identify ways to move forward for the community. They are currently working on a brochure identifying their services for the Indigenous community and to involve and encourage the community to make complaints against police, government etc when they are treated unfairly. Poppy stated the barriers that Indigenous people have when making a complaint against the police such as more charges being issued on the complainant, and sometimes more harassment, having to attend the police station. This is a major problem and for people who have already been charged and are going to court, making a complaint against police can jeopardise their court matter.

The Police Ombudsman has agreed to accept Indigenous complaints against police directly, so that he can monitor them and make enquiries himself. Hopefully this will have more impact on the police, provide more support and feedback for Indigenous people in relation to police behaviour, and achieve better outcomes of a complaint for the complainant. Poppy said there are many reasons to complain against police, and that making a complaint should be worth it.

Poppy suggested that we invite Brett along to the forum to talk about his role at the Ombudsman’s office, which was agreed to.

### **Helen Kennedy – Koorie Leadership Program, VACSAL**

VACSAL have a number of centres under their banner such as the Bairnsdale Women’s Shelter, Bert Williams Centre, Bert Williams Hostel. She also mentioned the programmes they have running such as the men’s programme run by Phil Cooper and the Indigenous Job Network which is the first one of its kind.

Helen also talked about the Community Leadership Programme that VACSAL currently have running with 24 participants (22 last year). This programme is based on the National Indigenous Leadership Programme through Canberra. She stated that 5 modules were run around the state including the recent trip which all participants joined in on a DV and community issues debate. There is a need for providing this work in the prisons. They receive funding from the Myer Foundation and are hoping to get corporate sponsors.

### **Maureen McNeece – VAHS, Family Counselling Services**

Maureen is currently working on a Family Healing Model at the VAHS Family Counselling Service, 229 High Street, Northcote. Could they work with VACCA in regard to this? The adolescent invites family if they wish for them to attend.

### **Colleen Marion – DHS and Councillor for Tumbukka Region**

Colleen is currently working on the development of the Corrections Victoria Indigenous Employment, Education and Training Strategy. A forum will be held on the 25<sup>th</sup> June at

William Angliss TAFE. Call Kelly Gallagher on 9627 6600 to attend. She said there is a need for more support for Koori women in prison and post release, and to make sure their needs are included in this strategy development.

Much of Colleen's time is spent working with the women from the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre in Deer Park where there are currently 16 women. There is a need to get more visitors on a regular basis to help women with their feelings of isolation both inside and when on parole, RAJAC are currently working with the Office of Corrections on the Aboriginal Official Prisoner Visitors Programme. A report is going to the Minister which will cover issues such as health. Soon the Western Suburbs Gathering Place will be open which caters for men and women and post-release programmes. They will be liaising with other Koori organisations such as VACSAL for employment, and VAHS for counselling and the Housing Board for accommodation.

### **END of ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

Catie then went on to briefly explain the 'how-to develop preventative programmes' discussion paper and advised everybody to read through it and it will be discussed more at the next Forum.

Melissa informed the participants of the CASA calendar and for anyone interested there were copies.

Melissa said that DHS had an FV action group meeting on and that Jan Muir couldn't attend to give an update on the FV Task Force.

Next meeting will be held in September and members will be informed of the actual date with the minutes from this meeting.

**MEETING CLOSED at about 1pm.**