

Background to Project and Terms of Reference.

The purpose of this project is to retrospectively review grants funded by the Victorian Women's Trust, around domestic violence and sexual violence to ascertain whether these projects made a difference for women in Victoria.

Domestic violence is the preferred term to be used as opposed to family violence because in context of this project, violence against women is viewed as a gendered issue, which is perpetrated predominantly by men against women. However, this project does recognise the complexity of violence against women in that it can occur in same sex couples, be perpetrated by women and can adversely affect children and impact on extended family members. Furthermore, this project also appreciates the term *domestic* violence does not encapsulate the full gendered meaning of violence against women.

Nevertheless this project adopts the *Partnerships against Domestic Violence* definition as

an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in relationship and after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate and control the other. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical, sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation (2003).

This paper would like to recognise, family violence is the preferred term to be used by Aboriginal women and Torres Strait Islanders. Family violence is viewed as a social problem impacting on women, children, extended family members, elders and the community and includes racism and marginalisation.

Sexual violence in this project will be defined as 'any behaviour that makes you feel uncomfortable, frightened, intimidated and that you have not agreed to' (Northern CASA,2003).

Where are we now?

Domestic violence and sexual violence are crimes perpetrated against women by men in the name of sustaining male supremacy. Domestic violence and sexual violence is an abhorrent execution of women's human rights to live a life free from violence and to live a life espoused with value, dignity and respect. Both these forms of violence are clearly a feminist, human rights and social justice issue cementing the fundamental ethos of this project.

Women's experiences of violence are not just personal tragedies, they are and need to be political stories grasping for social, political, economic and legal recognition and change. The second wave of feminism achieved to raise the status of domestic violence and sexual violence from a private affair to a social problem demanding community and political attention. For the first time, both forms of violence were understood within a socio political framework defining domestic

violence and sexual violence as an abuse of power (Laing,2000:2). Violence against women is not provoked by anger, by stress or by alcohol, it is a deliberate act to control, dominate, threaten and intimidate women. Both forms of violence are neither just an act, but born from a patriarchal belief system that believes men have the right to personally and institutionally control women at any cost, including death (Dobash&Dobash,1992:248).

One of the biggest surveys to be conducted to establish the extent women experienced violence was in 1996, by the Australian Bureau of Statistics titled the *Women's Safety Australia*. This was a national study that revealed one in three women are likely to experience violence at least once in their lifetime. The statistics also showed:

- 23% of women who have been married and in a defacto relationship at some point experienced violence by their partner.
- 1,11,000 women were subjected to violence in the last 12 months of the survey.
- 2.6% of women reported at least one violent incident 12 months prior to the survey.
- 42% of women were subjected to violence whilst pregnant.
- 20% of women experienced violence for the first time while pregnant.
- 21% of women escaping domestic violence sought Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs.
- 38% of the adult female population or 2.6 million women had experienced one or more incidences of physical and or sexual violence since the age of 15.
- 1.2 million women had experienced sexual violence.
- 2.2 million women had experienced physical violence.
- 10% of all sexual assaults reported only half were guilty convictions in court.
- 7.3% of women aged 18 - 24 years of age experienced physical violence.
- 3.9% of women aged 25 - 34 years of age experienced physical violence.
- 2.7% of women aged 35 - 44 years of age experienced.
- 2.1% of women aged 45 - 54 experienced physical violence.
- 1.2% of women aged 55 and over experienced physical violence.

The data gathered indicates that young women are at most risk of experiencing physical violence and the most likely period women may experience physical violence is whilst being pregnant and or having dependant children.

Domestic Violence in Victoria.

Due to the limited access and fragmentation of statistics of domestic violence, the Victorian Community Council Against Family Violence launched a Family Violence Database (2002). This

database was developed in the hope to integrate statistics gathered by the police, courts and SAAP agencies. The database showed:

Victorian Police Family Incidents Reports:

- Between 1999 - 2000, the police reported 19,597 incidences of domestic violence.
- Between 2000 - 2001 the police reported 21,618 incidences of domestic violence.
- Between these two periods police reports increased by 10%.
- 75% of incidences reported to the police were perpetrated either by a spouse, de facto, former spouse or former de facto.

Intervention order applications:

- Between 1999 - 2000 there were 19,308 Intervention Order applications made in Victorian courts.
- Between 2000 - 2001 there were 20,213 Intervention Order applications made in Victorian courts.
- Between these two periods applications for Intervention Orders increased by 5%.

Victorian SAAP agencies:

- Between 1999 - 2000 SAAP agencies assisted 11,100 service users, relating to domestic violence.
- Between 2000 - 2001 SAAP agencies assisted 10,200 clients, relating to domestic violence.
- Between these two periods the number of women seeking assistance decreased by 15%.

Homicides:

Between 2000 - 2001, there were 23 female victims of homicide, of which 47.8% were married and 13.1% were separated or divorced (Institute of Criminology).

In the period between 1st July 1997 and June 30th 2001, 182 people in Victoria were charged with homicide, of which 29.7% accounted for men who killed women (Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2003).

Victorian Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service

Between 2001 - 2002, the Victorian Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service received 26,000 calls from people seeking support, information relating to family violence and emergency accommodation (DVIRC)

Sexual Violence in Victoria.

In *Women's Experience of Crime and Safety in Victoria 2002*, revealed between 1999 - 2000, 1,170 incidences of rape were recorded and between 2000 - 2001, 1,234 incidences of rape were recorded, with an increase by 5.5%. Between 2000 and 2001, 3,961 females were recorded as victims of sexual assault, rape and sex (non-rape). Women aged between 15 and 19 years of age were recorded the highest group at risk of experiencing sexual violence. The Victorian Law Reform Commission reported between 1994 and 2002, one quarter of rapes were reported 6 months after the offence (Neame, Heenan, 2003).

Between July 1999 and June 2000, the Equal Opportunity Board received 325 "complaints" from women under the *Sex Discrimination Act*. Women are 10 times more likely to be victims of sexual violence (Victorian Women's Trust, 2001).

Discussion.

Based on the statistics presented, the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual violence in Victoria is outstandingly high. Providing accurate data to governments, policy makers, services and programs is important to develop effective intervention and prevention responses to stop domestic and sexual violence (Mulroney, 2003). However, these statistics do not and cannot give a real true indication of the enormity of violent incidences occurring against women, suggesting the problem of domestic and sexual violence is much bigger than the community understands. The danger is, if an effective community response to violence against women is dependent on establishing how big the problem is in terms of numbers, then the community could likely minimise the reality and impact of domestic violence and sexual violence.

Then what are the factors contributing to what could be an unrealistic representation of violent incidences occurring against women?

Statistics.

There are a number of misgivings particularly for critical decision-makers to depend on statistics alone to provide information about violence against women. The statistics gathered are often from different agencies defining domestic and sexual violence differently, hence leading to conflicting definitions. For instance some agencies and institutions often measure only physical forms of violence and neglect to consider emotional, psychological, social and financial forms of abuse, (Tomison, 2000:3,4). By failing to recognise the broader social context of violence against women, band aid solutions can easily prevail.

Statistics further fail to illustrate the real lived experience of violence. Numbers do not tell stories about depression, anxiety, mental health problems, low self esteem, social isolation, guilt, shame, fear of one's life and so on. Statistics do not either demonstrate the impact violence against women has on families, on children especially their developmental stages, on extended family members, on workplaces, on access to support services, on friendships, on the community.

In addition, statistics do not provide a genuine estimate of domestic and sexual violence experienced by women from non-English speaking backgrounds, refugee women, sex workers and women who are homeless and women with disabilities (Neame, Heenan, 2003). The statistics gathered only account for women who have made contact with police, courts, counseling services and SAAP agencies, hence the majority of women experiencing domestic and or sexual violence are likely not to be included in these statistics. This is a serious issue, demanding critical attention

given to barriers of disclosure. Women are more likely to seek help from family and friends rather than accessing support from social and judicial services. In a report written by Keys Young 'Against the Odds: How Women Survive Domestic Violence' (1998), less than 20% of the women interviewed accessed support services and 25% contacted the police. In the ABS study, 4.5% of women physically assaulted accessed crisis services (Mulroney,2003). Hence statistics cannot be interpreted on face value but need to address the critical issues hiding behind the figures, for instance why is that many women are not seeking support?

However the danger of asking why a woman does not seek support and or speak out is that it can breed victim blaming attitudes that send messages it is a woman's responsibility to stop the violence of men. Where in this question are men made accountable for their violent behaviour and belief system? In fact one just needs to look at the statistics in the Family Violence Database to see the figures only show women going to the police to stop men's violence; women applying for intervention orders to stop men's violence; women leaving their homes to escape men's violence and women going to counseling to cope with men's violence.

But for the purposes of this paper, asking the question why a woman does not seek support is critical to not only highlight the violence perpetrated against women by men is unacceptable, but the violence perpetrated against women by the *system* is also socially and morally unacceptable. Common attitudes even amongst women I have personally found, still ask the question why does a woman not leave or speak out and if this question is not adequately answered, there is a danger survivors will remain to be seen as victims perpetrating their own violence, by staying. Attention must be given to the structural systemic reasons why women find it so hard to speak and or leave to overcome myths and prejudices.

Domestic violence.

There are a number of complex structural reasons why women find it difficult to speak out, seek support and to report their experiences of violence to police. In the area of *domestic violence* women may fear a negative response from the community especially from a community that is structured on traditional family gendered roles. Women are commonly perceived in the family as the mother who is expected to keep the family together. Therefore the thought of leaving could be seen as a reflection of the mother breaking up the family leading to feelings of shame and guilt, instead of being seen as valuing the safety of the family.

However, it should be noted that domestic violence does not necessarily occur only within a familial context. Violence against women can and does exist in non-marital and non-de facto relationships. A woman does not have to live with her partner to experience violence and abuse. Hence remoulding stereotyped images of victims of violence is important to fully grasp the extent violence is experienced by women.

Nevertheless according to Keys Young (1998) in an interview study of women experiencing domestic violence found that the following factors contributed to a woman's decision not to speak out and or leave:

- Fear of retribution from the perpetrator, especially if she decides to leave.
- Fear her allegations are not going to be taken seriously by the police or courts.
- Fear her children will be taken away.

- Fear that if she leaves she will have no where to go and she will then be left with the choice of substituting one form of violence with another, namely being homelessness and poverty.
- Fear of being stigmatised as a single parent if she decides to leave.
- Fear of being judged by the community, family, friends and service providers as being a bad mother or bad partner.
- Fear service providers would not understand their particular problem.
- Fear service providers will judge her for staying.
- Other factors contributing to a woman's decision to speak out or leave included:
 - The need to keep the family together for the sake of the needs of the children.
 - Commitment to the marriage.
 - Economic dependence.
 - The hope that the behaviour of the partner will change.
 - Religious and cultural reasons.
 - Isolated incidences of abuse and violence, the attitude being "he isn't violent all the time".
 - Fear of being judged for staying.
 - Shame and embarrassment the relationship is not working.
 - Unable to identify the violence and abuse perpetrated by the partner.
 - Geographic and social isolation, particularly for rural women and women from non English speaking backgrounds and women with disabilities.
 - Depression, stress and confusion resulting in a deep sense of hopelessness and helplessness.
 - An understanding that the violence is a private matter.
 - Culture of families being non help seeking and valuing independence and self reliance.

Concomitantly, women, who do decide to leave their partner, does not mean women are completely safe and free from violence. Separation is classified as one of the highest periods of risk for women experiencing escalated acts and threats of violence because the act of leaving is the ultimate challenge to a man's power over a woman (Dobash & Dobash,1992:128). Separation further brings with it a multiple of issues for women such as housing, residential concerns, childcare, financial independence and so on.

As you can see, the main reasons why a woman may not speak out and or seek support is because she does not live in a society that institutionally values her worth, values her contribution and values her safety.

Sexual violence.

Women may find it difficult to speak out about sexual violence because like domestic violence, women may fear a negative response from the community that assumes the woman was somehow responsible for the sexual violent incident, leading to feelings of guilt and shame. This can particularly occur if a woman had been consuming alcohol, blamed because she was talking to a stranger, the way she was dressed, leaving her drink unattended. Drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault is a common occurrence in licensed premises which adds further fear of women not being believed because of the difficulty of recalling events. The challenge of speaking out could also be attributed to the trauma of sexual violence, which disturbs women's self-perception and sense of trust and safety (CASA).

Women may also fear being socially isolated and ostracised from friends and family, particularly if the perpetrator was known. A critical factor that could likely be dismissed and misunderstood is the prevalence of incidences of sexual violence being perpetrated by men known by women. Women are more likely to report sexual assaults if the offender is a stranger despite the majority of incidences being perpetrated by known men. Like domestic violence the low rate of sexual assaults being reported to the police is most likely a reflection that the perpetrator is known (Crime Prevention of Victoria,2002), which essentially challenges the "stranger danger" attitude that is often predicated in government initiatives to stop violence against women.

Domestic violence and sexual violence.

For both domestic and sexual violence, the difficulty of speaking out could also be accounted for the fact both these forms of violence are not understood entirely as crimes. If there is no physical injury sustained, or there is a vague memory of the incident, then there could be an assumption that a crime was not committed. If men do not see acts of violence against women being a crime, then women will remain subject to violent acts and beliefs.

In addition, due to the lack of community attention to domestic and sexual violence, access to information about women's rights and support agencies can also be affected. If the community is not going to give prevalence to the safety of women, then how is it that women will know their rights or how and where to access information and support? This is a crucial point that turns the accountability of violence against women away from women to the community. The answer to why a woman does not readily speak out is not because she is weak, has a personality deficit or has a syndrome, but because the community lacks the knowledge and resources to support women and make men accountable. Structural barriers such as housing, financial dependence, income support, childcare and lack of community awareness are likely to be critical factors preventing women from living a life free from violence.

In the state of Victoria, the number of violent incidences occurring against women is remarkably high, but the number of incidences not recorded is more likely to be even higher, suggesting there are many women who may be feeling they need and can only live in silence. Studies consistently demonstrate violence against women has no boundaries in terms of class, sexuality, race, culture and age. The majority of victims are women and the majority of perpetrators are men and in most cases, known men. But trying to extract the true numbers of domestic and sexual violent incidences will remain difficult unless women feel safe enough to speak out. This is not going to

occur until the structural and systemic barriers supporting the cycle of violence are changed and women feel assured the community values the safety, dignity and respect of women. Until then the problem of domestic violence and sexual violence will remain an ongoing issue in need of being addressed.

The role of the Victorian Women's Trust.

Of the 300 projects granted in the history of the VWT, 10% have been devoted to addressing violence against women. These projects have clearly advocated the rights of women to live a life free from violence and to be able to equally and fully participate in public life. A common theme in these projects was the attention given to community education. The basis of community education is - knowledge is power and without this knowledge women can remain powerless, hence integral to the projects was raising awareness of domestic violence and sexual violence. Some projects achieved this by critically challenging systemic barriers that prevented women from seeking support and receiving a positive response. Other projects provided information to professionals likely to come in contact with survivors of domestic and sexual violence e.g doctors, teachers, lawyers, and social workers to improve their responses to women. There were also projects that aimed to empower women by making sure they were informed of their rights and where to go to seek support. The ultimate goal of the 30 projects addressing violence against women was to achieve change either, socially, politically, personally, legally and or institutionally.

Furthermore, these projects achieved to address women across Victoria from different backgrounds including women:

- from rural areas;
- young women;
- women with disabilities;
- women in the Church and in sporting communities;
- women who have been murdered as a result of domestic violence;
- women who have killed in self defence;
- sex workers;
- Koorie women.

The Victorian Women's Trust has successfully shown to be a key supporter to projects addressing violence against women. The Women's Trust views this issue as being critical to enhancing the quality, status and value of women's lives. These projects supported by the Women's Trust have provided a valuable avenue for women's voices to be heard and provide an opportunity to seek appropriate change. Of the 30 projects that have all equally aimed to effect either social, personal or political change, 6 have been chosen to illustrate how the contribution made by the Women's Trust has made a difference for women. The six projects were chosen on the basis that they

covered a number of areas such as policy; service provision, legislation, community education and community attitudes and the personal and political lives of survivors and victims of violence.

1. *Domestic Murders Research Project (Blood on Whose Hands)* by the Women's Coalition Against Family Violence - 1989-1992.
2. *Sexual Assault Guide* by the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) - 1996.
3. *The Campaign Continues* by the Brimbank Community Centre - 1997.
4. *When Love Hurts* by the Domestic Violence Incest Resource Centre (DVIRC) - 1998.
5. *Anna Lost Anna Found / Shredded* by Annie North Women's Refuge - 2000.
6. *The Right to Party Safely* by CASA - 2000 - 2001.

PROJECTS

1. **Title: Domestic Murders Research Project.**

Organisation: Coalition Against Family Violence.

Year: 1989-1993.

Grant: Stage 1 - \$17,769

Stage 2 - \$34,593

Stage 3 (publication of Blood on Whose Hands) \$19,008

Total: \$71,370.

Key personnel: Kath McCarthy, Ariel Couchman, Mary Dankhert, Sabra Lazarus, maria Dimopoulos, Liz Short

Project: Action research study on domestic murders.

Definition of issue: Between 1981 and 1987, domestic violence accounted for 4 in 10 homicides and given that there was no research into the relationship between domestic violence and domestic murders, the Domestic Murders Research Project was the first of its kind. This project evolved from a commemoration of the women and children murdered due to domestic violence and as a result of the project, further commemorations were made across Australia, carrying with it a textile banner detailing the names of women and children murdered.

At the time of the project, media attention was given to domestic murders around the provocation laws in Victoria, that enabled men to be found guilty of manslaughter as opposed to murder based on only having to give evidence, that the accused was acting under provocation by the victim. In these cases courts failed to consider the prolonged violence women were subjected to prior to their murder. Courts did not acknowledge the premeditated nature of domestic related murders, instead focused on judging how women provoked their own murder. This sparked outrage amongst victims of family and friends demanding the laws to be changed.

The lack of effective responses by the police, media, the law and the community bred a social institutional approval of domestic murders, which essentially trivialised the issue of women and children being killed by known male offenders. The project stated, the media, the police, court trials all too often silenced the real life of violence women experienced and judged victims as being demanding, manipulative and provocative. In no way, the project informed, do the courts, police, the law and the community define domestic violence in context of gender, class, race and power.

The driving force of this project was derived from the failure of the police, courts, judges, legal system and community to view domestic violence as a crime. According to the project, the legal system clearly breeds racist, sexist, classist beliefs effecting survivors and victims of domestic violence. Even upon death, women are still covertly blamed for the violence of men.

Target group: Survivors and victims of domestic violence and all women.

Project Aim: The aim of the Domestic Murders Research Project was to:

- detail a comprehensive study of domestic homicides to highlight the otherwise untold stories of women's protracted personal experiences of violence, prior to their murder.
- Publicly raise the serious issue of domestic violence.
- Study the role of courts, police and the media when confronting, informing and intervening domestic murders. The aim here was to critically challenge the practices and attitudes that lead to discriminatory outcomes for women.
- Develop and publicise recommendations relating to policies and practices of the legal system around domestic violence and domestic murders.
- Make recommendations to improve police responses and media coverage of domestic violence and domestic murders.

The expected outcome of this very first project into domestic murders in Victoria, was not to just aim to make statutory reforms but to challenge the serious systemic barriers and structural inequalities, that reinforce women's subordination to men socially, politically and economically. The project was formed on the assumption the law cannot be recognised as providing the answers to stop violence against women alone.

The project also intended to dispel the myths and secrets surrounding domestic violence that it occurs in the home, it is deliberately perpetrated by a man the woman knows - mainly a partner and it can lead to murder especially prior and during acts of separation.

In addition, the essential aim of the project was not about producing new findings or conclusions but about reflecting on the debates and important issues around domestic violence.

Stage 1 of the project was directed at assessing and detailing the feasibility of the action research project.

Stage 2 was committed to carrying out the research study.

Stage 3 involved establishing a media campaign.

Project approach: The Domestic Murders Research project adopted a participatory action research approach, which involved people who were most affected by a social issue such as domestic murders, to work towards achieving shared aims to effect social change. This was achieved by project organisers meeting with family members of women and children who were murdered as a result of domestic violence, to explore and highlight how they gave meaning to the events surrounding the life of women and children murdered. The purpose of this approach was to make their stories known and to influence significant policy changes. The research project also had an emancipatory basis to it, in terms of challenging existing oppressive social structures.

Stage 1 of the project established a steering committee to devise a research framework and to publicly inform the community the existence of the project, appealing to surviving family members of domestic violence.

Stage 2 involved carrying out the research study and stage 3 employed a community education media campaign - promoting the project, which resulted in the publication of *Blood on Whose Hands*.

Project outcomes as defined by organisers upon completion of project: The key outcome of this project was it achieved to break the silence surrounding domestic murders. The project also highlighted the inadequate response by the community and legal system to domestic murders. The published book *Blood on Whose Hands*, further demonstrated the failed role of the police, media the courts and the law to prevail justice to female victims of domestic murders. The book sold over 30,000 copies was included in academic course reading lists. The project received the Australian Violence Prevention Award from the National Violence Prevention Committee. The project was also used to lobby tougher gun laws.

Based on the aims of this project the key outcomes as defined by project organisers indicated:

Aim 1. To carry out an action research study into the deaths of women and children who were killed as a result of domestic violence.

Outcome: A comprehensive research study was completed by collating documentation, statistics, anecdotal records to describe and highlight the serious magnitude of the problem of domestic murders.

Aim 2. To publicly raise the issue of domestic murders and domestic violence.

Outcome: A formal documentation of the research study was published, titled *Blood On Whose Hands*, which formed part of the broader community education media campaign. The book revealed untold stories of women's lives who endured prolonged violence prior to their murder. The book helped surviving family members speak out, including women from interstate. Speaking engagements at domestic violent forums were arranged by the Coalition Against Family Violence.

Aim 3. Analyse the role and impact of police, courts and the media on the issue of domestic violence.

Outcome: The project achieved to critically examine the role of the legal system when intervening in domestic murders. The project found the rights of victims to be less respected than the rights of the accused in court hearings. The project collated anecdotal facts reflecting the inadequate response of the legal system. The project also achieved to highlight how the role of the media can develop a biased picture when reporting domestic murders and domestic violence. The project also succeeded to target journalists, who indicated at the time of the launch of *Blood on Whose Hands*, they would change the way they reported domestic violence.

It was estimated the media campaign reached more than 5 million people through television, radio, printed media and workshops. Based on this many people, project organisers felt they achieved to increase awareness of the issue of domestic murders and found community attitudes to domestic murders and domestic violence were slowly changing.

Interview with Kath McCarthy:

Kath McCarthy was an original key project worker.

The intention of the project was to take domestic violence and domestic murders out of the private realm into the public eye and make these social problems a community issue and a community responsibility. Kath said “as long as (the) system does not change and community attitudes then we are all complicit” to the violence and murder of women and children. One of the guiding philosophies of the project was before significant changes can be made to domestic violence, changes in people’s belief system need to be made first, and this is what the project aimed to do.

Kath indicated the most important real outcome was the power of the Domestic Murders Research Project to make people from different sectors of the community, think and question the seriousness and danger of domestic violence. However to attribute changes made to policies, legislation, service provision practices and so on to the project is difficult. Kath clearly expressed the project cannot be credited for changes made due to the myriad of other influencing projects and campaigns directed at social change in the arena of domestic violence. The project was part of a bigger picture that added to the push to take domestic violence seriously. Nevertheless the project did achieve to reach out to judges, the media and the community.

The project clearly raised the awareness of domestic violence and broke the silence surrounding men who kill women and children. The project achieved to educate the community the relationship between domestic violence and domestic murders in a way that was not understood before. This was made evident by the fact that the media was present at the launch of *Blood on Whose Hands*. The television cameras that were going to be only present for a short period of time filmed the entire launch due to the powerful and provocative content of the book. Policy makers and bureaucrats who attended the launch also demonstrated a real interest in the book, which Kath felt the research project really helped people think and consider the serious issues around domestic violence. Making people think she said makes a difference to women because hopefully, if attitudes change so will responses.

Members from the Women’s Coalition Against Family Violence and surviving family members appeared on Good Morning Australia and the Bert Newton morning show and numerous newspaper articles were written. The book *Blood on Whose Hands* was distributed to a number of bookshops, libraries and universities across Australia. Kath felt the project clearly created necessary debate about the relationship between domestic violence and domestic murders. Kath felt this was due to the fact that these issues were controversial and provocative.

As a result of the project, a Family Violence Prevention committee was formed with members being represented from the community, the government sector, the justice system and the police. The committee worked towards ameliorating systemic responses to domestic violence and domestic murders. Kath explained the members of the committee were clearly influenced by the domestic murders campaign, which demonstrated the power of the project to permeate the consciousness of people across different domains.

The project did impact a considerable number of people including prominent people such as Phil Cleary, who had a key role influencing the media. Phil Cleary wrote a number of opinion pieces in The Age and wrote a book about the issue of domestic murders, publicly responded to Law Reform issues around domestic murders e.g. defences to homicide. Kath indicated Phil Cleary kept the issue of domestic murders alive in the public arena of the media. One of the aims of the project was to target the media coverage of domestic murders, both in Victoria and nationally. Kath highlighted the project at different media levels effected the representation of domestic violence and domestic murders. Even though there is still evidence of there being sensationalist stories and headlines, since the project the media's construction of domestic violence has

somewhat improved. As detailed before, at the launch of *Blood On Whose Hands*, one journalist expressed their representation of domestic murders would change.

Maria Dimopoulos who had a key role prompting debate within the legal system about domestic violence and domestic murders, was favourably received. Justice Nicholson, a Family Court Judge was impacted by the project and sought to support the project and speak out about the issues surrounding domestic violence. In Kath's opinion, an unintended outcome of the project was the book *Blood On Whose Hands* was made accessible to an educational conference for judges.

Moreover, what particularly surprised Kath was the feedback received from the whole of Australia, which demonstrated again to Kath, as a result of the project people began to think about the danger of domestic violence. Even though the project targeted systemic change, a direct impact was made on women across Australia. The project provided an opportunity for women's voices to be heard and an avenue to question their own or other's safety.

A number of ordinary women across Australia contacted the Coalition expressing their thoughts, their stories and their fears. Women began to think differently about their own experiences of violence and or other's because they began to become aware of its danger. Phone calls were received by the Coalition from women who expressed thanks because they felt their lives had changed upon being made aware of the deadly seriousness of domestic violence. Connections were also being made, in one particular phone call, a person rang to say they recognised one of the men who murdered a woman from the book who in fact was going out with their daughter.

The project further achieved to shed some needed light on the impact domestic violence has on children and that it can hurt kids and kill them too. In addition, the project broadened the understanding of domestic murders by encouraging people not to view these murders as isolated incidences, but be recognised within a context of what is often a prolonged experience of violence. This has been made evident by reflections made by prominent people such as Phil Cleary and Justice Nicholson and also by ordinary people.

In terms of the role of the project today, references are still being made to the Domestic Murders Research project. In a talk back radio show in September 2003, Kath listened to a debate about why some men are killing their families and a caller rang to discuss the issue in context of *Blood On Whose Hands*. Kath further explained that when she does talk to people about her involvement in the Domestic Murders Research Project people recognise the project, which Kath feels the project is still relevant today. In a recent submission made by the Victorian Women's Trust to defences to homicide, the book was again referenced. Kath did clarify, when she has read papers about domestic violence and domestic murders, *Blood on Whose Hands* has been referenced. The book is still receiving some loyalties. In terms of inciting reflection, having read the book myself prompted me to discuss the issue with my family and friends.

The funds provided by the Victorian Women's Trust, Kath expressed, clearly made this project possible and opened up an opportunity to do something meaningful with the issue of domestic murders. The project achieved to make a difference for women not only in Victoria but nation wide by making people think and consider the danger of domestic violence.

2. **Title:** Sexual Assault Guide 'Portraits of Chaos'.

Organisation: Counterpoint Young Women's Refuge, program of Anglicare Victoria.

Year: 1996/1997.

Grant: \$5,000

Key Personnel: Tracey Baird, Dorothe Akkurt, Susie Carter, Anna Eason, Sue Bassingthwaighte, Julie McKenzie, Cane Rogerson, Vanessa Helge.

Project: A booklet illustrating poems, drawings and short stories produced by survivors of sexual assault. The booklet also contains information about sexual violence relating to self harm, drug use, mental health etc..

Definition of issue: At the time of this project, Australia had the highest rate of youth suicide in the western world. Counterpoint a refuge for young women aged between 15 - 19 years who have been sexually assaulted, supported women who experienced high levels of suicidal behaviour and self mutilation. The effects of sexual violence can be devastating leaving women feeling traumatised and finding it difficult to become a part of "mainstream" society. To help define the issue of sexual violence, the following information was collected form the Sexual Assault Guide *Portraits of Chaos*.

Sexual violence is not about sex but an abuse of power perpetrated mainly by men who rob women of their power and control physically and emotionally. As opposed to men, women are more likely to internalise their pain, anguish and grief, which can lead to self harming and risk taking behaviour such as drug and alcohol use. Drug use is a form of self-harming which can be a way of coping for some women to escape the pain. However, if only the drug use was being dealt with the link between drug use and sexual violence could be overlooked leading to ineffective responses.

Self-harming is difficult to understand because it is not widely understood and is therefore left to hide behind closed doors. The different ways women can self harm include slashing their wrists with razor blades and sharp objects; using cigarettes to burn themselves; pulling out their hair, lashes and eyebrows; suicide and suicide attempts; sniffing aerosols and glue; promiscuity and other risk taking behaviour. Again it is difficult to understand why women self harm, but it could be seen as a way of women trying to control their pain by making it visible. Self-harming can also become habitual because if it relieves the pain, then women are more likely to continue self harming.

The relationship between sexual violence and mental health can also be easily obscured. Mental health issues may or may not be present but when they are, there can be a tendency to depend on drug therapy to "control" the mental health issues. An over reliance on medication can prolong the process of healing and make women believe they are incapable of dealing with their issues surrounding sexual violence.

Women who live and who have lived with long term abuse can come to a point in their life where they distort their concept of them selves, their personality and their reality. At this point psychiatric services can be quick to label women as having personality disorders in need of medication. These labels are disempowering and reinforce the belief that they do not

fit or belong to the "norm". There is no realisation that the behaviours being labelled within psychiatric terms, are behaviours that have been learnt in order to cope with the pain.

Based on this knowledge, Counterpoint decided to produce a booklet developed by survivors of sexual assault illustrating their poems, short stories, and drawings and provide information to educate professionals and people who are most likely to come in contact with survivors of sexual assault.

Target group: Survivors of sexual assault, young women and the wider community including educational, legal, medical and welfare bodies.

Project Aim: The aim of this project was to:

- promote the healing and empowerment of women who were sexually assaulted through creative means, e.g poetry and in doing so, provide young women with opportunities to increase their sense of control in their life.
- To validate the experiences and pain of young women at Counterpoint and Anglicare who have experienced sexual violence.
- To provide information to workers to improve self harm management practices and to encourage the development of comprehensive assessments by considering the broader contexts of sexual assault and violence.
- To provide insight to the effects of sexual assault and raise the voices of young women from a private domain to a public setting.
- To be used as resource for doctors, teachers, social workers and lawyers.
- To promote discussion within teaching institutions about the complex issues surrounding sexual assault.

By trying to increase the knowledge on the impact of sexual assault this project hoped to provide appropriate support and services to survivors of sexual assault, particularly during transition between Counterpoint and mainstream society.

Project Approach: The first stage of the project was participatory, it involved helping young women to identify their experiences of sexual assault, to be reflected in poems, short stories and drawings.

The second stage of the project adopted a community education model that aimed to detail information about sexual assault in the booklet to be distributed to schools, hospitals, sexual assault services, educational providers and local government services. Central to this component was educating lecturers in the Human Service arena of the impact of sexual assault by sending 2 copies free of charge to all Victorian Colleges. The project also adopted a feminist rights based approach which ensured the rights of young women were voiced and upheld.

Project outcomes as defined by organisers upon completion of project: No formal evaluative report of outcomes was located in file.

Interview with Vanessa Helge:

Vanessa Helge was one of the original key project workers.

According to Vanessa, the project 'Portraits of Chaos' had a significant impact on the young women involved, which she estimated were approximately 25. The project provided an empowering experience enabling young women to find and explore avenues of change. Vanessa explained workers recognised changes in some young women's behaviour. Prior to the project the young women were generally withdrawn and could not translate their feelings into words, but due to their involvement in the project, were able to express their pain, their grief and their loss through creative means. They were able to do this by engaging and helping each other with their work and share their work with workers. The changes in the young women's behaviour Vanessa explained reflected the sentiments of empowerment, self determination and public expression.

The project helped young women see the possibilities for change by being made aware of available resources and services that could provide long term support in a trusted and safe environment. The open options given to women to express themselves eg, alone, one to one or in a shared setting, actually provided women with a means to find what kind of support best suits them. The project gave hope to the young women involved that they could access support beyond Conterpoint and Anglicare and make a difference to their own life. Vanessa highlighted there were some women who began to write up plans for their future, whilst these may not have been indicating drastic changes, these plans were significant to opening up pathways for a better future.

At the launch of the booklet 'Portraits of Chaos', the young women Vanessa explained, experienced a real sense of achievement, pride and belonging. The group aspect of the project Vanessa discussed, was significant to the young women because it helped them realise their experiences of sexual assault and violence were not isolated but shared. The project clearly validated the experiences, voices and vision of the young women involved. As a result of the project, the validation of the young women's experiences were further reinforced by an art exhibition at Rhumberellas cafe in Fitzroy.

The project not only targeted personal change but also aimed to broaden the understanding of sexual violence by successfully balancing the personal with the political in the booklet. The booklet contained factual information, which helped service providers, teaching institutions, youth workers, social workers and General Practitioners to understand the kind of behaviours that can be linked to sexual violence. The feedback Vanessa described was fantastic and positive, the booklet was received well and described as compelling and powerful. Approximately 500 copies of the booklet were distributed.

In terms of attempting to make shifts to broader assessments, Vanessa has recognised these shifts are slowly being made and the project Vanessa indicated reflected part of these changes. Personally as a social worker, after reading the material in 'Portraits of Chaos', I feel have been equipped with the necessary knowledge of sexual violence and its impact on women to ensure I develop comprehensive and insightful assessments. The project opened up opportunities for workers to use creative intervention strategies to express issues around sexual violence.

The project further made a difference to the workers involved in the project. Vanessa described the project as being a kind of staff development exercise that achieved to reaffirm

the enthusiasm and commitment of the workers to their job. Vanessa further discussed that the project consolidated issues for workers and helped them feel more passionate about improving services for young women. Vanessa explained the consequences the project had on the workers was unintended but well embraced.

Even though the booklet was published 6 years ago, since then another booklet has been produced as well as a CD and a band formed. Vanessa further explained 'Portraits of Chaos' is still recognised as a valuable document. The booklet is still used by workers and clients at Anglicare.

3. **Title: Women who kill in self defence - Heather Osland Release Group - Community action and education project.**

Organisation: The Brimbank Community Centre.

Year: 1998.

Grant: \$4,850

Key personnel: Chris Momot, Deb Davidson, Debbie Kirkwood, Chrissie Warren, Pauline Spencer, Sharlene Carson. A number of people from different sectors of the community contributed to the project in different ways, including high level ex politicians such as Joan Kirner to a group of social work students.

Project: A community action and education project about women who kill in self defence.

Definition of issue: This project was inspired by the Heather Osland Release Group, which supports the release of Heather Osland who was sentenced to jail for fourteen and a half years, for killing her violent husband in self defence upon the threat of death. Heather Osland experienced severe physical, sexual and psychological abuse for 13 years. Both Heather and her son David killed Frank and upon retrial, David was acquitted and Heather remained in jail. Due to the gross injustice that prevailed, a campaign to release Heather was formed in 1996.

The campaign has two dimensions, one component is called 'Women Who Kill in Self Defence Campaign', which critically addresses the legal definition of self defence and provocation. The aim of this campaign is to reform laws regarding murder and manslaughter. The campaign further uses a community education model to highlight the inadequacies of the Criminal Justice System providing support and assistance to survivors of domestic violence.

The second dimension is called 'Release Heather Osland Campaign', which directly focuses on Heather's case and is committed to fundraising efforts to support Heather upon her release from prison.

Due to the justice system neglecting to recognise the reality of domestic violence, the law consequently fails to consider the relationship between women who kill in self defence and women who have had to endure a long history of violence. The Criminal Justice System fails to support women who are subjected to ongoing violence and abuse and then punishes women for trying to save their own lives. Based on this premise, the Brimbank Community Centre sought funds from the VWT to develop a community education project, to campaign changes to the Criminal Justice System relating to domestic violence and women who kill n self defence.

Target Group: Survivors of domestic violence.

Project aim: The aim of this project was to address the issues and systemic barriers supporting the cycle of domestic violence, and in doing so, make these structures accountable to the needs of women and children.

The project intended to develop a community education resource supporters kit about women who kill in self defence. The project aimed to do this by using Heather Osland's case as point

of reference to illustrate the broader context of domestic violence. The kit was developed to be used by the general community, including teaching institutions and academic courses for e.g. women's studies, legal studies and law courses. The project further aimed to develop a professional education package for professionals and provide training for advocates who worked with women who have killed in self defence.

The Federal Government requested responses to *Fatal Offences Against the Person*, to develop a national criminal code model, the project aimed to use this opportunity to establish a definition of the reality of women's lives experiencing domestic violence to be applied to legal options.

The expected outcome of the project was that Heather Osland be acquitted, otherwise continue to resource the Heather Osland Release Campaign and support Heather.

The project also hoped it would provide a means of influencing policy and practice to improve community and legal responses to women who kill in self defence.

Project Approach: The Brimbank Community Centre adopted a community education approach, which entailed educating the community about the structural dynamics surrounding women who kill in self defence. The proposed education module to be developed hoped to link groups, programs and university course work nationally and internationally.

Project outcomes as defined by organisers upon completion of project: No formal evaluative report of outcomes was located in file.

Interview with Chris Momot and Deb Davidson:

Chris Momot and Deb Davidson were the original key project workers.

Whilst the primary goal of the project to have Heather acquitted did not come into fruition Heather did get transferred to an improved prison. Given the disappointment and shock that Heather was not granted a petition of mercy, Chris and Deb did realise their efforts and many others in the project did make a real difference for women in Victoria. This difference was made by raising the community's awareness of the issues surrounding women who kill in self defence and in general domestic violence. By using Heather's case as an example, the project succeeded to clearly highlight the systemic barriers that prevented women who killed in self defence, and women who were subjected to male violence be justly protected.

One of the systemic barriers included the inadequate police response to domestic violence and women who kill in self defence. As a consequence a petition was made to improve police responses. There has been an improvement but Deb and Chris indicated, these improvements could not be attributed to the project alone because there were a number of other groups and campaigns aiming to ameliorate police responses to domestic violence. Nevertheless at the time, the Queensland police did respond to the project by requesting the resource supporters kit to be made available at the 'Women and Policing Conference'.

The favourable response to the supporter's and resource kit about domestic violence and women who kill in self defence indicated the community was receptive and wanted to know about these issues. Approximately 200 kits were sent out, with 20 to 30 thousand signatures signed in a petition to release Heather contained in the kit. Membership to Heather's

campaign grew into the thousands. The supporter's kit was well received by students and academics and was introduced into the course material.

The project viewed domestic violence and women who kill in self defence a political social issue and tried to educate politicians on behalf of women, about relationships and the reality of domestic violence and how it can impact on women and children. One of the strategies the project employed to ensure these issues were embraced politically, was attend deputations to ministers and swinging seats. Whilst the project did achieve to discuss the issues about domestic violence to politicians, Deb and Chris did indicate, it was very difficult to say whether politicians did clearly respond to the project. Nevertheless Chris did highlight one of the key influences of the project was the Victorian Government's decision to review the defences to homicide around family violence, which will impact on changes made to legislation. The project wrote a position, if the law had been different in Victoria, the outcome for Heather would have been likely different. There was a real push to review self defence in context of what is often a prolonged history of abuse and violence.

One of the questions that was frequently asked about Heather's case was, how was it that Heather's doctor did not know about the prolonged and harsh abuse Heather experienced given she had 62 urinary tract infections. The project saw this to be a serious issue in need of being addressed and was able to demonstrate the need to not view domestic violence as an isolated incident, but an issue that can filter throughout women's lives. Heather's case highlighted the need for GP's to be more receptive to women who could likely be coming to see them with "symptoms" of abuse and violence. Recently a kit was developed for GP's to help them identify possible signs where women may be being abused and how to appropriately respond.

One of the positive features of this project Deb explained was it was more responsive than reactive. The project moved along side people's concerns by answering questions as they were being raised. In a conference held by the project, one of the organisers returned to say people were often asking why did Heather not leave or why did she not apply for an Intervention Order? Given the interest in this area, the project then proceeded to do some work around these issues to educate the community about the reality around why women find it hard to leave and apply for Intervention Orders. An invaluable opportunity was given to dispel myths around domestic violence and to fill necessary gaps of knowledge. This was also made evident by Ease in Bendigo, a domestic violence service which used Heather's case in a project they devised *Solutions to the Jigsaw*, to reinforce the view, domestic violence is not a private affair but a social and political issue. Domestic violence does not just hurt women and children in their home, but their health, jobs, schooling, friends and so on.

However, Deb and Chris felt they could not identify the project as a key factor affecting any changes made to policies, service provision practices and legislation because a number of other similar projects and campaigns were also operating to effect social change, for instance in organisations such as CASA, DVIRC and neighbourhood houses. Deb described this whole process as people working together to chip away at the systemic injustices around violence against women.

A real achievement for Chris was the project helped make domestic violence and women who kill in self defence a community issue. Chris felt the project touched the community and made people aware and consider the serious issues around domestic violence. This was made evident by the outstanding response the project received. Chris and Deb were most surprised by the significant response they did receive from the community.

Numerous people rang and wrote letters to express their compassion and support to Heather. Deb and Chris felt the response they got was a reflection that the issue of domestic violence and women who kill in self defence was being seriously recognised. Chris and Deb felt by using Heather's case, information about domestic violence could be made more realistic. Rather than focusing on domestic violence as an abstract concept or label, the project achieved to educate the community about domestic violence by telling real stories especially by describing in detail what happened to Heather and her children.

As result of the project, real differences were being made to women for example women were ringing feeling they could name their own experiences of violence. Charlene who was one of the women who worked on the project felt her involvement helped her healing process because she was also a victim of domestic violence. Chris and Deb explained, Charlene's contribution to the project and campaign helped her to leave her "victim status" and play an active role seeking social change. For Heather personally, Chris indicated the campaign helped Heather feel more positive and hopeful because a great number of people believed in her. Today Heather is still receiving up to 50 letters each week. Moreover, Cheryl who killed in self defence but did not want to publicly make aware her situation, followed Heather's case and once realising the injustice that prevailed decided to go public and talk on television shows about domestic violence. Deb and Chris described Cheryl's experience as being very powerful.

The women who participated in the project and campaign also greatly benefited by their increased knowledge of domestic violence and awareness of the legal issues around women who kill in self defence. The women also gained new skills and confidence to speak out against domestic violence, gained new relationships and encountered interactions that they would never have. The project helped women who experienced male violence, to view their experiences differently and become more politically and socially active.

Differences were not only being made to women but men too. The project was conscious that to make a real impact on the community, the project also needed to target men. This was made evident by a man who sent a personal cheque with a considerable amount of money to be used to support the project and the Heather Osland Release Campaign.

In terms of the role of the project and Heather's campaign today, Heather is still supported till her release. Considerations are being made to write a submission to the United Nations about Heather's case. The campaign is also waiting to hear the results of a Freedom of Information hearing case.

Whilst this project did not have a clear beginning or ending as described by Deb, the project clearly helped the community to understand domestic / family violence as a community issue. Heather's case according to Chris illustrates how a "state failed a family "and how a "community failed a family". For significant changes to be made to domestic violence and women who kill in self defence, the community and the state need to be made aware how their own actions and views can lead to unjust outcomes for women.

4. Title: When Love Hurts.

Organisation: Domestic Violence Incest resource Centre (DVIRC).

Year: 1998

Grant: \$9,985

Key personnel: Mandy McKenzie (DVIRC) and Berry St Victoria.

Project: Publish a 24 page coloured booklet titled "Relationships" based on the website, "When Love Hurts".

Definition of issue: Little attention has been given to young women who are subjected to abuse and violence in their relationships. This has been recognised by the DVIRC as a gray area because domestic violence is often explored within the context of women in marital and de facto relationships. However according to the ABS study the *Women's Safety Survey* in 1996, women aged 18 – 24 are most at risk of experiencing violence. Despite these statistics, limited support is available to young women. Most resources are directed to women who are living with their partners, for this reason, the DVIRC decided to produce a website to fill this void. The needs and issues are likely to be different for young women aged between 18 and 24 years.

Given that the "When Love Hurts" website is not accessible to all young women, the DVIRC decided to produce booklet to ensure the information contained can be made available to all young women.

Target Group: Primary Target Group - Young women aged 14 – 25 years.

Secondary Target Group - Young men; people over 25 years old; parents, families and friends of young people who are victims of violence; perpetrators.

Project aim: The essential aim of the booklet was to increase young women's access to the information contained in the website "When Love Hurts". This project was part of an early intervention strategy to provide information to young women to help them identify abuse in relationships by defining abuse; recognising warning signs; developing a 'respect checklist'; exploring feelings, ideas and stories from girls who have experienced abuse; identifying the importance of making safety plans; providing information about the law and services in Victoria. The booklet aimed to empower young women to think for themselves by giving practical advice, instead of just providing a list of support services.

The purpose of the book was to promote abuse free relationships and increase the awareness of young women of their rights in relationships and how to recognise and respond to abuse. The book was intended to be used as a self help tool for young women and help them understand the difference between respect in a relationship and abuse by using teenage friendly language.

The aim of the booklet was also to raise public awareness of abuse subjected to young women. The booklet hoped to improve the way in which the community and schools responded to domestic violence by specifically assisting parents, family members, friends of young women, teachers and workers how to support young women who are abused.

The project further intended to increase awareness amongst young men, the importance of abuse free relationships.

Project approach: The content of “When Love Hurts” was founded on a research project containing a literature review and analysis of 600 stories submitted by young women. The project was driven by the consultation with young women, community members and schools. Focus groups were established to promote discussion about issues surrounding violence against young women.

Teachers, counsellors and the Department of Education were consulted in the development of the booklet. When the booklet was produced, it was distributed to schools, tertiary education institutions and community and youth services. Given the aim of the booklet was to promote community awareness, the project targeted the media such as Girlfriend and Dolly magazines, parents magazines and radio stations e.g. Triple J.

Project outcomes as defined by organisers upon completion of project:

- At the time of the completion of the project, 10,000 copies of the booklet was distributed to secondary schools in Victoria.
- Over 200 social workers, nurses, teachers and other professionals indicated as a result of the booklet, it helped them know how to support victims of violence.
- Feedback has further illustrated the booklet has been effective educating young people about violence and respect in relationships.
- The project achieved to prevent some young people from entering relationships where violence was perpetrated for e.g. a 16 year old said *"even if you don't have problems, the booklet helps you realise what an abusive relationship is (not just physical)"*.
- The project also achieved to reduce the continuation of violence by assisting victims to identify violence in their relationships and to take practical steps to protect themselves. Comments such as the following reflect this outcome *"Thanks for helping me realise how to take charge and get out of a hurtful relationshup"* (18year old).
- 100% of young people who read the booklet found the content to be beneficial.
- The project was innovative because it was the first of its kind to address violence against young people.

Interview with Mandy McKenzie:

Mandy McKenzie was on of the original key project workers.

Even though there has been no direct feedback from young women regarding the booklet, the popularity of the booklet expressed by teachers, workers and the government indicates the project can and has made a difference to women. The fact that there has been an increasing demand for the booklet today, is a clear indication it still is having an impact on young people.

The level of interest in the booklet particularly impressed Mandy. At a local level, Mandy went to her local swimming pool and found the booklet "Relationships" pinned on their notice board,

upon inquiry, Mandy discovered that there was a strong interest in the booklet amongst young people. Mandy was surprised that the booklet could be accessed by young people in what appeared to her at a non-educational facility.

Mandy was also surprised by interstate, federal and international responses to the project. Governments and workers from QLD and NSW were impressed by the content of the project and have requested to utilise the same format to be distributed to young people in these states. At an international level, a group of prostitutes in New York have asked for permission to reproduce the contents of the website into a booklet. Likewise in Japan, a woman requested that she produce a similar booklet for Japanese audiences.

One of the most important outcomes of the project was that young people themselves were requesting to access the booklet, which indicated that the project achieved to engage young people. Mandy suspects this was attributed to the fact that the booklet appealed to young people because the content was not just about abuse but also about what it means to be in a healthy relationship.

The booklets achieved to empower young women by validating their experiences and voices and concomitantly provide young women with tools to make their own choices. An important real outcome of the project was that it helped young women to know what abuse is in relationships and know what to do and where to go for support. Feedback has illustrated that the interactive style of the booklet has been useful for young people to actively question the meaning of respect and abuse in relationships.

Not only did the booklet target young women, but also targeted young men. The intention of the booklet to contain gender neutral language achieved to engage young men so that they felt they were not being talked *to*. Expressions of interest have surfaced amongst young men. The fact that the booklet was teenage friendly and worked to marry the interests of young people and the resources and knowledge of the DVIRC, achieved to engage young people.

However, there was a fine line to be treaded because one of the problems faced by the project was knowing what young people wanted, but also accommodating to the opinions of parents, teachers and principals around the issue of sex. These problems were somewhat overcome by the careful use of language that insured there was no assumption that all young people engaged in sexual relationships. However this did not mean all schools welcomed the booklet due to cultural and religious reasons. The project demonstrated the difficulty of producing a booklet about relationships and abuse that is culturally relevant and can be accessed by all young people.

Despite the ambivalence expressed by parents, teachers and principals regarding the content of the booklet around sex and relationships, the information contained in the booklet was recognised as being worthwhile.

What this project achieved to also do was deconstruct the stereotyped image of who is a victim of violence. The project shifted the focus from a 30+-year-old woman, with 2 children, married experiencing violence and needing to go to a refuge, to a wider image of young women experiencing violence and abuse in non marital and non de facto relationships. The project began to change people's view of who experiences violence. For instance, domestic violent services have included in their focus, young people and feel that as a result of the project, they are better equipped to understand the dynamics of abuse perpetrated against young women and have the tools to empower young women e.g. develop protection plans. In addition, the Federal

Government is in the process of assessing the feasibility of endorsing a Respect campaign targeted at young people.

Given that the project enabled to influence the need to focus on young people, the project had an opportunity to also have an impact on how the community views young people. The content of the booklet demonstrated young women can take steps to protect themselves e.g. by creating their own safety plans.

What surprised Mandy was that the booklet was given to not only young women but to older women. Workers informed Mandy they readily give women of all ages the booklet.

The funding granted by the Victorian Women's Trust made the project possible and lead to positive outcomes for women in Victoria and also nation wide. The project made a difference to young women, young men, service providers and federal decision makers. At different levels the booklet achieved to raise the awareness of violence experienced by young women and change the way domestic violence is viewed and responded.

5. **Title: Shredded (Formerly Anna Lost Anna Found)**

Organisation: Annie North Women's Refuge and Domestic Violence Service

Year: 2001.

Grant: \$19,500

Key personnel: Julie Oberin (Project manager); Diane Dempsey (project coordinator); Akosita Tamansau; Kathy Mendis.

Project: An educative video highlighting the impact of emotional abuse on survivors of domestic violence.

Definition of issue: Emotional abuse was chosen to be a topic in need of exploring due to the lack of attention given to this area. Much of the information around domestic violence has focused on physical forms of violence despite there being growing evidence that emotional abuse can be equally devastating. The psychological impact of domestic violence can be likened to the psychological devastation of living in a war zone.

Men, who perpetrate emotional abuse take away the power of women and replace it with their own power and control. Emotional abuse can essentially destroy a woman's self esteem and self worth, making her feel worthless. Examples of emotional abuse can include perpetrators:

- making a woman think she is going crazy
- humiliating her
- making her feel guilty
- making her feel bad about herself
- name calling
- playing mind games
- intimidating and threatening her;
- isolating her;
- using children to further abuse her
- using make privilege to control her.

To understand the dynamics of domestic violence, non-physical forms of violence such as emotional abuse need to be acknowledged. For this reason the Annie North Women's Refuge decided to produce an educative video to demonstrate the psychological impact of emotional abuse.

Target group: The project aimed to benefit survivors of domestic violence, but also to benefit human service workers likely to come in contact with women who have experienced domestic

violence. Thirdly the project hoped to reach the wider community and raise awareness of emotional abuse.

Project Aim: The essential aim of this project was to develop a preventative and educative strategy to domestic violence. The Annie North Women's Refuge and Domestic Violence Service produced a drama, clarifying and exposing hidden issues surrounding emotional abuse in domestic violence and send strong messages to the community the importance of acknowledging emotional abuse.

The project intended to be used as a learning tool and be distributed to welfare agencies, teaching institutions and community legal centres. By raising awareness of emotional abuse, the video also hoped to influence policy development, further funding and improved service provision in this area.

The video aimed to act as a resource for women to help women recognise patterns of emotional abuse and help them to avoid being emotionally abused. The project also intended to improve family and friends responses to women who may likely seek their support.

The project also hoped to empower the women contributing to the video by building their skills, confidence and self-esteem.

Project approach: This project developed a preventative and educative strategy to domestic violence through a media broadcast video, dramatising acts of emotionally abusive situations. The project adopted a participatory approach by involving women from the Refuge and workers and using local talents from script writing to acting, filming, producing and musical direction.

The content of the video was written by a local freelance writer, Diane Dempsey, who worked with survivors of domestic violence during workshops. Women were trained in film and editing by the Salvation Army media unit. Professional actors were used. The video was a 20 minute drama about women seeking help through friends, family and welfare agencies who had been emotionally abused.

Project outcomes as defined by organisers upon completion of project: As outlined by Annie North Women's Refuge and Domestic Violence Service, the aim to produce a 20 minute drama exploring issues around emotional abuse was achieved. The video is about 25 minutes long.

Aims 1.

To produce a quality broadcast video to be distributed to welfare agencies, educational institutions and community legal centres. The documentary style video would focus on emotional abuse and show case a story about women seeking help from family, friends and welfare agencies.

Outcome:

The project achieved to produce a good broadcast quality short film about emotional abuse. The project consulted with relevant educational institutions such as secondary schools, TAFE 's and universities, to assess whether the video was going to be relevant to their curricula. The project also consulted with welfare agencies and workers of which both responses were positive.

The video clearly focused on emotional abuse and highlighted the fine line between what constitutes as a "normal couple conflict" and a relationship where a man may use his power and control to emotionally abuse women and children.

Aim 2.

To involve clients and workers in the making of the video and be trained by professionals in script writing, drama, acting, film, editing, art design, song writing and sound track recording.

Outcome:

These objectives had to be slightly modified on the basis that the video required a professional camera person, editor and sound engineer to ensure the quality of the video was maintained. The project also gained funding from the City of Greater Bendigo to engage local actors and local musicians. There was no need for women to be trained in songwriting and track recording. The script remained on task.

Aim 3.

To expose and clarify the relationship between emotional abuse and domestic violence.

Outcome:

The video achieved to elicit common facts and messages about emotional abuse. For example, women can often justify men's abusive behaviour - "He's under stress" or "He had a bad childhood". Women can often blame themselves for the male perpetrators violent behaviour by saying they are too overweight or they need to keep the house cleaner, or need to keep the kids quieter and be out of his way while he is tired. Women can also try to change their behaviour to make the behaviour of men look better. Women can often tell a family member or friend of the abuse but if they receive a negative response, then they are unlikely to seek help until a crisis arises. Women also often don't leave the relationship or seek help until they can recognise the effects the abuse is having on their children.

The video also showed men who perpetrate domestic violence can be ordinary men who do not abuse women all the time. The video also highlighted that women often do not want to leave their partner they just want their behaviour to change.

The video succeeded to illustrate the cycle of violence, where the abuse escalates then is followed by a "honeymoon" phase where the perpetrator apologises and then is followed by another incident of abuse. The video portrayed emotional abuse as being just as dangerous as physical abuse. The video also showed that even upon separation, abuse can continue, with the perpetrator finding opportunities to exert his power and control in other ways, particularly through children during access. The ramifications of separation are also revealed where a woman can leave and feel shame, fear, loneliness and have socioeconomic, legal and housing issues. Post separation, up to 18 months can be an unsafe time for a woman and her children.

The video showed that women do not go to refuge's only if they have been physically abused but women also go to seek safety from extreme fear as a result of emotional abuse.

Women who worked on the project informed the organisers they felt their experiences of emotional abuse were validated. The local community was made aware of the issue of emotional

abuse and this was made evident by word of mouth, community sector meetings and the local media.

Aim 4.

The potential to distribute the video to national and international film festivals, and the possibility of distributing the video to television channels such as the SBS and the ABC.

Outcome:

The film was shortlisted in the *Independent Spirit Awards*. Unfortunately, due to time, the final copy of the film could not be submitted. The film will still be submitted in other film award categories.

Aim 5.

Portray principles of empowerment within the film - gaining skills, confidence and self esteem through the production and process of film making.

Outcome:

Achieving empowerment in the film did prove to be challenging because empowerment is not about being rescued and happy endings. Whilst the video did show Anna coming to realise she was being abused and leaves, the film made sure to remind viewers that ongoing issues do still persist post separation. e.g housing, income, finances, sole parenting, separation, contact and residency.

For the women involved in the project empowerment also proved to be challenging. Nevertheless, comments were made by women that they felt proud because they achieved to be part of the process of making the film; their knowledge and skills in film making increased and women made friendships.

Aim 6.

Develop a training package for workers to improve their responses to women who have been emotionally abused.

Outcome:

This has been difficult to measure but from verbal responses by workers from the night of the launch of the film, workers expressed they knew a lot more about emotional abuse than they realised. Workers also informed project organisers the film provided a good opportunity to remind them of the importance of recognising emotional abuse.

In general the film premier at the Star Cinema in Eaglehawk was successful with approximately 150 people attending the premier from the local Bendigo community. The response to the film was positive, people were requesting the film be shown again so those who did not get an opportunity to see the film do so. The Victorian Women's Refuges and Association Domestic Violence Services, the peak body for domestic violent services in Victoria, expressed interest and offered to co host a Melbourne premier. The Australian Federation of Homelessness Services, the

peak body of homelessness also expressed interest in the film. the project also opened up the Gippsland Domestic Violence conference.

The Annie North Women's Refuge and Domestic Violence Services was extremely happy and proud of the final product of the project, a good quality film. Positive responses indicated that the film helped people to think about emotional abuse.

However due to time and limited resources, the final master copy of the film was delayed. The workshops with women took longer than anticipated. What proved to be challenging was making sure women whom told their stories of abuse were included in the film and if they weren't some women felt disappointed.

Project organisers were thankful for the support received from the Donor and the Victorian Women's Trust. As a result of the support from the Women's Trust, this project was able to achieve it's aims to empower women and raise awareness of emotional abuse.

Interview with Julie Oberin:

Julie Oberin was one of the original key project workers.

Julie expressed the process of making the short film about emotional abuse had a powerful impact on the women and participants involved and on the community. For the women involved who were survivors of emotional abuse, the project had a significant impact because the process of making the short film clearly validated the voices, experiences and feelings of the women. The workshop between Diane and the women was particularly powerful because they provided a moving forum for women to tell their stories. This was a difficult process because the workshops involved a lot of telling, grieving and healing. In one particular incident between a woman and her teenage daughter, the teenage daughter disclosed information the mother was not aware of and Julie felt this to be interesting because it appeared to her that the teenage young woman obviously felt safe enough to openly discuss a private issue.

The workshops between the women and the actors was further poignant because the women had a chance to really express to the actors the feelings of humiliation, degradation and devastation they experienced. Julie indicated this forum helped the actors to capture the real lived experiences of women who have been emotionally abused. These workshops provided a safe and trusted environment for women to explore their experiences and emotions and not feel alone. Julie described this process as an empowering experience.

At the launch of the short film, Julie explained the women were feeling terribly anxious and feared their experiences would not be believed or be minimised because the abuse did not appear tangible. On the contrary, the short film received standing ovation, which Julie said made the women feel very proud. One woman Julie said proudly pointed out "I made a film" and went onto being involved in a special project teaching her peer facilitation and leadership skills. The project clearly moved women's lives and built their confidence and skills. The women who met weekly continued to do so after the completion of the short film.

The project also had an impact on workers and their practices. At the Melbourne launch of the short film, which was well received domestic violence workers came up to Julie thanking her for validating their hard work. Workers also expressed to Julie they plan to use the video for their clients and for training purposes. The training package that was developed in conjunction with the video, approximately 30 have been sent to domestic violence services across Australia. Julie

expressed she has had no formal feedback as yet because the packages had only been sent in April 2003. Workers have expressed to Julie informally, the training packages have been an effective tool to prompt discussion around emotional abuse.

In addition, at the Gippsland Domestic Violence conference, Julie indicated men's groups were very impressed by the video, especially by the portrayal of the male perpetrator. Similarly, at the Bendigo launch, two male social workers went up to Julie to say they were amazed to view the portrayal of the perpetrator's power. The men's group in Gippsland informed Julie they plan to use the video in their male behaviour change programs because they felt men still have a view abuse is only abuse if it is physical.

Julie has been most surprised at the power of the project to incite debate and critical reflection amongst viewers. Julie explained the power of the project to reflect the real lived lives of women who are emotionally abused achieved to prompt discussion around sensitive issues e.g. the shame of being pushed out of bed. Julie also highlighted, the project has enabled to raise awareness of what emotional abuse can do to women including post separation, to children and to young people. The intention of the project was not to just produce a drama but to be used as a community development tool to raise awareness of emotional abuse amongst workers, the general community and most importantly to young students. Julie explained a contract with Video Education has been sealed to distribute the video to schools and TAFEs across Australia and New Zealand.

Julie discussed politicians have also been moved by the video. Jacinta Allan who is a member of Bendigo and the Victorian Minister for Sport, Education and Training launched the short film in Bendigo and was supportive of the project. At the Gippsland Domestic Violence conference, Mary Gillett the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Affairs was very impressed by the video and expressed to Julie she planned to make sure Mary Delahunty the Minister for Women's Affairs viewed the video. After Mary had watched the short film also indicated she would like other politicians to view the video.

Measuring real changes Julie explained is difficult because the project is only now "coming into its own". Julie has highlighted people's responses to the video at conferences and launches have been very positive, but significant changes made to educational curriculums, policies and specific work practices are yet to be gauged. But there are signs changes are being made given that politicians have been impressed by the video and workers are planning to use it for their clients both women and men.

Julie expressed when the submission to the project was accepted, the organisers were thrilled because they felt the Victorian Women's Trust validated what they thought was always important. The role of the Women's Trust meant that the project could be achieved, which organisers were grateful for the respect they received from the Women's Trust, particularly around timelines. Julie explained crisis services often get caught up in dealing with crisis's only and this project gave an opportunity to step outside this role and "do some qualitative work around emotional abuse" by putting it on the public agenda and public eye.

6. Title: The Right to Party Safely.

Organisation: Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA)

Year: 2000 - Stage 1: 2001 - Stage 2.

Grant: Stage 1 \$9,500. Stage 2 \$9,500

Key personnel: Rachael Green, Juliet Watson, Marg D'Arcy,

Project: To develop a code of practice and community education campaign to decrease the incidences of sexual assault in nightclubs and hotels.

Definition of issue: There has been an increase in incidences of sexual assault and spiking of drinks in licensed premises, which are left unreported suggesting young women are not well informed of their rights. Assumptions that verbal and physical intimidation, harassment and abuse are part of the culture of nightclubs and hotels mean that women are reluctant to speak out.

The fear of reporting could be further attributed to the fear of being judged and blamed for e.g. talking to strangers, flirting, leaving a drink unattended, the shame and guilt. Blaming women simply diverts attention away from perpetrators taking responsibility of their behaviour and the accountability of licensed premises. Furthermore, young women are less likely to report their experiences of sexual assault if there was no physical injury and or if the perpetrator was known.

The main tenet of this project is founded on the belief that women have a right to participate fully and safely in public life. Yet due to the fear of sexual violence, women's access to public sites is limited. Given that limited attention has been given to sexual violence in nightclubs and hotels, this project aimed to readdress this balance.

Target Group: Young women under 30 years of age.

Project aim: The main aim of this project was to establish a focus on safety issues of young women in licensed premises and make the issue of sexual violence occurring in licensed premises a community responsibility. The Right to Party Safely had two components, one was to carry out a research project into the incidences of sexual assault and sexual violence in licensed premises. Secondly develop a community education campaign targeted at young women and men. The project also hoped to improve management practices by establishing a code of practice in licensed premises through the *Safer Cities and Shires Program*.

Based on the research completed, the project hoped to make recommendations to reform the legal system to make licensed premises accountable to sexual violent incidence occurring in hotels and nightclubs. Part of the legal recommendation also included to reform laws regarding crowd control.

The second stage of The Right to Party Safely was to continue to implement strategies outlined in stage 1, that is develop a community education campaign by advertising stickers, posters and pamphlets in licensed premises targeted at both young women and men. The campaign aimed to encourage young women to exercise their rights and increase young men's awareness of the inappropriateness and seriousness of sexual violence. Young men were

reminded sexual assault and spiking of drinks are criminal offences. The community education campaign also targeted staff in licensed premises to be more receptive of sexual violent incidences occurring in hotels and nightclubs. Information was also intended to be distributed to schools and young women services about the right to party safely

The Right to Party Safely hoped to achieve to work at both the local and structural levels to address the systemic barriers preventing women from speaking out and gaining support. The project also hoped to increase the awareness of women's rights and the issue of sexual violence in licensed premises.

On a long term basis the project hoped to establish a foundation that will sustain a commitment to developing safer venues for women.

Project approach: CASA adopted a feminist social action research approach, which aimed to use the information the project to raise awareness of sexual violence in licensed premises. Given that the research was action oriented also meant that the information collected was intended to be used to reform structural and systemic barriers that prevented women from speaking out.

The project also had a participatory element, which relied on developing reference and focus groups to help establish objectives and aims. These groups comprised of young women, the Victorian Police, the City of Melbourne, the VCCAV, Nightclub owners Association, senior schools, and local governments.

Project outcomes as defined by organisers upon completion of project: No formal evaluation report was located in file.

Interview with Juliet Watson:

Juliet Watson was one of the original key project workers.

The primary aim of the project 'The Right to Party Safely' was to raise awareness about sexual violence in licensed premises, however the research component kept running into the theme of drink spiking, which is defined by CASA as *drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault*. This issue received considerable media attention and as a consequence, the project directed its main efforts to drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault. Juliet expressed some disappointment over this because she felt the issue of "drink spiking" somehow hijacked the whole purpose of the project to publicly raise awareness around sexual violence in licensed premises. Juliet defined the focus on drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault as an unintended outcome. Despite the feeling the project was driven by outside forces, the issue of "drink spiking" understood by the project organisers was serious. A decision was made to take this opportunity to go ahead with the issue of "drink spiking" and express it in a meaningful way.

The comprehensive research efforts of the project gave credibility to CASA as being recognised as experts in the field of drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault. This was made evident by the outstanding response from the media seeking information from CASA about "drink spiking". Both *Today Tonight* and *A Current Affair* have interviewed Juliet regarding the issues surrounding drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault. In terms of media response, The Right to Party Safely has been the most successful project.

The considerable attention the project received from the media attracted attention from similar organisations as CASA from interstate. These organisations expressed clear interest in the

research project because the project was at the time viewed as cutting edge, no research into sexual violence in licensed premises had been done before. Consequently subsequent organisations also attempted to research sexual violence in licensed venues in their own state. A number of sexual assault services and women services from interstate requested the research and have pursued similar community education campaigns. In 2002 in Sydney CASA attended a conference, which the Western Australian police attended to specifically view CASA's presentation, which reflects the credibility of the project and the power of the project to influence key people in the community across Australia.

Given the credibility CASA gained through the research component of the project, Juliet explained this provided a valuable opportunity to develop a community education campaign, which was pursued in the second stage of the project. CASA achieved to work with the police to broaden their strategies when responding to women who had been victims of "drink spiking". As a consequence Juliet felt the project influenced the police to take drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault more seriously. In the Crisis Care Unit, Juliet explained the police were more likely to believe women who said their drink may have been tampered. Moreover, the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine, Juliet highlighted was also significantly influenced by the project. In 2002, the institute developed a testing kit for substances to be used as a standard procedure if a woman suspected her drink was tampered.

However, Juliet explained, even though significant inroads have been made to the way police and doctors respond to women whose drinks may have been tampered, further challenges are ahead. Juliet is worried that the focus on "drink spiking" may send messages that sexual assault and violence is only serious if someone puts something dangerous in a woman's drink. The message that really needs to be sent is, it does not matter whether drinks have been tampered or not, sexual violence is sexual violence and it is a crime.

The community education campaign piloted 10 licensed venues in Melbourne advertising stickers and posters that sent messages to both young men and women of the serious issue of sexual violence in bars and hotels. According to the evaluation of the project, 2 venues positively responded. Bar staff felt the project significantly raised their awareness of drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault. Bar staff indicated they took the issue more seriously and would inquire with patrons if they were buying two or more drinks, whom they were buying the drinks for.

One of the aims of the project was to develop training packages for bar staff but due to the difficulty of engaging with the culture of licensed venues, this objective could not be developed. Another recommendation the project was going to pursue was establish codes of practice that ensured women's safety in licensed venues. However project organisers realised the Melbourne City Council Licensees Accord in effect already covered the main issues the project would have liked to have included, therefore the decision was made not to go ahead but to continue the community education campaign.

More importantly, one of the real differences the project made was increase young women's awareness of the issue of sexual violence in licensed venues. At the time of the project, CASA received increased calls from young women regarding their experiences of sexual violence in bars and hotels, particularly around the issue of drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault. For most of these women, it was the first time they had contacted CASA to express their concerns and seek support, which demonstrated their increased knowledge of their rights and awareness of available support services. The increased calls also meant the project contributed to breaking down barriers that were preventing women from accessing support.

One of the key achievements of the project, Juliet expressed was the development of preventative programs in schools on the issue of sexual violence. The program grew out of the project and has been requested by many schools and is still operating. In terms of the role of the project today, CASA is still recognised as an "expert" in the field of sexual violence in licensed venues, this is evident by the media still contacting CASA to get access to information around this issue. Conferences interstate are being held as already mentioned. There are still some requests to purchase CASA's stickers and posters and research. Hence even though the project no longer has a permeating role in the community, there is still evidence that the project is still influencing the community as highlighted.

The role of the Victorian Women's Trust was crucial to the development of The Right to Party Safely. Juliet explained the funds provided the resources to do the project, which achieved to at least increase the awareness of drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault in the community; break down barriers for women to speak out and seek support and change some of the practices of police and doctors.

CONCLUSION

The kind of conclusions that can be drawn from the six projects reviewed is that community education and community awareness of violence against women is a key factor effecting social change. Building knowledge and understanding of violence against women puts the system in a better position to respond accordingly and puts survivors in a better position to seek support. As a result of the projects, which have been reviewed, concrete changes have been made to police and medical responses to violence against women; submissions to review relevant legislation have been made; work practices have been enhanced by training packages and increased knowledge; media responses have become more sensitive to the issue of violence against women; committees have been formed and preventative programs have been developed in schools.

Conceptual changes have also been made in the way of expanding the general community's awareness of violence against women. The power and provocative nature of some projects lead to serious dialogue between politicians, judges, service providers, policy makers and bureaucrats. What surprised most project organisers was the conversation occurring in people's communities, in neighbourhood houses, in people's households, which organisers felt reflected the achievement of their projects to stimulate debate and thought. What the projects succeeded to do was reveal the inadequate systemic responses to violence against women and in doing so lead many people, from different sectors of the community to critically reflect the violent injustices of women.

For many women personally, life altering changes were made, making a significant difference to their lives. Again, what surprised most project organisers was the response they received from women being able to express for the first time publicly, their fears, their stories and the need to seek support, which proved to be very empowering for many women. For survivors, the experience of personally being involved in projects was especially powerful. One of the themes that emerged from the projects was the amazing journey some women experienced traveling from a passive victim place to one that enabled them to be socially and politically active. Often survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence are seen and understood as being powerless trapped victims, but when provided a forum to express themselves, their true power is revealed and most projects did just so.

The projects reviewed also highlighted the importance of developing preventative measures to stop violence against women. Most projects reported, given the crisis nature of domestic violence and sexual violence, not enough time or attention is given to preventative work. But with the support of the Victorian Women's Trust, project organisers felt they were given an invaluable opportunity to meaningfully and sensitively develop preventative projects, and see their outcomes. Some projects did indicate their real achievements came from being able to target young people in schools and other educational institutions and develop preventative programs.

Interestingly enough, given that most projects used community education and community awareness strategies, information regarding domestic violence for instance has been made readily available at women's services, welfare services and community legal centres. However, the access to information in these places appears to contradict common knowledge that women, who are subject to male violence, are most likely not going to be in contact with these services. For many survivors, who they can see, where they can go, whom they can call is controlled by their partner. Hence only the women seeking support will gain access to important information regarding domestic violence so again, what happens to all those survivors who cannot access support or know where to go? If information is aimed to be made available to all survivors and victims, then it should be made accessible in places where women are likely allowed to go to.

Nevertheless, another common theme that has emerged from the review of the six projects is that while fundamental differences were made to the personal lives of women and to systemic responses, organisers explained their project could not be entirely credited to these significant impacts. Changes were being made as a result of many women working to achieve the same cause. In other words, the more women working to make violence against women a political and community issue, the more chances people, especially men and key decision makers have to listen and take seriously the injustice of violence against women and respond accordingly.

What has surprised me most personally is that after 30 years, campaigns are still fighting to put violence against women on the public and political agenda. Organisations and projects are still trying to shift violence against women from behind closed doors into the public eye. As complex as the answer may be I feel compelled to ask, why is the general community including politicians, police, judges, the media and bureaucrats so resistant and or scared to embrace the injustice of violence against women? What is the missing piece that will make a culture value the safety, worth and respect of women? How hard is it to have respect and compassion for another human being? Reforming gender relations is obviously a key task, which the projects that have been reviewed have tried to do and will need to continue to do so, so that laws, institutional responses and community attitudes do not condone the violence against women and children, 'It is a failure of our society that the safety of women and children subject to violence is not given more priority' (Women's Coalition Against Family Violence, 1994:52).

The Victorian Women's Trust's contribution to the projects reviewed has made a significant impact not only on women in Victoria but nation wide and internationally. The VWT's support has helped many organisations, committees and coalitions to break down the silence of violence against women.

Congratulations to the efforts and hard work of all women who have fought and will continue trying to stop violence against women and children.

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