

NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre

WRRC

ANNUAL REPORT

2002/2003

NSW Women's Refuge Referral & Resource Centre Inc.

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NSW WOMEN'S REFUGE RESOURCE CENTRE INC. (WRRC)

ANNUAL REPORT 2001-2002

1. BACKGROUND

The NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre (WRRC) is a community based service that has been operating since 1986.

The Centre has historically filled a crucial role in assisting women and children escaping domestic violence to access refuges. It has also functioned as a women's information service. Currently the Resource Centre acts as a point of contact for the NSW Women's Refuge Movement (WRM). It provides resources and information on issues related to domestic violence and refuges. A focal point of the service is to promote community awareness on issues relating to women and children escaping domestic violence and advocate for improved responses to their needs.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE CENTRE INCLUDE

- To act as a point of contact for women in the community, government and non-government agencies, the media and interstate refuges for the NSW Women's Refuge Movement.
- To resource women's refuge workers on issues of domestic violence and other relevant matters
- To resource women and children as well as others in the community, on issues of domestic violence, child abuse, housing, health and legal matters.
- To undertake research to maintain an accurate information base on services provided by refuges to women and children escaping domestic violence and use this information in future planning and service development.
- To resource the NSW Women's Refuge Movement on broader issues such as government policy, legislation and projects.
- To promote community awareness on domestic violence, child abuse and the Women's Refuge Movement.

- To aim towards equal representation of women from Non-English Speaking Background, Aboriginal and Anglo/Celtic backgrounds.
- To advocate for improved responses to domestic violence and associated issues.

3. NSW WOMEN'S REFUGE MOVEMENT OVER-ARCHING PRINCIPLES

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement operates within the framework of a feminist philosophy.

Domestic violence must be understood in the context of unequal relations of power between men and women and children. In the patriarchal structures of our society, men have greater access to power than do women or children.

Domestic violence is the result of this unequal power relationship and it also reinforces it. Those who perpetrate domestic violence often believe they have a 'right' to control and coerce women and children.

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement operates within a collective framework for decision making.

Historically the NSW Women's Refuge Movement has maintained a commitment to encourage all refuges to participate in the decision making process. This is achieved through Regional and State conferences and The NSW Women's Refuge Working Party, Koori, NESB, Lesbian and Child Support Groups.

Women's Services for Women

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement supports the policy and practice of women managing and operating refuges within a feminist framework for women alone and women with children escaping domestic violence.

Domestic Violence includes all types of violence

Domestic violence includes physical, verbal and emotional abuse, stalking, abduction and confinement, deprivation of cultural and spiritual rights, humiliation, harassment, intimidation, denial of access to money and resources, isolation from support, sexual abuse and assault including rape and incest, threat of or actual abuse, and, as part of the continuum of violence, murder.

Domestic Violence occurs in all types of relationships

Domestic violence can occur within all relationships of a personal nature, including heterosexual or lesbian, marital or defacto, extended families and ex-relationships.

Domestic Violence-Power Disparities based on Cultural Background

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement acknowledges the disadvantages experienced by women and children's experience as a result of discriminatory policies, practices and attitudes in our society based on cultural background.

Domestic violence is a breach of Human Rights

Domestic violence is a violation of human rights. It is a crime against the individual and against society. Domestic violence is a problem for the whole of society and not just an individual or private problem.

Domestic violence is a crime

Domestic violence is a crime and must be responded to as such. The perpetrator is solely responsible for domestic violence.

Domestic Violence requires a comprehensive response

A comprehensive response to domestic violence must involve government and community and include:

- Advocacy for the rights of individual women and children as well as for society as a whole;
- Change to the patriarchal structures of our society as they are reflected in the political, legal, economic, and social systems and as they occur in institutions and government departments
- Removing barriers to women and children's safety and empowerment wherever they occur.

Children experiencing domestic violence have particular needs

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that children have some needs that are separate to their mothers. Providing specific support for children is a crucial component of an effective response to domestic violence.

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement is committed to breaking the cycle of violence through providing effective support for children who have experienced domestic violence.

Access & Equity

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement values diversity. The Movement is committed to promoting access to and equity of, services for *all* women. This includes Aboriginal & TSI women and children, women and children from non-English speaking backgrounds, lesbians and their children, women and children in rural and isolated areas, older women, young women and women and children with disabilities.

Representation of Aboriginal/Lesbian/non-English Speaking Women

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement promotes decision making processes that involve diverse groups in the community. This includes promoting the involvement of Aboriginal women, Immigrant women and lesbians in staffing and management.

The Movement also supports the development of policies, which ensure appropriate and sensitive support and responses to domestic violence.

Aboriginal Issues

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that domestic violence experienced by Aboriginal women and children must be understood in a cultural and historical context, acknowledging that they remain a disadvantaged group due to discriminatory (overt and covert) structures in our society.

The NSW Women's Refuge Koori Support Group was formed by Aboriginal women in the NSW Women's Refuge Movement as a support network to ensure issues relating to Aboriginal women and children remain on the agenda.

Migrant, non-English Speaking Background Issues

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that migrant, non-English speaking background and refugee women and children in our society, face many barriers to accessing services.

The Immigrant Refuge Support Workers Action Group was formed by women from a non-English speaking background as a support network in the NSW Women's Refuge Movement to ensure issues relating to non English speaking background women and children remain on the agenda.

Lesbian Issues

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that lesbians and their children experience particular difficulties and barriers when trying to access services.

The Lesbian Support Group was formed by lesbians in the NSW Women's Refuge Movement as a support network to ensure issues relating to lesbians and their children remain on the agenda.

Women and Children with Disabilities

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that there are a wide range of barriers which impede women and/or children with disabilities from accessing services and has a commitment to addressing these issues.

4. MANAGEMENT

The WRRRC is unique in that it is the only Women's Refuge Resource Centre in Australia to have a representative body of refuge regional groups from across the state, as well as Koori, NESB and Lesbian support group representatives as the management committee, namely the NSW Women's Refuge Working Party (WP)

Delegates – July 2001 to June 2002	Refuge	Region
Wendy Anders	Kempsey Women & Children's Refuge	North Coast
Sally Steele	Essie Women's Refuge	Western Metro/Country
Sue Cable	Woy Woy Women's Refuge	Hunter/Central Coast
Joy Gissing	Elsie Refuge for Women & Children	Metropolitan
Unfilled		Inner City
Yvonne Wilson Maureen Martin	Griffith Women's Refuge Albury Wodonga Women's Refuge	Riverina
Chris Solberg	Tamworth Women & Children's Refuge	New England
Cheryl Nelson	Bega Women's Refuge	South Coast
Sharron McKinnon	Western Sydney Sole Women's Accommodation Service	Lesbian Support
Marilyn Fogarty Justine Elbourne	MARCIA Western Sydney Sole Women's Accommodation Service	Koori Support
Maureen Lacey Jill Evans	Essie Women's Refuge Jenny's Place	Child support
Thi Nguyen	Mimosa House	Immigrant Women

4.1 Roles of Responsibility

Chairperson:

Cheryl Nelson
Wendy Anders

Book Keeper:

Brenda Roberts

Public Officer:

Elwyn Reid

Financial Officer:

Maureen Martin
Yvonne Wilson

Vice Financial Officer:

Wendy Anders

Co-ordinator:

Pamela Foster (WRRRC)

Vice Co-ordinator

Cheryl Nelson (Bega)

4.2 WRRC Working Party Sub Group

The Working Party WRRC sub group maintains a specific focus on the day to day operation of the WRRC. The sub-group is made up of Working Party Delegates from both city and country regions and support groups. The composition of the sub-group should try to reflect the "Equal Representation Policy" of the WRM. Delegates on the WRRC during the 2001-2002 period include; Wendy Anders, Maureen Martin, Cheryl Nelson and Yvonne Wilson.

4.3 Funding

The N.S.W. Women's Refuge Working Party is funded by the Department of Community Services under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

Refuges also pay a subscription amount to the WRRRC to belong to the NSW Women's Refuge Movement. In 2001-02 the subscription amount was changed from a flat rate to a percentile amount of .015% of the agency funding.

4.4 WRRC Staff Members

Workers at the Centre have included:

Pamela Foster	Executive Officer
Cara Kirkwood	A/ Executive Officer/ Resource/Admin worker
Nancy Smyth	Project Worker
Brenda Roberts	Bookkeeper
Maureen Lacey	Acting Executive Officer
Leisa Gibson	Resource/Admin worker

After nine years, Pamela Foster left the WRRRC due to family commitments. Her massive contribution to the NSW Women's Refuge Movement was invaluable and most significant. Pamela's humility and unrelenting selflessness helped shape the WRRC into what it has become today, and on the way gaining much support from within movement and the broader community sectors. We wish her all the best for the future.

Welcome to the fabulous Leisa Gibson, who commenced work at the WRRRC in March 2003. Her enthusiasm, effectiveness and humour are assets to the centre.

Welcome also to Nancy Smyth, who commenced her twelve-month project position in June 2002. Nancy's long term history within the Women's Refuge Movement will be invaluable in the work undertaken at the Centre as will her commitment and passion.

Thanks to our fantastic bookkeeper Brenda Roberts for her expertise, efficiency and support in getting everything completed.

Jenny White, consultant extraordinaire, has just started her contract with the WRRRC to develop a generic policy and procedure manual for women's refuges. We look forward to working with the fabulous Jenny, and to the project outcome.

Thanks also to the wonderful Cheryl Nelson who acted in the Executive Officer position while Pamela was away on leave. Cheryl did an excellent job. It was great to have the expertise in rural issues put into the many meetings she participated in.

We have a great team of committed women at the WRRRC, which is the reason why we have been able to operate effectively, having a bit of fun along the way.

5. SERVICES PROVIDED

- The WRRC acts as a point of contact for government and non-government agencies, community groups, the media & women in the community who may need information or contact with the WRM.
- The WRRC facilitates interaction, networking and linkages between the WRM and other relevant services at a state and national level.
- The WRRC also raises community awareness of NSW women's refuges, the WRRC and the issue of domestic violence.
- The Centre contains information and resources on issues such as:
 - . The Women's Refuge Movement.
 - . Domestic Violence with regards to following issues:
 - . Aboriginal
 - . Lesbian
 - . Child ren
 - . Disabilities
 - . Child Protection
 - . Training
 - . NESB
 - . Legal
 - . Older women
 - . Mental Illness
 - . Housing
 - . Sexual Assault
- Records and resources for the NSW Women's Refuge Movement are stored at the Centre.
- The Centre maintains a library of resources and information on domestic violence.

6. RESOURCE FUNCTIONS

The Centre has provided resources and information to refuges as well as other services, and to the general community, particularly women requiring information regarding domestic violence issues. There are also many students who access information on domestic violence issues.

The WRRC is responsible for recording and disseminating the NSW Women's Refuge Working Party minutes along with other information of value to refuges.

The executive officer has also co-ordinated WRM responses and meetings regarding legislative changes, as well as negotiation on documents such as the SAAP Framework and specification documents, the SACS Award campaign and other processes as appropriate.

7. REFERRAL

The WRRC receives many calls from refuges, organisations and the general community who require assistance with accommodation, or information on a myriad of issues including legal, immigration, social security benefits, housing. Although the role of the WRRC has moved away from organising crisis accommodation, there are instances when it is not appropriate to refer on. There is also a counselling role taken on some occasions when women need support or information.

8. LOBBYING

The WRRC has worked hard to raise the profile of the NSW Women's Refuge Movement, advocating for the principles and policies as have been endorsed by the WRM. This includes participation in consultations and meetings as well as media interviews.

The role of the WRRC in raising the issues and needs of women and children escaping domestic violence has been an important (and busy) one. Media interviews have been conducted with radio, print and on issues including refuges, domestic violence, the effects on children, AVO'S, legal aid, police response to domestic violence, the Indigenous Family Violence Summit, changes to family law issues in relation to domestic violence. (2BL, ABC radio (Hunter & Bathurst, Bourke Radio) Sydney Morning Herald,)

Press releases, along with numerous letters to relevant ministers have also been put out regarding current issues and concerns.

The WRRC has retained a strong emphasis on lobbying for improved responses for Indigenous women and children who have experienced and/or are escaping domestic violence. Much of this has related to the long standing campaign by the

WRM regarding the lack of services, resources and support in the Orana Far West region.

- Providing support and resources to safe houses in the Orana Far West region
- Raise the issues as they have been raised to the WRM at the forums and meetings as appropriate (eg NCOSS, SAAC)

9. CAMPAIGNS

9.1 SAAP Transfer

After the Premier' department announced in July? That SAAP would be moving across to the Department of Housing portfolio without consultation or rationale. The community sector went into full swing to reverse the situation. The WRRRC coordinated numerous phone-in, letters and faxes to various departments. The campaign was successful, SAAP remains in DoCS.

9.2 TIS

In light of the legislative changes the federal Department for Immigration, Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs has proposed, the WRRRC is working in close quarters with Immigrant Women's Speakout to lobby that the increase in interpreters fees would be damaging for SAAP services. A survey is being carried out to attain statistical data regarding the impact this policy will have on our services.

9.3 Orana Far West

The WRRRC has been involved in high level lobbying for this region for many years. As part of the IMPACT 21 project Nancy and Cara traveled out to the region to meet with services and take on board issues and concerns faced by the safehouses. Through the Walan Jineras the WRM had sent a delegation out to the region to show support and meet with the local communities. This trip was a positive sign of support for the region. We're not giving up, ever.

9. ACTIVITIES

9.1. International Conference for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault – *Gold Coast*.

Leisa and Cara attended the conference along with a number of WRM members. The conference was well organised and attended, a number of fabulous speakers from NZ and the USA discussing models of service/s provided, including detailed forums on working with media, effective lobbying, women to women violence to name but a few.

9.2. SAAC (Supported Accommodation Assistance Council)

Pamela continues as a delegate on the SAAC, a ministerial advisory council replacing the Homelessness Council. The SAAC provides advice to Ministers of Housing and Community Services. The council meets every two months.

Some of the SAAC projects Pamela has participated in include the negotiations regarding the development of the SAAP Service Frameworks document and the SAAC Aboriginal consultation regarding homelessness held in Bathurst.

9.3. Film Night

Pamela has taken on a position on the Shelter board. This provides an opportunity to promote the issues affecting women and children who experience domestic violence in relation to housing. It also was a valuable avenue to incorporate the issues for SAAP agencies in the Shelter presentation to the parliamentary inquiry into Community Housing

9.4. Australian Services Union Social & Community Services (ASU SACS) Management Committee

Representation on this committee is of great importance to the WRM, particularly given the current situation where we are attempting to lobby for adequate funding to meet the SACS Award salary increases. The WRRRC has been active in the negotiations with the state treasury as well as highlighting the impacts to refuges if additional funding is not forthcoming.

9.6. WESNET (Women's Services Network)

WESNET have restructured and now broadened their representational base to that of a national peak for women's services regarding domestic violence. Cara recently took on the role of NSW delegate on this committee.

9.7. LINKS Project

Following a submission from the SAAP Peaks, funding was approved from the Centre for Mental Health and DCS for a pilot project to develop linkages between SAAP and mental health service providers. The WRRC is currently on the Reference panel. The project, auspiced by the Youth Accommodation Association will focus on the; Hunter, Riverina and South West Metro regions. The projects protocols are just about ready to be trialed in certain regions.

9.8. NSW Women's Refuge Working Party Interim Auspices

Over the past few years the NSW Women's Refuge Working Party has been undertaking a role of Interim Peak Auspice Management in situations where refuges have experienced difficulties. The objective of the process is to maintain women's refuges as per the over-arching principles of the Women's Refuge Movement and in line with our Access and Equity Manual (*"An Open Door"*) guidelines. This year the WRRC has been involved in a number of interim auspices undertaken by Working Party including Killara and Albury/Wodonga refuges.

9.12. Working Party Minutes and Conference Reports

The WRRC is responsible for minute taking and distribution of Working Party meetings.

The WRRC also gives a presentation on current issues and projects at all state conferences.

9.13. Conferences & Meetings Attended

- Albury Women's Refuge Auspice management committee
- DoCS DV Policy Reference Group
- DV Forum
- International Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Conference
- Forum Of Non Govt Organisations (FONGA)
- Orana Far West community visits
- NESB support group
- Killara Management Committee
- Launch of IMPACT 21, Policy & Procedure manual
- Links Steering Committee
- Meeting with the Department of Community Services ministerial advisor, Penny Sharp
- Mudgin-Gal
- Family Law Reform
- NCOSS peaks meetings
- NSW Women's Refuge Movement state conferences
- NSW WRM Young Women's Group
- Stop DV Day Organising committee
- SAAC Council
- SAAC Sub Group regarding Aboriginal consultation to be held at Bathurst.
- SAAP Access & Exit Project Reference Panel
- Stop DV Day Organising Committee
- Walan Jineras
- WRRRC and Working Party
- Youth Accommodation Association AGM
- Immigrant Women's Speakout
- Elsie Women's & Children's Auspice management committee
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10. SERVICE ISSUES

The WRRRC is in its second year based at Redfern, which still remains a great central facility for action. It has been year of change and challenge in the WRRRC with funding being approved for a restructure in the centre. This has enabled the addition of a 3 year full time Project Worker being employed with the continuation of both, the current EO and Admin/ resource positions.

The team at the WRRRC over the past 12 months has comprised of Pamela Foster, Leisa Gibson, Cara Kirkwood, Nancy Smyth, Brenda Roberts, Jenny White,

Maureen Lacey and Diana. In November 2002, the wonderful Pamela Foster resigned after a lengthy nine year stint in the WRRC. Her diligence and strength saw the WRRC what it has become today. We thank her and wish her well in her future endeavors.

Thanks to those who have been on the WRRC Sub group of Working Party, who turn up early on WP days. Thank you to the women at Griffith, Kempsey, Elsie, Albury/Wodonga and Bega refuges for supporting them to participate

A special thanks to Maureen Martin who was a member of the WRRC sub group when she left the WRM in June this year. Her humour, support and commitment will be missed. We wish her well in the future.

Lastly, thanks to the staff at YAA who have been most welcoming and extremely supportive in our move to Redfern.

11. SPECIAL PROJECTS

11.1. Update of Domestic Violence Resource Kit

As a result of numerous requests, the DV Information and Resource Kit "It's not Love – It's Violence " has been updated.

Following the update of the manual, it was placed onto the WRRC web page so a broader range of individuals and agencies can access the information. The kit continues to be utilised by many organisations as a training tool.

11.2. Project to focus on assisting refuges in the development of innovative models.

Nancy Smyth has been employed at the WRRC to act as a resource to refuges who require advice and/or assistance in policy development, restructures etc.

11.3. Development of a Generic Policy and Procedure Manual

In response to the many requests from refuges for policies, the WRRC has received DoCS funding to develop a generic policy and procedure manual in line with the Access & Equity manual previously endorsed by state conference. Jenny White has been contracted to undertake the project together with the WRRC and WRRC sub group. It is expected that a final draft is available to distribute at the November 2002 conference and that the final manual is launched at the April/May 2003 state conference.

12. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

12.1. WRM Book Of Refuges

Over the years these refuges have evolved into a range of models and service delivery options. This has been in response to local community and client needs. However, the WRM does not yet have a record of information on each individual refuge including when and how they started, what services they provide, indeed the story of their evolution. This project is to develop such a manual.

The outcome of the project will be a useful resource to document the range of models of services that make up the NSW Women's Refuge Movement. A further outcome will be to capture the historical development of refuges who make up the NSW Women's Refuge Movement. The manual will consist of a description of each of the 55 women's refuges that make up the NSW Women's Refuge Movement including; a brief description of the model and size of the service including types of services offered, a brief herstory of the development of the

refuge, and future directions.

12.2. Re-Print of the Access & Equity Manual.

Due to the huge demand for the Access & Equity Manual "An Open Door", a re-print of the document is needed. Funding from the Department of Community Services has been received to undertake the project.

12.3. Updating the Home Page

Training has been organized for Cara to enable her to learn the skills necessary to put information onto the Home Page.

12.4. Computer Training – WRRC Web Site

Cara has been undertaking training to enable her the skills to put up information on the web. The updated web site will not have advertisements and will include specific pages for;

Working Party

Walan Jineras

Immigrant Refugee Support Workers Action Group

Lesbian Support

Child Support

These will be able to be updated once a month.

The site will also include our resources such as the Access & Equity and, when it is completed, the WRM generic policy manual.

12.5. SAAP General Flier

The WRRC, together with a sub group from the NSW Women's Refuge Working Party, is developing a generic flier specifically about women's refuges. The DoCS have agreed to fund the translation of the flier into 19 different languages.

12.6 IMPACT 21

Innovative

Models

Promoting

Advanced

Concepts

Through the

21st Century.

Description of the Project

The aim of the project is to identify, document and promote a diverse range of innovative strategies and models of service provision in women's refuges. The

models/strategies documented will incorporate cultural, geographic and structural diversity. There will be a focus on quality of service and continuum of support which will tie in with directions included in SAAP IV.

As part of this process the project officer will spend time at culturally specific agencies to document the strategies they have developed to meet their client group. This is valuable information for other agencies across NSW

ABBREVIATIONS

ACWA	Australian Children's Welfare Association
ACOSS	Australian Council of Community Services
ASU	Australian Services Union.
CTS	Community Tenancy Scheme
DoCS	NSW Department of Community Services
FONGA	Forum of Non-Govt Agencies
NCOSS	NSW Council of Social Services
SAAC	Supported Accommodation Advisory Council
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SACS Award	Social & Community Services Award
WP	NSW Women's Refuge Working Party
WRM	NSW Women's Refuge Movement
WRRC	NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre
YAA	Youth Accommodation Association (NSW) Inc.