

Forming a Local Domestic Violence Committee

LOCAL Domestic Violence Committees are forums where all agencies providing services to women and children who experience domestic violence, can meet and discuss issues of relevance or concern.

The committee members are either workers in services assisting women and children in situations of domestic violence, or interested parties.

There are many Local Domestic Violence Committees operating throughout New South Wales. Some, such as Dubbo, have been going for over ten years, while others are just being established.

Aims and guidelines for Local Domestic Violence Committees

The following aims were identified by committees operating in the early 1990s.¹ They are suggestions only and can be modified to suit your area and needs.

The primary aims of a Local Domestic Violence Committee are:

- to develop effective liaison between groups and individuals involved in domestic violence work in the community;
- to promote cooperation between the police, other government agencies and the community, and foster understanding within the services and the community of the problems and dangers associated with domestic violence;
- to enable workers to support each other in their work;

Why do we need a Local Domestic Violence Committee?

The meetings of the Local Domestic Violence Committee allow service providers in an area to get to know one another, raise issues of concern, talk about what they are doing and identify the strategies that are working.

In the process of escaping from domestic violence, a woman may have contact with the police, the courts, the refuge, Department of Community Services, Department of Housing, her doctor and the hospital. A coordinated response from the many different services, departments and agencies involved will be much more effective in helping women and children escape from violence and live in safety.

- to enable matters associated with domestic violence to be, where possible, resolved promptly and at a local level;
- to raise community awareness of the different kinds of domestic violence, to promote the fact that it is a crime, and encourage the whole community to accept responsibility and to take positive steps to reduce and prevent incidents of domestic violence;
- to educate the community about the various agencies set up to assist people affected by domestic violence;
- to investigate the need for, and advocate the establishment of, improved services for victims of domestic violence;
- to monitor, at the local level, the enforcement and effectiveness of domestic violence legislation and associated policies, such as policing and housing;
- to consult with both the Premier's Council on Violence Against Women and regional officers, and make recommendations regarding changes to legislation, policy and service provision.

Who can be a member?

The following agencies and individuals are considered appropriate for membership because of the role, or potential role, they play in assisting domestic violence victims or in developing community education programs.

- Police and/or the Domestic Violence Liaison Officer
- Chamber Magistrate
- Clerk of the court
- Refuge workers
- Domestic violence counsellor or social worker, Family Court counsellor
- Court support scheme
- Department of Housing
- Department of Community Services
- Department of Social Security
- Women's health, Community Health and/or hospital representatives
- Local Teachers
- Local Solicitors
- General Practitioners
- Community Centre/Neighbourhood centre workers
- Migrant/NESB workers
- Representatives from Aboriginal services
- Members of the Aboriginal community
- Family Support Service
- Other non-government agencies involved in relevant services

Many agencies and government departments have a policy of sending representatives to interagency LDVC meetings.

What are New South Wales LDVCs doing?

The role played and projects undertaken by a LDVC will depend on the specific needs of the local area, the resources the committee

has, the support it enjoys and the priorities it establishes for itself.

In consultations with existing LDVCs, the following tasks and goals were identified as key areas of involvement:

- Problem solving/trouble shooting
- Advocacy
- Networking
- Provision of support and information, including information kits
- Court support
- Community awareness raising
- Lobbying
- Training

Making contact with other local domestic violence committees is a useful way to share information and pool resources. Another committee may have experience in the type of project you may be undertaking. They may be able to offer some helpful tips.

Less frequently mentioned tasks included ensuring the accountability of services and reviewing legislation.

Not all committees perform all these roles at any one time. Instead they take on tasks as required, for the appropriate period of time, be that months or years.

What sorts of projects could a committee undertake?

A Local Domestic Violence Committee can take all sorts of directions. It may begin by setting an agenda which responds to the situation in the local area and takes account of the available physical and financial resources. Most committee members are already busy and their time is at a premium. It is important that all goals set are achievable.

Suggested activities include:

Preparing a local resource directory

An important task in any area is the compi-

lation of a list of local services which assist women experiencing and escaping from domestic violence. This resource would include contact details and perhaps a brief description of what each service can do.

This information can be distributed to all services in your area, even those not on the committee, to ensure they are providing women with accurate and adequate referrals.

On page 114 of this kit, there is a space for you to enter this local information where it is relevant. You could photocopy and distribute this page.

Produce an emergency information card

Many committees have produced an emergency card which can be given to women. The card includes important phone numbers for emergency and domestic violence help services in your areas. For example:

Say NO to domestic violence

Police

Refuge

Hospital

Community Health Centre

Other

The card is small, perhaps the size of a business card. It can fit into a woman's wallet and can thus be concealed.

Other committees have produced information booklets and kits to distribute to GPs and the general community.

Court assistance

In some areas, court support schemes are funded by the Legal Aid Commission, or the Department for Women.

Some areas, however, run schemes which are not funded. These are often coordinated and

run by members of the Local Domestic Violence Committee.

Court support schemes have been found to be very helpful to women trying to use legal interventions to stop violence. They can mean the difference between a woman proceeding with her application for an AVO, and a woman withdrawing the application, or even making an application in the first place.

However, because of cuts to Legal Aid and the current climate of tight government expenditure, additional schemes are unlikely to receive funding. If a court support scheme is not operating in your area, establishing one could be a useful priority for the LDVC.

On page 136 of this kit, you will find more information about how to set up a scheme.

Raising community awareness

There are many ways to approach this. When determining the best way to communicate information about domestic violence, the committee will have to assess the particular needs and attitudes of its community.

Consider the following ideas for programs and events:

- Ensure that any posters and leaflets you may have, are distributed to services such as police, GPs, hospitals and DOCS. Also ensure that they are on display and available for women to pick up.
- Organise information sessions for the community. Perhaps you can show a video or organise a talk.
- Run an information stall in a shopping centre or mall.
- Organise a community awareness raising event.

The terms Court Assistance Schemes and Court Support are used interchangeably in this kit to describe schemes which provide assistance to women who are going through legal and court processes.

On page 145 of this kit is some further information about organising community events.

Lobbying

Local Domestic Violence Committees can lobby local, state and federal governments about issues, laws, policies, and problems which require governmental action.

Talk to your local council. Ask them what types of things they administer that may be of use to your service. For example, you could try to have space allocated at your local library for displaying advice on domestic violence specifically, or for general women's information.

Local councils may also be a source of funds for events or festivals. There is a promotional benefit for them in being seen to be working with the community to ensure safety.

See page 140 of this kit for more information on how to lobby.

Organising training workshops

Some committees organise training workshops for service providers and/or the community. They may invite speakers from one service to speak at a meeting or invite specialist trainers, local or otherwise, to run training programs. Suggested topics include 'an introduction to domestic violence', 'working cross culturally' or 'domestic violence training for GPs'.

If numbers are important to justify a training session, allow long lead times and invite relevant people from other regions as well. This may also assist in keeping the costs down.

On page 150 of this kit, you will find a list of phone numbers of organisations and people who can provide training on domestic violence issues.

Ensuring services provide adequate service

Some LDVCs perform the role of ensuring service accountability. This may involve making sure that services do what they are supposed to, when they are supposed to and

in a consistent fashion. This role can be vital to the provision of quality services.

Included on page 153 of this kit is a list of policies and protocols for each key service provider. These are summaries of policies to which departments are committed as a result of the 1991 NSW Strategic Plan on Domestic Violence.

Also included in the policies and protocols section, are grievance procedures for each department. If women, or you as a service provider, are not getting the help you need, you can take action.

Informing service providers about domestic violence

In your area there may be some service providers, with or without an understanding of domestic violence, who do not attend Local Domestic Violence Committee meetings and are unlikely to attend. For example, although

Informing service providers about domestic violence – a checklist

- Identify services which may provide assistance to or come into contact with, women and children experiencing domestic violence.
- Identify which of these may benefit from receiving some additional information.
- Photocopy relevant sections from the kit – less is better than more if they are new to the issue.
- Include details of your meetings, inviting them to attend.
- Staple or buy a presentation folder with a flap from the stationer – usually about \$1.
- Give the kit to the service provider.
- If it is appropriate and you have some time, perhaps let them know they can call you, or somewhere like the DV Line if they want more information.

GPs attend in some areas, in most towns they do not. Some GPs have a good understanding of domestic violence, but consultations have revealed that many do not.

One role Local Domestic Violence Committees can perform is to ensure that information about domestic violence is given to these services. While simply giving someone information is never as good as providing training, it may be better than nothing. Committees could photocopy and distribute relevant information from this kit, making sure to include the completed local numbers list.

When identifying which services or people may come into contact with women and children experiencing domestic violence, remember to consider that the contact may be unintentional.

General Practitioners – Doctors are often a first point of call. Women do not necessarily go to the doctor because of the violence, or to discuss it, but an informed and supportive doctor may be able to pass her some crucial information.

Rural Counsellors – These counsellors are employed to provide counselling to farm families in financial difficulty. They sometimes visit families on isolated farms where they may come in contact with domestic violence. If so, they need to be aware of the appropriate action to take.

For a list of rural counsellors in New South Wales, contact the Federal Department of Primary Industry.

Working with existing resources — a worksheet

For most people, the LDVC is an additional commitment. It may be well attended by only a handful of people. Time commitments, lack of employer support, lack of active members and distance are all cited as factors which affect attendance at meetings.

A committee needs to work with the resources it actually has rather than what it should have, or could have.

Following are some very simple steps you can take to review your resources and set priorities to match them, ensuring that you achieve your goals. There is nothing more dissatisfying than striving for an impressive goal that is simply not possible to achieve.

1 Who on your committee comes regularly and is active in proceedings?

2 How much time does each active member have available for committee activities each week? This is the time resource you have available to you.

3 What are the project priorities of the committee?

4 How much time does each activity take? Be realistic. The first estimate will usually be an underestimate. Remember to allow for all the 'fiddly bits'.

5 Align your available time resource next to the time required for each project.

6 If necessary, revise your project priorities so you can achieve your goals.

Remember, getting funding from an outside source takes time. If one of your projects depends on outside funding, remember to factor this in.

Working with the government

The Premier's Council for Women

In October 1995, the Premier announced the formation of a Council for Women as part of a strategy to develop a 'whole of government' approach to issues facing women in New South Wales.

The Premier's Council for Women identified six key objectives, with the first priority being to reduce violence against women.

The Council proposed addressing violence against women as a whole, rather than adopting separate strategies for different types of violence such as domestic violence or sexual assault.

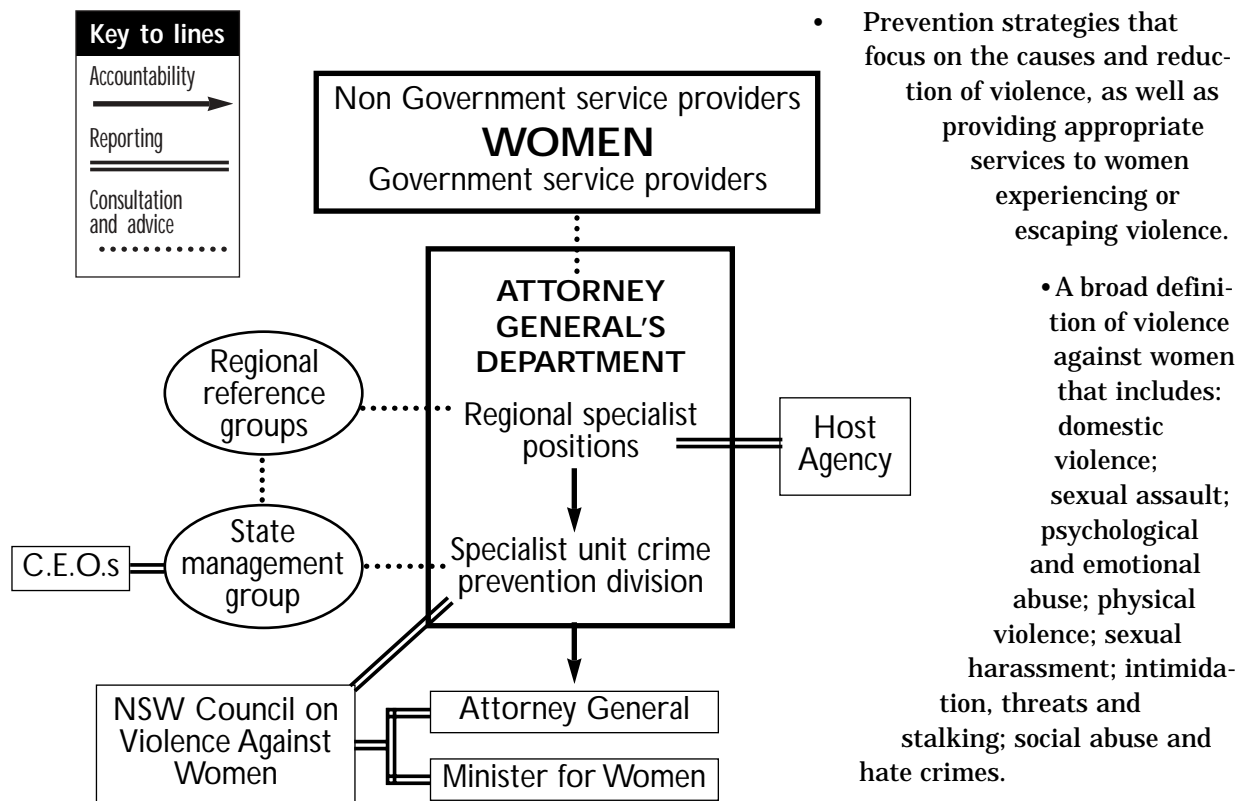
The NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women

The NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women was announced by the Premier in 1996. Its development was coordinated by the Department for Women and auspiced by the Premier's Council for Women. Preliminary work on the Strategy was conducted by the Premier's Department.

The Strategy is funded by four Government agencies – NSW Attorney General's Department, NSW Department of Community Services, NSW Health Department and the NSW Police Service. It operates in partnership with the Department for Women.

The Strategy promotes three key approaches to reducing violence against women. These include:

- A partnership response to violence against women.



Key operating structures of the Strategy

The NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women is coordinated by the Violence Against Women Specialist Unit, located in the Crime Prevention Division of the Attorney General's Department. The Strategy includes a number of key operating structures.

The NSW Council on Violence Against Women

The Council provides advice to the NSW Attorney General and the Minister for Women on measures to reduce violence against women.

The Council is comprised of senior level representatives from the Department for Women and the key funding government departments including Attorney Generals, Police, Community Services and Health.

In addition, there are ten community members (including the chair) and a representative from the Premier's Council for Women, that come together for Council meetings.

Regional Violence Prevention Specialists

A network of Regional Violence Prevention Specialists located in 17 regions across NSW has been established. The 17 regions are defined by the boundaries of the NSW Health Services regions. Regional Specialists are employees of Attorney Generals Department but work out of the regional offices of a host agency – either an Area Health Service, a regional office of Department of Community Services or the NSW Police Service.

Regional Specialists aim to improve links within and between government and non-government agencies, facilitate community education programs and develop prevention programs to reduce violence against women.

The Regional Specialists communicate with

the Council via the Violence Against Women Specialist Unit.

Regional Reference Groups

Reference groups are convened by the Regional Specialist in each region. These meetings are attended by government and non-government service providers and help to inform, advise and support the work of the Specialist.

The State Management Group

Senior government representatives from the funding agencies and the Department for Women meet to formulate inter-departmental policy and explore management issues associated with the Strategy.

Channels of communication

For local service providers and Local Domestic Violence Committees, the channels of communication, information, complaint and query are as follows:

- Take issues to your nearest Regional Specialist.
- Attend Regional Reference Groups.
- Approach a community member on the NSW Council on Violence Against Women that has relevant expertise.
- Write to the Council as a whole.
- Continue to lobby departments at a local or central level.

For more information about the Strategy and what it is doing, contact the Violence Against Women Unit.

contact

Violence Against Women Specialist Unit

NSW Attorney General's
Department
GPO Box 6
Sydney NSW 2001

or

Level 19, Goodsell Building
8-12 Chifley Square
Sydney NSW 2000
Phone: (02) 9228 7899
Fax: (02) 9228 8559
Or visit the web site
www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au

Court Assistance

The legal process seems complex and intimidating

Women who negotiate the justice system on their own are often bewildered and intimidated by complex court processes. Women withdraw from court proceedings for a variety of reasons:

- apprehension about the legal system and unfamiliarity with legal processes;
- cultural and language barriers;
- Aboriginal women's experience with racism;
- fear of encountering their abuser in court;
- difficulty in advocating for themselves in a strange and alienating set of legal processes;
- a lack of legal representation and support.²

Court Assistance Schemes can help

The Court Assistance Scheme aims to help women to use legal intervention, such as AVOs and criminal charges, to stop violence.³

The schemes provide women with help to understand the court processes, gain adequate representation, be educated about their rights and options, and receive support through the process. In addition, the scheme can assist women with a variety of needs by providing them with follow-up information and referral.

Court Assistance Schemes can have the added benefit of providing a focal point for cooperation between the legal profession, community workers, police officers and court staff. This improves interagency response to domestic violence as well as providing an opportunity for upgrading knowledge, skills and services.⁴

The NSW Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program is managed by the Legal Aid Commission. The Program funds over 30 Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Schemes across New South Wales, providing services to over 47 courts.

For more information about the program or the schemes, contact Legal Aid on (02) 9219 5921.

Guidelines for a Court Assistance Scheme

The NSW Department for Women drafted a statement of principles for domestic violence court assistance services. These were adopted by the Domestic Violence Advisory Council. This statement is as follows:

Victims of domestic violence benefit from appropriate court assistance services. Court assistance services facilitate women's access to protection from violence through the criminal justice system by demystifying the court process, by providing moral support and by ensuring access to competent legal representation in order to obtain Apprehended Violence Orders tailored to individual needs.

An appropriate court assistance service comprises three integrated components, namely:

- **Legal representation** for women who are victims of domestic violence;
- **Support for and advocacy** on behalf of women who are victims of domestic violence;
- **Referral of women** who are victims of domestic violence to appropriate services.

An appropriate court assistance service operates on the following principles:

- *the service will only act for women complainants in domestic violence matters, or women defendants where there is a cross application;*
- *the service will provide legal representation through appropriately trained solicitors: by utilising appropriately trained duty solicitors, community legal centre solicitors or police prosecutors;*
- *the service will develop appropriate recruitment and accountability criteria for its participants;*
- *the management structure of a scheme should be democratic, consultative and accessible;*
- *the scheme should employ a coordinator;*
- *an appropriate coordinating body should assume responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of the scheme;*
- *evaluation should be an integral part of the scheme and the scheme should be modified in accordance with the outcomes of the evaluation;*
- *the service will only employ appropriately paid workers;*
- *the service will only employ female non-legal court assistance staff.⁵*

Another draft document prepared by the Domestic Violence Advocacy Council suggests that schemes need to pay particular attention to the cultural diversity of the community, and recruit women from non-English speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal women.

Training is considered an integral component of the scheme and should cover cross-cultural issues and the impact of domestic violence on children.

The schemes make a difference to the outcome

Research indicates that Court Assistance Schemes have improved the success rate of

women using legal interventions. For example, at Redfern Local Court, reports indicate that in 1989, prior to the commencement of the scheme, only 18.4% of unrepresented complainants and 35.7% of represented complainants successfully obtained final orders. By 1993, with the scheme fully implemented, 76.4% of complainants obtained final orders. All of them were represented in court, either by the scheme solicitor or the police prosecutor.⁶

Setting up the scheme

The following are guidelines for setting up a Court Assistance Scheme in your area. (They were the steps followed by the Western Region Domestic Violence Collective when they set up their Court Support Scheme in Dubbo Court.)

- **Decide on the aim of your scheme:** what will the scheme achieve?
- **Decide who can coordinate the scheme:** who can be support workers, what time can they allocate and what can be achieved in this time? Note that trained staff are essential. Staff who are to coordinate and/or work on the scheme need to have completed Core Domestic Violence training and Court Support Training. In addition, support workers need to have some involvement with court assistance work so their employer will cover them for public liability.
- **Talk to court staff:** talk to the Chamber Magistrate, (and where relevant, the Magistrate and the Clerk of Court), Police

An excellent resource for Court Assistance Schemes is the *Redfern Legal Centre Domestic Violence Court Assistance – An information and training kit*. It was published in 1996 by Redfern Legal Centre Publishing and updated in January 1999. To get a copy, call (02) 9698 3066.

Much of the information in this section is from this source.

Contact details for Court Assistance Schemes across NSW are available from the Domestic Violence Line on 1800 65 64 63.

Prosecutor, and the Domestic Violence Liaison Officer, or the relevant police officer individually.

Discuss the scheme, your ideas, how you think it may work. Try to collect input and rally support.

- **Organise a meeting to discuss the scheme:** invite the Chamber Magistrate, the Police Prosecutor and the Domestic Violence Liaison Officer, or relevant police officer. Prepare a briefing paper or plan of the scheme to take to the meeting, so that you have a starting point.
- **Workshop issues and effective operation:** identify the most effective method of operation for your area. Take into account things such as when the court sits, and the space available in the court house.
- **Request that all domestic violence related listings be held on one day:** write to the Chief Magistrate. Ask to have all domestic violence matters listed on one day, preferably first thing in the morning. This will better address the needs of children accompanying their mothers, and will enable support staff to roster effectively.
- **Court safety:** if a separate space is available at the court, ask if it could be made available to the scheme on the days it operates. This will enable a separate waiting space, reducing the trauma of the woman and children encountering the perpetrator before the court proceedings.
- **Documentation:** access to information such as statistics and case history is essential for the Police Prosecutor and for the service. This information assists the service to clarify with the woman what needs she has for the AVO detail. This should be stored somewhere central and safe. To ensure confidentiality is maintained, a space will be needed for keeping documentation secure. This space may be in one of the agencies rather than

the court and may include a facility such as lockable filing cabinets.

Legal Aid have now developed systems for recording information. Contact them for more information.

Staffing

The guidelines suggest the employment of a paid coordinator for Court Assistance Schemes. However, if this is not possible, the Local Domestic Violence Committee may take up the role until funding becomes available.

Support staff should be workers from community organisations such as women's refuges, community health centres, community legal centres, family support services, Aboriginal organisations and migrant resource centres. The Court Assistance Schemes deliver a comprehensive service to women, a role that is a complex mix of support, advocacy, information provision and referral, often delivered under stressful conditions. Therefore, it is important that the support staff are trained and have ongoing professional contact with networks and legal services.⁸

Many community organisations in rural areas are already under-resourced and carry excessive workloads. Where possible, approach government departments to request that their workers participate in the scheme.

The Redfern Domestic Violence Court Assistance kit makes several suggestions about staffing.

- The number of workers required for the scheme will depend upon local demand and the desired frequency of shifts on the rosters. Ideally, one worker would be available on the roster for every three to four clients appearing at the court.
- The use of volunteers to make up for support worker shortages will have to be resolved at a local level by community workers who have the knowledge and experience to understand the role of the support workers.

Using volunteers

The use of volunteers in domestic violence work is often controversial. These are some of the issues of concern.

- Domestic violence is a complex issue that requires a professional response.
- Workers need skills and experience in crisis intervention.
- The work is dangerous.
- Public liability insurance coverage – who is responsible in the case of volunteers?
- Volunteers lack professional status which may affect their ability to advocate to solicitors and deal with police and court staff.
- It may be difficult to ensure the quality of service being given where the person is unpaid.
- Volunteers can be difficult to recruit and there is often a high turnover. An ongoing recruitment process and training requirements place additional demands on existing workers.⁷

However, volunteers should only be used where a paid professional coordinator is available to train and supervise these workers.⁹

Letting women know about the scheme

Consider how women will be referred to the scheme. You may need to do an information card or leaflet which provides brief details of what the service does, who to contact, and when these people can be contacted.

Give these cards to police and Chamber Magistrates and any other services in your area which assist women and children escaping domestic violence.

Client contact and worker safety

Here are some suggested guidelines for ensuring maximum worker safety.¹⁰

Recommendations

- Home visits should be avoided wherever possible.
- If home visits need to take place, two workers should attend.
- Make sure the scheme includes regular counselling, supervision and support for the workers.

Survival tips for workers

Workers should:

- make sure there is a system for debriefing, immediately if possible;
- know their limits – they cannot solve every problem;
- know what they can do to attempt to change things;
- have professional/support networks available if necessary;
- do nice things for themselves;
- leave work at work;
- make sure their employment contract includes stress leave in recognition of the stress involved in court assistance work.

Lobbying

Why lobby?

Lobbying is the process of getting support for your cause or issue. It is usually targeted at influential people such as politicians or bureaucrats and sometimes organisations.¹¹

You may lobby on a specific issue such as poor housing. Or you might protest against a particular change in policy like cuts to Legal Aid.

Lobbying can be carried out in conjunction with a community awareness raising campaign. Increased community interest and involvement can create a strong demand for change.

For example, if your issue is a local government concern, a petition of support from residents may be effective. A petition reflects the attitudes of an elected council's or councillor's constituency. It is in their interests to respond. In addition, a petition can stimulate media interest. Media attention on specific issues can be very persuasive, particularly at a local level.

Strength in numbers does count when you are dealing with politicians. If an issue attracts a lot of attention, and you can demonstrate strong community support, politicians will usually take notice.

Planning your lobbying strategy

To determine your strategy, ask the following questions:

What is your issue – what exactly do you want changed?

Who holds the power – is it local, state or federal government? Or does it cross different spheres of government? Which department has administrative responsibility?

Who are useful allies? For example, councils, community leaders, politicians, other organisations or departments.

As part of the planning process:

Use networks: such as your Local Domestic Violence Committee. Between committee members is a considerable resource of information and skill. Use your networks and combined skills to get things done.

Form coalitions: If there are other groups in your area who are not on your committee but have an interest in your cause or issue, see if they are interested in forming a coalition around the issue. Each group in the coalition maintains its separate identity and focus, while working collectively to achieve a goal.

Do some research:

- Find out relevant laws and regulations.
- Speak to people who may have been in similar situations – perhaps people who have lobbied around a similar issue in a different area. Ask them what strategies they found successful.
- Visit the library and ask the librarian to help find government reports. Search other databases for relevant information.
- Check the Internet for contacts and ideas.

Approaching your local councillors, and state and federal Members of Parliament can be a good place to start. Find out if there are any parliamentary committees that may be able to influence the situation.

How to lobby

Write personal letters (from your organisation or coalition) to relevant politicians asking them to do something. You could ask them to:

- meet your delegation;
- raise your concerns in the party's decision making forums such as Cabinet, Caucus, backbench and policy committees;
- ask questions on key issues in parliament to put the issue on the public record;
- provide you or your group with access to government reports and other information

Tips for effective lobbying from Dr Meredith Burgmann MLC

- Write a personal letter – use a person's name.
- One page is the limit – say whatever you need to in one page.
- State exactly what it is you want the person to do.
- State this action in the first two paragraphs.
- Include a 'closing' date for the action. For example – 'we would like to meet with you on or before Tuesday 23rd April'.
- You can send supporting material with your letter. But don't count on it being read.
- Organisations are more effective in lobbying than individuals. If there is more than one of you lobbying on a particular issue, form an organisation or a coalition. Create a letterhead on your computer and use this for your correspondence.

Dr Meredith Burgmann has been a Member of the New South Wales Legislative Council since 1991. As a lobbying activist for women's issues and a lobbied politician, Meredith has 'seen both sides'.

which might not be readily accessible;

- introduce you to members of relevant parliamentary committees so you may request the opportunity to address those committees.

Send as many letters as you can. Get as many organisations, groups, individuals as you can to send letters supporting your issue. **Use the media** to increase public awareness, interest and knowledge.

Key points for a successful delegation

- Select your delegates. You may select a group that is representative of diverse needs, or a group that comprises various skills or expertise.

- The optimal size of a delegation is around three people.
- Consider roles within your delegation. Perhaps select a leader or a key spokesperson. This may be the person with the best overview of the situation, and a good understanding of the solutions. The key spokesperson should be a confident presenter.
- Appoint a note taker for the meeting.
- Be clear and concise. Know what you are going to say, who is going to say it, what it is you want and what you want the politician to do.
- Prepare (brief) written notes to leave with the politician. These should very clearly summarise your key points and could be presented under headings: for example, 'Points raised by delegation to stop funding cuts to SAAP'.
- Remember to include contact names and phone numbers.
- Hand your notes over at the end of the meeting, not the beginning.
- Ask questions during the meeting – clarify anything you are not sure of.
- It is a good idea to write up the results of the meeting, noting any key responses from the politician and any actions to which they committed. This can be distributed to other members of the broader committee involved in your campaign. It can also be sent to the politician as a record of your expectations. You will then have a document of agreed actions against which you can monitor actual progress.

Lobbying local government

Petitions can be an effective way to lobby local government. They do not need to be drawn up in the formal language that is necessary to present a submission to state or federal parliament.

Here's how you prepare a petition.

- Put the name of the shire or local council to which it is addressed at the top of the page.

- Give a broad description of the signatories: for example, the residents of the City of Wagga Wagga.
- Below this, include a short statement of your concerns. Keeping it short and to the point will make collecting signatures easier. Make sure your statement is accurate.
- State clearly exactly what you want done about the issue.
- Each sheet of the petition should have the same information on the top and be ruled in columns.

Accessing parliamentary information

If you want more information about a debate which you know is going on in parliament, you can read *Hansard*, the transcript of parliamentary proceedings, at your local library. You can call one of the politicians involved or parliamentary staff and ask them to send you a copy of the *Hansard* report.

Or you may wish to utilise the Freedom of Information legislation. This legislation provides public access to information kept by government agencies, ministers and local government.¹² For more information about this legislation, contact the FOI Coordinator in the NSW Premier's Department or the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department – Information Access Unit, Family and Administrative Law Branch.

Keep it short

Politicians are very busy. Many people send them a lot of information to read and respond to. The key to lobbying MPs is be brief, be clear, be helpful, and be personal.

You are far more likely to get a response if it can be done quickly.

Dr Meredith Burgmann MLC

Using the media

THE media is a tool for communicating with people. The media can help you achieve your lobbying goals. Through the media, you may be able to reach and influence:

- the general public;
- politicians and other decision makers;
- potential supporters and sponsors;
- potential or lapsed members.

You can use the media to announce or 'launch' a project or event. Or you may comment on current affairs, respond to issues and raise public awareness and understanding about issues.

Getting to know the media and how it works is an advantage. If you have contacts, nurture them.

Integrity and honesty are very important in all dealings with the media. Make sure your information is accurate.

People in the media work to very tight deadlines. Remember, time is always a premium.

What is news?

News or a 'good story' is something that:

- is new – a new story or a new angle on a current story;
- is relevant – interesting to a large number of people;
- is about people – what people are doing about an issue and how that issue affects people;
- contains conflict – for example politicians versus people, or government versus people. Most news highlights conflict; some news talks of resolutions and solutions.

A 'good story' is one that an audience identifies with and will read with interest. It may be about a person they have heard of, an experience they are familiar with, or an issue that may affect their lives in the future.¹³

News is created

Most news is actually created by people. Because it is created, you can use the media to gain coverage for issues you feel are important.

However, getting coverage is not always easy. People who work in the media receive hundreds of press releases, stories from local, national and wire services.

How to create news?

The background

- Get to know the local media. Ring editors and journalists, identify yourself and your service or issue. Suggest lunch or coffee or a meeting.
- Do as much groundwork as you can before you approach the media.
- Clarify your issue and what it is you hope to achieve from the media coverage.
- Determine if this is a one-off event or issue, or part of an ongoing campaign?

Make sure you are ready to go public.

Have you spoken to all parties, and has everyone been given the opportunity to respond? Have you done enough research and are all your facts correct?

The Media Release

Once you are clear about your story and your angle, it is time to let the media know.

You do this by writing a media release.

A media release is a summary of your story, written in a short, sharp and clear form. It is intended to get the media interested and it need not be very long.

The key points to remember about a **Media Release** are:

Grab attention

- Think up a bold and simple headline.
- The first sentence should contain the most relevant point.
- The first paragraph is the most important. Assume the reader will not read the rest of the page.

When you are being interviewed, especially for television or radio, you have less than a minute to make your point. Make sure you are clear on what you want to say.

Susanne Briggs – Public Relations consultant

Make sure the content is relevant

- Keep all following points relevant and supportive of the opening statement.
- Answer the questions – who? what? when? where? why? how?
- Use quotes from relevant people that are 'ready to use'. This means the journalist can use them in their story.
- Be visual. Pictures are often more effective than words. Use pictures which reinforce emotions.

Keep it brief

- Your release should be no longer than one page.

Personal Contacts

- Include a contact person, or preferably two, and a 24 hour phone number.

Timing is important

There are good days and bad days.

- Earlier in the week is better.
- Earlier in the day is better.
- Days on which there is some other major event – the Prime Minister is in town – are very bad days. If you are planning any event, check out what else is going on.
- Send out your media release 3-5 days before the event.

It's not love – it's violence

- Remember that most stories written in the morning papers are written by 4.30pm the day before.
- Most journalists write more than one story in a day, so don't expect them to be able to spend long with you. Do as much work as you can, have your media kit and 'real people' ready to speak (if this is appropriate).

The media event

A large amount of news is about events: people making things happen. Having an event can therefore be a good way to attract the media. It can also give your story a visual angle.

Media events, such as a launch or rally with invited guests, are usually worthwhile events in their own right. If you get media coverage, it is a bonus.

What is 'media friendly'?

There are several points to remember when organising a successful media event:

- be certain your story is strong enough for reporters to attend;
- invite prominent speaker/s;
- have the speakers available to answer questions afterwards;
- be as visual as you can – remember 'photo opportunities';
- be in an easily accessible central location.

The media kit

A media kit includes a copy of your media release and background information about your issues or campaign.

Include information which a journalist can use for the story. For example:

- a brief history of the issue;
- facts and figures;
- quotes or key statements about your issue made by well-known people;

- case studies or personal stories;
- a list of people who are available to be interviewed with a brief biography of each person.

Make your own media/information kit

Domestic violence is often misrepresented by the media. It is important to have information available that counters myths easily. A media kit can do this. After all, it is far better that the LDVC is the journalist's source of information, rather than others who may have little understanding of domestic violence issues.

Sections of this kit may be used to compile a media kit which provides key information about domestic violence. For example, you could copy definitions and types of violence (pages 1 and 2), statistics (pages 6 and 7), common community beliefs and the barriers to getting help (pages 8-13). This will provide a good introduction to the issues. Similarly, you may find information in other sections which will tailor the kit to the issue at hand.

Add any of your own local information and leaflets. Include contact names and phone numbers if journalists require further information. Insert this information into a plain white folder, and a useful information/media kit will be at their fingertips. You can use this information kit for other events as well.

Don't forget newsletters

Other organisations' newsletters can be effective ways to tell your story. If your issue is relevant to their membership, you have ready access to an interested audience. For example, the Rural Women's Network produces a newsletter called *the Country Web*, which is distributed to approximately 10 000 women across New South Wales. They may agree to run a story for you.

Organising an event

Why have an event?

- Be clear about why you want to run the event.
- Identify your outcome objectives. These could include:
 - raising funds;
 - raising community awareness;
 - providing information to women in the community who may be experiencing domestic violence, including the possibility for information to be obtained anonymously;
 - discussing and workshopping issues with other service providers and members of the community.
- Develop strategies to meet your outcome objectives. The strategies will define the type of event you will hold.

What type of event can we have?

Each outcome objective may suggest different strategies and type of event.

Fundraising events

An event which aims to raise funds may include a dinner or lunch where you may have arranged an interesting speaker. It is generally a specific event in which people pre-pay to participate. Fundraising events may also help to raise community awareness.

Festival

A festival with a domestic violence theme is an opportunity to raise community awareness about the issues. It can also showcase a variety of community activities with stalls, raffles and competitions, performances, exhibitions and speakers. In the midst of the action, an information stall about domestic violence would allow information and written materials

on domestic violence to be distributed to or collected by women in the community.

You could organise a **community picnic**. Or a **rally**.

Conference or seminar

Conferences are the most useful for focussing directly on a theme. They provide an opportunity for discussion and workshops, among service providers and if appropriate, interested members of the community.

Conferences may also result in decisions for actions and future directions.

Some factors to consider

Some towns have reported difficulties in running events with a domestic violence focus. These difficulties include low attendance, even among service providers. Furthermore, some people have expressed feeling wary of 'being seen' to publicly support these events, even if they believe that the violence should stop.

It was also reported that women experiencing domestic violence often fear that, if they attend, people will 'guess' that they are being abused. In addition, they may fear the perpetrator's response if he sees them, or hears that they were there.

These issues and concerns will vary from area to area. They may be factors the Committees need to consider. Whether holding an event is appropriate or not will clearly be a local decision.

Incorporating domestic violence into your event

There are several ways in which sensitive issues can be raised at an event.

The first of these is through performance and exhibitions. Many women write plays, or poems, or produce artwork, about their experiences of domestic violence. A narrative form, or a drama piece may be a more accessible medium for audiences who know little about violence. People sometimes find it

easier to identify with a character in a play or scenario.

Artwork may also illustrate the issues well. Consider displaying pictures drawn by women and/or children who have lived in violent situations. These need not be the work of people in your area. You may decide to organise a swap with another region.

Inviting well-known and respected people to speak about domestic violence is also useful. Your speaker might be a supportive member of a Local Council, or someone who is well respected in your town. Popular celebrities are often ideal speakers. They already attract the interest of the public, who will come just to see them alone. Some celebrities who have had personal experience of a situation or illness become spokespeople for that issue. For example, Trisha Goddard often speaks publicly about her experience with a mental illness.

Brief your speakers

You should always brief spokespeople, even if they have had a relevant personal experience. At a public event, you need to be clear about the message you want to communicate, and you can ask people to speak to your objectives. You might want to prepare some briefing and background information. Use the information kit referred to on page 139.

When choosing a well-known person to speak at your event, it is not necessary that they know very much about the issue beforehand, because you can inform them. It is necessary, however, that they be sympathetic.

When should we have the event?

Choose a time which suits your committee and your area.

Do not organise an event if it is competing with other events which have high community interest. For example, avoid the time of the picnic races, football matches or the show. There may also be times when many of

Funding sources

Sometimes the Department for Women (state) and the Office for the Status of Women (federal) provide funds for events. If your event has a family or community focus, you could contact the Department of Community Services, or the Health Department, via women's health.

the community are occupied with work needs such as harvesting or similar activities.

There are some state and national days to which you could tie your event. These include:

- International Women's Day – first Sunday in March
- Stop Violence Against Women Day – 26 April
- Reclaim the Night march – last weekend in October

And for the men:

- White Ribbon Week (run by Men Against Sexual Assault)

The advantage of linking up with these days is that a considerable amount of activity goes on across the state. In addition, the Department for Women sometimes provides funding for activities, on an application for grant basis.

Planning and organising the event

Once you have decided why, what and when, it is time to start planning and organising. You may want to nominate a small group to take responsibility for overseeing the event.

The planning committee will need to consider the following factors for most types of event. There are also some additional planning steps to consider if you are organising a rally, conference or seminar. They are guides only, and the specific organisational needs will vary from event to event.

Budget and funding

What is the budget? What are some possible funding sources? Do budget projections and anticipate how much each component will cost. Can you afford it? It is important to be realistic about what it will cost, and also what resources you definitely have available.

The venue

- Where should the event be held? Choose the venue on the basis of numbers and type of event. Will it be indoors or outdoors? If there are speakers, is it a good place for them to be seen and heard. Can we afford the venue?

For a conference, rally or seminar

- Once you've decided on the topic areas and the outcomes you want, choose your speakers. Choose speakers that cover the range of topics you want to discuss.
- The speakers should have a (preferably known) background in the topic, be well aware of the area you are discussing and be able to speak about the topic with an informed voice.
- Contact these people and confirm their availability.
- Discuss topics with them. Reconfirm the topic and the information that they can speak about.
- Make up a program with a title of the day's events and an order of events including starting and finishing times. The program should also include the names and titles of the speakers and the topics they are going to speak about.
- Allow for question time and/or a workshop at the end of the speaker's presentation.
- Send a draft of the program to your speakers for their approval.
- Brief the chairperson about the program.
- Provide the chairperson with speaking notes and a short introduction to each of the speakers.

- Is it central and easy to access? (If you want media coverage, make sure it is central.)
- Confirm the venue booking in writing well in advance of your event?

Stalls

If there are going to be stalls, they will need to be pre-registered so that you know how many there will be. Prepare a map for stall holders. This will let them know where their stall will be, when to set up, how to set up (ie what do they need to bring), and when to take the stall down.

Sound

- If the event is indoors, make sure there is sound and that it works. You may need to hire a PA system. Make sure the system works and that there will be sound technicians available on the day.
- If your event is outside, consider sound requirements and noise competition (for example is the venue on a main road).
- Do you need to arrange a roving microphone for questions at the end of the speaker's presentation.

Time

The type of event will determine the best times to hold the event. Who is likely to attend, and what are their commitments? For example, if the event is a conference, then it is best to hold it in business hours. If it is for mothers and children, then avoid the after school rush.

If it is to be a media event – it will need to suit media deadlines. See page 144 for details.

Representation

Have you consulted with groups in the community that would like to be involved? Have they agreed to do something? Will the event represent a range of views from women in your community? If not, how might you encourage participation?

Themes and programs

Consider what to include on the day. What are the topics to be discussed? Who are the speakers? Make up a program which clearly shows speakers or activity, topics and timing. If there are going to be workshops, has there been time and space allocated? If it is a festival, what stalls and events will there be?

Accommodation/childcare

Will you need to provide these?

Publicity and promotion

How will you promote the event? Can you do leaflets, or posters? If you are considering promotional material such as balloons or T-shirts, be realistic about the cost and how many you can sell.

Will it be a media event

A media event could be held to launch new information such as a report of a book, to hear from a celebrity or a government representative or to hear personal accounts from women who have experienced domestic violence. Media resources are limited, so if you are looking for media coverage, keep the event short and well organised. Some pointers include:

- provide visual support such as a backdrop that will provide a focus for the camera;
- send out your media alert 5 days before the event and ring around key media the day before;
- arrange seating for the media so the cameras have easy access to the front of the hall, or the stage;
- check for noise control, that the microphones work and that the lighting is adequate;
- have copies of the media kit available and arrange for speakers to be available to speak to the media after the event;
- include contact details for further information in the media kit.

See page 145 for more information on using the media.

Setting up

Go through the event with your team to make sure everything has been considered. Also check that each person clearly understands their role and responsibilities.

You need to consider whichever of the following is relevant to your event:

- Participant pre-registrations and registrations on the day;
- Stalls;
- PA system and sound technicians;
- Catering or food stalls;
- Entertainment;
- Parking;
- Signage;
- Cleaning up;
- Help and information: do you have enough people to direct parking, or to direct people, once inside?

Evaluating the event

It is always a good idea to review the day, reviewing your outcomes against your objectives. Did you achieve some of the outcomes you expected? What were the bonuses? What would you do differently? What lessons did you learn about the process?

Evaluating your event will help you to build a body of expertise and knowledge about running events. Next time, you won't have to start from scratch and can build on the positive aspects of your first experience.

Training

THE following is a list of organisations and people that may provide training or referral in issues surrounding domestic violence. It is by no means exhaustive, and a space is included so you may add any additional useful trainers you may have used or know of.

Cross Cultural training and Indigenous women's issues

Wirringa Baiya
Ph: (02) 9569 3847

Cross Cultural training and issues for immigrant women

Immigrant Women's Speakout
Ph: (02) 9635 8022

Legal issues and Court Assistance

Domestic Violence Advocacy Service
1800 810 784

General Practitioners

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners has a Women and Violence Project, currently developing and piloting training for GPs.

Ph: (03) 9214 1414

Training in domestic violence, sexual assault and child sexual assault

The Education Centre Against Violence is a statewide service administered by Western Sydney Area Health Service. It provides courses and resource material for Health and

other community workers, about adult and child sexual assault and domestic violence.

For a training calendar and/or more information, contact the Education Centre Against Violence on:

Ph: (02) 9840 3737

Training across a range of issues

The Centre for Community Welfare Training (CCWT) offers professional development in regional centres throughout NSW. Courses areas include Child Protection, counselling, Therapy and Groupwork, Disability, Legal Issues, Management and Administration, Service/Program delivery, Training and Professional Development. Courses within these areas include: solution focused counselling, empowering children who have been abused, working with refugee families, domestic violence, cross cultural training, sexual assault and Aboriginal issues.

The training locations in NSW include Berry, Dubbo, Lismore, Tamworth, Wagga Wagga, Sydney, and Penrith. However, CCWT does offer workplace training in other areas to groups of service providers, managers and service users. Fees are negotiated on a case by case basis.

For a training calendar or more information, contact CCWT's Workplace Training Coordinator

Level 2, Central Square
323 Castlereagh St
Sydney NSW 2000
Ph: (02) 9281 8822
Freecall 1800 649 613

Put your local numbers in the spaces provided

contacts

as at //

Local contacts

Your Local Domestic Violence Committee

Postal address:

.....

Contacts:

Name:

:

Name:

:

Other LDVCs you are in contact with:

Committee:

:

Committee:

:

Your Court Assistance Scheme

Postal address:

.....

Contact name:

:

Times when scheme can be contacted:

.....

Other Court Assistance Schemes you are in contact with:

Scheme:

:

Scheme:

:


Scheme:

:


Lobbying

Local Councillors:

Name:

:

Name:

:

Name:

:

Local State MP:

:

Local Federal MP:

:

Other MPs who may be important to your area:

.....


.....

Local Media

RADIO

Names:


Position:

:

NEWSPAPER

Names:


Position:

:

TELEVISION

Names:

Position:

:

Further reading

Department for Women Information Services 1997, *Fact Sheet: The Whole of Government Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women* Department for Women, Sydney.

Department for Women 1995, *NSW Court Assistance Program Issues Paper* (unpublished document).

Domestic Violence Unit 1994, *Draft Statement of principles on Domestic Violence* NSW Department for Women.

Flood, M. and Lawrence, A. (eds) 1994, *The Community Action Book* Council for Social Service of New South Wales (NCOSS).

NSW Domestic Violence Committee 1991, *Domestic Violence Information Manual* Women's Co-ordination Unit, Sydney.

Public Interest Advocacy Centre 1996, *Working the System* Pluto Press, Sydney.

Redfern Legal Centre 1996, *Domestic Violence Court Assistance: An Information and Training Kit* Redfern Legal Centre Publishing, Sydney.

Endnotes

- 1 The introductory information about LDVCs is from NSW Domestic Violence Committee 1991, *Domestic Violence Information Manual* Women's Coordination Unit, pages 28–33
- 2 Department for Women NSW Court Assistance Program Issues Paper 1995 (Unpublished document). The reasons for withdrawal are not direct quotes.
- 3 Redfern Legal Centre 1996, *Domestic Violence Court Assistance: An Information and Training Kit* Redfern Legal Centre Publishing, Sydney, page 60
- 4 Redfern Legal Centre 1996, page 59
- 5 Domestic Violence Unit 1994, *Draft Statement of principles on Domestic Violence* NSW Department for Women
- 6 Redfern Legal Centre 1996, pages 60–61
- 7 Redfern Legal Centre 1996, pages 64–65
- 8 Redfern Legal Centre 1996, pages 64–65
- 9 Redfern Legal Centre 1996, pages 66–67
- 10 Cited in Redfern Legal Centre 1996, page 85, the source of these recommendations is Sue Graham and Sue Godwin, *Safe Practice for Domestic Violence Workers*. Domestic violence training workshop for the southwest Sydney Legal Centre Court Support Scheme, Sydney 1993.
- 11 The sources for 'How to lobby' are Public Interest Advocacy Centre 1996, *Working the System* Pluto Press and Flood, M. and Lawrence, A. (eds) 1994, *The Community Action Book* Council for Social Service of New South Wales (NCOSS)
- 12 Public Interest Advocacy Centre 1996, *Working the System* Pluto Press, Sydney, page 52
- 13 Social Change Media notes (unpublished document)