

# 1. Background

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# Acknowledgments

The Background section has been written using the NSW Women's Refuge Movement 1999, *An Open Door — NSW Women's Refuge Movement Access and Equity Manual* as source material. We gratefully acknowledge this input.

## 1.1 The history of women's refuges in NSW

The first funded refuge in Australia opened in the inner Sydney suburb of Glebe in 1974 after intense lobbying of the Whitlam government. Elsie Refuge, as it was (and is) known, provided a safe accommodation option for women and children escaping domestic violence at a time when no other service existed.

In line with feminist philosophy, the focus of the early women's refuges in NSW was on empowering women and children by providing a safe, supported environment and emphasising mutual support between the women. These ideals are still the central principles in women's refuges. However twenty-five years on, refuges have evolved and now provide a broad range of services, support and advocacy including; outreach, court assistance, assistance with housing and legal matters, information, training and referral.

As the number of refuges increased, it became clear that a unified approach was needed to put domestic violence on the political agenda. In February 1979, refuges met in Bathurst for the first State Wide Conference. Out of this meeting, the NSW Women's Refuge Movement was formed.

There are now 55 refuges for women and children escaping domestic violence operating across NSW that are members of the NSW Women's Refuge Movement.

## 1.2 Structure of the NSW Women's Refuge Movement

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement has become the statewide representative body of all but a few refuges for women and children escaping domestic violence in NSW. It has a specific focus on the support and advocacy of women and children escaping domestic violence. A primary role has always been to ensure that all refuges can be involved in policy development and lobbying for change.

The structures of the Women's Refuge Movement are based on equal representation in policy development and in the decision-making processes. This is achieved via the following structures.

### Regionals

The Women's Refuge Movement has divided NSW into geographic regions. Refuges within each region meet on a regular basis to share information and discuss issues relating to their region and/or the Movement as a whole. Each region endorses a delegate to represent them at the monthly Working Party meeting.

### Support groups

In recognition of the disadvantages experienced by some groups, statewide networks were formed to provide support as well as networking and advocacy opportunities. These include; Koori Support, Immigrant Refuge Support Workers Action Group, Lesbian Support and Child Support Workers. More recently, a Young Women's Network has been formed.

## NSW Women's Refuge Working Party

Working Party meets monthly and can implement decisions made at conference. It also has the authority to make decisions between conferences if necessary.

Working Party members are the delegates from the regions as well as the representatives from Koori, Immigrant, Lesbian and Child Support groups. The delegates' role is to represent the views of their region (and/or representational base) and to provide feedback on any decisions made or activities taken on.

## State Conferences

Any major policy decisions that affect the Movement as a whole are made at the State Conferences. These conferences are held twice a year and all refuges are encouraged to present their views and proposals for discussion.

## NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre

The NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre (WRRC) is the contact point for the NSW Women's Refuge Movement. The NSW Women's Refuge Working Party is the management committee of the WRRC and ensures that the Centre reflects the interests of the NSW Women's Refuge Movement. The Executive Officer represents the NSW Women's Refuge Movement in line with endorsed policies and philosophies, as well as forming policy and undertaking specific projects.

## 1.3 The over-arching principles of the NSW Women's Refuge Movement

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.

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement maintains a commitment to encouraging all refuges to participate in decision-making processes. This is achieved through Regional and State Conferences and the NSW Women's Refuge Working Party, Koori, NESB, Lesbian and Child Support Groups.

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement operates under the following over-arching principles.

### 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 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 & Torres Strait Islander 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 background 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.

## Over-arching principles relating to child support

### Feminist philosophy in child support

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement is committed to working within a feminist framework by providing child support that addresses issues of power and gender roles in relation to domestic violence.

### The rights of children

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that the safety, needs and wellbeing of children and young people is paramount. The Movement is committed to promoting the rights of children and young people within refuges and the wider community.

### Child-centred focus

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises children and young people as clients in their own right. This is reflected in individual case management that includes follow-up, outreach, advocacy, referral and liaison.

### Aboriginal children and young people

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that issues affecting Aboriginal children and young people must be understood in a cultural and historical context and that Aboriginal children and young people often face barriers when accessing services.

The Movement aims to promote an awareness of the specific needs of Aboriginal children and young people in refuges and the wider community.

### Children and young people from a non-English speaking background

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that children and young people from a non-English speaking background have specific cultural needs and often face barriers when accessing services.

The Movement aims to promote an awareness of the specific needs of children and young people from a non-English speaking background in refuges and the wider community.

### Children and young people from lesbian relationships

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that children and young people from lesbian relationships and gay and lesbian young people often experience marginalisation and face the difficulty of living in a homophobic society.

The Movement is committed to improving access and providing appropriate support to children and young people from lesbian relationships and gay and lesbian young people by promoting awareness of the issues in refuges and the wider community.

### Children and young people with disabilities

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that there are a wide range of issues and barriers affecting children and young people with disabilities.

The Movement is committed to improving access and providing support for children and young people with disabilities.

### Child support staff in refuges

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses the equal status and rights of child support workers in refuges. This should be reflected in staffing ratios, hours of work, employment, training, working conditions, job descriptions and contracts.

## 1.4 NSW Women's Refuge Movement access and equity resolutions

To enhance the NSW WRM principle of access and equity, the Movement has developed the following access and equity resolutions. These resolutions were endorsed at State Conference in 1999 and all refuges in the Movement commit to abide by them.

### **Resolution 1**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that women's refuges must operate within the guidelines of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977.

### **Resolution 2**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that all women's refuges must establish and/or maintain a non-discriminatory eligibility criteria.

Blanket exclusions based on specific characteristics can not be imposed.

### **Resolution 3**

In line with the Transgender Discrimination Act (1996) the NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that women's refuges must not exclude access to service on the basis of transgender (male to female).

### **Resolution 4**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that women's refuges must accept women and children escaping domestic violence who have a physical, intellectual, sensory or neurological disability except in those cases which would cause unjustifiable hardship to service or client.

### **Resolution 5**

In line with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, the NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that women's refuges must not exclude women on the basis that they have a mental illness.

**Resolution 6**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that to ensure accessibility to women's refuges, it is good practice that a refuge worker is directly contactable and available on a 24 hour basis.

**Resolution 7**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to review staff rosters to maximise the availability of workers on the premises during office hours.

**Resolution 8**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to develop a contact system to on-call staff that is of no cost to residents.

**Resolution 9**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that a client-focused approach to planning of rosters will enhance accessibility to women's refuges.

**Resolution 10**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for the use of answering machines in women's refuges to be kept to a minimum and only used at times of genuine need. Alternatives to answering machines should be considered.

**Resolution 11**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to provide support and accommodation to women without an income.

**Resolution 12**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that refuges must not exclude women on the basis that they are employed.

**Resolution 13**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for refuge routines to be flexibly applied to accommodate women who work or who study at night.

**Resolution 14**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that women must not be excluded from refuges on the grounds of their usual area of residence unless the safety of the woman or other residents is compromised by the proximity of the perpetrator.

**Resolution 15**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to require a minimum amount of information at the time of assessment. Each refuge should develop a set of questions that are asked of all women accessing the refuge.

**Resolution 16**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that refuges must not discriminate against women and/or their accompanying children within the target group who have specific needs.

**Resolution 17**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to provide appropriate referral services for women and children.

**Resolution 18**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for refuges to adopt an intake procedure that assists clients to access the service quickly and comfortably.

**Resolution 19**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to always have a staff member available with the authority to assess and accept intake referrals.

**Resolution 20**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure that all important information is available to clients in written and taped form. This includes ensuring that information is available in as many community languages as is possible.

**Resolution 21**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to document and make accessible to clients the policies of the refuge.

**Resolution 22**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to make policies available in both taped and written form.

**Resolution 23**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it good practice in women's refuges to keep house rules to a minimum and cover only those issues necessary for the safety and smooth running of the household.

**Resolution 24**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice in women's refuges to ensure that house rules do not undermine a person's rights under law.

**Resolution 25**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice in women's refuges that house rules are flexibly administered to ensure that residents have equal access to and equity within refuges.

**Resolution 26**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for women's refuges to operate within the spirit of the Community Services (Complaints, Appeals and Monitoring) Act, 1993.

**Resolution 27**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure that all refuge staff receive training in conflict resolution or mediation.

**Resolution 28**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for women's refuges to develop internal and external disputes procedures, and make them available to clients in written and taped form.

**Resolution 29**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for women's refuges to observe confidentiality and ensure that clients who lodge a complaint are not penalised.

**Resolution 30**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure that women will not be refused access to a refuge because of previous service debts or because of an inability to pay fees.

**Resolution 31**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for women's refuges to maintain resident fees at no more than 20% of a woman's

income if food and utilities are included, and at no more than 10% of a woman's income without food and utilities.

### **Resolution 32**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure that women who have fees waived will be entitled to the same amount and types of services as those offered to fee-paying residents. A woman's fee-paying status should be kept confidential.

### **Resolution 33**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for women's refuges to issue printed and numbered receipts containing full payment details for any payment made to the refuge.

### **Resolution 34**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure that extra charges will be kept to a minimum and designed to cover costs or replacement (such as room keys) value only.

### **Resolution 35**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement endorses that it is good practice for women's refuges to gain client consent before releasing information relating to a resident's agreed case management or support plan. The exception is when criminal conduct or child abuse is alleged.

### **Resolution 36**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure that information in resident files is recorded in an objective, factual manner.

### **Resolution 37**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure client files will be kept in a secure form that safeguards privacy at all times.

**Resolution 38**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure that residents have access to their own file and retain the right to clarify and to add to information contained in their files.

**Resolution 39**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to record reasons for the exit or eviction of residents in their file.

**Resolution 40**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure that only non-identifying, factual information will be recorded in a refuge's day book.

**Resolution 41**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to provide support to children as clients in their own right with specific needs separate to their mothers'. It is essential that this be reflected in policies and procedures.

**Resolution 42**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for all staff in women's refuges to have a working knowledge of the effects of domestic violence on children.

**Resolution 43**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to recruit adequate numbers of skilled, child-focused staff to meet the specific needs of children.

**Resolution 44**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to provide child-focused programs and support including; one to one support, excursions, and opportunities for new experiences.

**Resolution 45**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to provide adequate, developmentally appropriate resources and equipment for children.

**Resolution 46**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice in women's refuges for all staff to be aware of cultural issues for children.

**Resolution 47**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that women's refuges must follow the Interagency Child Protection Guidelines.

**Resolution 48**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to ensure that the refuge receives regular information on issues of concern to Aboriginal women.

**Resolution 49**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to develop policies that promote the employment of Aboriginal workers.

**Resolution 50**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to implement a policy of designated positions for Aboriginal workers.

**Resolution 51**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to organise cross-cultural and indigenous-issues training for all staff as a matter of policy.

**Resolution 52**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to develop policies that actively seek Aboriginal participation and support at management level.

**Resolution 53**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to provide an appropriate service and build trust with community members by networking with Aboriginal women and organisations.

**Resolution 54**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to provide an appropriate service and build trust with ethnic and refugee women in the community as well as appropriate organisations.

**Resolution 55**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to provide resources and information in different languages as well as access to cultural events and workshops.

**Resolution 56**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to develop policies and practices which actively encourage participation of women from diverse backgrounds on the management committee of the refuge.

**Resolution 57**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to develop recruitment practices which actively promote the employment of women from non-English speaking backgrounds.

**Resolution 58**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to include an understanding of cross-cultural issues in all job descriptions and ensure that the selection process demands that this skill is demonstrated.

**Resolution 59**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that good practice for women's refuges is to ensure that all staff receive cross-cultural training as a matter of refuge policy.

**Resolution 60**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure that all staff are trained in the use of both face-to-face and telephone interpreting services, and know how to book and work with interpreters.

**Resolution 61**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to display pamphlets about lesbian domestic violence.

**Resolution 62**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to inquire about a person's relationship rather than assume that all women who seek admission to the service are heterosexual.

**Resolution 63**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to promote the employment of lesbians in women's refuges.

**Resolution 64**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to provide training to all staff on the issues involved in assisting survivors of lesbian domestic violence.

**Resolution 65**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to encourage representation of lesbians on refuge management committees.

**Resolution 66**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure policies and procedures are not based on the assumption of heterosexuality.

**Resolution 67**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to provide women with information on how to contact a Gay or Lesbian Liaison Officer within the NSW Police service.

**Resolution 68**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to provide an accessible service for women and children with disabilities escaping domestic violence.

**Resolution 69**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for each refuge to develop and implement a Disability Discrimination Act Action Plan.

**Resolution 70**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for refuges to lodge their Disability Discrimination Act Action Plans with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and make them available to other refuges.

**Resolution 71**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for refuges to provide (where possible) an accessible physical environment for women with disabilities.

**Resolution 72**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for refuges to provide information in ways which meets the different access needs of women with disabilities.

**Resolution 73**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to organise Disability Awareness/Rights Training for all staff as a matter of policy.

**Resolution 74**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to include an understanding of issues for women with disabilities in all job descriptions and ensure that the selection process demands that this skill is demonstrated.

**Resolution 75**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice to provide an appropriate service and build trust with women with disabilities by networking with women with disabilities and relevant organisations.

**Resolution 76**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to encourage representation of women with disabilities on refuge management committees and provide the support necessary to facilitate this.

**Resolution 77**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to develop policies that promote the employment of women with disabilities.

**Resolution 78**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to implement an Affirmative Action Policy for the employment of women with disabilities.

**Resolution 79**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to include mental health services in the refuge's local networks and establish protocols for working within these networks.

**Resolution 80**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to organise training for staff in supporting women with a mental illness.

**Resolution 81**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that in line with the Anti Discrimination Act women must not be excluded from women's refuges on the basis of being on a methadone program.

**Resolution 82**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to use the SAAP Case Management Manual to establish ways to undertake case management with women with alcohol and other drug issues.

**Resolution 83**

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women's refuges to ensure all refuge staff develop a greater understanding of

Alcohol and Other Drugs (A&OD) issues through undertaking relevant training offered by SAAP and CEIDA.

**Resolution 84**

The NSW Women’s Refuge Movement recognises that it is good practice for women’s refuges to include A&OD services in the refuge’s local networks and to establish protocols for working with local A&OD services.

**Resolution 85**

The NSW Women’s Refuge Movement recognises that in line with the Anti-Discrimination Act, women’s refuges must not exclude women and children on the basis that they have HIV/AIDS and/or Hepatitis.

**Resolution 86**

The NSW Women’s Refuge Movement recognises that refuges should not ask a woman to divulge the HIV or hepatitis status of herself or her children. If information on a resident’s HIV or hepatitis status is offered to the refuge, this information must be kept confidential.