

INQUIRY INTO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRENDS AND ISSUES IN NSW

Organisation: Kempsey Family Support Service Inc.

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KEMPSEY FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE INC.
'STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES'

To The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

16th May 2012

To The Hon. Niall Blair MLC,

Re: Response to Inquiry into Domestic Violence Trends and Issues in NSW

On behalf of Kempsey Family Support Service Inc. (KFSS) I would like to take this opportunity to provide our experience and comments to the committee.

This submission was prepared by _____, Manager, _____, Staying Home Leaving Violence, Case Manager (SHLV), coordinator and facilitator for Men Exploring New Directions (MEND) and _____ Youth Worker and facilitator of Skill2Chill a behaviour change program for young men 12-1. Skill2Chill has been adapted by our service from the MEND behaviour change program so that it is appropriate and relevant for youth.

Our service has 18 years of experience working with Domestic Violence issues in Kempsey on the Mid North Coast of NSW. We provide a number of programs to youth, women and men to assist in the reduction of the impact of violence on families and individuals.

1. Strategies to reduce breaches and improve compliance with Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVO's).

In our experience,
Police do not always respond appropriately to the reporting of breaches and do sometimes minimise the level of violence that the victim is reporting. Often when staff members are assisting women to report breaches police officers show a lack of sensitivity in their response and sometimes actively discourage the reporting of the breach. Police do not always act on the reporting of breaches often requesting women to return the next day when more staff are



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available. This sometimes deters women from returning to report the breach because it has not been shown the importance and urgency of the incident.

More training for police in regional areas where lack of understanding of the complexities of domestic violence and power and control reduces the support police could be offering to women.

Harsher penalties are required for breaches existing penalties are not adequate to reflect the seriousness of the crime. Locally good behaviour bonds are handed out regularly for breaches that are significant, sometimes physical violence. There is no accountability for the perpetrator and word of mouth in the community is that breaching an AVO is not a serious offence.

More training for police on the importance of acting on breaches in a timely fashion and training in sensitive support of women who have experienced domestic violence.

Kempsey has one of the highest rates of domestic violence and domestic violence related offences in the State and Kempsey only has a part time Domestic Violence Liaison Officer.

Increase the DVLO to a full time position with education to the whole station on the importance of the support for this position in reducing breaches and incidents of domestic violence. The appointment of a full time DVLO would support other DV services such as Staying Home Leaving Violence and Community Partnerships Against Domestic and Family Violence. CPADFV has a worker co-located in the police station.

2. Early Intervention Strategies to Prevent Domestic Violence.

- Education, Education, Education. Community awareness through everyday messages.
- Use of media to encourage respect for women in society.
- Messages to emphasise that domestic violence is not a relationship problem Domestic Violence is a Crime which happens in every culture and community.
- More literature and education to be distributed to teachers, doctors, nurses and local Councils to highlight the importance of naming and reporting signs of domestic violence.
- More literature and education on the effects and impact on children and their emotional and physical health from domestic violence.



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- Education- media blitz on the intergenerational impact of domestic violence.

2. Early Intervention Strategies to Prevent Domestic Violence.

Continued:

Behaviour change programs for young men enacting violent and aggressive behaviours in schools. Facilitators must be trained in the complexities of abusive and controlling behaviours and trained in gender imbalances of power in teenage relationships.

Feedback from _____ our youth worker at KFSS who runs a behaviour change program with youth in schools.

Skill2Chill is a narrative based program addressing young people's experiences with anger and violence. A massive gap in service delivery was identified to address the increasing violence committed by young men in our community. In 2008 NSW Police Crime statistics for domestic assaults saw Kempsey top the LAC with the 17-19 year old men being the highest demographic of perpetrators. _____ along with developed Skill2Chill to address this growing statistic.

Skill2Chill is based on the framework of Lismore Men and Families Centre MEND program. MEND has demonstrated considerable success through several surveys with over a third of partners of the men stating that all violence has ceased.

Skill2Chill was first piloted for Melville High School (Kempsey) term 3, 2010. After changes to the intake procedure Skill2Chill was run again in term 2, 2011.

Feedback from the school principal stated "while the sample is small and there are many factors which determine the behaviour of boys, the results of this program are very encouraging. I would recommend that the partnership be continued in the future and that resources be allocated to allow more students to participate in 2012'.

4. Any other relevant matter

Feedback from _____ from his experiences of working with men in the MEND program and his dual role as Family Worker with Fathers.



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I have met many men where my position has entailed supporting men to develop their own safety plans so as to remain compliant with ADVO's and to make child focussed choices through relationship breakdown and ensuing family law matters.

My experience lends me to believe that the roll out of accountable 'Men in Families' support workers into the community sector across the state would be an accountable support mechanism for men with children experiencing relationship breakdown or who have resorted to abusive / violent tactics within their intimate relationships. It is my firm belief that these forms of support for men provide early intervention for prevention of violence and combine to include strategies to reduce breaches.

In my experience in this position I have also had the misfortune to meet many men's advocates who, in spite of having the best intentions, come from an often dangerous subjective position in relation to family violence and 'men's rights'.

These positions could not only have an impact at the early intervention / prevention end of the spectrum, but also combine to reduce the steady national rates of DV homicide— currently steady at approximately 140 murders per year.

To ensure accountable service delivery the following should be considered:

1: Positions should be funded and coordinated through recognised service providers such as Family Support Services or other services whose core business / service delivery model is for the support of whole of family and domestic violence victims specifically.

2: Men's support workers should be educated and experienced in case management practice.

3: Men's support workers should be steeped in the knowledge of abusive relationship dynamics.

4: Men's support workers should be obliged to name the violence / abuse (the elephant in the room) when it is present and develop intervention strategies in relation to the violence as a priority.

5: Support agreements should be signed by male clients that include provisions for partner / ex- partner contact details to be followed up through the female support systems within the service.



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6: On-going professional development in the field of DV and family law and child protection legislation from recognised training institutes such as ECAV Education Centre Against Violence to Women.

7. Minimum Standards should be developed for all positions where men and potential for family violence is a factor.

In my role within the service as the Coordinator for the MEND – Men's Domestic Violence Behaviour Change Program we work meticulously to support compliance and reduce recidivism rates of reoffending violent behaviour.

Although this work is with men who have enacted violence within their intimate and family relationships, the early intervention is to support the cessation of the intergenerational violence our community experiences.

Further to this it is our belief that the completion of the 16 week program is not a clear basis for 'cure' however the educative and broader understanding of self and choice in relationship supports the development of a 'conceptual gate' that marks a clear decision to reoffend if this occurs.

Our program is supported by local Magistrate and a participant who reoffends and presents before the court is dealt with based on points of law at the upper end of sentencing.

Our model is a transparent, collaborative approach that enlists the local Women's Refuge, Community Partnerships Against Domestic and Family Violence, Staying Home Leaving Violence, Kempsey Family Support Service and Hastings Women and Children's Refuge to oversee and support the work undertaken.

The model and community set up to engage men to develop strategies to reduce breaches, recidivism and to make responsible choices in their intimate relationships has supported the AG's Domestic Violence committee in its development of the long awaited 2011 minimum standards for the delivery of DV behaviour change programs in which we are compliant.

Our compliance has been established through our collaborative approach that included liaison with ECAV, the NSW Coalition Against Violence to women and other peak victims' bodies as well as our regional partners from the Women's advocacy/ support services. Our aim is to always provide services based on 'optimal standards' in service delivery.

More than 50% of our participants are Aboriginal and we see a reduction in violence against women throughout the life of the program.

This model is currently run on one off federal funding that will expire at the time of State compliance requirements for such programs. Our program is



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compliant and will be registered as compliant with State Attorney Generals at the time the funding runs out.

In our region women and children experience Domestic related assaults at 2.5 times higher than the state average (BOSCAR 2010) highlighting a genuine community need to engage men in the process of reducing these figures.

Further to this, the region experiences a 60% recidivism rate meaning these families are exposed to on-going, systematic violence.

These statistics support the community demand for a men's specific centre (such as the Lismore Men and Family /centre) to provide outreach support and referral for men. To provide case management services for men and to provide accountable programs for men enacting violence within their intimate relationships.

Thank you for inviting us to participate in this inquiry. If you have any questions about any of the above please contact our service on 65631588 or kempseysupport@bigpond.com

Yours truly

Manager