

## **INQUIRY INTO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRENDS AND ISSUES IN NSW**

**Organisation:** Carrie's Place Women's and Children's Services Inc  
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# **Submission to the Inquiry into domestic violence trends and issues in NSW**

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Prepared by

Carrie's Place Women's and Children's Services Inc.



**Women and Children – violence free - independently**

## **Domestic Violence and Human Rights**

Domestic violence is a human rights issue. Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states that ***“Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person”***. As domestic violence is about the exertion of power and control by one person over another (or others), then it acts to deprive the victim of their liberty. Those subjected to domestic violence lack the most basic sense of security; and in its most heinous form, domestic violence is a vehicle used to deprive a victim of their life.

***Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women’s lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence — yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.***

— UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, March 2007

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## Profile of Carrie's Place Women's and Children's Services Inc.:

Carrie's Place Women's and Children's Services Inc. is a not for profit specialist domestic violence service supporting women and children who have experienced domestic violence and/or homelessness in Maitland and the Lower Hunter. It has been operating in the Maitland and Lower Hunter region for 32 years.

Named after Caroline Chisholm (1808 – 1877), who established the 1<sup>st</sup> refuges for immigrant women in the mid 1800's, Carrie's Place is a women's only community based organisation which takes a holistic approach to service delivery by delivering services to women and children pre, post and during crisis.

Our vision is:

***'Women and Children – violence free – independently'***

Carrie's Place Women's and Children's Services Inc. administers five programs:

1. **Accommodation & Support Program:** crisis & transitional accommodation and case management – **SHS Funding**
2. **Court Advocacy Program:** advocate for women within the criminal justice system relating to AVO's and domestic violence related criminal matters – **Legal Aid NSW Funding**
3. **Staying Home Leaving Violence Program:** provision of case management & brokerage funding to upgrade security to allow women & children to remain living in their a house of their choosing and away from violence – **NSW FaCS Funding**
4. **Resource Centre Program:** provide a range of services for women and children to support recovery from domestic violence, including free legal and medical clinics, social and support groups, information kiosk, library - **unfunded**
5. **Education Program:** Community Education about domestic violence, DV education workshops for women, in house training, VET support – **Xtsrata Coal, Corporate Social Engagement Funding**

Primary funding source is NSW Family & Community Services(60%); Legal Aid NSW provide a further 25% and the remainder comes from philanthropic, corporate, and community donations.

## **Executive Summary**

The incidence of domestic violence is at an intolerably high level within Australia, and has not been reduced despite many years of government policy development and subsequent service delivery aimed at reduction.

This organisation undertook a paradigm shift six years ago, which resulted in moving to a holistic service delivery model. This involved the recognition that providing shelter for women and children during a crisis was not enough; that without the provision of ongoing support services during the post crisis phase, and without strategies aimed at early intervention, the provision of crisis accommodation can be seen as purely a “band aid” solution.

This organisation sees the terms “post crisis” and “early intervention” as one in the same. Evidence shows that a woman in what is termed the “post crisis” stage of domestic violence is, in fact, in the “pre crisis” stage to the next incident of crisis. This organisation views these stages as a continuum of a cycle, with one preceding the next and onwards. Interventions in the form of ongoing support for all areas of a victim’s life are required to interrupt and derail this cycle.

This view has resulted in the creation of our Resource Centre and Education Programs. Neither of these programs receives any form of government funding, in spite of many funding submissions over the past six years. This submission will set out the evidence base gathered over recent years that demonstrates the need for these service models to be adopted as best practice, and funded accordingly by government. This submission will demonstrate how, with appropriate interventions, positive, sustainable results can be achieved; results that see domestic violence victims recover and move forward with increased resilience, able to reengage with community and make positive contributions to social capital and community wellbeing.

## **Introduction**

### **Terms of Reference**

As outlined in the Executive Summary, this organisation has expertise in providing a broad range of intervention services to women and children who have lived with domestic violence. This paper will focus on point 2 and point 4 of the published Terms of Reference for this inquiry:

***2. Early Intervention strategies to prevent domestic violence***

***4. Any other relevant matter***

### **Methodology**

Firstly, this submission will provide a summary of one of the “early intervention” streams within Carrie’s Place Education Program. This and other intervention streams are offered in conjunction with what was traditionally our “core” business: crisis accommodation and case management.

This submission will demonstrate, using both quantitative and qualitative data, how the intervention results in the achievement of organisational mission and vision statements; and how this intervention contributes to the reduction and prevention of domestic violence, and therefore reduces the financial and psycho emotional impact of domestic violence on Australian communities.

It is noted that other early intervention streams offered by Carrie’s Place, have evidence based results similar to the example referred to in this submission. These interventions are located within our Resource Centre and Education Programs. These include our community education stream, and our domestic violence education group work programs for women.

Secondly, in addressing point four (4) in the Terms of Reference, this submission will look at the need for strong, unambiguous political leadership on the topic of domestic violence. This submission will assert that domestic violence must be given a high priority in the context of government policy, and addressed with a multi partisan approach; an approach which highlights domestic violence as a whole of community problem. The discussion will entail an investigation of Australian political websites and popular media discourse in the immediate lead up to recent federal and state elections. It will also rely upon practice based anecdotal evidence.

## **Discussion**

### **1. Summary , rationale, and results of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Stream**

#### **(Term of Reference 2: Early Intervention strategies to prevent domestic violence)**

The Education Worker coordinates the VET project, and works with women who are not in crisis, to establish pathways to independent, violence free living. This is done by conducting a skills audit, and then, in conjunction with the woman, identifying training and education goals. Support is provided to assist with the initial process of applying and enrolling. Brokerage funding is offered to assist with the initial costs incurred, including purchase of books and other resources, payment of enrolment fees, and initial child care. Advocacy is provided within the key systems, such as the broader VET system, and with Centrelink. The Education Worker then performs a mentoring role as the woman settles into the education experience. Tutoring is also offered in appropriate circumstances.

If a woman's focus is primarily on obtaining immediate employment, then an assessment of job readiness is conducted, and referrals to Job Network providers and rehabilitation services may occur. Assistance in the form of tutoring and mentoring is provided, to assist women with resume and job application



writing. In addition, coaching is provided to assist women develop interview experience.

## **Rationale**

### **Local Evidence:**

- Consultation with service users in 2008 identified lack of financial security as an important barrier to leaving a violent relationship, and also maintaining separation after leaving. They then identified that the barriers to achieving financial security were their perceived lack of employability based on lack of skills and education.
- Women also identified that this impacted on their sense of self worth and added to their belief that they could not live independently and away from violence. This often confirmed the “story” they had been told by the perpetrator; that they were “stupid”, “useless”, and totally unable to cope in the world without the perpetrator.
- Many service users who participated in this consultation identified a fear of participating in mainstream job network services, because they do not feel safe in these environments for a number of reasons.
- It is worth noting that empirical research, and this organisation’s anecdotal experiences, shows that women who have experienced domestic violence suffer from a higher incidence of poor mental health outcomes; particularly anxiety and depressive illnesses. This is another reason why the provision of these VET services needs to be available to women through women’s only specialist domestic violence support organisations.
- This organisation provides a VET service that allays the identified fears of women – service provision in a safe, familiar environment; by providing a worker who is already known to women and who is experienced in working with women who have experienced domestic violence, and are therefore sensitive to their needs. This environment is conducive to women making choices to engage in this process. Once engaged, the ongoing support

offered, ensures continuing commitment by women to their chosen VET pathway.

#### **National & International Evidence:**

- The 2008 report titled ***Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness***<sup>1</sup>, discusses the need for the provision “***of a continuum of individualised and open ended support...that wraps around women and their children in a range of areas***”. This organisation’s VET intervention stream does just that.
- This report also makes a clear correlation between income and housing options, stating “***income shapes the accommodation options available to women and their children...and a lack of independent income for women affected by domestic and family violence is a major cause of homelessness***”<sup>2</sup>. This gives evidentiary backing to the anecdotal evidence supplied by service users
- Section 5 of this report looks at prevention of DV related homelessness, and states that “***strategies to assist women to secure appropriate employment [is] paramount***” and goes on to discuss the concept of a “***national funding stream***” to “***assist women [to gain] access to employment through the provision of personal development assistance and improving their education and job seeking skills***”<sup>3</sup>.
- A report by Amnesty International (2008), cites a similar fund to that suggested in previous point , which was established in Ireland, as an example of “***International good practice: supporting women’s economic independence***”<sup>4</sup>. This report identifies that amongst the many reasons why

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<sup>1</sup> Flinders University, *Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness – A Synthesis Report (2008)*, p v

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p 18

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p32

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International 2008, *Setting the standard: international good practice to inform an Australian national plan of action to eliminate violence against women*, Amnesty International Australia, p 46

women do not leave, or do return to violent relationships, is the ***“risk of unemployment and poverty”***. The report then states ***“programs to support women through, and into employment”*** are a necessity.

- In the 2008 report titled ***Going it Alone: Single, Low Needs Women and Hidden Homelessness***<sup>5</sup>, a clear link is established between domestic violence, poor economic outcomes, and homelessness and Recommendation f) states:

***“Effort needs to be made in relation to improving employment and re-training opportunities for women experiencing housing insecurity”***

## **Results to date:**

The following is an excerpt from a report provided to Xstrata Coal, relating to the **period 1 July 2009 to 31 December 2009:**

- *100 % (20) have remained living free from violence – they have not returned to a previous violent relationship, or formed other unhealthy relationships.*
- *Of the 20 women who have been involved with VET during this period, 75% (15) have a long term goal of gaining employment, or increasing their hours of employment, or gaining employment in other areas. 100% of these women are undertaking training and education as part of the long term strategy to gain necessary employment qualifications*
- *Conclusions can be drawn from this data that the VET program plays a very important role in supporting women to remain independent and free from violence. While financial independence in most cases has yet to be achieved by way of employment outcomes, these women are now all positioned to make this a reality in the near future.*

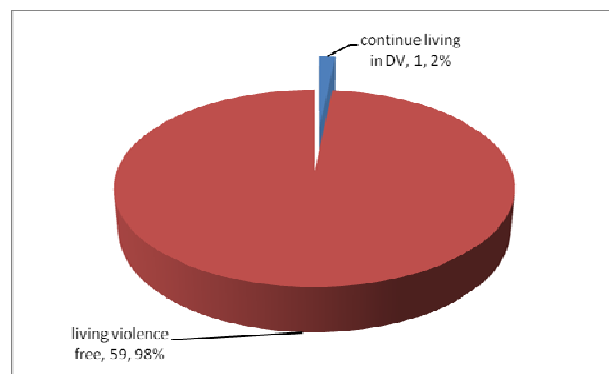
**Attachment A** to this submission contains the results of a survey conducted with women when the VET intervention had been in existence for six months.

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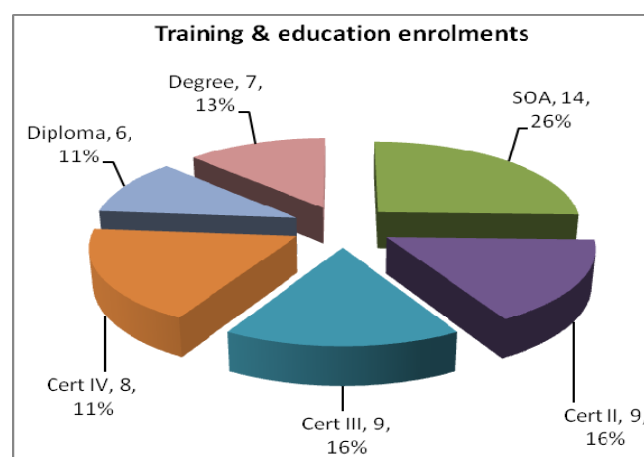
<sup>5</sup> Women's Information, Support and Housing in the North, *Going it Alone: Single, Low Needs Women and Hidden Homelessness*, 2008, p 11

Since then, the following results have been achieved:

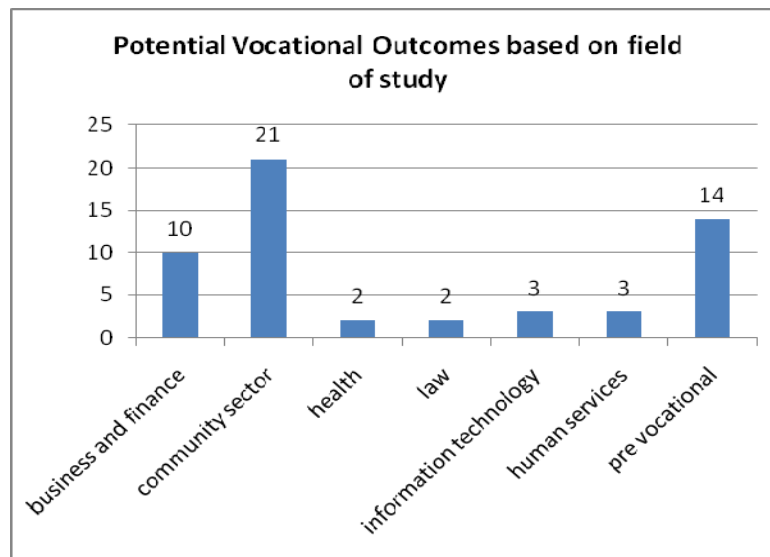
- Of the 60 women that have engaged in the VET intervention stream, only 1 woman has continued to a live with a violent perpetrator. No women have returned to live with their previous violent perpetrator, or commenced new relationships that involve violence.



- Of the 60 women engaged, 15 are now in employment (casual & part time), and the remaining 45 are still engaged in various forms of education and training.
- Of the 15 in employment, 10 are also undertaking study



- Of the 55 women, 41 are participating in education and training with a clear long term vocational aim. The remainder are participating in training and education that may lead to other vocationally orientated educational pathways



- All those engaged in either employment or education report that the cycle of isolation they experienced while living in violence has been broken.
- All those engaged in either employment or education report that their self esteem had greatly improved. As a result, they report feeling a strong sense of entitlement to a life that is free from violence.

## Case Study

*Sue, who has 4 children, had been living in an abusive relationship for over 10 years. The abuse included physical, sexual, and emotional violence. She stayed in the relationship because she was married and she believed she was supposed to stick by her husband. She also stayed because of her children and the fear that their financial life would be extremely difficult. Sue 1<sup>st</sup> came to the Resource Centre in 2008. She was supported by a case worker to identify that this was not a safe & healthy environment for either herself or her children. She was assisted to leave the violent relationship, and obtain private rental. Our court advocacy workers supported her to obtain restraining orders (AVO). She attended our workshops, and then felt confident enough to participate in our Vocational Education & Training Program. There she identified her desire to become a nurse. Initially she stated that she doubted her ability as she never been any good at school, and her husband had always been the “clever one”. She was supported firstly to participate in a computer introduction course (Statement of Attainment). Then she was supported to go to TAFE, where she flourished, and attained high distinctions in the Tertiary Preparation Course (Certificate II). This year she has commenced a Bachelor of Midwifery at Newcastle University. Sue stills “checks in” with the Education Worker regularly. She and her children now live violence*

*free, and Sue is on the way to achieving her goals and providing a vital service in our community.*

## **2. Domestic violence: an all of community issue**

### **(Term of Reference 4: Any other relevant matter)**

Based on interactions with members of the public in a variety of contexts, this organisation notes that people and groups in society continue to believe that the impact of domestic violence is limited to individuals and small isolated groups. This attitude places domestic violence outside society's norms, and allows people to adopt an attitude of "nothing to do with me". Yet the data collected over recent decades paints quite a different picture; a picture that is very clear to those of us who work at the front line of service delivery and intervention practice. Domestic violence is not just a women's issue. It is a health issue; it is an economic issue; it is a whole of community issue.

If lack of dialogue on this topic is used as a base line, then this attitude appears to be held also by this country's political leadership. During recent elections (both state and federal) the discourse around domestic violence was nonexistent. Everywhere you turned there was, from both sides of majority politics, dialogue about "stopping boats"; where was the discussion about stopping domestic violence?

Prior to the Federal election in 2010, the Sydney Morning Herald listed the top 25 election topics as identified by political dialogue and press releases. Domestic violence did not rate.<sup>6</sup>

In a summary of the Coalition's election promises preceding the 2010 federal election, 13 major policy areas were mentioned<sup>7</sup>. In spite of these policy areas

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-election/people/tony-abbott> accessed 1/9/2011

including Health and Crime, domestic violence did not rate a mention within these or any other area.

A search of the website of the Liberal Party of Australia under the policy headings “Community” and “Health” failed to find a policy or media download available on the topic of domestic violence<sup>8</sup>.

Yet, according to a report commissioned by the Office of the Status of Women, the annual cost of domestic violence to the Australian economy is \$8.1 Billion<sup>9</sup>. This report goes on to identify that over 15% of these costs are born directly by the community. The remaining 85% are also born by community in a variety of less direct ways. These costs include (but are not limited to) lost productivity, reduced consumption, and loss of available capacity.

According to a report by Laing and Bobic (2002), “Domestic violence incurs significant social, emotional and economic costs to victims, their families and the broader community”. Quantitative data report by VicHealth<sup>10</sup> (2004) shows that domestic violence is the single biggest health risk to women aged 15 to 44.

Domestic violence is demonstrably linked to a range of women’s health problems, including homicide, alcohol and drug abuse, rape, poor pregnancy outcomes, and female suicide attempts. NSW state government Child Protection legislation identifies domestic violence as a form of child abuse. This is backed up by many studies that demonstrate that children exposed to domestic violence have a higher likelihood of problems, such as:

- issues related to cognitive, emotional and social functioning and development which can lead to behavioural and learning difficulties;

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.politics.net.au/the-coalition-their-election-promises/> accessed 10/9/2011

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.liberal.org.au/> accessed 1/9/2011

<sup>9</sup> The cost of domestic violence on the Australian Economy: Part , Access Economics Pty Ltd, 2004

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.dvirc.org.au/PublicationsHub/Chris%20Jennings%20Access%20and%20Equity.pdf>



- an increase in the risk of mental health issues, including depression and anxiety disorders;
- issues related to education and employment prospects;
- more accepting of or willing to excuse the use of violence against women;
- involvement in violent relationships with peers and conflict with adults and other forms of authority;
- increased risk of becoming perpetrators or victims themselves; and
- a detrimental impact on their future parenting capacities

These facts indicate clearly that domestic violence is a whole of society issue. Data has shown repeatedly that domestic violence occurs in all areas of society; geographic, cultural, and socio economic boundaries are no limiters to where domestic violence incidents are to be found. As such, the “compliant majority” cannot remove themselves from the impact of domestic violence. It occurs everywhere in communities, and cannot be treated as an aberration. The all pervasive nature of domestic violence requires a committed and vocal approach from leadership, not the “tacit at best, silent at worst” approach that is currently the norm.

## **Conclusion:**

This organisation acknowledges that there will continue to be a need for the provision of crisis accommodation for women and children who are forced into homelessness as a result of domestic violence. Looking after those who are least advantaged and most vulnerable is clearly a responsibility of government in a civilized society.

The existence of women & children living in our communities who are not afforded safety and security due to the violent and abusive behaviour of an intimate family member is unacceptable. Communities that are healthy, robust, and resilient are those where **all** members feel safe and secure, and are able to participate fully.

If all that government does to address this community disease, is to provide short term solutions in the way of crisis accommodation, then domestic violence will continue to plague communities. While this organisation accepts that there are many demands on the public purse, it is our assertion that the elimination of domestic violence must be given a very high priority by all levels of government.

## **Recommendations:**

For government to make quantifiable in-roads into this massive social problem, then it is recommended that the following points be implemented as a matter of policy.

### **(Term of Reference 2: Early Intervention strategies to prevent domestic violence)**

1. Government develop a funding stream for administration by specialist services, that provides VET support for women at risk of homelessness
2. Government allocate more time and resources to consulting with front line specialist domestic violence services
3. Government acknowledge that non government, not for profit DV specialist services are not currently resourced to collect, collate, and analyze evidence of an academic standard.
4. Evidence provided by specialist DV services based on practice wisdom must be given credence, treated as valuable data, and used to inform the development and implementation of government policy.
5. Government recognise successful interventions practiced by specialist DV services
6. Government provide secure funding to a specialist service that can demonstrate by way of a variety of evidence, 'best practice' in domestic violence intervention models

### **(Term of Reference 4: Any other relevant matter)**

1. All levels of government lead conversations on domestic violence.  
Leaders in government need to demonstrate through action that domestic violence is real and is an all of community issue.
2. Domestic violence needs to be spoken of by leaders on an ongoing basis, and with a clear commitment to its elimination
3. Domestic Violence needs to be a specifically identified major policy area; not buried as a sub sub topic within health, women's issues, or crime.

## References

Amnesty International 2008, *Setting the standard: international good practice to inform an Australian national plan of action to eliminate violence against women*, Amnesty International

*Carrie's Place Inc Annual Report 2009*

*Carrie's Place Inc Annual Report 2011*

*Carrie's Place Inc Final Report to Xstrata Coal 2009*

*Carrie's Place Inc Final Report to Xstrata Coal 2010*

Flinders University, *Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness – A Synthesis Report*, 2008, p v

Women's Information, Support and Housing in the North, *Going it Alone: Single, Low Needs Women and Hidden Homelessness*, 2008, p 11

*The cost of domestic violence on the Australian Economy: Part I*, Access Economics Pty Ltd, 2004

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-election/people/tony-abbott> accessed 1/9/2011

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<http://www.dvirc.org.au/PublicationsHub/Chris%20Jennings%20Access%20and%20Equity.pdf> accessed 10/9/2011

## **Submission to the Inquiry into domestic violence trends and issues in NSW - Attachment A**

### **Carrie's Place VET Program - Consultation – January 2009**

During the week of 19 January 2009, 6 VET clients were invited to participate in a focus group consultation process, where they were asked 6 open questions, and given a brief survey to complete. At this point 6 months had passed since the commencement of the VET program. The following is a compilation of their responses:

#### **1. Has the VET program assisted you to remain living in a violence free relationship?**

**Yes: 6; No: 0**

#### **2. How has the VET program assisted you to remain living in a violence free relationship?**

- VET has helped me to get a sense of my rights
- Referral through VET to other services at Carrie's Place has led to a greater understanding of abuse
- The VET process has led to a greater sense of me and what I deserve
- VET has helped me to see that I can do things – I use to be told that I was useless and couldn't look after me and the kids
- VET has let me focus on me and now I know I can move on and do things that I want to do, like eventually go to uni
- I realise just how bad things were and how dependent I was – I don't want that any more

#### **3. Has the VET program changed your outlook for your future?**

**YES: 6; NO: 0**

#### **4. How?**

- VET has helped me to form some goals for the future that will lead to work
- I can look forward to new things in the future
- I have always wanted to be a nurse, and now I am on track to do this
- I use to think that I could never cope with studying, but the computer course showed me I can – now I'm enrolled in website design certificate
- I can't wait to get qualified and then get a job
- I was very depressed about the future; getting involved and supported by Jan [VET worker] has just made me feel great, and the TAFE teacher has made me feel so welcome. It gave me the confidence to get a job [NESB woman who undertook ESOL training]

#### **5. What was the most positive aspect of participating in the VET program?**

## **Submission to the Inquiry into domestic violence trends and issues in NSW - Attachment A**

Carrie's Place VET Program - Consultation – January 2009

- Feeling supported but not pressured
- VET worker knowledge about training things
- Help given to me to work out what I wanted to do
- The worker's belief that I could go back to school. I said I couldn't, but now I know I can
- Being treated like a person – I was use to getting into trouble if I wanted to do something for me
- The VET worker ringing and checking with me – the support, and being reminded. It feels like someone cares.

### **6. Please state what other services you would like VET to offer?**

- Not sure - it would be good to have computers to do job searching, and to be able to use to practice
- Help with resume writing and how to do interviews x3
- Training about DV and other things x 2
- Other things like computers – it would be great if there were some here we could use and practice on, and even do the training here.

### **7. Have you used the services of a Job Network Agency (such as Employment Plus)?**

**No: 3 Yes: 3**

### **8. Are you currently registered with a Job Network Agency?**

**No: 5 Yes: 1**

### **9. Why did you choose to participate in Carrie's Place VET program instead of, or as well as, a job agency?**

- Because I know Carrie's Place helps women in my situation
- Carrie's is a man free zone and I don't feel safe where there are lots of men, and the Carrie's workers are women
- I am scared of all that stuff; having to talk to Centrelink is bad enough
- They don't know anything about DV and abuse
- VET is part of Carrie's Place and I feel safe there
- I don't think they know about what we need – I need a place that knows what I've been through

## **VET survey**

## **Submission to the Inquiry into domestic violence trends and issues in NSW - Attachment A**

Carrie's Place VET Program - Consultation – January 2009

**1. How would you rate the importance of the VET program in you (and your children) living violence free**

Not important (0)    Don't know (0)                      somewhat important (1= 17%)

Very important (5 = 83%)

**2. Which of the following explain why VET has contributed to you living violence free?**

- a. Improved sense of self worth **(6)**
- b. Increased self confidence **(5)**
- c. Increase in income **(2)**
- d. Understanding my right to not live with DV **(5)**
- e. Positive outlook for future without needing someone to financially support me **(4)**

**3. Will you continue to be involved with the VET program in the near future?**

No (0)                      Don't know (0)                      Yes (6)

**4. Would you consider participating in training courses if offered by the VET program?**

No (0)                      Yes (6)

**5. Please tick which of the following courses you would consider?**

- a. Resume & job application writing **(6)**
- b. Interview skills coaching **(5)**
- c. Communication skills **(4)**
- d. Time management & organisation skills **(6)**
- e. Financial management & budgeting **(5)**
- f. Domestic violence education **(5)**
- g. Community work **(4)**
- h. Courses that result in accredited qualifications **(6)**

**6. Please rate your satisfaction with the VET program?**

Not satisfied (0)                      somewhat satisfied (0)                      very satisfied (4 =67%) Exceeded expectations (2 = 33%)