



South West Carer and Respite Services Network Submission Royal Commission into Family Violence

About South West Carer and Respite Services Network

South West Carer and Respite Services Network (the Network) comprises 29 member organisations that provide essential carer and respite services to the carers of people who are frail aged, people who have a disability and people with a mental-ill health across South West Victoria. Network membership is open to government agencies at all levels, health and welfare organisations, community support groups and agencies that support and provide carer and respite services across the five local government areas of Corangamite, Moyne, Warrnambool, Glenelg and Southern Grampians. The Network supports member organisations to work collaboratively to improve carer and respite services in the South West by identifying gaps and issues, building partnerships, providing a focal point for interagency information sharing, identifying the needs of service users and by maximising the use of available resources to the region.

Based on current research it became clear to the Network that the lack of knowledge and skill to adequately prevent and respond to violence against women with disability is a major gap in the provision of carer and respite services. Gender-based and disability-based discrimination intersect and increase the risk of violence for women with disabilities (Woodlock, p5). The Network believes this issue is so significant that it included the following key priority in its 2013-15 Strategic Plan: 'To improve outcomes for service users by promoting gender equity among all Network Members, Service Users and Stakeholders'. The Network believes this is a unique position to take from a mainstream organisation. To guide the work under this key priority the Network developed a Gender Equity Project Plan. The work under this plan has been very successful to date including promotion of the Office of the Public Advocate Interagency Guideline for Addressing Violence, Neglect and Abuse (IGUANA) and gender equity/violence prevention/women with disability professional development for member organisations.

In August 2014 the Network and Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West partnered to deliver the inaugural Everybody's Business : Taking action to prevent and respond to violence against women with disabilities conference. More than 100 representatives from community organisations, local government, the disability sector and domestic violence agencies were challenged to step up and take action to address and/or prevent violence against women with disabilities.

Keynote speaker the late Stella Young opened the day with a resounding call to action, followed by a panel discussion that included Women with Disabilities Victoria, Disabilities Services Commissioner, Office of Public Advocate, Victoria Police, South West Centre Against Sexual Assault and Emma House Domestic Violence Services Inc., followed by workshops to consider how to progress local action to identify, address and prevent violence against women with disabilities.

This conference highlights the strength of local partnerships and the ability of small, agile organisations to pool their resources and take action in an area still emerging at a state, national and international level. This agility led to a tremendously successful day, a firm commitment to ongoing action and the opportunity to put the Great South Coast on the map as a region leading action to prevent violence against women with disabilities.

The conference prioritised the learning of expert bodies such as Women with Disabilities Victoria, but also drew on the experience of local organisations and practitioners to identify current contexts for improving outcomes for women with disabilities.

The conference moved quickly from describing the problem to identifying a work plan for collaborative action by partners across the continuum from primary prevention to crisis response. A number of key local actions were derived from this forum and have now been formulated into an action plan that supports the work already being done through local government Health and Wellbeing Plans and the *Great South Coast Strategy to Prevent Violence against Women and Children 2013-2017*. A local reference group is being developed to oversee the implementation of our action plan. Please see Everybody's Business Action Plan attached.

What became clear from the Everybody's Business Conference was a tremendous amount of good will and commitment on the part of local organisations and their staff to support women with disability to maintain their human right to live free from violence. They were able to acknowledge that despite best intentions there are gaps in the systems in which they work and that they need support to overcome them.

While considered important by Network member agencies, gender and disability training is given low priority in comparison to other requirements in the context of constrained resources. Gender and disability training and prevention of violence against women with disabilities training needs to become a priority of disability, aged care and mental health services. Services need a better understanding of the prevalence and nature of violence against women with disability and a recognition that, as these women are their clients, they have a responsibility to prevent and respond appropriately. They need to review and update policy and procedure regularly to ensure it complies with best practice and ensure their staff are knowledgeable of the policy and procedure and adequately trained to identify and respond to suspected abuse and foster a culture where staff feel confident and able to respond when necessary.

Current State level work in this area does not reach local regional organisations in a way that helps people do their jobs. Support for organisations to better understand these issues and act appropriately needs to come from their own region.

In addition to providing this specific submission, we also endorse the submissions to this Royal Commission by Women's Health & Wellbeing Barwon South West and Warrnambool City Council.

Research

VicHealth's 'Preventing violence against women in Australia: Research summary: Addressing the social and economic determinants of mental and physical health' provides the following alarming statistics about violence against women with disability:

Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to violence, especially when perpetrators are carers who are in a position of exerting control and power. Women with disabilities are also at risk of violence from people with whom they share a house or residence. It is not uncommon for women with disabilities to experience violence by more than one person in their lifetimes and for the experience of violence to be a protracted and enduring feature in their lives (Salthouse & Frohmader 2004; Women With Disabilities Australia 2008).

- Violence experienced by women with disabilities is often specific to the nature of their disability and includes the denial of mobility and communication devices, a withholding of food or medication, and threats of institutionalisation (Curry et al. 2001).
- Humiliation, harassment, forced sterilisation, denial of reproductive rights, neglect and restrictions to social networks are other documented forms of abuse directed at women with disabilities (Salthouse & Frohmader 2004; Women With Disabilities Australia 2008).
- Overseas studies show that women with disabilities are overall 40 per cent more likely to be the victims of intimate partner violence over the past five years than women without disabilities. Women with disabilities are also vulnerable to more severe forms of violence (Brownridge 2006).
- Women with cognitive disabilities are very vulnerable, experiencing extremely high rates of sexual assault (Victorian Women with Disabilities Network Advocacy Information Service, 2007).
- A staggering 90 per cent of Australian women with an intellectual disability have been subjected to sexual abuse, with more than two-thirds of women (68 per cent) having been sexually abused before they turned 18 years of age. These rates are consistent with overseas studies (Australian Law Reform Commission 2010; Salthouse & Frohmader 2004).

The Voices Against Violence research found the following:

Women with disabilities are at greater risk of experiencing family and sexual violence compared with both men with disabilities and women without disabilities. Women with disabilities experience violence in many of the same ways as other women but also experience 'disability-based violence' including perpetrators controlling access to medication, mobility and communication supports, threats to withdraw care or institutionalise and abuse of Enduring Power of Attorney (p14).

Whilst intimate partners are the most common perpetrators of violence against women with disabilities, women with disabilities are also at risk of experiencing violence from personal carers, other support staff, service providers, medical and transport staff (such as taxi drivers), peers and

male co-residents. Women experienced violence in their homes, but also in residential care settings, such as emergency housing, group homes and supported residential services (p15).

When women with disabilities attempt to seek help stereotypes about disability create barriers as they are seen as not being credible witnesses or are not listened to when they make attempts to tell others about the violence. Often women with disabilities do not identify what they are experiencing as violence due to a lifetime of cumulative discrimination and demeaning experiences can result in some women seeing their experiences of violence as normal and an everyday occurrence. Women with disabilities are fearful of violence escalating, having their children harmed and being killed, being institutionalised or that their children would be removed from their care if they told anyone about the violence (p16).

The service systems are difficult to navigate and responses are often poor. Women were referred between disability and violence response services without coordination or collaboration. Women mentioned that family violence services were not always helpful because of the woman's disabilities, and disability services did not respond well to reports of violence. There is clear need for the disability sector to better understand the gendered dynamic of violence and for the family violence-sexual assault sector (including criminal justice services) to better understand and take account of the particular needs of women with disabilities (p17).

(Woodlock Delainie, Healy Lucy, Howe Keran, McGuire Magdalena, Gedes Vig and Granek Sharon, Voices Against Violence Paper One: Summary Report and Recommendations (Women with Disabilities Victoria, Office of the Public Advocate and Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria 2014).

Recommendations

1. Extend and expand The Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative to include mental ill-health and chronic ill-health.
2. Fund urgent and immediate infrastructure upgrades to Emma House Domestic Violence Services Inc's facilities, including refuge facilities so that they are accessible to women with disability.
3. Fund whole of sector mandatory training, provided locally, for domestic violence services staff, sexual assault service staff, police and court staff to meet the needs of women with disabilities.
4. Fund whole-of-sector mandatory training for Staff from disability, aged care and mental health services to understand the intersectionality of gender, disability and violence.
5. Mandatory application and use of family violence screening to be included in all client intake tools with particular attention being paid to elder abuse and disability-based abuse. Fund whole-of-sector mandatory training on use of these screening tools.
6. In addition to funding specialist women's services, fund organisations like South West Carer and Respite Services Network to support local disability organisations to skill their workforce to more confidently identify and appropriately respond to violence against women with disability.

7. In addition to funding State wide services, fund South West Carer and Respite Services Network as a local organisation with existing relationships with disability, aged care and mental health organisations to support culture change within those organisations to accept gender equity and prevention of violence against women with disability is part of their core business and a necessary requirement for them to carry out their duty of care to their clients.
8. Fund a media campaign to raise awareness about violence against women with disabilities.

'Everybody's Business' Action Plan 2014-16

1. Leadership

Strategic Objective	Action/Strategy	Agency/Program/ Person Responsible	Timeline
1.1 Steering Group – To establish a steering group to progress the strategic objectives identified from the 'Everybody's Business' forum.	Contact agencies that have expressed an interest in being on the 'Everybody's Business' Steering Group including Karingal, Mental Health Fellowship and other relevant agencies.	South West Carer and Respite Services Network	June 2015
	Develop a Terms of Reference for the Steering Group.	Steering Group	
	Identify priority projects from the Everybody's Business forum and the Great South Coast Strategy.	Steering Group	
	Develop a 12 month action plan based on priority projects.	Steering Group	

2. Reporting (Internally & Externally)

Strategic Objective	Action/Strategy	Agency/Program/ Person Responsible	Timeline
2.1 Environment - To develop an environment of trust within community services organisations where people feel confident to share/disclose information.	Provide Rural Access with a list of Domestic Violence agencies (including Police)	Women's Health & Wellbeing Barwon South West	June 2015

<p>2.2 Positive Leadership - To support staff of community services organisations to identify risk factors associated with family violence and to respond appropriately</p> <p>2.3 Reporting Pathways - To communicate the reporting pathways for violence against women.</p> <p>2.4 Information – To provide information in accessible formats, distributed through networks.</p>	<p>Invite Domestic Violence agencies to have a disability access audit taken of their premises. Consider communication boards, easy read information, assistive hearing devices and training. Include an offer of disability awareness training for agency staff</p> <p>Identify and promote a training program that addresses the issues for women with disabilities who experience violence.</p> <p>Investigate CRAF (Common Risk Assessment Framework) training specifically for disability support workers in the South West. Consult with the Regional Integration Coordinator.</p> <p>Support family violence screening to be included in all client intake tools with particular attention to elder abuse and disability-based abuse.</p> <p>Arrange a facilitated workshop with key stakeholders to develop a quick reference flow chart to clearly articulate the referral pathway and ‘what happens next’ and what happens if it doesn’t work. Include middle managers and coordinators in the conversations.</p> <p>Identify and distribute information about family violence and sexual assault services available for people with a disability. Ensure information is available in safe, public places that women are likely to attend.</p> <p>Identify examples of policies that can be used by disability service organisations to address violence. Provide examples to Rural Access.</p>	<p>Rural Access</p> <p>South West Carer and Respite Services Network / South West Disability Network</p> <p>South West Carer and Respite Services Network</p> <p>Steering Group / South West Carer and Respite Services Network</p> <p>Steering Group</p> <p>Women’s Health & Wellbeing Barwon South West</p> <p>Steering Group / Rural Access</p>	<p>June 2016</p> <p>August 2015</p> <p>March 2016</p> <p>June 2016</p> <p>March 2015</p> <p>July 2015</p> <p>September 2015</p>
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<p>2.5 Policy and Procedures –To develop policies and procedures which support rights and respect.</p>	<p>Work with the SWDN Quality Improvement Working Group to review agency evaluations and rights and responsibilities statements to include statements and information about domestic violence services and rights to safety.</p>	<p>South West Disability Network / Rural Access</p>	<p>June 2016</p>
<p>2.6 Building Social Connections – To build broader social networks as a priority for disability service organisations (eg social connection, “infiltration”).</p>	<p>Highlight opportunities for increased social activity by people with a disability through the South West Disability Network and the Community Inclusion Network</p>	<p>Rural Access</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

3. Partnerships / Referral Pathways

Strategic Objective	Action/Strategy	Agency/Program/ Person Responsible	Timeline
<p>3.1 Collaboration – To promote better collaboration between sectors and to share expertise and knowledge across sectors.</p> <p>3.2 Referral Pathways – To develop a referral pathway – from crisis services to agencies and from agencies to crisis services.</p>	<p>Ensure cross sector representation on the steering group and all issue based working groups.</p> <p>Develop joint issue based working groups</p> <p>Conduct additional forums that enable the sharing of knowledge and expertise.</p> <p>Refer 2.3 Reporting Pathways.</p>	<p>Steering Group</p> <p>Steering Group</p> <p>Steering Group / South West Carer and Respite Services Network</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>As required</p>

<p>3.3 Commitment – To ensure that the topic of ‘violence against women with disabilities’ is on the agenda for all relevant networks.</p>	Discuss ‘violence against women’ at the SWDN Community Inclusion Network.	Rural Access	Completed
	Discuss ‘violence against women’ at the South West Disability Network	Rural Access	Completed
<p>3.4 Advocacy – To empower women with disabilities – with support and advocacy skills.</p>	Continue support of All Abilities Advocacy Network (self-advocacy group for people with a disability)	Rural Access	Ongoing
	Sponsor an AAA participant to undertake WDV ‘Enabling Women’ training program.	Rural Access	Complete
	In partnership with Women with Disabilities Victoria establish a Steering Group to implement the ‘Enabling Women’ leadership course in the south west.	South West Carer and Respite Services Network	March 2015
	Implement the ‘Enabling Women’ leadership course in the south west.	Enabling Women Steering Group	Dec 2015
	Investigate the feasibility of implementing the ‘Living Safer Sexual Lives’ training in the south west.	Rural Access	December 2015
	Identify and promote opportunities for women with a disability to participate actively in, and be represented on, decision-making, advisory and planning bodies relating to violence against women with disabilities.	Rural Access	Ongoing
	Promote the Independent Third Person program to South West Disability Network agencies.	Rural Access	March 2015
Promote volunteer recruitment of the Independent Third Person program volunteer recruitment in Portland and Hamilton.	Rural Access / Volunteers @ Warrnambool	Ongoing	

Data Collection/Further research	Provide Rural Access with an electronic and paper based version of the <i>'Attitudes to Violence'</i> staff survey.	Women's Health & Wellbeing Barwon South west	June 2015
	Identify a disability service organisation that is prepared to have their staff complete the <i>'Attitudes to Violence'</i> staff survey.	Rural Access	June 2015
	Distribute and collate the <i>'Attitudes to Violence'</i> staff survey from the disability service organisation.	Rural Access	November 2015

4. Prevention

Strategic Objective	Action / Strategy	Agency / Program / Person Responsible	Timeline
4.1 Dialogue – To promote “courageous conversations” – talk about it more.	Investigate future 'Everybody's Business' forums. Inform stakeholders of outcomes from previous forum.	Steering Group	April 2016
4.2 Social Change/Valued Social Roles – To support women with disabilities to achieve valued social roles.	Refer 3.4		
4.3 Planning – Undertake strategic planning for the south west region to address the need for short term and long term action.	Refer 1.1		
4.4 Education – To educate young boys and men to understand consent and respect.	Undertaken community education initiatives across the south west	Domestic Violence agencies	Ongoing

<p>4.5 Media – To undertake a media campaign (featuring people with disabilities) highlighting the issues of violence against women with a disability.</p> <p>4.6 Awareness – To raise awareness of violence against women and what violence is (“hidden violence”, eg withholding of resources).</p>	<p>Work with media to highlight the issues of violence against women with a disability.</p> <p>Refer 4.5</p>	Steering Group	Ongoing
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