

## **DIFFERENT BEGINNINGS!**

### **FINDINGS FROM AN EVALUATION OF A THREE YEAR PILOT PROJECT**

**Presentation to**

**“Seeking Solutions”**

**Gold Coast Conference 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> September 2001**

The Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence, Wynnum Pilot Project. The CCR Pilot Project was initiated by and primarily funded by Brisbane City Council. Back in 1995, The Lord Mayor Jim Soorley, made a commitment to the safety of women in Brisbane. During 1996 a number of workshops were held that highlighted the needs in relation to domestic violence. Australian and overseas models of response to domestic violence were investigated and public forums held and hosted by Brisbane City Council. From these forums a reference group was formed. In 1997 the Lord Mayor and State Government ministers discussed the concept of State Government representatives being involved in a Steering Committee.

#### **STEERING COMMITTEE**

The newly formed Steering Committee, comprising of representatives from across State Government Departments and community based organisations, with commitment from all parties, went on to develop: Principles; a Model for the project; aims and objectives; a process for the selection of locality and auspice; and consulted locally in a number of areas of Brisbane. The Steering Committee met monthly for approximately 18 months prior to the project commencing on the ground and have met bi-monthly for the past 3 years. It must be one of the longest meeting Steering Committees around!!

After due process the project was located in Wynnum Police and Court district and auspiced by Family and Community Support, Uniting Care, Uniting Church Queensland.

#### **INITIAL MODEL**

The initial Model proposed a: full time Coordinator; part time Administrator; full time Specialist Worker Aggrieved (Women’s support worker); a Specialist Worker Respondent (Men’s worker); and a perpetrator program. The model proposed that the SWA and SWR responded within a 24 hour period of a domestic violence incident; provide appropriate information and referral; and assist with the court process.

#### **FUNDING**

Funding primarily came from Brisbane City Council. BCC committed funds for a period of three years. This funding covered:

- Coordinator - half salary
- Administrator (part -time)
- Operation expenses
- Evaluation
- Specifically identified project money for Indigenous people and people from diverse cultural backgrounds

Within 6 months of the project commencing, funding was secured for 12 months from Queensland Law Society to employ the Specialist Worker Aggrieved. At about the same time, the Department of Families funded the remaining half of the Coordinator position. Department of Families also made funds available to run a 12 month trial of a Perpetrator Program. Kinnections were the successful tender and employed a male worker to work beside the CCR Project team in Wynnum to facilitate perpetrator groups. The SWR was not funded. CCR is one of the only projects to receive funds from Centrelink. This funding initially assisted with salary for the SWA. The balance of the money then went to identified projects.

One of the projects was to employ of a 2 day per week indigenous project worker for six months to work with the indigenous community to identify their needs in relation to domestic

violence. CCR also employed a worker for 6 months to facilitate women's information sessions and identified the need for work with young women.

Funding constraints led to changes in the initial model. Although the only worker not employed as proposed was the Specialist Worker Respondent, this has had an impact on how the model operates. The focus of the model has always primarily been on the justice response, however the proposed 24 hour model was not possible with the funding provided.

Other considerations on how the model operates include the Local Focus Group. The Local Focus Group consists of representatives from local services and agencies responding to domestic violence within the Wynnum area. They include: Wynnum Police; Wynnum Magistrate Court; Community Corrections; Centrelink; Redlands Domestic Violence Service; Kinnections; WINNAM Aboriginal Corporation, for the past 12 months a worker from Department of Families.

It is not surprising, when dealing with the issue of domestic violence, and bringing together structured government services and community based organisations, that there will be a difference in perceptions and attitudes. Police work from the perspective of law enforcement and work within their Operations and Procedures Manual. Attending domestic violence incidents is only part of their role and from my understanding the *Domestic Violence (Family Protection) Act 1989* is only one of many hundreds of Acts that come under their jurisdiction to administer.

Even though the majority of victims of domestic violence are women, the Magistrate Court works from the perspective of Aggrieved and Respondent. As part of the judicial system the procedures are clear for court staff and Magistrates that they must treat every person coming before them in an impartial manner. Therefore, no matter if it is a male or a female coming before the system claiming to be a victim, they are afforded all the safety and security that is in place through the court system.

In general workers in the area of domestic violence have an interest in studying social welfare, social policy and human rights. These workers focus on welfare and social issues. This is in contrast to the justice system that has the role of enforcing and maintaining current legislation.

Neither police officers nor court staff are social workers. They are however workers who have experienced a society that still has a certain view of women, grown up in families with differing views and values, gone to schools which have different philosophies and been taught by teachers with their own values and beliefs. There is still not a clear understanding by many in our society of the gendered analysis required to deal with the patriarchal structures that maintains women's subordinate role in society. In fact, many systems still predominantly operate to support male dominance and control over women's lives.

So, within a coordinated community response, how are these complex issues dealt with? To begin with, there had to be relationship building. There had to be a bottom line. That line was, and is, safety for women and children. From this bottom line protocols were able to be developed. Even the development of protocols, was different between the structured government services and the community based organisations.

An impact on the development of the CCR was the changes to staff within the justice system, particularly the changes within the police system. At one stage the Wynnum Police Station had a change of Officer-in-Charge every three months until a permanent officer was appointed. Over the 36 months there have been many changes to staff. I believe the current Domestic Violence Liaison Officer is the fifth person to hold that position. Again, and again there had to be relationship building. Of course the protocols were in place and that assisted greatly. It has also been of great value to have the higher ranked tier of representatives attending the Steering Committee meetings. This has certainly influenced the process.

On the ground, fortnightly meetings are held between all members of the Local Focus Group. At these meetings open communication allows issues to be raised in a safe environment. Again, this has only happened because a certain amount of trust has been established through personal relationships. There are also the protocols that show clear processes for dealing with issues such as confidentiality and grievances. These meetings not only deal with poor work practices, but also highlight the positives and benefits of work well done.

Gaining a common understanding has been achieved not only through fortnightly meetings, but also by holding information sessions. (Further detail under training and information)

So, a common understanding exists between agencies, however, in reality, regardless of training and information sessions, understandings are informed by worker values and beliefs. Attitudes really do inform work.

The other side of the CCR Pilot Project is that it is a limited response. With current staffing it is only possible to offer a crisis intervention model to victims of domestic violence. This means that the SWA can only assist with protection order applications, information and referral and court assistance as requested. Kinnections have been funded to provide a part-time response to perpetrators of domestic violence. This worker has the capacity to do minimal amounts of one-to-one counselling and offers group work for perpetrators.

Although there is only minimal responses to victims of domestic violence there are a number of advantages of working within the Wynnum area. Wynnum is a small succinct area with a real sense of community. It has a small country town feel. Local community agencies and volunteer services support each other. The Bayside Interagency Network meets 6 weekly and is well supported.

To follow up on what is lacking within the Wynnum area, there is no:

- Counselling services for women experiencing domestic violence
- No generic counselling service
- No refuge or crisis accommodation of any type
- No response to children who have witnessed domestic violence
- No Community Centre
- Bayside Community Legal Service is now located at Capalaba
- Very little transport to Capalaba
- Public housing has a long waiting list (over 80 months)

Also the demographics of the area show there is a:

- High number of older people
- High number of young people
- High unemployment – particularly in the youth area
- Higher than Brisbane average number of indigenous people

Part of the CCR's role has been and continues to be community development and community education. Resources developed by the CCR Project team have been an asset to local services and in particular the police. Police hands out the "help" card to both parties when they attend a domestic dispute. These cards, although only designed for the Wynnum area can now be found in other police stations such as Cleveland and Capalaba. Police have identified that they are a useful resource. Other resources include information brochures, a bi-monthly newsletter that is distributed to all services locally and other domestic violence networks across Brisbane. A local information kit is still part of work in progress.

To assist in connecting the community, CCR has been responsible for a range of community events. These events have always focused on the positives of families and relationships. At these well attended events information on domestic violence, domestic violence specific services and all local services have been available and presented to participants in a range of formats. Local media coverage has always been very positive about these events. This media coverage has assisted in promoting the CCR and raise awareness of domestic violence within the Wynnum area.

At a local level, the CCR team has been able to gather data and stats. Unfortunately, the information technology systems of the justice system do not interface. This makes it difficult to find a true picture of how individuals are being responded to through the justice system.

Manual systems in both the Police service and court system allowed easier access to data locally. Now they both have computerised systems.

The court system has a new computer system called QUIKEN. This system again has centralised all the stats. This has caused considerable problems as statistics were unavailable for some months. Even the Department of Families could not track the number of PO applications, or the no of orders granted etc. Another problem with the system is that the court is unable to tell if other protection orders are in place or have ever been issued. This only becomes obvious when both parties are present to court and present their case. The Queensland Police Service do have the electronic domestic violence registrar, but this does not interface with the court system.

#### **EMERGING DATA**

Emerging data in previously uncollected statistics show 21.5% of women coming to the court with protection order applications have had previous orders. Abuse occurs for many women on child contact visits. Parties have often been separated, divorced and in new relationships and abuse still continues within the context of child contact. This only goes to further confirm the findings of Women's Legal Service in the report "Unacceptable Risk".

Locally in Wynnum magistrate and the Specialist Worker Aggrieved have developed a pro-forma that allows consistency of extra conditions on protection orders. Details such as how or when contact can be made are clear. This means it is easier for police when interpreting conditions to see if a breach has occurred. It also means both parties have clear, easy to understand language in the extra conditions, therefore hopefully assisting in understanding the process.

The ongoing Evaluation has been an important element of the CCR Pilot Project. Project evaluation and its findings follow:

#### **EVALUATION IDENTIFIES THE FOLLOWING :**

##### ***COORDINATOR POSITION***

Coordinator position was seen as essential to the success of the CCRDV Project.

The Coordinator role is seen as

- offering continuity and stability in a sector where people change positions frequently;
- crucial in negotiating the introduction of protocols with other agencies;
- crucial in establishing standards of best practice.
- essential for the maintenance of the group

Members of the LFG identified the continuity the Coordinator brought to the project as essential to its success as the high turnover of personnel within agencies at a local level was identified as an area of concern.

LFG members identified the group would not be viable without support, so without Coordinator role the LFG would be "hit and miss" interagency.

Also the Community Development work undertaken by the Coordinator was praised by all members of the LFG. Community support for the CCR project was perceived as high among the LFG members due to the extensive community activities, information sessions and work with the schools.

## ***LOCAL FOCUS GROUP***

For all members and agencies attendance at the LFG represents a major commitment. Most members stated that they had a personal commitment to the project as well as having supportive managers. In the past Police in particular attended meetings in their own time, demonstrating a great deal of commitment to the project.

LFG members identified transient nature of members makes stability within LFG difficult. Members stressed how dependent the LFG is on individual commitment.

The majority of LFG members found being part of the LFG a positive experience. Many noted it as a learning experience that has helped them understand how other agencies work and the constraints under which they operate. The exchange of information between agencies has led to an improved service for women.

The educational information component of the LFG meetings was particularly well supported and viewed as producing a high level of cohesion. It was also seen as meeting a gap in the training needs of those working within the sector.

Members of the LFG consistently commented upon the high level of community support for the CCR. Community attendance at public events has been impressive and seen as an indicator of community support.

Achievements of the CCR as identified by LFG members:

- more integrated services for women
- raised profile of domestic violence in the community
- greater interagency cooperation
- agencies more accountable – both to other agencies and the community
- improved experience of female aggrieved at court
- issues raised dealt with appropriately
- ability to develop solutions to issues

Specific comment on LFG and coordination

*“Project offers a forum – would not happen without it. Provides structure for information flow – hit and miss before. Important for victims to know there is communication between agencies. Great for accountability.”*

## ***STEERING COMMITTEE***

The membership of the Steering Committee has identified:

- problem solving;
  - evaluation;
  - resources ;
  - informing policy;
  - identification of emerging issues; and,
  - development of a shared agency perspective
- as major roles of the committee with a continued focus on the criminal justice system.

Brisbane City Council has played a crucial role in the establishment and function of the Steering Committee. BCC has been responsible for resourcing the meetings and following up with issues where required.

Issues are brought to the Steering Committee either through individual representation by LFG members to their Steering Committee representative or through the Auspice report.

Achievements of the Steering Committee

- setting program up
- training for members
- success of CCR locally
- whole of government conversation on issue (coordinated responses to domestic violence)
- good relationships locally and across all levels

All Steering Committee members believed the funded Coordinator position is critical to the success of the project. Also highlighted was the community development and monitoring aspect of the Coordinator's role. As well, the stability of having an ongoing coordinator for the entire pilot time was seen as necessary due to the frequent turnover of staff with other LFG services/agencies.

Difficulties for the Steering Committee include:

- piecemeal funding for project (model would have been more successful if all funding available at commencement of project)
- inability to maintain diversity
- some members of Steering Committee not at sufficiently senior level to make systemic changes

Overall the Steering Committee was considered as operating effectively. I coordinates a range of stakeholders at a strategic level and has provided the essential strategic support and coordination for the operation of the CCR

### ***OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN***

The Evaluation team conducted a survey of women assisted by the SWA who attended court. They also observed the interaction at the Wynnum Court House to assess the information available for both aggrieved and respondent in domestic violence matters. There was also a review of the Information Card, an analysis of follow up interviews with women and a review of statistics.

Aggrieved clients assisted by the SWA were asked questions about the following:

- area of residence
- cultural identity
- who was the applicant on current or original protection order applications
- which was the agency of first response in relation to their domestic violence issues
- satisfaction with agency of first response
- satisfaction with SWA

Data gathered show that:

- 63% of women assisted reside in Wynnum
- 6% of women identify as Indigenous
- 7.5% identify as women from diverse cultural background
- 77% of Protection Order applications are lodged by Aggrieved Women
- 19% of Protection Orders are taken out by Police
- 72% identified the Police as agency of first contact
- Rate of dissatisfaction with agency of first response down from 7% in first year to 1% in the past 12 months.
- No unsatisfactory comment has been recorded against agency of first response since January 2001.
- All clients stated they were satisfied with service offered by the SWA.

### **Findings from Court Surveys**

50% of women interviewed had no previous experience with the court system.

100% of women indicated that the information received was accurate and appropriate.

Beside receiving information from the SWA, 30% of women indicated that information had come from: Police; local doctors; solicitors; and other written information provided by the CCR Project

100% of women were very satisfied with the response from the SWA.

Specific comment by women:

*“ The role the SWA played was excellent. It allowed me to know what I could do. This time I was more informed and confident about the process”.*

90% of those interviewed indicated Police had been involved at some stage. A majority indicated that police were often involved in providing information and referral to the CCR. 70% of those interviewed also indicated that the Police Prosecutor assisted. In one case a Police officer (in addition to the Police Prosecutor) was present to ensure safety for a female aggrieved at court

Specific comment by women:

*“The Specialist Worker Aggrieved was the person who mainly provided advice on Court proceedings. The Police advised about safe practices such as taping phone calls [evidence for breaches to protection orders] and what to do when arriving home”*

### **Summary:**

80% of women aggrieved appearing before the Wynnum Magistrate Court are assisted by the SWA

Police and Court present the bulk of referrals to the CCR (25% of women self refer)

71% of women requiring assistance from the CCR project on domestic violence issues had dependent children

### ***PERPETRATOR OUTCOMES***

No funding has been provided throughout the pilot project for the operation of a Specialist Worker Respondent.

Under a separate tender process Kinnections applied and were provided with 12 months funding to run a perpetrator program in Wynnum. The funding was not primarily for the CCR project however it was expected by the Department of Families that the men’s program would link with, work closely and be a participating agency in the Local Focus Group.

A one year 22.8 hour per week position was funded to run the “Living Without Domestic Violence” perpetrator program. This position commenced in January 1999.

Following the expiry of the initial 12 months funding a comprehensive ‘Service Report’ was compiled. No further funding was available until August 2000. Current service provision is for 6 hours 2 days per week.

Service delivery provided has included:

- face-to-face counselling
- voluntary group work
- mandated perpetrator program
- community education/training

Achievements:

- establishment of perpetrator program in Wynnum
- strong linkages with local agencies/organisations
- provision of training to Community Corrections staff
- provision of a range of components of a Men’s program
- marketing of the program and finding suitable men to participate in the program
- establish strong work linkages with CCR Project team
- linkages with an Indigenous men’s group
- provision of one Mandated Perpetrator program

The Kinections 'Living Without Domestic Violence Program' is based upon the 'Practice Standards for Men's Domestic Violence Perpetrator Program' issued by the then Department of Families Youth and Community Care – January 1997.

-

As the perpetrator program has only been available for 56% of the time of the 3 year CCR Pilot Project, it has an impact on the service delivery and connectedness to the overall pilot.

### ***RESPONSES TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE***

Within the Pilot Project funding there has never been any funding available to directly respond to children and young people

CCR has implemented a number of strategies to ensure children who experience harm through exposure to or directly abused by the perpetrator of domestic violence receive a response.

Strategies include:

- involving local Area office of Department of Families in Focus Group to ensure awareness of links between domestic violence and child protection
- offering training on the effects of domestic violence on children and young people
- offering training of Child Support Agency and Family Court processes to local agency workers
- actively referring to agencies involved in child protection work where significant harms to children exist
- raising awareness and distributing information on the risk to children and young people in violent homes (local agencies/networks)
- encourage Police when responding to domestic violence situations to assess the situation for children and refer to Crisis Care when appropriate
- 
- facilitate a forum involving local youth agencies to identify gaps in services
- participate in activities during Child Protection Week
- involve children and young people in Domestic Violence Prevention Week activities
- involvement in school based activities – (ie young people at risk programs- information sessions- displays-sausage sizzles)

### **RESPONSES TO DIVERSE CULTURAL GROUPS**

Women from diverse cultural backgrounds represent a significant number of those supported by the SWA. To ensure appropriate responses to the needs of this group a range of strategies were implemented by the CCR Project.

These included:

- work closely with local Indigenous agency (WINNAM Housing Cooperative)
- work closely with Immigrant Women's Support Service
- development and distribution of flyers and questionnaires to engage local indigenous women

Training and Related activities

- cultural awareness training by an Indigenous facilitator
- cultural awareness training by IWSS staff

Other activities and involvement

- involvement by WINNAM Coordinator in all staff selection processes
- Police Liaison Officers involvement in Local Focus Group meetings

- Joint submission writing for projects/project workers
- Active link with elders on Stradbroke Island
- Involvement of Indigenous performers/artists in -1999 “Homes or Castles” Domestic Violence Prevention Week and ‘WAVE 2000’ DVPW
- “TIMEOUT” Domestic Violence Prevention Week 2001 – joint project

#### Other Outcomes

Employment of a part-time Indigenous resource/project worker for 6 months has led to the:

- establishment of the “Mirri Gimpa’ Indigenous Women’s Group
- development of an Indigenous specific “Help card”

### **TRAINING INFORMATION AND EDUCATION INITIATIVES**

In addition to the coordination of a range of agencies at a local level, the Local focus Group provides the opportunity for identification of training needs regarding domestic violence across the community.

Sessions have covered the following:

- basis understanding of domestic violence
- Protocol Development
- Project Orientation
- Family Law/Domestic Violence Act
- Barriers faced by women from non-English speaking background
- Family Law Court Processed
- 4 Day Court Assistance Training
- Defacto Legislation
- Changes to the Domestic Violence Legislation and issues for Police
- Lesbian Gay, Bisexual and Transgender issues in relation to domestic violence
- Domestic violence and children
- Social marketing (“Can marketing help change attitudes and behaviours”)
- Family Law and Domestic Violence
- Police Powers and Responsibility Act

All training sessions were well attended with workers from across South East Queensland attending some sessions.

Other training-

- Centrelink staff on protocols/project and domestic violence
- Wynnum Police staff on protocols/project and domestic violence
- Community Corrections effects of domestic violence on women

The CCR has made significant efforts to ensure all participating agencies are fully aware of the relevant dynamics, issues and legislation relevant to domestic violence

### **CHALLENGES FOR THE CCR PILOT PROJECT**

Inability to attain funds for the Specialist Worker Respondent has meant the project has been unable to access the effectiveness of such a position within a coordinated community response

Resourcing for the Men's program was not at a level to allow compliance with the Practice Standards. Concern particularly for follow up work with women in relation to effectiveness and impact of men's program.

Difficulty in attracting funding to operate all aspects of the proposed model. All funded aspects not operational at the same time

Magistrate Court and Queensland Police Service implementing a new computer systems. Impact on the collection of statistics needed to fully evaluate the success of the CCR

Little or no support for women locally. No counselling and little follow up exists for women. No counselling services for children and young people.

Continuous turnover of police.

## **POSITIVE OUTCOMES**

CCR has certainly had different beginnings to other Coordinated responses programs. Wynnum is the only one instigated by Local Government, as far as I know in Australia. Other CCR's and ICR's have developed out of existing domestic violence services or networks. Local government involvement has certainly proved beneficial for this project.

Even though there have been some difficulties and shortcomings in relation to implementing the CCR Project, there has been a range of significant improvements by agency response and information and support for people experiencing domestic violence in Wynnum.

- significant improvement in the police response to domestic violence situations
- protocols developed and implemented
- a sense of trust between the justice system and the local community
- increase in communication between local agencies and
- Police are reportedly consistent in their response to other agencies in relation to domestic violence
- Police network with other agencies to provide a consistent response to people affected by domestic violence.
- Local agencies/services utilise the specialist knowledge of individual agencies and departments to provide the most appropriate and safest outcome for women and children while holding perpetrators accountable for their actions
- Issues raised are dealt with at a local level. If the issue raised points to a discrepancy within the broader system and is not seen as the "best response" to women, the CCR conveys this information to the relevant authority.

Some members of the LFG have indicated that "sharing the load" has assisted in dealing with the issue of domestic violence. Being able to discuss situations and share resources have assisted many of the families in the Wynnum area.

Overall though, the way the CCR is effective is through relationship building and direct contact with individual workers and agencies. The coordination role is important. Most networks will not survive without a driving force. Also, as previously stated, attitudes and beliefs are what drives workers response to the emotive subject of domestic violence.

As Katherine Mayfield said;

"Could we change our attitude, we should not only see life differently, but life itself would come to be different. Life would undergo a change of appearance because we ourselves had undergone a change of attitude."

By working together, supporting people, providing information I believe that attitudes can be influenced to create a safer environment for women and children.