



Inside this issue:

Date Claimer	2
Address from DVRC Inc. Management Committee	3
The Body Shop Event— Queen Street Mall	4
Staff Profile	5
Project Safe Home	5
Enough—Patricia Hughes	6
Case Study	8

**EMERGING TRENDS
OBSERVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF WORKERS AT
THE BRISBANE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
ADVOCACY SERVICE**

The interface between homelessness and domestic violence

The majority of women who access the Brisbane Domestic Violence Advocacy Service (BDVAS) for support and assistance, experience incredible difficulties in accessing safe and appropriate housing. BDVAS's current experiences of working with women to secure housing, has highlighted the extreme lack of community awareness concerning the complex nature of violent relationships.

Of significant concern to BDVAS is the extent to which women are being discriminated against by housing services due to the disclosure of their experiences of domestic violence. This type of discrimination aids to perpetuate the silent nature of domestic violence, and in many cases reinforces to the woman negative undertones learnt in the relationship that the violence is some how her fault. Often the continual barriers that women experience whilst attempting to access housing mean that both she and her children are trapped in situations where they are at significant risks of physical and/or emotional harm, or potentially death.

Working with Young Women

Securing safe and affordable housing was a primary issue for the majority of young women who accessed the service. BDVAS's has identified that when young women are attempting to find accommodation in order to leave a violent relationship the issues of accessing appropriate accommodation are often compounded by the many complexities associated with being a young woman. It has been well documented that young women become homeless largely due to domestic or family violence. During the month of June 2004, 40% of BDVAS clients were young women aged between 18-25 years of age.

Another significant issue for young women who accessed BDVAS was in relation to Department of Child Safety involvement. Many of the young women who access BDVAS have been contacted by the Department of Child Safety for child protection concerns, in most cases the Department of Child Safety mandated that the young women find alternative accommodation (away from the perpetrator) or risk having their children removed from their care. In some cases young mothers are risking homelessness out of fear of losing their children. In these situations young women become responsible for the perpetrator's violence and the onus is placed on the young woman to ensure the violence stops.

Women and children continue to be victims of domestic and family violence through the Family Court process

It has been witnessed by BDVAS that the Family Court process can play a pivotal role in maintaining the unequal power balance between the perpetrator and the victim, and often acts as another mechanism by which the perpetrator can control and abuse the victim.

In many Family Law matters where there has been the prevalence of domestic violence, it has been clearly witnessed that a woman's safety, and the safety of her children, fail to hold considerable weight when making orders for residency or contact. In some cases contact orders are made which reflect the control that was exerted over the woman whilst in the domestic violence relationship. In some cases all areas of the woman's life is controlled and monitored through the contact order. The contact order can control things ranging from where the woman lives (even if it is not with a safe distance from the perpetrator), whom she associates with, what sort of contact she is to have with the perpetrator and can stipulate what times she and the children are to remain at their home (in some instances turning the home into a prison).

Cont. from pg 1

Court orders made by the Family Court have the jurisdiction to override Domestic and Family Violence Protection Orders, therefore contact arrangements made by the Family Court can often put women and children at risk of further harm or potentially death.

The effects on women who are made to go through the Family Court process can vary, and in some cases are severe. The court process can act to reinforce the learnt feelings adopted by the woman in the domestic violence relationship, that she is powerless and cannot control what is happening to her or her children. The Family Court trial and the interview processes with court report writers often require women to revisit, the horrific memories of past abuse. This process can often lead to re-traumatisation or an elevation of Post-Traumatic Street Disorder (PTSD).

PACE Alert Issues

BDVAS has provided intensive support to a number of women during the family court process who are applying to have their child/ren placed on the National PACE ALERT System. This process has proven to be very frustrating when the perpetrator has already removed the children from Australia.

A PACE Alert is placed by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) on the request of a person with respect to children. The alert 'triggers' on the AFP's system when and if an attempt is made to remove the children from Australia e.g. customs at an airport will alert the AFP when the child is processed through customs, and the AFP will stop the child leaving the country. PACE alerts can be obtained by applying to the family court.

Women with a range of complex issues

BDVAS provides a considerable amount of intensive support to women and their children who have difficulties accessing other services and/ or refuge due to varying complex issues impacting on their lives. Often BDVAS works with women and children with multiple needs within which issues of domestic violence are one component of numerous issues affecting the woman's life. BDVAS has provided intensive support to women with intellectual disabilities, mental illness, women with immigration issues, homelessness, drug addiction, family law issues etc.

DATE CLAIMER

**Domestic Violence Resource Centre Inc
Annual General Meeting
11th November 2004 @ 5:15pm for 5:30pm**

GUEST SPEAKER

Dr Angela Taft BADipEd, MPH, PhD

Dr Angela Taft MPH PhD is currently a Research Fellow at Mother and Child Health Research, La Trobe University. She was active for many years in community, government and non-government organisations, around women's health in general and violence against women and children in particular. She spent the last ten years conducting research, teaching, writing and speaking both nationally and internationally about the health system's response to intimate partner abuse, especially the identification and management of partner abuse by health professionals. Angela is currently Principal Investigator of MOSAIC (Mothers' Advocates In the Community): a community randomised trial of 'mentor mothers' to prevent or reduce partner abuse and depression among abused or 'at risk' pregnant women or recent mothers.

ADDRESS FROM DVRC INC MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Professor Fiona Stanley in her keynote address at the recent International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect advocated for the corporate world to consider becoming more active in sponsoring programs in the community to address child abuse and neglect. Over the past three months we have been fortunate that the Body Shop has engaged in educating the community about domestic violence and support services directly involved in the consequences of domestic violence. Domestic Violence Resource Centre management and staff applaud this initiative and hope that more businesses will consider how they contribute to creating more resources for people in the community who are affected by domestic and family violence. We are also grateful for the continued support we receive through the CEO Challenge in partnering our organisation with an appropriate business. We acknowledge and thank Tricare for their donation to date. The money will be used to provide direct assistance to women and children in establishing safe housing and creating a new home.

We also wish to thank people for attending the lecture by Carolyn Johnson on "Familiicide and Disputed Residency and Contact". It was a great opportunity to share in the learning's and insight regarding homicide within the family. Sixty-five people attended and reported positively on the presentation.

The Family Violence Network has begun meeting bi-monthly and sub committees are active around collaboration and referral pathways between police, community services and child protection. Representatives from the Department of Housing also addressed issues in relation to the continued difficulty for people affected by domestic and family violence to access timely and appropriate housing. BDVAS appreciates and welcomes the continuing dialogue that is being created through the network and sub committees. The aim of the network is to learn and listen to each other's experiences, to identify the gaps and seek possible solutions to problems that are creating barriers for people accessing services in Brisbane

As indicated in the report from the workers, BDVAS is continuing to grow in its capacity to engage and support a diverse range of individuals in seeking safety and addressing the impact of domestic and family violence. Overwhelmingly, the majority of individuals are women and their children who continue to carry the costs and scars from domestic and family violence. Services and systems that exist need to continue to focus on how we can best arrange our programs to work with and respect the pathways and choices that many women and their children are facing. Unfortunately, we have a long way to go in extending these pathways so that women can find a way of reducing the downward spiral the impact of violence creates. We need to be proactive in reversing the spiral so that women and their families are able to access safe, affordable housing backed with the range of child care, educational opportunities, employment, health, legal services, family and social supports that enables each individual in a family to reach their potential as individuals, as family members and as community members.

The workers at Brisbane Domestic Violence Advocacy Service have done a wonderful job in establishing a new program and in the creation of new pathways for the Brisbane community.

By Karyn Walsh
Chairperson
Domestic Violence Resource Centre Inc.

THE BODY SHOP EVENT – QUEEN STREET MALL

The Body Shop and BDVAS hosted an event in the Upper Stage of the Queen Street Mall, Brisbane on 29 July 2004 to promote the “Help Stop Violence in the Home” Campaign. Eloise Bishop, Social Affairs Manager, from The Body Shop in Melbourne organised the setting up of the stage and the sound system, as well as seating and hanging of the banners.

Below: Staff from the Body Shop at the launch



Eloise said that The Body Shop hoped that



Colette singing “Higher Ground”.

the campaign would demonstrate that domestic and family violence is an issue that needs to be owned by the whole community.

We were fortunate to acquire Anna Reynolds from “The Courier Mail” as MC. Tamiann Morgan a survivor of domestic violence sang her own composition “Never Gonna Give Up”, and her performance caught the attention of passers-by. Anne Bowron from the Body Shop spoke about the campaign and their partnership with the Brisbane Domestic Violence Advocacy Service. Then Karyn Walsh provided an overview of BDVAS’s work and our involvement with the campaign. Patricia Hughes, author of the best selling book “Enough” addressed the audience, speaking about domestic violence, and her experience of moving from victim to survivor. *(Patricia’s speech is on page six of this newsletter.)* Finally Colette Diedricks sang her original piece “Higher Ground”.

CD’s and Keyings are still available at The Body Shop and will be until December 2004. The proceeds from the fundraising items will go towards assisting Queensland Refuges and domestic violence services, in providing support and assistance to women, children, family members and individuals in the community affected by domestic and family violence.



Staff Profile

Tamara Child Care Worker



My name is Tamara Griese and I am the Childcare Worker at BDVAS. Prior to starting work at BDVAS, I have worked for ten years working with children of all ages, in many varied settings.

I have studied both Childcare and Community Services, and am continuing to further my studies by completing a Bachelor of Social Science. I am avid about Human Rights especially in regards to children's rights, and I thoroughly enjoy working with children.

PROJECT SAFE HOME

a domestic and family violence faxback project

Children & young people in domestic violence situations

Aim of Project Safe Home:

The aim of this project is to develop a partnership between the Brisbane Domestic Violence Advocacy Service (BDVAS) and the Metropolitan South Police Region, Brisbane, to deliver a coordinated multi-agency response in providing a high level of information and support to women, children and young people who are experiencing domestic and family violence.

Objectives of the project:

- To increase opportunities for children and young people who are exposed to or are victims of domestic and family violence, to be protected through appropriate linking and referral by the Police to BDVAS and/or the Department of Child Safety.
- To provide early intervention for women, children and young people through appropriate referrals to BDVAS.
- To provide proactive outreach to women, children and young people referred to BDVAS by the Police.
- To work with the women in identifying their children's needs for care and protection.
- To scope the demand for services, the appropriateness of referrals and the capacity to respond.
- To promote proactive responses by Police when responding to domestic and family violence calls.

This faxback project enables the Police to engage with individuals who are experiencing and/or are affected by domestic and family violence by providing more appropriate interventions through linking them with the Brisbane Domestic Violence Advocacy Service.

Project Safe Home was launched in May 2004 as a three month pilot project. In August this project was extended for a further three months. This project will be undergoing a formal evaluation process in the coming months. For any further information on this project please contact BDVAS on 07 3217 2544.

ENOUGH

BY PATRICIA HUGHES

AS PRESENTED AT THE BODY SHOP—QUEEN STREET MALL EVENT

There is a culture of violence engulfing our world. To our shame, future generations will look back on this period of history and identify it as one of the most violent periods ever with the severity of war and terrorism. We are almost becoming immune to seeing it splashed all over the news and television on a daily basis. But with all the expressions of violence, the worst is domestic violence. Women and children in huge numbers live in terror in their own homes, weighing up every word they say, always on the edge, afraid to relax and doing their best to please and calm their persecutors even knowing that their best will never be good enough to prevent the next attack.

Domestic violence is not just a curtain raiser for a much bigger event. It's an event in itself. People not directly involved in domestic violence don't believe that it's the serious social problem that it is. It's existed for centuries and has been hidden and ignored firstly by a society that sees it as a taboo subject to be swept under the carpet. And secondly, by the victims themselves who have chosen to keep quiet, mostly out of shame. The seriousness of this problem is diminished by the fact that like rape, the crime of domestic violence is under-reported because it usually occurs at home and with no witnesses.

One question everyone seems to ask is 'So why don't these women just leave?' One factor I'm sure you'll agree keeps women under the control of these men is they're scared. They have this underlying hope that the man's behaviour is just a one-off or two-off occurrence and it will stop. Unfortunately, most times it doesn't. Even when it seems it couldn't get any worse, not all women decide to leave their abusers.

A lot of women decide to stay for many reasons. One is economic dependence. They may have children and their husband is the sole provider so they have no money of their own. Some decide to stay because we all know that domestic violence is an attempt to establish dominance and control and this mistreatment breaks down their sense of self-worth already low after being told repeatedly how useless and worthless they are. The choice to stay is inevitable and overpowering and therefore they put up with the abuse. Another is that they are justifiably scared that leaving will not end the abuse. They find themselves in a Catch 22 situation where they are abused if they stay but then they are followed and terrorised if they leave. Statistics show that nearly HALF of all women murdered by their spouses are, at the time, separated or in the process of separating. We hear about this all the time on the news. All too often a woman knows she will be pursued by an enraged man. This is after she has made the decision to uproot herself and her children all with varying degrees of shame, low self-esteem and self worth.

Another reason is people who are abused often hate and love their abusers at the same time. Anger, confusion, fear and hurt all create a turmoil of emotions. What a lot of people don't realise is that these violent men can appear remorseful after every attack and show regret for their actions. These women are confused by this show of love and willingly stay in order to feel that warmth and acceptance. We all crave love and human contact and this is another major reason why women go back to their abusers.

So considering all of this, why isn't the question, 'How on earth do these women manage to leave at all?' And why do we never ask that question? Why do we always throw our hands up in horror and disbelief when someone keeps going back for more? Too often, you hear men say that it's 'her own fault' for going back. The trouble is these people don't understand that in these women's minds, they have nowhere else to go.

I **know** these women don't know where to turn or who to turn to because ten years ago, I was in this exact same position. Not many people seem to know the answers and even fewer people seem to care and no-one seems to understand the extent of your wounds both physical and psychological. People say wounds can't hurt but I beg to differ. Emotional wounds need to be dressed and attended to, and long after the bruises have healed, the words still remain to haunt and damage you. Being a punching bag and experiencing emotional abuse in the form of intimidation and humiliation are almost on a par as far as women are concerned. This is why the majority of women tend to withdraw from a society that regards domestic violence with such disregard.

Mainly because of the shame they feel, they hide their injuries and this only creates more pain in the way of loneliness. Shame keeps a lot of women quiet and sometimes they refuse to put their fears into

words because the words make them concrete and inescapable. I myself went through terrible agonies to keep the truth to myself. So why did I accept this dreadful behaviour? Why did I let things go as far as I did? It took me many years to ask myself the same questions but when I did, the answer came quickly and succinctly because I thought it was 'my fault'. Something in *me* not him. I'd read horror stories of women who end up with burn scars, broken limbs and dead children and like everyone else, I thought, 'That'll never happen to me.' But before I even realised it, I was a statistic.

One woman in every four who are abused by their partners.

Those who work to provide safe places and relieve the suffering of victims and survivors of domestic violence have puzzled for many years over the fact that societies everywhere seem willing to tolerate extreme levels of violence against women and children by their male partners and ex-partners. But it's never too late and society **can** start to help these women NOW.

Prevention plays a huge part in the fix and in my book 'Enough', I've devised seven identifiable steps. The first step is Identifying Abusive Behaviour and the second is Recognising Abusers. Some forms of abuse are subtle and they can easily be denied. It can be as subtle as not liking the way their partner is treating you. At first they may appear kind, sensitive, affectionate and thoughtful but abusers have a low tolerance level and expect impossible standards that don't seem to apply to themselves. The patterns of aggression, anger, intimidation, manipulation and control begin to appear and leave victims dependent on their abusers.

The third step is preparing for emergencies and is really a short term one. It only covers you and your children *during* the violence. When the violence suddenly escalates, remain near a safe exit. Think ahead and have the contact number of someone you trust nearby.

The fourth step is getting help after a crisis. This comes in the form of shelters, hotlines and advocacy groups and a great number of them are listed at the back of my book as well as their contact numbers.

The fifth step is Making the decision to stay or leave. Making changes and taking action isn't easy, especially when you are psychologically fragile. You doubt your own abilities. Thinking clearly in the midst of so much confusion and chaos is again not easy and should be done with professional help.

The last two steps are Remaining Abuse Free and Learning to heal and rebuild.

These last two steps are vital and I want to stress to women that there *is* a way out and you *can* make a new life for yourself. You hear people say, 'He ruined my life.' Believing that is a crime in itself because you are making yourself a victim for the rest of your life. There *is* another side and I'm living proof. I won't ever let myself forget those experiences because remembering is part of the healing process. In one respect, you remember the helplessness and utter desolation but you also know that it's something you've overcome, even though painfully. Sometimes it's a smell you remember. Sometimes it's a mannerism. Then suddenly, the memories are there again at the top of your mind. When those memories come back, don't let them drag you down. Recognise them as something you've freed yourself from. Clarify everything and put everything into perspective. Never let yourself forget those memories. Use them as positive reinforcement that you're a survivor and that you've come this far and will never go back. Say 'I used to be a victim but I'm not one anymore. I'm a survivor.'

If we are serious about wanting to rid our community of domestic violence, we have to employ a radical approach. We begin by asking questions like: Why do men and boys use violence with such ease? Why do non-violent men and boys feel so much pressure to fall into line? How early in life does the desire to degrade women and girls begin? How can we change this present culture of violence into a culture of harmony and acceptance?

Up to HALF of you out there know someone who is in a domestic violence situation. Be aware of what's going on around you and then reach out and help those women. It's up to us as a society who really cares, to play an active part in the easing of this terrible situation. *Every* society has a responsibility to respond to domestic violence as effectively as possible.

I'd like to finish with a quote from Edmund Burke, a 17th century Irish philosopher:
'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.'

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case study

For the purpose of this case study the names have been changed to protect the individuals identities.

PERSON SUBJECTED TO VIOLENCE:

Carla is a single mother with a 12 year old daughter. She was involved in a relationship with Steve that lasted for almost 2 years. Although the couple have been separated for 2 years, Steve continues to come to Carla's unit on almost a daily basis to harass and abuse Carla. Carla also receives unwanted visits from Steve's drug associates, usually trying to locate Steve for either money or drugs. When Carla contacted BDVAS she had a temporary DVPO, which was a Police application, with the 2 standard conditions.

PRESENTING ISSUES:

Carla's temporary DVPO was not providing her with the protection she needed. Carla requested assistance to vary her existing order to include extra conditions, specifically for Steve not to be allowed to approach or enter Carla's unit block. Carla identified that she felt unsafe in her current accommodation and wanted support in applying for a priority transfer with the Department of Housing Queensland. Carla also was experiencing significant emotional trauma as a result of the continuing violence and harassment.

ACTIONS BY BDVAS:

An Advocate and the Crisis Counsellor worked together in providing the following assistance and support to Carla:

- Advocacy with the Police and Legal Aid to vary Carla's temporary DVPO and to secure a permanent DVPO,
- Court support,
- Crisis counselling –in person and over the telephone,
- Referral to a women's group and to another counselling service closer to Carla's place of residence and
- Advocacy with the Department of Housing – particularly to appeal against a decision made by Carla's Area Office.

OUTCOMES:

- Carla has a permanent DVPO with extra conditions, one of which is that Steve is not to come to or approach her unit block,
- Steve has not attempted to contact Carla since the order has been in place,
- Steve's associates have stopped coming to Carla's place looking for him,
- Carla regularly attends the women's group in her local area,
- Carla's appeal against a decision made by the Department of Housing was successful
Carla is now waiting for a priority transfer to a suburb of her choice and
- Carla reports feeling more confident and that her general outlook on life has improved.