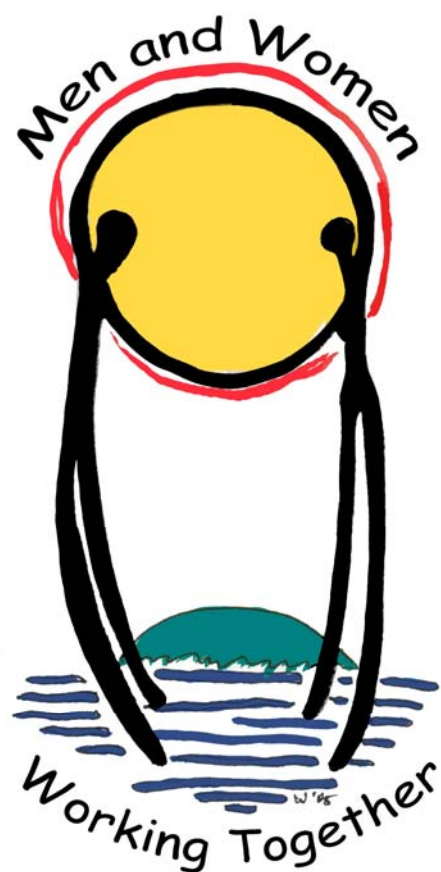


2005
Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Forum:
Men and Women Working Together



ISSUES PAPER

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Prepared by
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Background

The Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Forum: Men and Women Working Together was held on 12 and 13 May 2005. This was the second annual Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Forum convened by the Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research (CDFVR), in conjunction with its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group. The forum is held as CDFVR's contribution to Queensland's annual Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month.

The forum was attended by more than 150 delegates on each of the two days. The vast majority (more than 130) of the delegates were Indigenous people and there were almost equal numbers of men and women. Delegates came from communities across the state including Thursday Island, Mapoon, Bamaga, Yarrabah, Lockhart River, Mt Isa, Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Mackay, Woorabinda, Cherbourg, and Brisbane as well as some interstate delegates.

The program included men and women as keynote speakers covering a wide range of topics, such as the Pormpuraaw Healing Centre, the State Library's Indigenous Knowledge Centres project, research on justice responses to domestic and family violence, research on Indigenous men's groups, and healing for men and women traumatised by the impact of colonisation, racism and violence.

The forum culminated in concurrent workshops where delegates were able to discuss issues raised during the forum in regard to their own practice experience and strategies for advancing Indigenous family violence prevention initiatives. The issues and recommendations arising from these workshops and analysed by CDFVR's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group, are discussed below.

Workshops: Men and Women Working Together

1. Responding to Domestic and Family Violence in Rural and Remote Communities. Facilitator: Shirley Slann, North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service – Mt Isa.

Issue 1: Child Protection Policy and Practice

- Participants expressed their concern about courts currently making 2-year protection orders for children exposed to domestic violence and the children being removed from their mothers for this period of time. Although an application can be made to vary the orders, the difficulties in getting access to court time to have applications heard means this doesn't usually happen. Workshop participants discussed the hardship faced by children and mothers because of this long period of separation and the long-term negative consequences of this separation for children's and mothers' health and well-being.
- There appears to be a presumption by Department of Child Safety staff that mothers who are victims of domestic violence are unable to protect their children from the effects of domestic and family violence, and are incapable of caring for their children.

Issue 2: *dvconnect*¹ services to rural and remote communities

Workshop participants suggested a recommendation from the conference to prioritise *dvconnect* funds to rural and remote communities because of the difficulties experienced by women and children needing to flee violence in these areas. Such difficulties relate to the high cost of evacuation and limited transport and accommodation opportunities. Some participants also noted that *dvconnect*'s staff did not all have a good understanding of local services and supports, nor the issues such as distance and lack of access to transport or accommodation options, facing people in isolated areas.

Issue 3: Domestic violence shelters in rural and remote areas

Government funds to build safe environments are not enough to enable women to live a life free from violence. Workshop participants expressed concern about the lack of adequately trained staff at women's shelters in remote communities. While considerable money had been spent on building the shelters, there needs to be more funding put into training and employing local people to effectively operate the shelters.

In addition to the lack of adequate staff and training, participants also said that some shelters had been told that they could not purchase food and other grocery items with departmental funds and victims of violence were arriving at shelters to find that there was no food and a minimum of resources to support them so they were forced to return home almost immediately.

CDFVR's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group analysis of issues

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group discussed the need to support women to protect their children by holding the perpetrators of domestic and family violence, not their victims, accountable for the harmful effects that exposure to such violence may have on their children. The *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989* provides for "ouster orders" to remove perpetrators of domestic and family violence from the family home, enabling women and children to remain within their own environment, rather than be dislocated from social networks, schools and other stabilising factors.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group also discussed education as the key to the prevention of domestic and family violence and believe that perpetrators should not have to be in jail to access education/rehabilitative programs on the prevention of domestic and family violence. The Rockhampton Murri Court has a good model involving the Magistrate placing offenders on a 12-month probation order, in which time they must attend the "Ending Family Violence Program". This program was developed, and is delivered, by Indigenous Correctional staff for Indigenous men in corrections.

¹ *dvconnect* is a state-wide telephone service funded by the Department of Communities to provide crisis intervention and referrals for people affected by domestic and family violence. Its services include the provision of emergency evacuation for victims fleeing domestic and family violence, through meeting the costs of travel and accommodation.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group acknowledged the difficulty of prioritising *dvconnect's* travel and accommodation funds, as needs across the state are extremely difficult to anticipate and plan for, and it would not be appropriate to retain funds needed to secure safety for women and children in less remote areas of the state.

The Reference Group believe that it would be beneficial for *dvconnect* to enhance its networks with local service providers and the Department of Community's "Community Services Officers" (who resource funded community services), to further develop and maintain its database of local services for each community across the state. Such a comprehensive, current database would also enable *dvconnect* to have an informed discussion with clients about possible, safe alternatives to evacuation.

Recommendations

1. Where safe and appropriate, perpetrators of domestic and family violence should be removed from the family home, enabling children to stay with their non-abusive parent.
2. Women should be given the option to either stay with their child in their own home or move to a safe place with their children, with appropriate support from family violence support services, in collaboration with child safety officers where necessary.
3. Community-based programs for perpetrators should be available to encourage and support attitudinal and behavioural change without the requirement of court orders.
4. Mandated programs (such as "Ending Family Violence") for perpetrators referred by courts because of breaches of protection orders, assaults or other criminal convictions should be available state-wide and be funded, delivered and administered by the Department of Corrective Services in collaboration with domestic violence services.
5. *dvconnect* to enhance statewide networks to develop and maintain a comprehensive, up-to-date database of services, informal support mechanisms and accommodation options in local communities across the state.
6. An adequate training program for staff working at the remote women's shelters is urgently needed. An experienced worker should train local staff and stay at the shelter until staff are able to effectively run daily operations and manage the budget independently.

2. Innovations in Education to Prevent Indigenous Family Violence, Facilitators: Willy George (Woorabinda) and Michelle Bradford (CDFVR Education Officer).

Willy and Michelle presented an overview of Koora the Kangaroo: Violence Prevention at Woorabinda State School, a collaborative initiative between the Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research, Mrs Ailsa Weazel, and the Woorabinda State School. This initiative won the School-based Prevention Program category of the 2005 Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Awards (for further details see the CDFVR Newsletter Vol 3 No. 4, June 2005 at <http://www.noviolence.com.au/public/newsletters/news12.pdf>).

The workshop discussion focused on the possibility of utilising the Koora program in the State education system, given its adaptability to suit localities across Queensland, and even nationally. Some participants showed great enthusiasm for the inclusion of the life-size Koora mascot and Ailsa's stories, within the current school system. Others suggested the inclusion of the Koora mascot, supported by stories created specifically for local communities to suit the local context, cultural interpretations and knowledge.

Workshop participants stressed that initiatives such as Koora should be included within the education system. The inclusion of such initiatives could support educators and bureaucrats to begin to value cultural capital within each locality. Employing more community education counsellors would ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have been given the best possible opportunity to develop culturally within their learning environment.

Workshop facilitators agreed with the sentiments expressed by participants and advised of the need to secure the creators' intellectual property rights before further distribution of the initiative could be undertaken. They also advised participants that the Australian National University's Institute for Indigenous Australia had expressed interest in publishing and marketing the program. The Manager of the Department of Communities' Violence Prevention Team, a workshop participant, also expressed the Department's interest in assisting with the publishing of the program.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants shared their thoughts that support, such as that given to the Koora Project by CDFVR, needs to continue and broaden to schools throughout the State. They also called on Education Queensland to further support and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, teachers, teacher's aides and Indigenous support staff.

Recommendations

1. CDFVR to meet with Ailsa and finalise copyright issues and discuss opportunities for Koora to be the personality within each local area incorporating local stories.
2. CDFVR to follow up with Professor Mick Dodson of the ANU Institute for Indigenous Australia, the Department of Communities and others as necessary on marketing and publication opportunities for the Koora program.
3. CDFVR to develop a resource package and identify opportunities to support and assist initiatives such as Koora around the State.

4. CDFVR to follow up initiative using the Koora Project with the Sisters from Yarrabah.
5. That the education system demonstrate its valuing of cultural capital through enabling current Indigenous staff, and the employment of more community education counsellors, to culturally develop learning environments.
6. That Education Queensland to raise the profile of domestic and family violence within schools and to support teachers and teacher aides with information relevant to domestic and family violence and other related issues.
7. CDFVR to write to the Minister for Education highlighting recommendations relevant to that portfolio.

3. Indigenous justice issues Facilitators: Harold Fatnowna,

Harold's workshop gave an overview of developments of Indigenous justice issues over the past 15 years, including the establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) and initiatives such as Murri Watch and, more recently, Murri Courts, arising from RCIADIC recommendations.

Participants in Harold's workshop highlighted how the good will, good intentions and hard work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in "the industry" can be impeded in making real change by government policies and procedures that they have to work within. They felt that government policy should be developed to better reflect, and respond to Indigenous needs and initiatives, rather than initiatives having to fit in with government policy (eg government specified outcomes linked to funding, do not always reflect Indigenous-centred outcomes – government and communities sometimes want to achieve different things, and government support should be available for the things that Indigenous communities want to achieve, locally).

The workshop also discussed the need for more Healing Centres in communities, with roles including accommodation, counselling and support.

Recommendations:

1. Funding guidelines need to be changed so that communities can develop programs, then approach Government to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to do what they need, not what Governments want them to do.
2. Increased skills training for Indigenous service providers urgently needed.
3. CDFVR to recommend development of programs by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with community focus, to: the Ministerial Advisory Council on Domestic and Family Violence; the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors; and the Minister for Child Safety.

4. Healing Workshop. Facilitators: Sandi Taylor, Lilla Watson, Kurt Noble and Josie Creek.

The focus of this workshop was to continue the discussions prompted by the facilitators' plenary presentations on the Pormpuraaw Healing Centre (which also provides counselling services in Lockhart River) and the State Library project on Indigenous Knowledge Centres. Participants recognised the vital role of continued dialogue and support for each other in their work across the state on healing initiatives. A major outcome of this workshop was the agreement to establish an electronic network of Indigenous people working in this area. As a result, Sandi Taylor approached CDFVR on behalf of the workshop participants to ask for assistance in establishing and maintaining the network.

CDFVR's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group analysis of issues

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group were impressed with the work being done in Pormpuraaw and Lockhart River on healing and discussed the existence of several other Department of Communities' funded healing centres around the state. It was noted that it would be helpful for all concerned to have a better understanding of where they are located, how they are staffed, what stage of establishment they are at; and the training that staff of healing centres have had, or to which they have access.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group discussed the need to restore respect for elders, noting that respect for elders will not be automatic but needs to be legitimate. In this regard, it was noted that the conduct of elders involved in leadership roles needed to be exemplary. For example, it was noted that the presence of an Elder in a courtroom situation can have a positive effect if there is a level of respect afforded to the elder by the offenders and the conduct of the Elder in the courtroom is appropriate. The shaming aspect of having an Indigenous Elder in the courtroom was recognised as being highly valuable.

It was also noted that staff at mainstream centres should be skilled in working across cultures, so that Indigenous clients receive appropriate support and assistance.

Recommendations

1. CDFVR to identify email addresses for all participants in the healing workshop and meet with Sandi Taylor and CDFVR's multi-media officer to explore options for an electronic Indigenous healing network.
2. CDFVR to seek an audit of funded healing centres and identify training and support needs for the healing centres.

