Home Truths
A conference in review

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The Home Truths: Stop Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence – A National Challenge conference was held in Melbourne, 15-17 September 2004. The conference aimed to:

- foster a vision for the year 2014 of the optimum service response for victim/survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence;
- create partnerships between sexual assault and domestic violence sectors at both a practice and policy level in the local and national arena;
- highlight examples of best practice with respect to involving victim/survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence in service and policy development;
- weave the voices of victim/survivors throughout practice and policy discussions;
- showcase the aims, achievements and key findings of the National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault; and
- contribute to the ongoing feminist debates surrounding sexual assault and domestic and family violence.

Researchers from the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) attended the conference, and in this paper we review some of the major themes and ideas that emerged. We aim to convey what is often unclear from compilations of conference presentations and what is absent from electronic versions of the proceedings – namely, the hum or buzz of ideas that were expressed and debated over the three days.

This Issues Paper will assist both delegates and non-delegates in navigating through some of the debates and themes that were identified at the local, national and global level. We highlight how participants responded to new ideas or challenges, and draw attention to the areas they felt were obvious next steps for governments, policy workers, service providers and communities to extend their collective efforts towards ending sexual assault and domestic violence.

Introduction and aims of the paper

As more than 400 delegates gathered under the chandeliers of the ballroom at the Sheraton Hotel in Melbourne, for the Home Truths conference on 15-17 September 2004, Carolyn Briggs, a well-respected member of the Boon Wurrung community, told the story of women gathering for a different purpose just over 200 years ago. She described
the final journey made by the Boon Wurrung women along the bay to Point Nepean as being about connection – “a connection to their country, connection to the great spirit, Bunjil, and connection with each other”. She said the journey for these women had been “about survival” and their strength to cultivate new lives through harvesting the land and sea.

In welcoming us to stand together for the *Home Truths* conference, on this same land two centuries later, Carolyn Briggs spoke of the importance of our “understanding each other”, and of respecting “others’ collective histories and traditions”. And she asked us to make two promises: not to harm the land of Bunjil (“our Creator”) and not to harm the children of Bunjil. As Kate Gilmore from Amnesty International later remarked: “If only we could observe these two promises as a nation, our work would indeed be done.”

Carolyn’s words set the tone of the conference. The vision for *Home Truths* was that it be more than just a forum for showcasing what we know and what we are doing to address sexual assault and domestic violence. Conference organisers were instead keen to provide a space in which victim/survivors, service providers, policy makers, researchers, and other professionals could come together to consider what has been achieved over the past 30 years, to reflect on the nature of the current challenges, and to envisage what an optimum service response for victim/survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence might be for the future.

Carolyn was one of a number of Indigenous women from across Australia invited to the conference to tell their “home truths” about the violence that they, their children, and their communities experience daily. Throughout the conference their voices were a reminder that Indigenous women have been resisting violence for over 200 years and that non-Indigenous women have often excluded the voices of Indigenous women, their needs and their ways of understanding the violence perpetrated against them. It was important, as Carolyn Briggs suggested, that participants use the forum of the conference to find new ways of working together.
One of the major aims of the conference was to renew our understandings of “the truths” that explain the extent, nature and consequences of sexual and domestic violence on the lives of women and children across the nation. Many of the papers presented at the conference outlined the details of new programs, new policy frameworks, new research findings, and new ways of working to address issues of violence against women in the home. In focusing on the key themes of some of these presentations, rather than on the precise detail of individual papers, we aim to give life to the spirit of ideas that flowed across the sessions over the three days.

In line with ACSSA’s mandate, emphasis is given to papers that addressed the issue of sexual assault against adult women. However, the inevitable link that often binds sexual assault and domestic violence will be made, and indeed the need for greater interaction between the two fields was one of the main themes of the conference. While the conference title, “Home Truths”, implies a focus on the home as the primary site of violence, including sexual violence, it was not intended to exclude violence against women in other contexts. We reflect that understanding in this paper.

The Home Truths conference was also important for creating a space where the sexual assault and domestic violence fields could come together. The sectors have historically tended to hold separate forums to discuss their core business. Important exceptions to this have been the two recent conferences hosted by the “Combined Women’s Services” on the Gold Coast in Queensland in 2001 and 2003 where the organisers promoted the national importance of the sectors finding ways of working more collaboratively.

The conference further provided an opportunity for service providers, policy makers, researchers, and other professionals to check themselves against those who “speak from experience” (the title of the plenary session devoted to the testimonies of victim/survivors). As “Donna” (not her real name) noted during the survivors’ panel, when women talk about sexual abuse, they are not recounting their “stories”, they are reporting their “truths”. We certainly attempt to represent accurately “the truths” of the issues raised by survivors, whether they spoke or identified as survivors, as academics, as professionals, or as workers.

The issue of language featured strongly throughout the conference. For example, the terminology used to describe women and children who have experienced abuse was debated, as was the notion of whether the sector should speak of “violence against women” or “violence against women and children”. On another occasion, in
one of the roundtable discussions, a number of women commented that they were finding the language at the conference difficult to understand. Hannah Moran, who was speaking for Marlene Presley from Ali Curung in the Northern Territory summed up the sentiments of many of the women when she said,

“Sitting here today and listening to the language, and we have the utmost respect for all of these speakers, [but this language] is providing another barrier to these women actually getting the messages that we’re trying to convey. And I think if we can take a step back and say, okay, let’s cut the crap a bit, and talk about the real issues as they are, in simple language, then perhaps more people will understand what we’re actually trying to say.”

We were mindful of these issues in writing this paper and have attempted to use language that clearly outlines the issues raised at the conference. However, we note that some of the issues presented are complex. Further, the language and some of the terms used (particularly within the criminal justice system, the human rights field, and by policy makers) can be highly professionalised or specialised. Therefore, our language on occasion reflects the accepted terminology used in these fields.

The paper is structured according to the title of the conference itself. It distinguishes seven of the “Home Truths” that featured consistently throughout the conference:

1. The home is the main site of violence against women and children
2. Violence against women and children is a human rights violation
3. Victim/survivors ask “Who’s the expert?”
4. Specialist sexual assault and domestic violence services are in danger of being diminished due to mainstreaming
5. Those working to end violence against women need to collaborate more
6. A lack of resources is the single biggest obstacle to adequate service provision
7. The criminal justice system continues to fail women

Within this paper we rely on the themes and issues covered by presenters as well as other information and ideas that were referred to in the roundtable discussions and workshops. We supplement some of the issues raised with contemporary research findings, or statistics and reports that have made a recent and significant contribution to our current knowledge-base or understanding of violence against women. When referring to material presented at the conference we rely heavily on the knowledge of the presenters and participants themselves. The accuracy of the statistics, research findings or statements attributed by presenters to others, are the sole responsibility of the presenters themselves.

Finally, this review is but one account of the conference. Some of those who attended may feel that there were other papers that better articulated the issues in terms of their own work or approach to understanding and working to end violence. In order to make sure that these papers and ideas are also available to the public, the conference organisers have developed a website that provides electronic links to many of the conference presentations (subject to the agreement of individual speakers). Readers are invited to view the available papers on the conference website at http://www.hometruths.com.au. A list of the presentations referred to in this Issues Paper is included in Appendix 1, with the biographies of the presenters detailed in Appendix 2. Remaining presentations, or those not discussed in this paper, are listed in Appendix 3.
HOME TRUTH ONE

The home is the main site of violence against women and children

That the most prevalent form of violence against women and children is abuse perpetrated against them in their own homes ranked first and foremost amongst the “Home Truths” represented at the conference. Speakers referred to the plethora of both national and international surveys and studies that speak to the prevalence and consequences of domestic violence and sexual assault in Australia and around the globe.

The findings from the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women (IVAW) Survey are the most recently published statistics to confirm the nature and extent of violence experienced by women at the hands of intimate partners and family members. Overall, 57 per cent of the women surveyed said they had experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence over their life course (Mouzos and Makkai 2004: 19). This figure is reduced to 10 per cent when women were asked exclusively about their experiences over the last 12 months. However, more than one-third of women (34 per cent) had experienced at least one form of violence by a former or current partner when asked to reflect on relationships they had held over their lifetimes. Twelve per cent of women reported experiencing sexual violence by an intimate partner over their lifetimes, including instances of attempted (3 per cent) and completed (6 per cent) forced intercourse (Mouzos and Makkai 2004: 46). Of the women who had experienced sexual violence by their intimate partners, 73 per cent had also been physically abused by them.

Twenty-seven per cent of women in the survey also identified sexual violence by non-intimates (Mouzos and Makkai 2004: 65), such as other close family members, relatives, friends, colleagues and strangers (although a number of women reported violence from both intimate partners and others). Seven per cent of these women reported attempted forced intercourse and 4 per cent reported forced intercourse over their lifetimes.

While not all violence against women and girls is familial, a significant proportion of sexual violence committed against women over their lifetimes is perpetrated by family members. The myth that women’s main source of danger, particularly the likelihood of sexual assault, comes from strangers in the street is undermined by the statistics. One per cent of the International Violence Against Women survey sample reported having been raped by a stranger (Mouzos and Makkai 2004: 70). However, according to many delegates this fact is not always reflected in policies directed at anti-violence programs or family-related issues. Many delegates noted how policies aimed at strengthening families need to acknowledge and respond to the prevalence of violence and sexual assault in families.

The often long-term and damaging health effects of intimate partner violence against women was the subject of Kim Webster’s presentation when she demonstrated the compelling findings from the recently published “burden of disease” research conducted by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (hereafter known as “VicHealth”) in 2004. This study is a world first in being able to reliably establish the wide-ranging and persistent effects of intimate partner violence on
women’s physical and mental health. Indeed the study revealed that intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged between 15-44 years.

Elspeth McInnes from the National Council for Single Mothers and their Children reminded us of the sometimes fatal consequences of violence for women and children. Separation has been shown to be a period of increased risk for many mothers and children surviving violence. According to Elspeth, the Family Law Courts represent a central institution in separation dispute, but at present often re-expose children and mothers to continuing abuse, sometimes with fatal results. She reported an average 129 family homicides being committed in Australia per year. Sixty per cent of homicides are perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and women are the victims in three out of every four cases. One in four of these murders occur after separation. Further, 19 per cent of homicides are parent–child homicides with fathers as perpetrators in 63 per cent of cases (Mouzos and Rushforth 2003).

**Male partner rape**

While responses to domestic violence and sexual assault have been primary areas of concern for the women’s movement, the point at which these two issues often overlap has been severely neglected. In her paper, *Just Keeping the Peace: A Reluctance to Respond to Male Partner Sexual Violence*, Melanie Heenan (2004) suggested that:

“There is a strong, though controversial, consensus among writers who have addressed the issue of rape by male intimate partners that services in both the domestic violence and rape crisis fields have failed to provide adequate support to women survivors of male partner rape.”

Key-note speaker and esteemed writer and academic Dr Kersti Yllö, concurred:

“One of the most important intersections that we have to address, as we all are concerned about violence against women, is the issue of rape within marriage. And it’s something that we don’t talk about very much. It is understudied. The victims are under-served and I think we can’t continue to ignore the problem any longer.”

Kersti further suggested that “marital rape has not been subsumed, either as domestic violence or as sexual assault; it’s basically been ignored by all of us, and the victims have fallen through the cracks”. Kersti spoke about the impact of marital rape on individual women, many of whom have described the soul-destroying emotional effects of being raped by someone they loved:

“Women really experienced a profound violation of trust… When you’re raped by a stranger you live with a frightening memory. When you’re raped by your husband, you live with your rapist. And the complexity of that and the difficulty of escape is very, very difficult. Consequences include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, unwanted pregnancies, destruction of trust, ongoing assaults – as it’s a rare wife rape victim who’s raped once.”

The impact of marital and child rape on women’s and children’s health across the globe, particularly with respect to the spread of the AIDS virus, is discussed further in “Home Truths” Two and Seven.
Violence during and following pregnancy

Research into the prevalence of women’s experiences of domestic violence before, during and after pregnancy reveals that it is often at the time of starting a family that women are first subjected to violence. The Women’s Safety Survey (ABS 1996) found that 20 per cent of women who disclosed violence from a previous partner stated that the onset of violence occurred during pregnancy. Other research from the United States has suggested the rate may be higher with 75 per cent of women who were hospitalised twice during the same pregnancy reporting domestic abuse as the cause of the trauma (Pak, Reece and Chan 1998). Recent research undertaken by Angela Taft showed that young women exposed to violence are up to three times more likely to have a miscarriage, and are more likely to have a stillbirth, premature birth or an abortion than those who live free of violence. Overall, the study revealed a strong association between experiences of violence, rates of pregnancy and difficulties in pregnancy or childbirth (Taft, Watson and Lee 2004).

These alarming statistics were further reinforced by Deborah Walsh who presented her recent research on this topic at the conference (carried out with the late Wendy Weeks). Her survey of 400 women showed that 27 per cent (108 women) had experienced violence during pregnancy, with 20 per cent (80) reporting that these behaviours continued in some form throughout the life of the pregnancy. For the women, the consequences included breast and genital injury, higher rates of miscarriage, induced abortions, higher risk of placenta abruption, late trimester bleeding and infection, blunt abdominal trauma, penetrating trauma (caused by a weapon), and even death from injury. For infants, risk factors of the violence include: “foetal fractures, low birth weight, injury, suppressed immune defence system, increased exposure to toxins and pollutants, increased risk of neglect, exaggerated startle response, and the knowledge that life is not a safe place”.

Although this study did not find overwhelming evidence to suggest that violence started or escalated for most women during pregnancy (the small sample size of this study compared to that of the ABS’s 1996 survey was cited as a possible explanation for this), the study did confirm that for the majority of women, a past history of violence in the relationship was a strong indicator for the violence to continue in some form throughout the pregnancy. The same is true of sexual assault: the timing of intimate partner rape often coincides with women having been in hospital, most often because of childbirth (Mahoney and Williams 1998). Other studies have shown that both physical and sexual violence can continue or even escalate when women return home from hospital with a new baby. For instance, in Raquel Kennedy Bergen’s (1996) first-hand interviews with male partner rape survivors in the United States, women described being forced to have sex soon after having given birth (a time when doctors specifically caution women against having intercourse).

Clearly this research highlights how for many women starting a family can mean the beginning of a life defined by fear and violence. Mayet Costello, speaking at the Feminism Round Table at the conference, heavily critiqued the current policy climate for:

“…ignoring feminist critiques of ‘family’ as the central patriarchal institution facilitating domestic violence. I’d argue, as Jill Radford and Elizabeth Stanko have done elsewhere, that this approach is not concerned with the welfare of women and children. Rather it seeks to police and restore legitimacy to families, and heterosexuality, as a safe institution for women, and thus reaffirm patriarchal gendered power relations that have been damaged by feminist activism.”
According to Mayet (and others who voiced similar concerns at the conference), “family” policies that promote the “strengthening” and “celebration” of families are doing so without recognising the prevalence and seriousness of domestic violence. The risk of co-locating domestic violence within more general areas of family policy is that the violence becomes a “family problem” rather than a problem of male violence. In contrast, locating domestic violence programs within a justice policy area, for example, sends the message to perpetrators and the community that violence is a crime. In joining “domestic violence” and “family” policy areas, women are receiving the message that they ought to remain in a violent relationship to keep the family “strong”, or that they are somehow to blame for the violence in the family, if their family is not “strong”. These policy approaches, according to Mayet, also wash over the fact that women are more likely to experience violence if they are in a relationship, which simply endorses the myth that the family is always the safest of havens for women and their children.

**Indigenous women**

Women within marginalised groups are at even greater risk of violence and sexual assault. For Indigenous women, the legacy of colonialism, dispossession and racism has led to their being profoundly marginalised within Australian society. Research has shown that the rate of family violence victimisation for Indigenous women in some parts of rural Australia is up to 45 times the rate for non-Indigenous women (Harding, Broadhurst, Ferrante and Loh 1995; Ferrante, Morgan, Indermaur and Harding 1996). The recent *IVAW Survey* confirmed that Indigenous women were continuing to report higher levels of physical, sexual and other forms of violence compared to non-Indigenous women. Over the 12-month period prior to the survey, “about 7 per cent of non-Indigenous women reported experiencing physical violence, compared to 20 per cent of Indigenous women. Three times as many Indigenous women reported experiencing an incident of sexual violence, compared to non-Indigenous women (12 per cent compared to 4 per cent)” (Mouzos and Makkai 2004: 30).

Greta Jubb and Terrie Stewart from the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Cooperative, noted in their presentation, that “Indigenous Australian family violence is broader than spousal violence as it encompasses behaviours that occur within families, extended families, intimate relationships, kinship networks and communities.” While the “home” and “family” may remain the main site of violence against women and children, for Indigenous women they need to encompass the likelihood of violence across larger family groups. Greta and Terrie also pointed out that, “Indigenous Australians consider family violence to be a matter that impacts on the entire community, rather than an individual or single family.” However, other Aboriginal women have stressed the importance of recognising that while the violence might impact on the whole community: “The victim/survivors know it’s a partner, it’s somebody who supposedly loves them who beats them regularly, puts them down and sometimes murders them” (Greer and Laing 2001: 14). In this sense the focus, according to these women, needs to remain on keeping Indigenous women and children safe.

**Women with disabilities**

In her conference presentation, Sue Salthouse from Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) stressed the fact that women with disabilities make up 20 per cent of the population of women (ABS 2004). Though they are most certainly
“marginalised” by discriminatory practices, she suggested that the numbers of women (and men) who live with some form of disability should mean they are targeted as part one of the key client groups for sexual assault and domestic violence services. While violence against women with disabilities also occurs mostly in the “home”, “home” for people with disabilities may be a community-based group home, or residential institution, a boarding house, shelter, hospital, psychiatric ward, or nursing home (Frohmader 2002). And the abuser may be a spouse, long-term partner, dating partner, other residents, co-patients, any worker in place of residence, relative and/or a carer (family member/paid service provider), or health worker. Sue noted that women with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse than their non-disabled counterparts, as “one of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in Australia”.

A South Australian study from 1992 found that women with an intellectual disability were more than ten times as likely to be assaulted as other women (Wilson and Brewer 1992). Although there is a dearth of research in the Australian context, Sue referred to international research that indicates 90 per cent of women with intellectual disabilities have been sexually abused, mostly before they reach the age of eighteen (Fairchild 2002, cited in Frohmader 2002). Other studies show women with disabilities are raped and abused at a rate of at least two times greater than non-disabled women (Sobsey 1988, 1994; Cusitlar 1994; Stimpson and Best 1991).

On the final day of the conference, Jonathon Goodfellow and Naomi Brown from the Disability Discrimination Legal Service presented findings from their report Beyond Belief, Beyond Justice: The difficulties for victim/survivors with disabilities when reporting sexual assault and seeking justice. Their report highlighted how the barriers for victim/survivors of sexual assault with a cognitive impairment systematically operated against their receiving a criminal justice response. These included: not being believed when they report sexual assault; being considered unreliable witnesses; not being considered capable of participating in the justice process; feeling “punished” by being removed from their homes or away from the perpetrator and potentially being placed at even greater risk of further sexual assault as a result; and feeling frightened and withdrawing into social isolation.

Women from non-English-speaking backgrounds

Reliable statistics on the prevalence of violence against non-English-speaking background women are scarce. The IVAW Survey indicated that these women “report lower levels of physical violence than women from English-speaking backgrounds”, but that “a similar proportion from both groups experienced sexual violence during the 12 months preceding the survey”. The researchers also noted that “research has identified factors which not only influence non-English-speaking background women’s perceptions of what is considered to be violent behaviour but also their willingness to report” (Mouzos and Makkai 2004: 32). Specifically, in relation to sexual violence, Denise Lievore suggests that the reasons why women from non-English-speaking backgrounds are unlikely to report are varied and include personal, cultural and religious, informational and language and/or institutional and structural reasons (2003: 66). These factors have jointly led to women from non-English-speaking backgrounds being under-represented in both police...
and court statistics. Luba Tanevski and Diana Orlando from the Immigrant Women’s Domestic Violence Service in Victoria recounted how these factors are also likely to impact on women’s access to support services.

For non-English-speaking women in rural areas of Victoria, difficulties in accessing services are also heightened by the closeness of communities, and the distances often needed to travel to access support. Angela Nesci from Working Women’s Health (Victoria) spoke of the ongoing difficulties that services have in accessing bi-lingual workers and interpreters/translator who are not only familiar with languages other than English, but who understand the issues in relation to sexual assault and domestic violence. The difficulties for women from non-English-speaking backgrounds in accessing appropriate and adequately resourced services have remained almost unchanged over the past decade. This issue will be examined later in the paper.

Summary

Overall, this section has demonstrated that while “home” is the main site of violence against women and children, the notion of “home” has vastly different meanings for different communities. “Home” is not simply the residence of a nuclear family, it can be a hospital or residential care facility, an extended family or community. The fact remains that whatever “home” may constitute, women and children are more likely to experience violence at the hands of those who live within it, than from anybody else. It is evident that Indigenous women, women from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and women with disabilities are often at greater risk of experiencing violence in the home and yet still face additional barriers to accessing services to assist them.

However, while violence in the home has long been ignored, legal systems, governments and communities are increasingly being challenged to focus their attentions beyond the traditional “public sphere” to issues that have historically been considered “private”. This activism has resulted in a wider recognition of violence in the home as unacceptable, and indeed as an abuse of human rights.

HOME TRUTH TWO

Violence against women and children is a human rights violation

Amnesty International’s Stop Violence Against Women campaign defines violence against women as nothing less than “the greatest human rights scandal of our times” (Amnesty International 2004a: 1). The “human rights framework”, like frameworks for community development, health or justice, is a way of looking at, talking about and acting on violence. In this framework, violence constitutes a human rights abuse of the “security of person” (United Nations 1948, Article 3). The human rights framework provides a common international language for the work of anti-violence activists, and specifies governments’ obligations under international law to promote and protect women’s human rights. Amnesty International estimates that violence against women constitutes the most widespread and prevalent human rights abuse in the world (Amnesty International 2004a).

Throughout the conference the local and global statistics presented revealed a disturbing picture of human rights abuses in the form of violence against women and children. Kate Gilmore of Amnesty International said:
“It’s quite clear from the statistical evidence that violence against women is a story of global suffering, deprivation and discrimination . . . The Council of Europe, for example, has stated that domestic violence is the major cause of death and disability to women in Europe aged 16 to 44. More women are killed and disabled by domestic violence than by either cancer or traffic accidents. Across the globe more than 60 million women are missing as a result of sex-selective abortions and female infanticide. In the United States women account for 85 per cent of all violence which takes place in the home. The Russian Government estimates that 14,000 women are murdered each year by their partners, and the World Health Organisation survey established that 70 per cent of women who are murdered, are murdered at the hands of their partners . . . That violence against women is the world’s most hidden and yet widespread human rights scandal is irrefutable.”

Kersti Yllö talked more specifically about the right of women to choose or refuse sex with partners and the need for global action to position rape in marriage as a human rights abuse:

“The freedom to choose or refuse sex, even within marriage, should be a human right globally. And it should be a basic human right based on its own merits. However, if one unintended consequence of this horrific epidemic [HIV/AIDS] is the opportunity to challenge forced sex, and forced sex in marriage, then we should seize that opportunity. But again, it’s not easy, because that is a radical position to take, and the United Nations has lots of positions that really ultimately don’t have any impact on the lives of women around the world unless we take those positions and move forward with them. But we have to seize the opportunity right now.”

Recognising violence against women and children as a human rights abuse highlights the continuum of violence that women and children face. For instance, studies have shown that domestic violence and sexual assault increase during conflict situations, and that “the heinous violence inflicted on women in conflict areas – mass rape, abduction and sexual slavery are the norm in many war zones – can be seen as a brutal extension of the violence women face in everyday life” (UNIFEM 2003: 18).

This “continuum of violence” was analysed in two ways during the conference. First, Jon Conte, an American academic, said in his conference presentation that in some ways the distinction between violence against women, and violence against children, is false: children are often “battered by the same person who battered their mother . . . it’s not a different problem. People who batter tend to batter people they can get away with battering.” Second, the different forms of violence against women, such as sexual assault and domestic violence, are also not “different problems”. Human rights and feminist perspectives see them as both rooted in discrimination against women and having the effect of reinforcing that discrimination: a manifestation of “unequal power relations between men and women and one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men” (United Nations 1993).

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) notes that: “Abusive husbands and partners, sexual harassers, traffickers, rapists and armed combatants
who abuse women all use violence, particularly sexual violence, to assert their power and to shame and subordinate women” (UNIFEM 2003:18). Although this may seem obvious to those who work to end violence against women, it is not always reflected in service provision and policy making which tends to differentiate between domestic violence and sexual assault. Nor is the enormous scale of this “abuse continuum” reflected in the funding allocated to address it. This point will be dealt with in more detail in a later section (see “Home Truth” Six).

HOME TRUTH THREE

Victim/survivors ask “Who’s the expert?”

The intention of the conference organisers – to weave the experiences of victim/survivors throughout the program, and to make survivors the judges, the deliberators and the evaluators of the systems, services, and policies that many of us inhabit – was to create a deeply challenging space for us to reconsider what we do and how we do it.

Particularly confronting were the collective and powerful calls by survivors to make more than cursory room for them at the table, to resist the urge to speak on their behalf and to dominate the space through which we carve our future agendas for change. In this light, the women representing the Reclaiming VOICES group thanked:

“. . . the women of generations past who have prepared a platform from which we can speak. We warmly acknowledge your grace and the grit determination of your activism. We are inspired by you. Now kindly make room for us, because we have much to say and want to do so ourselves.”

The sentiment of their words captured an important question that punctuated various sessions at the conference – the question of who can legitimately claim to be an “expert” on the subject of domestic violence and sexual assault, and to what extent do we contribute to silencing those who speak with the most authentic voice? Some of the women who identified as survivors at the conference described feeling both marginalised and dismissed, mostly by service-providers and others working in the sector who they said had, in the process of becoming more professionalised, forgotten the foundations on which most service frameworks had been built – the experiences of women survivors themselves.

For many survivors at the conference, therefore, the most important “Home Truth” was that society recognise that the voices and experiences of survivors of violence provide a kind of “expertise” that is both unique and unparalleled. This point was powerfully delivered by Dr Caroline Taylor, during her introduction to the survivors’ panel, “Speaking from Experience”:

“The delivery and the quality of any service and program designed to meet the needs of survivors of abuse, both children and adult, is dependent upon the kinds of knowledge that advance and construct them. Such knowledge must be informed by those who possess the most authentic knowledge and who therefore speak with the greatest authority. Those people are, of course, survivors of sexual violence. When men climb mountains they become experts in mountain climbing and in surviving and conquering the mountain, and when we want to know about
surviving or conquering a mountain we go to those people. And yet the opposite very often happens to women when they speak as survivors of sexual abuse. Their experiences and words at best are treated as anecdotes and they remain as subjective anecdotes unless they are given the authority of the expert. The ‘expert’ is normally male. This needs to change and survivors are starting to do that. They are starting to make very political the process in which we operate and the lives and environment in which we live that life.”

Sixty-nine year old Judith Arnott, who features in the new domestic violence training video developed by Victoria Police, spoke of her pride at being involved in the project and in being able to attend the conference. The six-minute video, shown at the conference, concludes with Judith’s words: “People ask me why it took 45 years to leave my violent husband and I tell them ‘you have never walked in my shoes’.” Her words again capturing what most survivors say must never be forgotten – to understand the experience and impacts of violence, we must start with the voices of those who know.

The survivor’s panel on day one of the conference, “speaking from experience”, was designed to inform delegates about the kinds of service approaches and programs that the women on the panel found useful following their abuse. A common theme across the presentations was that survivors be given a choice about how they engage with healing or recovery processes. Donna also stressed that victim/survivors of sexual assault must be given the opportunity to talk of their experiences in a manner that does not re-victimise them. Both Caroline Taylor and Donna were critical in this context of how little time had been allocated to the “Survivors’ Panel” by the organisers (12 minutes per speaker). For Donna it typified the sector’s tendency to impose limits on listening to the voices of survivors both in the counselling room, in providing advocacy, and in public forums: “In my experience in the sexual assault sector, too little time for too big a task is perennial. This leads to confirming feelings of inadequacy.”

The manner in which Donna chose to speak of her experience was also, according to her, an important issue for us to consider. One of the outcomes of journalist Andrew Rule documenting the details of her experience in a feature article in The Age newspaper’s Good Weekend Magazine, meant that Donna was no longer “being repeatedly bullied into reliving the trauma” which she said is simply “not helpful.” Another delegate, also a victim/survivor, spoke about feeling disenfranchised by the feminist movement, which, she argued, set up organisations in a manner that did not invite, or allow for, the participation of victim/survivors. She argued that the current sexual assault services do not listen to victim/survivors and fail to provide adequate space for them to contribute to public debate.

Linda Osmundson, a domestic violence worker from Florida and one of the keynote speakers, entered this end of the debate after a woman delegate spoke of her frustration with how few workers were now prepared to identify as survivors. In previous decades, women who were both working in the sector, and who publicly identified as victim/survivors, were given particular legitimacy. These days, according to some speakers from the floor, survivors are often stigmatised and marginalised by the field. However, while Linda agreed that it was important for
victim/survivors to be positioned as “experts”, and to speak publicly about their experiences, she also stressed her right to choose whether, and in what circumstances, she might herself decide to identify as a survivor:

“One thing I think we might look at, as a survivor/advocate, which is a term I’ve only heard here, is that we all choose how to identify. As a survivor, I don’t always choose to identify as a survivor, because sometimes it truly isn’t safe. Sometimes it seems irrelevant, and sometimes it causes me to be discounted. So I always choose. I have learned in later years in my work, that I identify as a survivor because it empowers others who may not be executive directors, who may not be in leadership roles to be able to also speak as survivors.”

Linda spoke in more detail about the courage of women who as survivors both speak out about, and work against, violence:

“And the people who started this movement were the battered women; who were hurting and who were bleeding. We were the founders of our own movement, and I proudly stand before you today to say I honour the women of yesterday, the very brave survivors who spoke about their lives, and to say too that I, today, am a survivor of domestic violence. And sometimes I choose to tell people that and sometimes I don’t. And the reason I choose not to tell some people is because I think you will discount who I am. I think you will discount my work of the last 20 years. I think you will patronise me and pat me on the head and say, ‘Oh well, she’s just one of those survivors’. I want you to know, that as a survivor of domestic violence, of physical violence, of marital rape, I stand before you today as an expert in my own field . . . Those of us who have been raped, those of us who have been battered by our partners are certainly experts in our field, are certainly experts in knowing what it is like to try to save our own lives, with very few resources, with very few tools, with no-one really saying, ‘I can help you’. Especially not 20 years ago.”

Linda argued more strongly in favour of victim/survivors and workers manoeuvring to be more represented on research panels, as advisors to policy makers and on committees where decisions about domestic violence and sexual assault services and funding are made. However, Linda also argued that while she is an expert on her own experience, she cannot necessarily claim to be an expert on violence due solely to that experience.

Questions were also raised about how to incorporate different types of knowledge within anti-violence work and the kinds of credentials that ought to qualify individuals to work in direct service. Marg D’Arcy related a recent experience as part of her panel presentation that suggested there has been some change in how services view the legitimacy of those who identify as the “one[s] who know”:

“In the early days of women’s refuges, and I don’t know what the employment policy is now, but I know when I worked there, one of the qualifications that actually suited you for the job, and that we looked for when we interviewed people, was whether you’d had an experience of violence. Now I work in a Centre Against Sexual Assault, which is very much more professionalised. Most of the people who work there are social workers, and I had an experience actually where on an interview panel, a
woman who applied for the job as a sexual assault counsellor talked about her experience of sexual assault. And the other members on the panel, went: ‘Ooh, gee, we have a bit of a problem about boundaries here, and we have to think about that’. And it’s just a really interesting sort of process – there is a huge challenge for us I think in dealing with it. And somehow I think the original sort of philosophy around women’s refuges, and the workers in refuges coming from the experience of violence themselves was a very powerful thing that we seemed to have moved away from.”

The establishment of this contemporary divide between workers and victim/survivors was also highlighted by Linda Osmundson in a very different context. She spoke of how a refuge worker herself had been a victim of significant physical and other abuses by her partner and on one occasion was nearly killed by him. The worker subsequently moved into the women’s refuge. Almost immediately this prompted other staff to question the way the refuge was run, particularly the rules that are imposed on women (whom Linda said were sometimes referred to as “inmates”) when they are escaping violence, now that their colleague was a resident. The “refuge rules”, she argued, in many ways had come to replicate the power structures within society that disempowered women and further regulated their lives. The workers subsequently reviewed the “rules” sparking greater attention being given to the issue of how the women’s movement more generally was moving away from a practice-driven approach that relied heavily on women’s first hand experiences, both individually and collectively, in structuring their services, and in advocating for systems to change the way they understand and respond to violence against women.

The debate around “who’s the expert” and what counts as “expertise” was very much at the forefront of many of the discussions that took place both formally and informally at the conference. The next section draws further on some of these issues.

**HOME TRUTH FOUR**

**Specialist sexual assault and domestic violence services are in danger of being diminished due to mainstreaming**

The fourth “Home Truth” theme raised by conference delegates concerned the extent to which “mainstreaming” was increasingly jeopardising the quality of services delivered to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. Two different types of mainstreaming were discussed: the shift away from a gendered analysis of anti-violence work; and mainstreaming through the professionalising of the sexual assault and domestic violence sectors.

**The shift away from a gendered analysis of anti-violence work**

First, delegates identified the mainstreaming of service responses as a move away from using gendered or feminist analyses to inform the frameworks that were specifically designed to meet the needs of (mainly women) victims of male violence. A feminist or gendered approach to anti-violence work is one that primarily sees violence as the outcome of a society that is structured around unequal power relations between men and women. Feminist inspired approaches were concerned with challenging traditional systems’ responses that tended to blame victims for their own abuse or to minimise the harm caused by perpetrators. Calls
for reform based on this analysis led to changes both within the law and in how police, doctors and support services would be expected to respond to women who reported violence. The use of a feminist or gendered approach resulted in greater attention being given to strategies that might increase victims’ willingness to seek support or to make a police report.

The shift towards mainstream service delivery has meant that funding and programs for specialist sexual assault and domestic violence responses has increasingly been redirected to more generic health and welfare services. The concern is that mainstreaming service responses will remove the focus from ensuring the safety of women and children to reintroducing approaches that result in victim-blaming, or in strategies that are designed to place some responsibility on women to help change the behaviour of violent partners. At a societal level the danger of losing a feminist or gendered analysis, according to Kersti Yllö, is that we allow sexist ideas to go unchallenged and good practice to be diminished.

Although the perceived dangers of mainstreaming were often raised, there was also a recognition that violence against women and children needs to be discussed and addressed in all areas of society and within the broader health and social sectors. This ideal incorporation of a feminist or gendered analysis into all areas of policy, community development and service provision is often referred to as “gender mainstreaming”, particularly in international forums, making the terminology of “mainstreaming” confusing. For example, there are important moves in many states for general practitioners to be trained in recognising and responding to domestic violence which will promote strategies of early intervention for women experiencing violence. However, there is a difference between incorporating a gendered analysis into mainstream services, and mainstreaming specialist services where a gendered analysis would be lost. It was argued that it is not necessarily the loss of specialist services that is feared, but the loss of a feminist or gendered analysis in structuring appropriate service responses that is likely to impact most heavily on women.

A number of speakers at the conference called for services to reclaim a feminist analysis – indeed, for the services to reclaim the word “feminism”. Mayet Costello, from Yarrow Place (South Australia) argued, however, that feminism is being rejected by young women, even those who have gravitated towards more socially liberal professions, such as social work.

Linda Osmundson was also vocal on this point stressing that:

“We’re now struggling to have a gender-based analysis of the work that we do. We now talk about the domestic violence movement, don’t we? Not the battered women’s movement. We’re talking about clients, not just women. We’re talking about sexual assault survivors, not rape. We talk about incest, as though it was different from rape. We need to look at our language, we’ve taken the gender out of it. We’ve talked about the fact that we are failing to respect the lives of women who brought this movement to us today, who brought us to where we are today . . . But we are women who need to work together to remember that if we take the gender out of our movement, then we have really taken the essence of what we are doing out of this work . . . We’ve forgotten that we are a feminist movement . . . So yes, I am a dangerous woman, and we are all dangerous women, because we are here today to really start, or continue, a revolution. Because that’s what we’re really talking about here, we’re talking about revolution, because that’s what it will take to really create equality for women – to end battering, to
end rape. And that’s frightening and dangerous to the men who have not joined us in our movement.”

It was not necessarily, however, a reclamation of the term “feminism” that was called for. In fact, although Linda was highly in favour of the “F-word”, as she called it, she also recognised that “feminism” is largely a white middle-class academic term, and noted that in the United States, in the non-white communities the term “womanist”, originally coined by author Alice Walker, is often preferred. What Linda and other speakers were calling for was that the feminist spirit, the “ability to be outrageous”:

“Today, because we’ve been called male-bashers, man-haters, what’s happened to our fierce advocacy for battered women? Are we nice girls against rape? Are we nice girls against battering? Are we afraid to stand in front of the prosecutor and say, ‘You are dropping too many cases?’ Are we afraid to tell the police they are arresting too many women? Are we afraid of what the father’s rights movement will tell us? Are we afraid that they might sue us when we in fact say, ‘Yes, domestic violence is women battering, it is about women?’ Are we afraid to stand up to them? Have we forgotten our politically gendered analysis? Or have we become so service-oriented that we no longer have political discussions? . . . Are we sanitising our work to make it so politically palatable that we no longer remember that we are about the gendering issues, we’re no longer serving women? And finally, are we being inclusive of all survivors?”

Mainstreaming through the professionalising of the sexual assault and domestic violence sectors

The preoccupation with direct service and all things therapeutic that Linda referred to lies at the heart of the second form of mainstreaming identified by conference delegates: the shift towards the “professionalising” of the sexual assault and domestic violence sectors. Linda argued that this shift has meant that the important work carried out by many women without professional/academic credentials is devalued by their peers and others in society and, as a consequence, their voices are being lost. Linda talked about the meaning of the term “expert” within the world of the professional counsellor:

“As we began to organise, as we began to talk to each other, we began to look for credibility. After all, the only credentials we had – the only credentials I have – is that I’m just a battered woman. And that doesn’t play very well in court when I go in to talk about it, as an expert. And so it was always ironic to me, that as I went to court to be an expert on domestic violence, the mental health worker who was 24 years old, and who had talked to a couple of battered women when she was an intern, had more credentials than I, with 20 years of experience in the field of domestic violence.”

As previously outlined, a concern of some conference delegates is how the voices of those who speak from experience are being silenced or delegitimised as a result of this contemporary valuing of professional/academic qualifications over lived experience. As Linda noted:

“As we search for our credibility we need to be very careful not to leave the voices of battered women on the floor. We need to be very careful that as we work together to establish credibility, that we don’t leave the voices
of the people – the women – who founded our work, behind us. That, as we go for government funding for instance, we don’t say to the lesbians who’ve always been involved in our work, ‘Well it’s okay that you’re involved, but just go under the table again, be quiet, be silent. We don’t want anybody to know who you are.’ We have to be very careful, because as we get more credibility in our work – and we have – we need to be careful not to forget to bring along all of our sisters, most of whom are the founders, the very basis of our work, the reason that we exist at all.”

Jon Conte also noted his concern that if we become too professional, too caught up in developing “elegant” models to work with issues around violence, and too concerned with our research grants, that as a sector:

“We’re moving further and further away from the lived experience of survivors. And you know if our community, if our white community, had elders, Judith Arnott would be an elder – because she reminds us, much more powerfully than any elegant model like PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], of what the lived experience of survivors is . . . And so, I’m suggesting that we need to kind of get back to basics. That we really essentially have to have a profound understanding and appreciation that goes beyond PTSD, goes beyond our papers, goes beyond our research models, and recognises, and does not ever lose sight of, the truth that can only come from those who have actually had the experience. And so what I’m going to go home with is a profound appreciation that there is a community in the world, here in Australia, that understands how important the political is. And I want to remind us what Judy Herman said in the early 1990s: awareness of trauma will not survive without a political movement.”

Interestingly, this shift towards a de-gendering of sexual assault and domestic violence services in Australia runs contrary to international trends. Both Kersti Yllö, when speaking of the United Nations, and Kate Gilmore, when speaking of Amnesty International’s Stop Violence Against Women campaign, noted how these organisations have embraced a need for a feminist or gendered analysis of violence. Kate Gilmore referred to Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, who notes that:

“The greatest challenge to this scourge [of violence against women] has come from individual women and women’s groups who have stood up and spoken out, often at cost to their lives. They have organised themselves to demand justice. They have called for their human rights to be respected, protected and fulfilled. Thanks to their efforts, important breakthroughs have been made in terms of international treaties and mechanisms, laws and policies.” (Amnesty International 2004a: iv)

Kate argued that it was specifically this feminist approach to activism that allowed wife rape, for example, to be identified as a human rights abuse; that without a gendered account of this phenomenon, it would still be considered an acceptable, or at least as a lawful, experience of women in marriage.

**Indigenous women**

While many of the conference participants were in favour of promoting a “gendered agenda”, and of rejecting the push towards mainstreaming, there was also recognition of how feminist accounts have often excluded the voices and experiences of particular groups of women. Although many Indigenous women, for
example, see a feminist or gendered analysis of family violence as a necessary component to their anti-violence work, other Indigenous women have suggested that gender cannot alone explain the nature and extent of family violence in their communities, and are wary of solely advocating the benefits of a gender-specific response. Indigenous people have written at length about the effects of colonisation and race oppression by white Australians and see these as having direct links with the disproportionately high rates of family violence and sexual abuse in Indigenous communities. Understanding the effects of colonisation as a contributing factor to the causes of family violence has certainly been helpful for Indigenous activists to counter claims by some non-Indigenous people, particularly in the context of the legal system, where it has been argued that violence in Indigenous communities is “cultural” and therefore to be accepted.

In their presentation, Greta Jubb and Terrie Stewart from the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Cooperative (VALS) suggested that:

“The underlying causes of family violence within the Indigenous Australian community are broader than gender inequality and are unique to Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians stress that family violence within the Indigenous community is not part of Indigenous culture.”

They continued to clarify the position of VALS as follows:

- “The legal justice system, meaning police and Court processes, is in many respects failing Indigenous Australians experiencing family violence.
- Indigenous Australians’ experience of family violence has distinct characteristics.
- A trend towards a pro-prosecution approach to family violence is concerning for Indigenous Australians. We want to make it clear that VALS is not advocating the de-criminalisation of family violence. VALS criticism of the pro-prosecution approach is that it means that the legal system is dominant over alternative responses to family violence that are appropriate because they involve the Indigenous community.
- Space should be created for intervention in family violence that: is based on an Indigenous community-led approach or involves the Indigenous community; is holistic in approach which means dealing with underlying issues; and provides alternatives to the legal justice system that operate either in a stand alone capacity to the legal justice system, work in conjunction with the legal justice system, or both.”

Indigenous women at the conference argued for service responses to domestic violence and sexual assault that recognise the importance of family and kinship in Indigenous communities. They called for responses that also recognise the realities of living in remote communities where everyone knows everyone’s business and the women running the safe houses may well be related to the perpetrators of the violence. Some of the presenters also spoke of how many Aboriginal women are still reluctant to access non-Aboriginal services, given how culturally inappropriate they remain. For example, hospitals are seen as places to die, not to heal. It is well documented that Indigenous women avoid generic services given the role they are seen to have played in the destruction of Indigenous communities, in terms of imprisoning their men, in removing their children, and in alienating them from their lands and communities.
Another pressing issue for Indigenous women was the lack of funding to meet service requirements to address sexual assault and domestic violence, which in some areas has reached epidemic proportions (Gordon, Hallahan and Henry 2002). Janine Warren from Warndu Wathilll-Carri Ngurâ Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Service Inc. (South Australia) spoke of running a sexual assault service in a remote area of South Australia with no resources, other than her wage, and with little or no assistance from other organisations. Janine found that getting support for her work was made extremely difficult as she is mandated to report child abuse, and Indigenous organisations are very wary of working with people who may be involved in the removal of children from their families. While the feminist debate is topical in some areas of the country, for Indigenous women the additional effects of institutional racism means that Indigenous-specific services, where they exist, are appallingly under-funded and in urgent need of resourcing and support.

Hence, for Indigenous women, the issue of mainstreaming is not just about having sexual assault and domestic violence services subsumed within generic services, but is also related to how services that are considered culturally appropriate are in danger of being subsumed within non-Indigenous services.

Women from non-English-speaking backgrounds

There were a number of speakers who also highlighted the specific issues that affect immigrant women in this context. Diana Orlando and Luba Tanevski from the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service (Victoria) spoke about their report (to be published early in 2005) in which immigrant women in regional Victoria were asked about their understanding of domestic violence, where they would seek assistance, and about the barriers they experienced.

Some of the findings Diana and Luba reported included that: women in small rural communities feared that if they were to disclose the abuse, their confidentiality would be broken and rumours would spread among the community; women had a low level of knowledge about service options; some women felt afraid to access services, fearing that their problems would be openly discussed and that they would be forced into action by services; a number of women reported receiving discriminatory treatment from professionals and workers from their own communities; and women felt fearful of the police.

Diana and Luba also talked about the difficulties faced by women from newly arrived communities and the devastating and compounding effects of unemployment and minimal education opportunities. The women in one newly arrived group feared for the safety of their children because of racist behaviours. Further, the lack of female doctors was seen as a huge problem. There were also requests for doctors who could speak the relevant community language and a number of women spoke of services being culturally inappropriate.

Diana and Luba’s research also canvassed the experiences of workers in regional areas in responding to the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse women in their areas. They identified the following priorities needed to improve their ability to develop more culturally appropriate responses:

- the introduction of cultural diversity training for workers;
- more resources in different languages;
The development of professional networks; interpreter training for professional staff; recruitment of diverse staff; the development of responses to violence that involve all members of the community; the development of strategies to work with women that value cultural diversity; the provision of options for women for action, safety planning and/or escape; improved relations with police; the delivery of more service information to women; and addressing issues around interpreting and translating needs.

**Women with disabilities**

The “mainstreaming” of specialist services also poses particular risks to women with disabilities. As Sue Salthouse pointed out in her presentation, in a recent mainstream government campaign targeting domestic violence, “there was no evidence that the information was made accessible or available to women with disabilities in supported accommodation or who resided in institutions”. Moreover, women with disabilities within these households are often dependent on their carers to take action or to advocate and speak out about incidents of domestic violence. However, carers may also be the perpetrators of violence, leaving victims with few options to safely disclose what might be happening to them, particularly for those women living (and being subjected to abuse) in hospitals, psychiatric wards or nursing homes. As one conference participant observed, the more marginalised a group, the greater the need for specialist services.

This is certainly true for women with disabilities. However, as Sue Salthouse suggests, not only are issues for women with disabilities largely excluded from most generic policies by the limits of an “able-ist” perspective, but “women with disabilities are largely invisible in both the disability and women’s movements”. Therefore, while the separate concerns of the disability and women’s movements are indeed in danger of being diminished by “mainstreaming” of services, the concerns of women with disabilities are in danger of being ignored altogether.

**HOME TRUTH FIVE**

Those working to end violence against women need to collaborate more

The conference brought together workers from the sexual assault and domestic violence fields in recognition of the need for services to work more collaboratively in terms of providing adequate responses to intimate partner and family violence. Historically, there has been a tendency for domestic violence and sexual assault services to function as silos, “together but distinct in terms of their service delivery, and in coordination of systems’ responses to the issues women face” (Heenan 2004: 24). This has resulted in women being arbitrarily positioned as either a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault, rather than services acknowledging the extent to which these issues regularly overlap. Kersti Ylö has previously described (1999) how this failure by services to better coordinate their responses to male partner rape has further compounded the difficulty women themselves face in terms of defining their experiences as rape. According to Heenan (2004), services must take more of a leadership role in re-educating policy-makers, researchers, and the wider community about the prevalence of male partner rape in the context of violent relationships.
As Marg D’Arcy noted at the conference:

“I think one of the issues about de-gendering, is that we box women’s experience of men’s violence into different packages. So we can’t talk about violence against women. We have to talk about domestic violence, family violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment – you know, all that sort of stuff . . . We compartmentalise the violence, instead of seeing it as part of a continuum, and . . . rising out of a culture that we have that allows it to happen.”

That still greater attention needs to be given to services consolidating these efforts remained an important theme throughout the conference and is presented here as our fifth “Home Truth”. The aim of creating partnerships between the sexual assault and domestic violence sectors at both a practice and policy level, in the local and national arena, featured strongly in many of the presentations. This culminated in participants calling for the establishment of a national “Home Truths Alliance” between the sexual assault and domestic violence fields. Such an alliance would allow the field to more effectively unite in lobbying governments to respond to calls for policy and legislative change. Under the banner of a “Home Truths Alliance”, services might also be able to demonstrate more effectively the levels of unmet demand in terms of not being able to accommodate the numbers of victims seeking support. (The full list of recommendations can be found in Appendix 4.)

For a number of speakers and audience members the scope of the alliance between domestic violence and sexual assault services did not go far enough: a number of women called for the inclusion of children’s services under the “Home Truths Alliance”, in recognition of the extent to which violence in the home, either witnessed or experienced, almost always extends to children. Further, for women with children there are often difficulties associated with finding affordable housing, or problems in terms of finding new schools or child care, that act as powerful barriers to women leaving violent relationships.

In his keynote presentation, Jon Conte reflected on these issues in calling for the service sectors to bridge the artificial barriers that tended to separate their approaches to service delivery:

“If you look at some of the scientific literature – for example, on domestic violence – we used to study the effects of domestic violence on children. That early research was so surprised to learn that a lot of these kids look just like victims of physical abuse . . . So this parameter we put around the field that said domestic violence is different from physical child abuse has begun to sort of disappear.”

Moreover, Jon spoke of how different professional groups had tended to theorise and individualise the expertise around the causes and effects of particular forms of violence, rather than observe the inter-relationships:

“About 20 years ago Gene Abel did research on sex offenders. We used to believe that sexual abuse was a different type of problem from incest. Gene Abel did some interesting research and one of the things he found was that 50 per cent of incest offenders abused children outside of the home . . . Gene Abel told us 20 years ago that incest fathers rape adult women. And so we develop theories that make it easier for us to live with the problem. They make us feel comfortable. So if domestic violence is different from physical abuse, and sexual abuse is something different [it
is not so confronting]. And what’s beginning to happen is that the walls around those theories are beginning to fall apart or come down.”

Specialisation across the professions, according to Jon Conte, has tended to correlate with discrete disciplines, such as the “psy” professions or medicine, that each subscribe to their own ways of explaining and responding to the effects of violence. For example, he spoke of the current focus on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), amongst psychologists and counsellors, to explain the potential impact of violence on victim/survivors:

“We have very elegant research paradigms now, which we try to apply on people. PTSD is a very elegant model, it’s got a lot of research. Now the fact that most people who are traumatised don’t develop chronic PTSD doesn’t sort of bother the people who are in PTSD. But there’s an inherent notion, if you go into a community, say, after, where rape has been used as an instrument of state power, and you evaluate women and children for PTSD, and you find that half the population, or one-third, or whatever it is [has PTSD]; there’s sort of an implied message that those who don’t have PTSD are somehow undeserving. And that’s the big danger I think about this move.

“So what I’m worried about is that our models create reality. Our paradigms create reality. And if PTSD becomes the model, then anyone who doesn’t have PTSD, we’re going to somehow view in a different way. And that’s what I want to caution us about. And that’s why I think the human rights model that Kate talked about is so terribly important – because it’s a different paradigm. And it’s not a paradigm that says that one right is more important than another. It says that all violations of rights, and if you’ve been violated, whether you have PTSD or not, that is something that we ought to be concerned about.”

The paradigm to which he refers is one subscribed to by Amnesty International, and one that recognises that there is a “continuum of violence” that is “both rooted in discrimination and serves to reinforce that discrimination, preventing women from exercising their rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men” (Amnesty International 2004a: 5). A focus that is limited to harm minimisation and specific forms or analyses of abuse, according to Jon Conte, can never adequately deal with the roots of the violence. Nor can individual therapeutic or medical theories accommodate some of the conceptual issues taken up by human rights models that see violence and its effects as an attack on our individual and collective freedoms:

“One of the things that I have learned by talking to so many victims over the years . . . one of the things that I go away with, is a profound understanding and respect for, is that it doesn’t matter what symptom you have, it doesn’t matter whether you’re depressed, it doesn’t really matter. What has happened is that you’re never again free. If you think about what happened to you for only one minute a day for the rest of your life, you’re never free in the way you were before that experience. And so we need a paradigm, and we need, especially in my field of mental health, to pull in a paradigm that recognises the essential violation of rights, or the profound impact on someone’s capacity to be free.”
In this sense, the push for greater collaboration should extend beyond the notion of professions and sectors to crossing nations and hemispheres. Kersti Yllö provided a perfect example when she made her impassioned plea for those of us working in the violence against women sector to form alliances with human rights agencies who are currently focused on the HIV/AIDS pandemic:

“We have to turn our attention to forced sex in marriage globally. Forced unprotected sex is spreading HIV around the world. We’re working on violence against women, globally, at the same time there are activists and practitioners, clinicians, working on the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and to date those efforts have been two separate, two important goals, but we really need to work in greater coordination.”

Encouragingly, at a more local level, some of the presenters highlighted current and very practical examples of sectors coming together to find new ways of understanding and addressing issues of violence. In the Northern Territory, Hannah Moran, who is the Barkly Region sexual assault counsellor, and Pam Stein, the region’s domestic violence counsellor, have just completed a joint project to look at the types of services needed by Indigenous women in town camps on the outskirts of Tennant Creek. Rather than competing for funding, which often occurs in the metropolitan regions, Pam put forward a grant application to undertake qualitative research with assistance from Hannah.

Their presentation at the conference highlighted how working together in this context allowed them to achieve something they would never normally have the capacity to do given the demands on them as sole workers. Sometimes the need to collaborate is borne out of other types of necessity: Hannah noted that the ferocity of the camp dogs is such that rather than walk around the town, one worker drives and the other jumps in and out of the car to accomplish house-visits with individual families.6

Further North, Ann Barr from East Arnhem Land, who co-presented with Simone O’Mealley, a domestic violence worker also from East Arnhem Land, spoke of how the physical location of their services had fostered a collaborative approach to responding to both perpetrators and victims of domestic violence. Simone described how being next door to the local correction’s office had forced her and her corrections counterpart to devise new ways of working together given the extent to which their respective service-users were often in current relationships.

That the various sectors find ways of working more collaboratively and innovatively may well prove a necessity given the pressures of under-funding and the climate of mainstreaming that is currently occurring. The next “Home Truth” explores the issue of under-resourcing more specifically.

**HOME TRUTH SIX**

A lack of resources is the single greatest obstacle to adequate service provision

Under-resourcing was identified by services as a significant barrier to their being able to deliver consistent, professional, and high quality responses to domestic violence and sexual assault. This section details where service providers felt the capacity for service delivery was most compromised, particularly for Indigenous women, women from non-English-speaking backgrounds, women with
disabilities, and women living in remote or regional areas. The section also examines the issue of resourcing from within a human rights framework where there is increasing international attention being given to how governments variously distribute their funding as a measure of their commitment to ending human rights abuses, such as violence against women.

**Adequate resourcing of services is a human rights obligation**

Throughout the conference, speakers continually identified the current lack of resources as being the most significant impediment to services adequately responding to sexual assault and domestic violence. Kate Gilmore, of Amnesty International, explained how the allocation of resources remains the responsibility of governments (Federal and State/Territory) according to international human rights law. In fact, appropriate levels of funding for services is considered an important measure of governments’ commitments to addressing human rights abuses that occur within their individual nations. The Beijing Platform for Action specifically calls on states to “allocate adequate resources within the government budget and mobilise community resources for activities related to the elimination of violence against women” (United Nations 1995, paragraph 124p).

As a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Australia has a “sovereign responsibility” to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, “including through national laws and the formulation of strategies, policies, programs and development priorities” (United Nations 1995, paragraph 9).

To clarify exactly what “adequate resources” might entail, it is useful to look at international human rights texts. The Beijing Platform for Action lists the actions to be taken by governments in order to prevent and eliminate violence against women.7 There are also specific requirements for services to victims and witnesses of criminal offences, which includes victims of violence in the home and victims of sexual assault. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women calls on states to:

> “work to ensure . . . that women subjected to violence, and, where appropriate, their children, have specialised assistance, such as rehabilitation, assistance in child care and maintenance treatment, counselling, and health and social services, facilities and programs, as well as support structures, and should take all other appropriate measures to promote their safety and physical and psychological rehabilitation.” (United Nations 1993: paragraph 4g)

**Services must be resourced to be available, accessible, acceptable, and appropriate**

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations 2000) has outlined some general requirements for services to assist the recovery of victims of human rights violations (again including victims of violence in the home and victims of sexual assault). These services should be: *available* – of sufficient quantity within the state party; *accessible* – without discrimination within the jurisdiction of the state party; *acceptable* – culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive; and *of appropriate quality* – providing a service which responds to needs.
The requirements of availability, accessibility, acceptability and appropriateness are closely interrelated and cannot be considered independently of one another. Obviously, if services are unavailable, then they cannot be said to be accessible, acceptable or appropriate. Less obviously perhaps, if a service is not culturally acceptable to a certain group (for example, Indigenous women), then it becomes unavailable, inaccessible and inappropriate to that group. By the same token, if services are inaccessible to a certain group (for example, women in remote areas), issues of acceptability and appropriateness become irrelevant. In the Australian context, the links between these different standards are especially important in the face of enormous cultural diversity and vast geographical distances between communities. These conditions mean that sufficient resource allocation and distribution is difficult yet critical to achieve. Representatives of services attending the “Home Truths” conferences indicated that current resource levels frequently failed to meet the above international standards on all counts.

**Resources for rural and remote services**

In terms of availability, rural and remote area services are under great stress. Isolation was identified as a key problem by WESNET (the national peak body working to eliminate domestic and family violence in Australia), particularly for communities in Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, where there was often only a single service to cover a large area. As such, services could not be said to be “available” nor “accessible” to all women in the area (and particularly not to those without transport). Furthermore, services that do exist have been forced to reduce their hours because of lack of funding: the WESNET representative for Western Australia told us how, in that state alone, five refuges that were previously staffed on a 24-hour basis have recently been reduced to “on call” status only, resulting in women being placed at increased risk (both those already in refuge, and those seeking refuge).

Alexandra Neame and Melanie Heenan have noted how “rural women continue to suffer sexual assault in ways that uniquely compromise their capacity to remain anonymous, their right to access culturally-appropriate services, and their rights to seek a police and/or legal response” (2004: 1). The services they spoke to each “felt hampered by inadequate funding and resources, especially those where either sole workers or under-sized teams [provide] the only specialist service response to victims of sexual assault in the region” (2004: 11). As one worker commented: “Rural people have to rely on social support or the local GP as there are fewer professional services to turn to. If those support people aren’t around, they face more isolation” (2004:11). Moreover, conference participants noted how rural services were simply more expensive to run. According to Neame and Heenan (2004: 16):

> “Geographical distance, for example, imposes additional expenses: traveling to provide outreach services is costly both in staff time and in practical outlays like transport . . . The isolation that rural services often experience has a financial impact also – sustaining networks by attending meetings, training workshops or conferences, is far more costly for rural services.”

**Resources for culturally appropriate services**

In their conference presentation, Greta Jubb and Terrie Stewart, of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) Cooperative, highlighted how “family violence experienced by the Indigenous community is distinct to that experienced by the non-Indigenous community. Intervention in family violence should consider the
context and involve Indigenous Australians in the interests of cultural sensitivity.” They also stressed that “there are many gaps in service provision to Indigenous Australians.” In Victoria for instance, the Elizabeth Hoffman House is the only Indigenous-specific emergency accommodation centre for Indigenous women, and “VALS is concerned by threats of closure to Elizabeth Hoffman House due to lack of State Government funding”. Greta also noted that there is no Indigenous-specific sexual assault centre in Victoria:

“The offices of the Centre Against Sexual Assault work in conjunction with hospitals that employ Koori workers. However, most CASA offices do not have a Koori worker of their own and are crying out for them.”

Monique Keel (2004), in the latest ACSSA Briefing Paper, Family Violence and Sexual Assault in Indigenous Communities: Walking the Talk, pointed out that, although a number of states have Indigenous family violence policies, service provision remains far from adequate. As one worker put it:

“The reality for many remote Aboriginal Communities is that they have minimal access to services. While workers strive to provide services to women in remote communities, organisations are not funded to meet the demand. Sole practitioners are servicing many communities: this makes accessing the service difficult and is a major frustration for both workers and communities.”

The worker noted how few dedicated sexual assault services currently exist given the high level of need within the communities:

“The reality of what our services can provide is unfortunate. We have government policy guiding practice but we as workers do not have the people power or the resources to sustain the basic requirements and functions of our services. The result of this is that women work with women in remote communities, but nobody is working to educate the men, and the women suffer further as a consequence. Women are learning about their rights and their attitudes and acceptance of abuse is changing. They are less accepting of violence now: women do go and get a restraining order. Men, however, are not receiving any education and as a result their attitudes and behaviour remain the same.” (Cited in Keel 2004: 10)

Under such circumstances, the international obligation to provide services that are culturally acceptable, appropriate and available clearly falls far short. Women workers from the safe house at the Ali Curung Aboriginal community, south-east of Tennant Creek, in speaking of the importance of safe houses for women in remote communities powerfully illustrated the implications of this shortfall:

“If women want to run away, they have to go hundreds of kilometres, into the bush, without transport, without safety, without anything, except if there’s a safe house, where the other women can look after them.”

(Pam Stein, domestic violence counsellor for the Berkeley region)
As Pam continued, conference delegates were shocked to learn that not only is the safe house under-funded with a budget of only $30,000 but that:

“These women here run it themselves, and they don’t get paid. They don’t get wages like other women in women’s refuges across Australia. What they get is what’s called CDEP [Community Development Employment Program] money, which is basically the work for the dole money, to run it. And they’ve been running it for a number of years now, with that.”

Clearly, this situation also raises serious human rights concerns around discrimination and equal pay, and several conference delegates demanded national action to address the inequity.

As noted in the previous section, issues of cultural acceptability of services also affect women from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Hurriyet Babacan (1999:239) has described in her research how the “lack of culturally-relevant support services, breakdown of family networks, […] a lack of child care, and transport difficulties” impact particularly on women from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and even more so in rural communities. The Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC 2003) has also noted that mainstream service delivery is ill-equipped to respond to the needs of different ethnic communities in the absence of specific programs to address immigrant women’s experiences of violence.

The NASASV report by the late Wendy Weeks, *Cultural Diversity and Services Against Sexual Violence*, noted that, in New South Wales:

“Current sexual assault service provision to clients (predominantly women) from non-English-speaking backgrounds is 9.9 per cent of total service provision (NSW Health 1995) yet the proportion of the total female population speaking languages other than English at home in New South Wales is 24 per cent. Some factors that have been identified as contributing to this situation are intermittent resourcing, lack of coordination . . . and the enormity of addressing complex issues across many cultural contexts.” (Fairfield Multi-cultural Family Planning Conference Proceedings 1994, cited in Weeks 2002: 21-22)

**Counselling and accommodation resources**

Services that are the first point of contact for those who have experienced (or are experiencing) violence simply cannot meet the demand. As one victim/survivor Donna pointed out, adult survivors of childhood sexual assault often have no subsidised access to counselling, as tight resources mean counselling for “recent assaults” is prioritised within services. Another woman, Vicki, who identified as a survivor of sexual assault, said that “in Perth there’s a sexual assault centre where there’s 120 people waiting to get counselling”.

Nor do services have enough accommodation to offer victim/survivors who are escaping violence. WESNET noted in their presentation that in every state and territory women who are fleeing domestic violence are forced into the private accommodation market. This means, in the short term, staying in motels (where they are isolated from support services and run the risk of being found by their abuser), and, in the long term, trying to find accommodation in the private rental market where they face discrimination as “single” women, especially if they have children and little or no income.
According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), domestic violence is the most common reason why Australians turn to the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), which provides services to homeless people (AIHW 2002-2003: figure 5.2). SAAP is a Commonwealth-State joint-funded program, with each government providing roughly half the funds. “Family violence” SAAP funding is largely in state hands, as states decide how much to spend on family violence services out of the total SAAP budget. Western Australia spends the most on family violence at 44.5 per cent and Tasmania spends the least at 1.8 per cent. Victoria spends the least of the mainland states, at 21.8 per cent of the total SAAP budget (AIHW 2002-2003: table 2.2).

WESNET presenters noted how in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania, homeless services are modelled on traditional ideas of male homelessness, and more funding is provided to agencies supporting homeless single men than those supporting homeless women and children. Domestic violence agencies receive about $100,000 less per agency when compared with single men services. This is despite the fact that, in all age groups under 45 years, there were more women than men accessing SAAP services (AIHW 2002-2003: figure 4.1). WESNET noted the situation was particularly discriminatory in Victoria, where 63 per cent of SAAP clients are women, most often because of domestic violence, yet only 21.8 per cent of the SAAP budget is allocated to women and children fleeing domestic violence (AIHW 2002-2003).

Resources for outreach and planning

The WESNET presenters also noted that services in both metropolitan and rural areas are severely lacking in the time and resources (such as access to transport or even office supplies), to do outreach work. Workers in sexual assault services reported similar limitations. This means marginalised groups, especially Indigenous women, women with disabilities or women from non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as those living in rural or remote areas, are not made aware of the services available and continue to suffer violence with no hope of a supported “way out”. Without the possibility of outreach work, the “accessibility” of services is severely compromised. Several service representatives also mentioned that they lack the money to adequately invest in training and/or planning that might help to increase the capacity of the service, resulting in a continual cycle of under-resourcing.

As one conference delegate suggested:

“The home truth really is that we don’t have an adequate system to deal with violence against women and children. Now that’s the real home truth. I’ve been working in this area for 17 years. In my service I just lost two workers – one a children’s worker, and one a domestic violence worker – because we’re in contraction in New South Wales. Unless you happen to be in a marginal seat.”

Comparative funding and “due diligence”

For long-term workers in the field, under-resourcing was said to have become so widespread, and to have existed for so long, that it was becoming normalised. Throughout the conference, participants spoke of how inadequate funds significantly reduced any scope they had to improve service delivery.

Kate Gilmore described how a human rights approach to violence against women could be used to assess the adequacy of resourcing levels. International human
rights law demands that governments at all levels exercise “due diligence” in addressing human rights violations. “Due diligence” requires governments to “respect, protect, fulfil and promote” human rights. Under the obligation to “fulfil”, they must adopt “appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial, and other measures towards the full realisation of the right” (Amnesty International 2004b: 15). That is, they must allocate adequate resources to services to ensure their availability, accessibility, acceptability and appropriateness. A long-standing problem with this model has been the question of how to measure exactly when states have achieved “due diligence” in resource allocation. This is particularly difficult considering international variations in the wealth of different countries and their governments. In other words: how much funding is enough within any particular economy?

One solution to this problem has been to consider comparative funding models, where it is assumed that funding should match the allocations provided to address similar-scale problems. This means, first, the scale of violence against women within the country must be determined. In Australia this is hardly a problem: we have an enormous amount of information attesting to the magnitude of violence against women (as the statistics quoted at the beginning of this paper show). Kim Webster reminded delegates that, in physical health terms, domestic violence is a “serious, prevalent and preventable” public health issue that is the biggest cause of death and injury to young and middle-aged women (VicHealth 2004). Jon Conte spoke of the associated mental health problems that violence causes: statistics show that nearly half (47.6 per cent) of victim/survivors suffer from depression, the majority (63.8 per cent) suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, and victim/survivors are three and a half times more likely than non-abused women to be suicidal (Golding 1999). The recently-released Access Economics study _The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy_ (2004) revealed that, in economic terms, intimate partner violence represents a cost to Australian society estimated at $8 billion a year.

These are some of the more obvious and measurable characteristics of violence against women. Many participants also referred to the impacts of violence which are not so easily measured, such as the effects on community development, or on children who grow up in a culture of violence, some of whom are likely to repeat the behaviours or perhaps accept violent behaviour in their own adult relationships.

However, according to Kate Gilmore, “due diligence” can be determined by examining “measurable” factors such as the health impact of the abuse, and comparing them with similar-scale social or health-related “problems”. While the health impact of sexual assault has not specifically been distinguished, the recent findings from the 2004 VicHealth study suggest intimate partner violence is a health “problem” of unequalled proportions for women aged between 15 and 44. Here, Kate suggested using the example of diabetes, which is Australia’s sixth leading cause of death affecting over one million Australians, as a source of comparison. Although diabetes is a serious health issue, it’s contribution to the “disease burden” in women is considerably less. And yet, the problem of diabetes appears to be considerably better resourced.

In a subsequent discussion following the feminist roundtable at the conference, a participant quoted a policy document showing the Federal Government’s determination “to maintain our level of sporting success” has resulted in “an additional $161.6 million into Australian sport over the next four years, bringing our total commitment to sport to a record level of $547 million” (Commonwealth of Australia 2001: forward). This means, the participant noted, more than seven
times as much public money is allocated to sports institutions than to addressing the “human rights scandal” of domestic violence and sexual assault. Several participants reacted to this statement, noting that this situation was especially ironic in the face of recent allegations of sexual assault against high-profile sporting figures. Marg D’Arcy also pointed out that on AFL Grand Final weekends there is generally an increase in demand of around 10 per cent in both calls to the Sexual Assault Crisis lines and in requests for crisis care.

Linda Osmundson talked about the situation in Florida, in the United States, where services apply or campaign for funding collectively, rather than individually. The funds are then distributed according to the needs of specific services:

“One of the standards that we have to make sure that we meet is that the funding is shared, and fairly shared around the country. I know one of the things that we’ve done on our statewide level . . . we have joined together all of our services and our funding goes out by formula, instead of by competition. [The formula] includes the population factor, it also includes a factor for rurality, so for the areas where there’s a very small population the formula is weighted more heavily in those areas so there’s more money, because we realise that it’s more expensive because of distances and because of the inability to raise money.”

However, this assumes a significant level of funding is available to adequately address the needs of victim/survivors through services, which, according to conference delegates, is not currently the case in Australia. Linda also noted that:

“In our country, our funding comes from all over the place, we have some government funding, but we raise almost a half of our funds from our local community. While it takes a lot of our time, it gives us some autonomy. Our CASA has 30 different funders and hundreds and hundreds of different donors, so that means for us, while we have to respond to all of those funders, it also means if any one of those funders went away, we wouldn’t be dead. We are not so dependent.”

While acknowledging the pragmatism of this approach, Paulina Woodbridge, the Coordinator of the North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service in Townsville, and the National Chairperson of WESNET, objected to it on political grounds, saying:

“My stomach shrinks a little bit when we start to talk about doing without government funding, and forming corporate partnerships and so on . . . For me it is important as it’s about social capital, and about our taxes working for the people in the communities . . . I want my taxes to go to be re-distributed around Australia, to provide justice and safety and better living conditions for all the citizens, especially women and children.”

Other participants agreed with her, saying that as women and children make up the majority of the Australian population, this was not an unreasonable claim. These comments sparked a debate in the audience about the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. There seemed to be a consensus that while governments at every level have an indisputable human rights obligation to respond to human rights abuses on their territory, there were also issues of
discrimination and the question of who should bear the economic costs of violence. Violence against women, said one speaker, is not a “women’s problem”. As women are nearly four times more likely to experience violence by a man than by a woman, and as 99 per cent of perpetrators of sexual assault are men (ABS 1996), the evidence is overwhelming that men are the cause of the problem. Women, however, bear the brunt, not only of the physical and emotional trauma violence causes, but also the economic costs. The Access Economics study (2004) estimates that the largest economic burden of domestic violence – $4.4 billion – is borne by victims. The next largest cost is borne by “the community”, including services. The study estimated the value of volunteer labour in services to be around $5 million – another cost borne almost exclusively by women.

Adequate resource allocation emerged as one of the key demands of the conference. Many participants identified it as a fundamental condition of achieving an end to violence against women and children. Several women spoke of the horror of the situation before the establishment of women’s refuges and rape crisis centres in the 1960s and 1970s, when women and children simply had nowhere to go to escape violence. The fact is, one participant noted, “it still is the 1950s for many women”. If services are not funded to be available, accessible, acceptable and of appropriate quality, then women and children are simply forced to live with violence.

**HOME TRUTH SEVEN**

**The criminal justice system continues to fail women**

Seeking justice in response to violence in the home has remained a key theme of conferences that aim to address the issue of violence against women and children. How to raise public awareness about, and campaign for, reforms that will recognise *criminal assault in the home* has been an important platform around which victim advocates have often gathered. Even more so in the case of sexual violence where “Rape Law Reform” has been the principal banner under which several national conferences have been organised. Almost a decade ago, *Legalising Justice for All Women: A National Conference on Sexual Assault and the Law* was held at Melbourne’s Royal Women’s Hospital. The participants there attempted to identify “all that stands between every woman [sexually] assaulted and formal justice” (Gilmore 1995: xii).

For most of the presenters who spoke on this theme at the conference, “justice” was remarked on more for its absence than it was characterised as something achievable, or something which has been adequately provided. Speakers described, critiqued and evaluated “justice” through a policy and legal lens that considered changes to family law procedures, the criminal justice system, the police forces, and more conceptually, as an ideal for which victims, in all their diversities, should rightly have a claim upon. These papers were powerfully and often courageously delivered at the *Home Truths* conference by lawyers, service providers, researchers, victims and survivors, and we encourage readers of this paper to access and read them individually and collectively from the website.

To summarise just some of the issues raised.

Dr Caroline Taylor suggested that “Never the Twain Shall Meet?” when we contemplate criminal justice and a notion of legal ethics in how sexual assault trials are currently being conducted. Caroline methodically and passionately traced the
legal and procedural treatment of father–daughter rape cases which she suggests draws on “well preserved time capsules” made up of “ancient stories about women and children”. During her presentation she walked conference delegates through individual trials where examples of the tactics used by defence barristers in cross-examining children were exposed. Caroline detailed some disturbing examples of children being subjected to confusing and demeaning questions that were primarily designed to “conceal and limit their evidence in ways that decontextualised the environment in which their abuse took place”.

For example, Caroline described a case involving three children who were siblings, each of whom had described being sexually abused by their father. Ultimately the Office of Public Prosecutions opted to proceed with just one trial, involving one of the children. Caroline described how this child was made to “hopscotch” through her evidence, being told that she could not refer to any of the other instances that involved her siblings or any of the other occasions on which she was abused, apart from the one isolated incident that had formed the basis of the charges. Caroline highlighted how the exercise of judicial discretion and the shaping of evidentiary boundaries in cases involving multiple victims, or where children are serially offended against by family members (mainly fathers and stepfathers), is where the practice of “legally sanctioned lying” is most pronounced.

Some presenters contemplated the merits of exploring alternatives to the traditional criminal justice system’s response to sexual assault victim/survivors. Melanie Heenan, Coordinator of the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, critiqued the move towards positioning restorative justice approaches, such as conferencing, as offering the most meaningful alternative to victims for the failings of the criminal justice system. However, while restorative justice programs have been operating in Australia over the past decade particularly in the area of juvenile justice, Melanie suggested there were particular concerns about adapting these models to the context of gender-based crimes such as sexual assault and domestic violence. While proponents of restorative justice models are confident of the benefits that would flow to victims (offender apologies, behaviour change reducing the likelihood of reoffending, scope for victim compensation), Melanie suggested other alternatives, such as specialising criminal justice responses to sexual violence in the form of specialist lists or specialist courts (for example, where only specially-trained legal professionals and judges are entitled to appear in or hear the proceedings) may carry greater scope for delivering a better brand of justice to victims in the short term.

Conference delegates were also invited to consider the potential offered through the civil justice system for victims of sexual assault to claim compensation at common law, either against an individual perpetrator or against an organisation that may have negligently put the victim at risk. Vivian Waller, from the Sexual Assault Unit at the law firm Maurice Blackburn Cashman in Victoria, talked about her work in making successful claims against individual perpetrators, Catholic orders, government bodies, churches, children’s homes, and other organisations who have failed to ensure that people in their care were safe from sexual violence. While Vivian suggested there were legal limits to the kinds of cases that might succeed through this process, she nonetheless encouraged service providers to see the
civil process as one that might offer survivors a more realistic mechanism for accessing justice and for making the offender directly accountable.

The papers delivered by Elspeth McInnes and Angela Hartwig from the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services in Western Australia were sobering reminders of how options for women and children escaping violence are sometimes dangerously mediated by family law processes that routinely privatise the perceived needs of a child to have contact with both parents ahead of any human right that women and children might have to live safely from violence and abuse.

In her presentation, Elspeth McInnes pointed to the contradictions that exist between state and federal systems of law when women attempt to have “home Truths” about their experiences of domestic violence understood by the Family Court. According to Elspeth:

“The role of police in securing restraining orders, monitoring restraining orders, prosecuting breaches of orders, investigating assaults and prosecuting assaults against women and children often comes second, in practice, to supporting family court contact orders which force victims to be constantly re-exposed to offenders.”

Elspeth said that problems still exist at the state level in terms of relying on police to secure women’s and children’s safety from family violence (for example, lack of police in country areas, a lack of understanding by police of the issues, a lack of faith in the effectiveness of court orders). Child protection responses tend to discount the impact of domestic violence on the child (where their mother is the target), or struggle to meet the threshold test required to substantiate that the abuse occurred (where the child is the target) (Rendell, Rathus and Lynch 2000; Kaye, Stubbs and Tolmie 2003). While efforts have been made to develop frameworks that can link state-based systems’ responses to child protection and to domestic violence (for example, the Family Court’s Magellan Project and the Columbus Project in Western Australia), the Family Law Council’s recommendation in 2002 for there to be a national multi-disciplinary family violence unit has yet to be adopted.

In her presentation, Angela Hartwig reminded us of how the consequences of systems continuing to fail to protect women and children can be fatal. Research, as presented by both Angela and Elspeth, continues to show how separation is often a period of escalated risk for many women and their children (Mouzos and Rushforth 2003). Angela detailed how urgent action was called for by the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services in Western Australia, when eight women and one infant were killed in the space of four months as a result of domestic violence-related homicides. Two of the offenders had participated in perpetrator programs; one woman had a duress alarm that apparently notified police of imminent safety risks to her, while other women had various kinds of restraining orders in place.

The Council’s efforts prompted the hosting of a parliamentary roundtable in April 2004 where representatives from government, non-government organisations and community services worked to develop a plan for new policy, program and legislative interventions that would prioritise the protection of women’s and children’s rights to live free from domestic violence. According to Angela, the roundtable helped to generate a climate of renewed vigour in developing a “no tolerance” approach to domestic violence that included: changes to legislation
such as broadening the circumstances, and the length of time, under which restraining orders can be granted (children will also be eligible to obtain orders if they witness physical or emotional abuse); introducing lifetime restraining orders for certain offences; at a policy level, introducing a four year strategic plan for responding to and preventing family and domestic violence; and implementing a “no tolerance” approach to policing. Angela listed other recommendations for action that were specific outcomes of the roundtable, two of which have received funding commitments from the Western Australian Government.

Some further measures of relief may be forthcoming if initiatives such as the new Family Court Family Violence Strategy are properly implemented. Ché Stockley and Danielle Wooltorton outlined key areas for action to address the issue of family violence within the context of the Family Court and the guiding principles that underpin the operation of the strategy. Ensuring the safety of those who attend court who have experienced violence, as well as the safety of workers, lawyers and members of the judiciary is seen as a priority within the strategy. Other key features include the importance of the court recognising the impact of family violence on adults and children; being responsive to the needs of diverse client groups; building partnerships with agencies and community groups; and developing ongoing information that can increase an awareness amongst judicial officers and court staff about family violence. Practical advice about how to provide support in a Family Court context, and in maximising the practical effect of the principles of the Family Violence Strategy was also usefully outlined by the presenters.

As the presenters spoke in these sessions of the detail surrounding the nature and consequences of domestic violence and sexual assault, they each acknowledged what, for the law as well as for service providers, researchers, and for policy workers, has historically been neglected or taken for granted. The remainder of this section now turns to this fundamental “home truth” – that of intimate partner sexual violence. ACSSA draws here on the presentations delivered by speakers Kersti Yllö, Patricia Easteal and Denise Lievore, each of whom contemplated the theme of “seeking justice” in responding to male partner rape.

The law’s response to male partner rape

While Kersti Yllö acknowledged the tremendous inroads made in addressing domestic violence and sexual assault, her keynote presentation spoke of the silence that continues to surround sexual violence within marriage – a silence that results in women being under-studied and under-served by the sectors. For Kersti:

“The goal of ending rape in marriage is a radical one. I think it goes to the very core of how marriage is defined in almost all cultures. It goes to the very core of intimacy and trust and violation. And it’s about the patriarchal control over women’s bodies. Given that, no wonder it’s hard to talk about and hard to challenge.”

That there remains a dearth of research that can reliably attest to the prevalence of rape in marriage is evidence of Kersti’s point. Her own research with David Finkelhor during the mid-1980s conservatively estimated that between 10 per cent and 14 per cent of women in the United States had been forced to have sex by their husbands. Since that time, little research has been done to allow women to give voice to their experiences, and yet Kersti is confident that there are literally “millions of women who are raped in their own homes in their own beds and who really silently survive that as an inescapable part of marriage under patriarchy”.9
Patricia Easteal’s research on partner rape cases in Australia is a welcome and significant exception. Drawing on 23 cases that represented a decade’s worth of male partner rape cases that proceeded in the Australian Capital Territory, and interviews with counsellors, prosecutors and in-depth life histories of women who identified as survivors, Patricia’s presentation at the Home Truths conference “examine[d] the crime that results from the intersection of domestic violence and sexual assault – ‘partner rape’” (Easteal in press).

Powerfully represented through her research are the narratives of the women survivors whose experiences of male partner rape highlight the varying degrees of coercion used against them throughout the relationship. According to Patricia:

“Of the 21 women’s narratives collected for this project, the coercion experienced was not physical for seven: it was either personal, which included threats by the husbands to leave, or social – societal messages, reinforced by religious teachings, about appropriate ‘wifely duties’.”

For example:

“I was very much there to satisfy him but because of the way I would have been brought up and the way marriages tended to be at that time you didn’t say anything about it because you were the wife and you had to satisfy.” (“Eva Jane”)

It was an expectation. Even if I didn’t feel like it, it was his right . . . I used to pray a lot of the time when we had sex that he would just come so the deal was done, the act was finished.” (“Liz”)

The difficulties these women faced in naming their experiences as rape typified the problems identified by other commentators (Bergen 1996; Mahoney and Williams 1998). According to Heenan (2004: 9):

“Establishing the point at which rape should be distinguished from ‘wifely acquiescence’ has proved so difficult for the courts and for women, precisely because coercion, pressure, aggression and ‘seduction’ remain culturally acceptable expressions of male sexual behaviour.”

Kersti Yllö recalled how for many of the women she interviewed the emotional devastation was particularly paralysing:

“In the immediate aftermath, the women talked about the fear, the injury, the nausea, the numbness, and the fact that it was her husband – the person she had chosen to marry, the person that she wanted to have consensual sex with . . . but not when it involved coercion, violence and degradation. It’s not about not having sex with your husband, that’s a misconception out in the world too. And these women talked about how much worse the sexual assault was than the actual battering. I had one quote in here about that: ‘The physical abuse was horrible, but that was something I could get over. It was like a sore that heals. When he forced me to have sex with him, that was more than just physical. It went all the way down to my soul. He abused every part of me – my soul, my feelings, my mind. It was just as much a mental rape as a physical rape, and I don’t think there’s anything worse than that’.”

Not one of the seven women in Patricia’s study who spoke of coercion in the absence of physical violence reported the rapes to police. Nor did three other
women, who described their experience of partner rape as a “one-off” with physical force, seriously contemplate going to the police. For the remaining 11 women, domestic violence was a regular feature of the relationships. Even though for six of these women, the police were regularly contacted to respond to the non-sexual violence by their partner, only one of the six had ever disclosed the sexual assaults to them.

While police forces in Australia are now more likely to be better trained in issues related to domestic violence; more interventionist in terms of their response; and more likely to have established working relationships with domestic violence services, some women’s confidence in prompting a timely, sympathetic and proactive response from police when reporting intimate partner violence remains shaken. This may be even more pronounced when women report sexual assault in these contexts. One woman who Patricia spoke to, “Marg”, had informally approached a police member at her local church and asked for advice:

“I approached him and said, ‘Look, I’m asking on behalf of a friend’, because I didn’t want anyone to know what had happened. I asked him what you would have to do to prove marital rape. And he was very sympathetic. He said, ‘Look, it’s really hard to prove. My suggestion is she gets a divorce, and then tries to bring charges, cause otherwise the police are just going to look at her and . . . I know it’s not right, but that’s how they act’. He was really sympathetic and I just ended up going, ‘Forget that idea’.”

Patricia also reported on her findings after having examined prosecution files involving cases of male partner rape. Significantly, of the 21 cases identified by the DPP in the Australian Capital Territory between 1993 and 2002, there were no jury findings of guilt. In summary: ten prosecutions were discontinued; three trials resulted in acquittals; two trials had “hung juries” (where the jury verdict was divided); and six pleaded guilty.

That almost half of the cases were discontinued is significant. It is important to note that in seven of the ten discontinued cases, the women-complainants actively sought the dropping of charges. The case files suggested a range of disincentives that were related to women fearing retaliation by the offender; anxiety about having to give evidence at trial (for some women, their fears were reinforced by having experienced lengthy cross-examination at a committal proceeding); and feeling pessimistic about the prospects of a successful outcome. Patricia notes that some of the case files suggested police discourage women-complainants from proceeding due to the unlikelihood of a conviction; or there being little resistance by prosecutors to withdrawing the charges where it was a case of “word against word” (with no forensic evidence available).

In the remaining three cases, the charges were dropped following a recommendation by the prosecution team. According to Patricia, the reasons for discontinuance focused on the perceived reliability of the woman-complainant or that there was evidence of recent consensual sex following the offences. According to a DPP solicitor:

“This rate of discontinuing is probably more than other crimes but in sexual assault we tend to discontinue a lot. I don’t know if it’s higher dropping with a partner [as the offender] or not, but I think the child sexual assaults have the highest attrition rate because we determine that there aren’t reasonable chances of success.”
The manner in which prosecutorial discretion is exercised “is one of the least understood aspects of the administration of criminal justice” according to Denise Lievore, “because the decision-making process is rarely subject to external scrutiny”. Denise’s presentation at the conference helped to shed further light on the kinds of contemporary factors that most influence the screening decisions made by prosecutors across all adult sexual assault cases. Traditionally, the role of police and prosecutorial decision-making, in determining which cases were investigated and which offenders were to be charged and prosecuted, has been heavily criticised by feminists and victims’ rights advocates for being largely responsible for the high attrition rate in rape cases. Their approach to “gate-keeping”, in only progressing cases that accorded with a more stereotyped image of a “real rape victim”, was seen to reflect the gender bias of those who were responsible for administering criminal justice.

According to Denise’s own research, however, decisions about whether to prosecute a case, to terminate the proceedings, or to negotiate with the defence in exchange for a guilty plea, are now more likely to be influenced by a range of both legal and extra-legal factors specific to the case. Denise examined 141 adult sexual assault cases referred to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in five states and territories between 1 July 1999 and 30 June 2001. She supplemented her findings by analysing interviews she conducted with 24 Crown Prosecutors (11 women and 13 men) with experience in prosecuting sexual assault. Importantly, Denise found that decisions about whether or not to proceed with a case were being uniformly assessed against policies and protocols that suggest the case must first meet “the reasonable prospects test”. That is, prosecutors were obliged to consider whether there was a reasonable prospect that a jury may be convinced of the accused’s guilt beyond reasonable doubt. Prosecutors were, however, unanimous in saying that one of the most important factors in how they apply the reasonable prospects test is to assess “the victim’s credibility and reliability as a witness”. According to Denise, prosecutors felt that:

“Victim credibility is crucial in adult sexual assault cases, because they often come down to word against word, with little or no corroborating evidence. The probability of conviction relies on the victim’s ability to articulate the events and convince a jury beyond reasonable doubt that a crime occurred, so prosecutors will be reluctant to proceed if her credibility, character or behaviour is questionable or open to adverse inference. Having said that, the majority of prosecutors saw no reason to discontinue most cases, even where there is no corroborating evidence. In most cases, the victim’s word is sufficient grounds for prosecuting, as long as her evidence is inherently credible.”

The findings of earlier studies have suggested that prosecutors’ assessments of case credibility have often been mediated through a set of social and cultural expectations about victims and offenders and how readily the circumstances lend themselves to perceptions of conventional rape scenarios. Whether a victim’s version of events was perceived as credible was shown to be heavily influenced by whether she was drinking alcohol around the time of the rape, by how she was dressed, or by whether she is perceived as sexually active or sexually “provocative”.

Interestingly, and in some contrast to Patricia’s more specific study of partner rape cases, victim characteristics did not appear, overall, to unduly influence how prosecutors chose to exercise their discretion in the cases examined by Denise, as

Ensuring the safety of those who attend court who have experienced violence, as well as the safety of workers, lawyers and members of the judiciary is positioned as a priority within the strategy.
had been shown to occur in other studies. Nor did she believe that prosecutors were “overly influenced by gender stereotypes” in their assessments. While she still held concerns about some of the factors prosecutors identified as being particularly influential on their decisions, such as victim’s post-assault behaviour, her “overall impression was that the prosecutors who took part in the study were aware of and genuinely concerned about victim welfare and the outcomes of sexual assault cases”. However, it is significant that of the 40 cases examined by Denise where a current/former partner had been charged, 20 were withdrawn and seven were resolved through plea negotiations. Denise noted that:

“Cases involving strangers and other known defendants were more likely than cases involving intimate or family relationships to proceed through the criminal justice process.”

In none of the five cases examined by Patricia that proceeded to trial did the jury find the accused man guilty. One of the women interviewed by Patricia spoke of her experience at trial where her ex-husband was acquitted by a jury for charges that involved both rape and assault (through threatening her with scissors):

“Well, he got off. It’s incredible how he managed to do that when there was so much evidence. The court case was worse than anything I could imagine. As a victim I found that the courts are set up for the defendants and it is terrible that the victim is put through trauma both inside and outside the court.”

For Patricia, the reasons for the low conviction rate might at least partially be explained by three variables that typify male partner rape trials. First, there is the difficulty of educating a jury about contemporary definitions of consent particularly where the case includes a complicated history of violence and non-consensual or coercive sex. Second, the law is still divided on whether a jury should be exposed to evidence of prior violence and abuse. In cases of long-term domestic violence, prosecutors have become more attuned to the notion of positioning her non-consent in male partner rape cases within a broader relationship context. However, Patricia notes how for some cases, the admission of previous violence has resulted in successful appeals against conviction where a more conservative view is taken by appellate court judges who view the evidence as highly prejudicial to an accused, or alternatively, quite irrelevant to any adjudication of the charges for which he now stands trial.

Third, the issue of victim credibility continues to plague the successful prosecution of most partner rape cases. As previous commentators have noted, when women accuse men they know of raping them, cross-examination will disproportionately focus on her character and credibility, and how her behaviour before during and after the events falls far short of what is expected of rape victims (Department for Women 1996; Heenan 2001; Lievore 2003). Moreover, victims will be made to recount sequentially the details of the rapes by their partners in isolation from the impact and emotional devastation that accompanies their publicly disclosing their husband/partner as the rapist. One of the women interviewed by Patricia Easteal (in press) described it this way:

“I was asked a question at the forensics, ‘Did he penetrate me anywhere else’, and I said no because he hadn’t. They ask you a question and you say no and that’s it. [He] had tried to put my legs right up over my head and tried to enter my bottom and he hadn’t managed it but because I was
so embarrassed about it, I didn’t bring it up until the formal statement. I didn’t even bring it up until the second day of giving my formal statement because I was too embarrassed the first day. They tried to bring that up in court implying that it hadn’t really happened.”

While most male partner rape cases continue to fall between the justice cracks (as reflected in the title of Patricia Easteal’s paper), there is every indication that the issue of intimate partner violence is drawing unprecedented attention in other contexts. Globalising women’s experiences of male violence may prove profoundly important if the issue of male partner rape is to be understood as a question of public health and an issue of human rights.

For example, according to Kersti Yllö, marital rape or forced unprotected sex is the principal reason why HIV is spreading at catastrophic rates around the world. Kersti referred to the growing recognition among human rights and world health experts that gender equity is becoming an increasingly crucial part of our response to this epidemic:

“Recent research is starting to document what makes perfect sense to those of us who just think about it using common sense. An article in Russia showed how strict gender role socialisation that fosters an acceptance of sexual coercion is a clear risk factor for HIV infection. Another study focused on African American women in the United States found that women who experienced sexual coercion and sexual violence had higher HIV infection rates. That doesn’t surprise us. In sub-Saharan Africa, women are now more likely to be infected than men, those in the 15-24 years age group are most vulnerable, and a study of 191 teenage mothers in Africa, in South Africa, found that 78 per cent reported that they would be beaten if they refused sex; 58 per cent said that they had been beaten by sexual partners ten or more times. And the most recent study that I read documented that young, married women in sub-Saharan Africa have higher infection rates than unmarried sexually active women. The married women who are faithful to their husbands, are getting infected at higher rates because they tend to be married to older men, who are more likely to be infected, more likely to go to prostitutes.”

Kersti pointed to the recent United Nations Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS as taking some strong, if not somewhat surprising, leadership on the issue. In it, the heads of nations around the world collectively endorse the position that:

“Gender equality and the empowerment of women [are] fundamental elements in the reduction of the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS. We must empower women to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, to increase their ability to protect themselves from HIV infection.”

Kersti urged us as activists, practitioners, as researchers and reformists to seize the opportunity to build alliances and to better coordinate the efforts of both movements – those who are active in campaigns that address violence against women and those whose focus is the HIV/AIDS pandemic – so that “the freedom to choose or refuse sex, even within marriage [is seen as] a human right globally”.

Traditionally, the role of police and prosecutorial decision-making, in determining which cases were investigated and which offenders were to be charged and prosecuted, has been heavily criticised by feminists and victims’ rights advocates for being largely responsible for the high attrition rate in rape cases.
Conclusion: “Despair is not an option”

The *Home Truths* conference was a significant event for the domestic violence and sexual assault sectors in marking the collaborative effort on the part of women (and some men) to come together with the aim of finding better ways to progress the work they do and to manage the challenges they jointly face. In this Issues Paper, ACSSA has sought to draw together or, perhaps more accurately, tease out some of the “Home Truths” that were given particular prominence.

That violence against women and children is overwhelmingly perpetrated against them by family members in their own homes, and that it is a profound and undeniable violation of their human rights were amongst the first “Home Truths” explored. We outlined statistics that continue to demonstrate the prevalence of intimate partner and family violence, both in Australia and internationally, and to expose its effects on the health and wellbeing of millions of women, children and men around the globe. We explored the issue of male partner rape in some detail, drawing in particular on the presentations given by key note speakers, who highlighted the continuing reluctance of service sectors, governments and the wider community to adequately address the specific issue of intimate partner sexual violence.

Few delegates will not have felt deeply challenged by the voices of survivors that punctuated the various sessions throughout the conference. Few delegates will not have felt inspired and enraged, even confronted by, or perhaps complicit in, having somehow muted the voices of “those who know”. Mostly, we saw delegates motionless. Listening. And it was the listening that was critical. Survivors spoke to us through the details of their experiences of sexual and physical violence; they spoke to us through detailing their agendas for change or reform; they described for us in practical terms, what worked for them therapeutically, and they detailed where they had been most let down by the systems that were meant to help and support them – legally, socially, financially, and emotionally.

Importantly survivors questioned, individually and collectively, whether their words still counted. In particular, some women questioned the extent to which the sector has moved away from feminist approaches to service-delivery, where the experiential – the lived experience of women – is not afforded the same legitimacy or authority it once had when it came to debates around the policy table or in discussions about what constitutes good practice.

“Mainstreaming” and its effects on the future of specialist sexual assault and domestic violence services was the subject of the fourth “Home Truth” considered in this paper. Presenters noted the attempts being made to dispose of “the language of gender” to understand and respond to what overwhelmingly remain gender-based crimes. In particular they feared a return to generic service delivery approaches, where the traditional health and welfare response had resulted in women’s and children’s safety being compromised, individualised, misunderstood, or worse, where they were blamed or chastened for compromising the family unit. However, emphasis was also given to how the notion of “mainstreaming” carries with it particular implications for Indigenous women, for women with disabilities, and for immigrant and refugee women. Losing gender as a primary level of analysis or as informing the basic structure of frameworks for service delivery must not, as was powerfully cautioned through the words of many presenters, again be privileged over and above the historically and socially specific conditions that variously effect and impact on the lives of women in all their diversities.
Nonetheless, as reported by many of the conference delegates, there was a nostalgic sense of the conference providing a forum where feminist analyses and much more collaborative approaches to understanding domestic violence and sexual assaults were being openly discussed and debated (Home Truths Five and Six). Despite the “backlash”, of which mainstreaming was identified as just one aspect, there were discussions about consolidating across sectors, that were insistent on inclusiveness, on listening to difference, on contemplating “the processes”, not just “the outcomes” in advocating for social change. In the closing moments of the conference, the performance skills of the Melbourne group “Playback Theatre” were used to interpret the comments made by many of the participants about “rediscovering feminism”. The demise of “the backlash” performed hilariously through the interpretation of the Playback Theatre was warmly appreciated by the conference delegates as the remaining actors grew louder and more insistent that feminists, in all their shapes and colours, had plenty to offer yet.

The conference brought to the fore all that we as researchers, as service providers, as survivors, as advocates have to offer: commitment, skills and knowledge. Conference participants shared and reflected on their understandings of how violence against women and children operates, drawing on both research and on personal and professional experience. They also shared ideas on how to end the violence, their strategies for education and prevention, and their models for effective crisis response.

Ideas and commitment were in abundance: what was lacking, participants noted, was the money to implement them. Under-resourcing was identified by services, consistently and unanimously, as hamstringing their responses to domestic violence and sexual assault. Kate Gilmore of Amnesty International pointed out that governments have an international human rights obligation to fund services so that they are available, accessible, acceptable and of appropriate quality, yet services indicated that these obligations were not being met. Funding allocated to domestic violence appears to be lower than that allocated to health problems which contribute substantially less to the “disease burden” in women. Such under-resourcing can mean that many women, particularly Indigenous women, women from non-English-speaking backgrounds, women with disabilities and women living in remote or regional areas, have nowhere to go to escape violence, to consider their options and to receive support.

The final “Home Truth” saw presenters calling for resistance and persistence in describing how the law and its practice continued to fail women and children who call on the police and the courts to intervene to keep them safe. Its potential to dehumanise, to re-traumatise, to deliver back into the hands of the abuser was disturbingly captured in many of the papers delivered by presenters. The particular issue of male partner rape was also highlighted amidst systems that seem to equally ignore the violence of sexual assault (or its likelihood in the context of domestic violence), neglect to find pathways that will recognise the effects of both domestic violence and sexual assault, or disregard women’s reluctance to name it in the first place.

In spite of this seemingly irreconcilable difference between women’s experiences of violence, and the law’s ambivalence or indifference to it, at least some victim/survivors spoke optimistically of the need to remain resilient. Women representing the survivors’ activist group VOICES, put it this way:

“We want to witness significant changes to the legal system so that an offender protecting culture no longer exists . . . We want the legal sector to

 Violence against women and children is overwhelmingly perpetrated against them by family members in their own homes, and that it is a profound and undeniable violation of their human rights.
identify, acknowledge and take responsibility for their problematic attitude
to, and handling of, sexual assault crimes and the manner in which they
deal with sexual assault survivors. We want the legal system to be held
accountable for the fact that it achieves less than 2 per cent conviction of
reported perpetrators of sexual assault. Further, we want the legal system
to genuinely be receptive to feminist suggestions of change. Indeed,
where sexual assault is concerned, we want a feminist legal system to
replace the unworkable patriarchal one.”

Undoubtedly the words of Christine Nixon, Victoria’s first woman police Chief
Commissioner, were an indication to delegates that change is possible. At the
podium during the opening plenary session, Chief Commissioner Nixon said she
had abandoned much of what she had planned to say. “More importantly”, she
said, “I suppose I really wanted to just give you my support for the kind of work that
you all do.” She also acknowledged the responsibility that the police must them-
selves take for better responding to issues of both domestic and family violence and
sexual assault, and how important it was that the police take advice on that from
community, from service providers, and from those working on the “front line”:

“We’re going to try the best we can, to work through our own attitudes
and our own issues, and be able to work forward. I think that as we learn
the ways and means to do it better – and as long as people do it with us,
help us, complain about us when we don’t do it properly, look to provide
us ways and means of support – then we’ll do much better.”

Kate Gilmore also reminded us in the closing moments of her workshop that: “The
challenge lies ahead of us, not behind us, to bring change to the lives of every woman:
women of Mexico, of Darfur and of Iraq.” She said: “This struggle needs a shared
vision of individual, collective and global solidarity.” More importantly, amidst all of
the “Home Truths” we shared over the three days, amidst all that for many present-
ters remained beyond reach in imagining “something better”, Kate, with almost
precision timing, reminded us that “despair is simply not an option”. Indeed, Kate
challenged where we position ourselves amidst a struggle that both Kate and Kersti
Yllö suggest is undeniably global:

“Our battle against violence against women is of this binding quality:
Amnesty International’s membership worldwide has finally taken up the
cause. Across more than 90 countries around the world we’re taking to the
streets, to say stop violence against women in all its forms, in all its mani-
festations, no matter where it occurs. Stop violence against women because
it is eroding economy, because it is eroding family, because it is eroding
human potential, because it is eroding human rights.”

Further, she asked us to look into the eyes of the women in Darfur, a photo that
depicted women, shielding themselves from the hot sand, brandishing scarves of
the brightest colours. She asked us to look at them closely – they had gathered to
tell their stories of rape and of being brutalised by the militia groups. They had
gathered, bravely, determinedly to protest what had happened to them. They
were women organising, resisting – as women do all over the world – in holding
conferences, in participating in protest marches, by gathering in secret to give
their testimonies of human rights abuses – women sharing their collective histo-
ries, traditions and their demands for justice. Kate asked whether we recognised
ourselves. We looked carefully. We thought we did.
Endnotes

1 Although the conference was entitled, “Home Truths: Stop Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, A National Challenge”, the term “family violence” is also used throughout this paper. Many Indigenous people, in particular, have indicated their preference for this term and its capacity to better recognize the importance of kin within Indigenous society. See Keel (2004) for a more comprehensive discussion of this issue.

2 Although not all sexual assault is perpetrated by family or kin, within the Indigenous literature, sexual assault is often considered within the context of family violence, rather than as a stand-alone issue.

3 The terms “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal” are used interchangeably throughout this Issues Paper.

4 There is ongoing discussion within the sexual assault sector about the use of the terms “victim” and “survivor” to describe women who have experienced sexual violence. Jan Jordan (2004) argues that the term “victim” was criticised, at times rightly so, for reinforcing a sense of women’s passivity and confirming her victim-status. The term “survivor” was later preferred as it recognised a women’s active resistance to violence and its consequences, and her ability to make choices and determine the path her life would take. More recently, however, there is a recognition that the debate over the terms “victim” and “survivor” meant that a woman is viewed as either a victim or a survivor, which does not reflect the complex realities of women’s experiences. An unintended result of the use of the term “survivor” is an emphasis of the survival skills and strengths of women and girls, which can lead to a silencing of the victims’ voices and a minimising of the negative effects of sexual assault. In this Issues Paper we continue to use the term “victim/survivor”.

5 See www.abelscreen.com/index.html for a list of Gene Abel’s publications.

6 When asked further about the need to pool resources, Hannah noted that she, as the lone worker in a region the size of Victoria, is not provided with a car and although she has access to two cars in the hospital pool, they are often not available. She is then forced to rely on obtaining lifts to communities and town camps from residents of Tennant Creek who may, by chance, be heading in the direction she seeks. This of course makes it extremely difficult to access women who need crisis care.

7 United Nations (1995) paragraph 125:

“[Actions to be taken] by Governments, including local governments, community organisations, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, the public and private sectors, particularly enterprises, and the mass media, as appropriate:

(a) Provide well-funded shelters and relief support for girls and women subjected to violence, as well as medical, psychological and other counselling services and free or low-cost legal aid, where it is needed, as well as appropriate assistance to enable them to find a means of subsistence;

(b) Establish linguistically and culturally accessible services for migrant women and girls, including women migrant workers, who are victims of gender-based violence;

(c) Recognise the vulnerability to violence and other forms of abuse of women migrants, including women migrant workers, whose legal status in the host country depends on employers who may exploit their situation;

(d) Support initiatives of women’s organisations and non-governmental organisations all over the world to raise awareness on the issue of violence against women and to contribute to its elimination;

(e) Organise, support and fund community-based education and training campaigns to raise awareness about violence against women as a violation of their human rights and mobilise local communities to use appropriate gender-sensitive traditional and innovative methods of conflict resolution;

(f) Recognise, support and promote the fundamental role of intermediate institutions, such as primary health-care centres, family-planning centres, existing school health services, mother and baby protection services, centres for migrant families and so forth in the field of information and education related to abuse;

(g) Organise and fund information campaigns and educational and training programmes in order to sensitize girls and boys and women and men to the personal and social detrimental effects of violence in the family, community and society; teach them how to communicate without violence and promote training for victims and potential victims so that they can protect themselves and others against such violence;

(h) Disseminate information on the assistance available to women and families who are victims of violence;

(i) Provide, fund and encourage counselling and rehabilitation programmes for the perpetrators of violence and promote research to further efforts concerning such counselling and rehabilitation so as to prevent the recurrence of such violence;

(j) Raise awareness of the responsibility of the media in promoting non-stereotyped images of women and men, as well as in eliminating patterns of media presentation that generate violence, and encourage those responsible for media content to establish professional guidelines and codes of conduct to raise awareness of the important role of the media in informing and educating people about the causes and effects of violence against women and in stimulating public debate on the topic.”
8 Pam commented in a subsequent conversation with one of the authors that $30,000 does not stretch far given that food is around 200 per cent more expensive in Ali Curung than in the metropolitan areas of Australia.

9 See ACSSA Issues Paper 1, “Just keeping the peace”: A reluctance to respond to male partner sexual violence (Heenan 2004), which outlines a general reluctance to address the issue of male partner rape in the context of research, service delivery, the law, etc.

10 Patricia Eastal notes that in one of the cases that resulted in a “hung jury”, the accused was acquitted following a retrial. In the other, the jury was similarly unable to reach a unanimous verdict.

11 These included the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Tasmania, and Western Australia.

12 Denise Lievore suggests that this variation is likely to reflect the fact that the majority of studies have been conducted in the United States where the role of prosecutors is to contribute to investigations as well as prosecute the case in court.

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APPENDIX 1

LIST OF SPEAKERS’ PRESENTATIONS REFERRED TO IN THIS PAPER

**Feminism Roundtable**
Reclaiming a Gendered Agenda, Resisting Mainstreaming
Ms Kassa Bird, Ms Mayet Costello, Ms Marg D’Arcy, Ms Linda Osmundson

**Keynote Address 5: Lessons From History**
Dr Jon Conte
Professor, School of Social Work, University of Washington

**The Disappearing “F” Word**
Is Feminism Becoming Extinct in National Policy Approaches to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence in Australia?
Ms Mayet Costello

**Women Sexually Assaulted by a Partner or ex-Partner**
Falling Between the “Justice” Cracks
Dr Patricia Easteal

**Keynote Address 4**
Ms Kate Gilmore

**It’s In Our Hands – Stop Violence Against Women**
Amnesty International Campaign
Ms Kate Gilmore

**Beyond Belief, Beyond Justice**
The Difficulties for Victim/Survivors with Disabilities when Reporting Sexual Offences and Seeking Justice
Mr Jonathon Goodfellow, Ms Naomi Brown

**National Challenge for Action**
Domestic Homicides in Western Australia
Ms Angela Hartwig

**Exploring Alternatives to Abandoning Criminal Justice for Sexual Assault**
Dr Melanie Heenan

**Victim Credibility in Adult Sexual Assault Cases**
Dr Denise Lievore

**The Challenges of Securing Human Rights to Safety in Australian Family Law Frameworks**
Dr Elspeth McInnes

**“Ladies Talking” Tennant Creek**
Ms Hannah Moran and Ms Pam Stein

**Violence Against Women In and Of the System**
Ms Angela Nesci, Ms Diana Orlando, Ms Luba Tanevski

**Opening Plenary Session**
Ms Christine Nixon
Chief Commissioner of Police for Victoria

**Families in Crisis**
Implication of Living in Remote East Arnhem Land
Ms Simone O’Mealley and Ms Ann Barr

**Research on the Safety and Related Needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women in Rural Areas**
Ms Diana Orlando and Ms Luba Tanevski
Keynote Address 6
Ms Linda Osmundson
Executive Director, CASA St Petersburg, Florida

Speaking From Experience
A panel of victim/survivors of sexual assault and family violence reflect on their experiences of support and the criminal justice system to identify what helps and hinders recovery
Davina, Cecily, Donna, Robbie: Facilitator: Dr Caroline Taylor

Keynote Address 1
Senator the Hon Kay Patterson,
Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women

“Double the Odds”
Domestic Violence and Women with Disabilities
Ms Sue Salthouse

Intervention in Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Experienced by Indigenous Australians
Ms Terrie Stewart and Ms Greta Jubb

Navigating the Family Court and Understanding the New Family Violence Strategy
Ms Ché Stockley and Ms Danielle Wooltorton

And Never the Twain Shall Meet?
Legal Justice and Legal Ethics in the Area of Sexual Crimes
Dr Caroline Taylor

Injustice with Attitude: Working Towards the Fourth Wave Using an Innovative, Cutting Edge Model for Best Practice Activism
VOICES

Civil Claims for Compensation Injuries Arising from Sexual Assault
Ms Vivian Waller

Silent Suffering
The Extent, Level and Nature of Violence Against Women During Pregnancy: A Study of 400 Australian Women
Dr Deborah Walsh

The Difficulties of Setting Up a New Sexual Assault Service and Being a Sole Worker in the North ff South Australia
Ms Janine Warren

Intimate Partner Violence
Ms Kim Webster

Directions – Where We’re At, at a Glance, and Where We’re Going
Women’s Refuges, Shelters And Outreach Services In Australia: Major Findings and Recommendations
The WESNET research team and reference group

Wife Rape and Human Rights
Dr Kersti Yllo
APPENDIX 2

BIOGRAPHIES OF PRESENTERS REFERRED TO IN THIS PAPER

**Ann Barr** has a bachelor of Community Welfare and has worked in Gove as a domestic violence worker for eight years. She is currently the domestic violence counsellor for East Arnhem Land and is employed by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services.

**Dr Jon Conte** teaches on clinical issues involved in interpersonal violence and trauma. He is the editor of several professional journals, the founding president of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, the immediate past president and a member of the board of directors of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children. He is on the board of councillors of the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse. He has a private psychotherapy practice in Washington, where he works with both teenagers and adults and in the area of forensic mental health. Dr Conte has testified in the United States and Canada as an expert on abuse and the standard of care in psychotherapy and social work.

**Mayet Costello** is a social worker in a sexual assault service and until recently worked in abortion/unplanned pregnancy and domestic violence. In March 2004 she commenced her PhD in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney examining national gendered violence policy with a focus on prevention.

**Marg D'Arcy** is currently the Program Manager of the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA), and the Cancer, Advocacy, Diversity and Social Support Programs at the Royal Women's Hospital. She is also a member of the editorial committee of *Women Against Violence: An Australian Feminist Journal*, the board of the National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence and the Victorian CASA Forum Inc.

**Dr Patricia Easteal**, Adjunct Professor in Law at the University of Canberra and a research consultant, has conducted a number of research projects on domestic violence and sexual assault. Her books include: *Killing the Beloved; Voices of Survivors; Shattered Dreams; Balancing the Scales: Rape Law Reform and Australian Culture*; and *Less Than Equal*.

**Kate Gilmore** is the Executive Director Secretary General of the International Secretariat of Amnesty International. She is responsible for operational and strategic leadership of the international dimensions of Amnesty's work. Prior to moving to London, Kate was the National Director of Amnesty International, based here in Australia.

**Angela Hartwig** has been the Executive Officer for the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (Western Australia) since 1995 and has worked in the area of domestic and family violence since 1987. Angela is committed to social change and has been actively involved in the Women’s and anti-Apartheid movement for many years and worked in South Africa with the African National Congress Women’s League (ANCWL) and the South African Prisoners’ Organisation for Human Rights during 1993-1995.

**Dr Melanie Heenan** is the Coordinator at the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. ACSSA aims to improve access to current information on sexual assault in order to assist service providers, policy makers, and communities to develop strategies that might better respond to, and ultimately reduce, the incidence of sexual assault. Melanie has worked in the area of sexual assault, as a researcher, counsellor, and trainer for over 12 years. Her particular interest has been in the area of research and advocacy for meaningful reform to the criminal justice system’s response to sexual violence.
Greta Jubb has held the position of Research Officer for five months at the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service. She completed a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Law at the University of Melbourne. Greta has a passion for researching issues affecting Indigenous Australians.

Dr Denise Lievore is a Research Analyst at the Australian Institute of Criminology, specialising in criminal justice responses to adult sexual assault. Published research reports include an international literature review on the non-reporting and hidden recording of sexual assault and recidivism of sexual offenders. She has also recently completed a study into prosecutorial decision-making in adult sexual assault cases.

Elspeth McInnes is a Lecturer at the University of South Australia and Convenor of the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children. She is also currently Deputy President of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). Elspeth has a research and advocacy focus on families, social policy and gendered violence.

Hannah Moran (BSW) has worked in the areas of Mental Health and Disability Services and is currently employed as the Sexual Assault Counselor for the Barkly Region in the Northern Territory. She has been in this position since June 2002.

Angela Nesci has a social work background and is currently the Coordinator of the Bi-lingual Health Education Program with Working Women’s Health. She has worked in the area of domestic violence and with women from non-English-speaking backgrounds for eight years, within a legal, community health, and domestic violence refuge settings. She is currently the non-English-speaking background representative on WESNET (Women’s Services Network) and is a member of the Migrant Women’s Lobby Group (South Australia).

Simone O’Mearly is currently the Coordinator of a crisis accommodation centre in East Arnhem Land and has a background as a teacher working with children who have disabilities and with youth at risk.

Diana Orlando is the Executive Officer of Immigrant Women’s Domestic Violence Service in Victoria.

Linda Osmundson is the Executive Director of Community Action Stops Abuse (CASA) in St Petersburg, Florida. CASA is a domestic violence centre in St Petersburg and Linda has nearly 30 years of experience working as a grassroots community activist and was one of the founders of the clemency movement for battered women in Florida. Linda was the recipient of the 1995 Florida’s Governor’s Peace Award and also the 1998 National Sunshine Peace Award.

Sue Salthouse has worked in the area of social justice since 1996, playing an active role in advocating for women with disabilities. She is an energetic member of Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) and is a current member of the WWDA Management Committee.

Terrie Stewart is a member of the Board of Directors of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS). Terrie has been involved with VALS and the criminal justice area for over ten years. Terrie is currently working at the Broadmeadows Koori Court as an Aboriginal Justice Worker.

Ché Stockley (BA, LLB, Grad Dip Women’s Studies, Grad Dip Legal Practice) works at the Equal Opportunity Commission. She has worked at the Family Court undertaking research on a range of topics including family violence and sexual assault and has experience in the court environment as a women’s support worker. She has worked in policy in the area of violence prevention and contributed to community resources on violence. She is admitted to practice as a legal practitioner in New South Wales.
Luba Tanevski has been working in domestic violence services for nearly 14 years and in immigrant women’s domestic violence services for more than nine years. She is currently working as a cultural support worker and has been a registered migration agent for nearly seven years specialising in domestic violence provision.

Dr Caroline Taylor’s PhD received a national award and has been distilled into two books, *Surviving the Legal System* (2004) and *Court Licenced Abuse* (2004). She is currently a member of the Victorian Law Reform Commission’s Advisory Committee on Sexual Offences. She is a member of the Ballarat Centre Against Sexual Assault Consultative Committee and is involved in several working committees connected with Victoria Police. She is currently a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Ballarat. Caroline has a powerful interest in social justice and advocating for the rights of survivors of sexual abuse and the human rights of women and children.

Kim Webster works with the Mental Health and Wellbeing Unit at the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. She has a particular interest in women’s health and cultural diversity and in addressing health inequalities. Her postgraduate experience of some 20 years has been in direct care, advocacy, project management and policy development in a range of government, non-government and community-based settings.

Vivian Waller is the head of the Sexual Assault Unit at the law firm Maurice Blackburn Cashman where she practices law exclusively in the area of sexual assault, child abuse and psychiatric injury. She is currently completing her doctorate at the University of Melbourne in sexual assault and psychiatric injury.

Deborah Walsh is a social worker who has specialised in domestic violence with many years of experience of working with women who have experienced domestic violence and co-facilitating a violent men’s behavioural and attitudinal change program. She is a trainer and consultant who recently completed her PhD research into domestic violence in pregnancy.

Janine Warren is a sexual assault worker in Port Augusta, South Australia. She worked in the legal system for 13 and a half years, working with perpetrators before moving to working in the court system as a paralegal. She has held her current position since December 2003 and is a Justice of the Peace.

Danielle Wooltorton (BSW, LLB) works as a legal officer with the Department of Human Services in Victoria. Prior to studying law Danielle worked as a social worker in child protection and disability services. She also has experience in direct service delivery in the women’s refuge system in Western Australia.

Dr Kersti Yllö is a noted feminist researcher. She’s the Henrietta Jennings Chair of Sociology at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, USA. Kersti studied domestic violence and marital rape for more than twenty years. Her publications include, *License to Rape: The Sexual Abuse of Wives*, co-written with David Finkelhorn, and also *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*, with Michelle Brogard. Kersti recently has started to focus on issues of race and ethnicity, and feminist analyses of violence, as well as the connection between marital rape and HIV/AIDS.
APPENDIX 3

LIST OF PRESENTATIONS NOT REFERRED TO IN THIS PAPER

From Behind Closed Doors: A Creative Response to Family Violence
A Touring Family Violence Art Exhibition
Ms Jenny Atkins, Ms Kate Pepplinkhouse, Ms Ruth Turvey, Ms Val Hastings

Towards a Feminist Analysis of Lesbian Relationship Violence
Ms Kassa Bird

Crawling Through Caves / Standing Tall in the Sun
A Group Work Model for Young Women Survivors and Their Carers
Ms Stephanie Blake and Ms Maria Katsikas

Let’s Get Serious About Training
Three training organisations discuss current issues in training including accredited training, theoretical underpinnings, retaining a feminist agenda, and the feasibility of a national domestic violence and sexual assault training network
Mr Danny Blay, Ms Margot Scott, Ms Lorna McNamara

Changing the Tide of Survival: Partners Journey
Ms Andrea Bowles, Ms Sandra Loxton, Ms Fulvia Dee

Service Access and Pathways of Accompanied Children at Dawns House Shelter
Ms Sue Brownlee

But How Do We Protect the Children?
Working with Children who are Living with Family Members who Use Violence
Ms Kerry Burns and Ms Simone McCorkell

Women’s and Children’s Safety or Misplaced Effort?
Dr Donna Chung, Dr Lana Zannettino, Dallas Colley

The Language of Gender Role and Sexual Assault in Indonesia
Dr Theresia Citraningtyas

Multiple Perspectives on Dissociative Identity
Ms Kymbra Clayton

Managing the Therapeutic Relationship
Empathy, Counter Transference, Vicarious Trauma and Listening
Dr Jon Conte

Seeking Basic Justice
Co-research the Children and Mothers Who Have Experienced the Criminal Response to Child Sexual Assault
Ms Ruth Crew

Screening Women – It’s Debatable
Ms Mary D’Arcy, Dr Deborah Walsh, Ms Marion Tower, Ms Gwen Cosier, Ms Michelle Bonner

Our Special House!
Ms Marg Dean and Ms Jo Campbell

Preventing Women’s Homelessness as a Consequence of Domestic Violence
Innovative Research
Ms Robyn Edwards and Ms Jane Mulroney

“But Mum’s a Victim Too”
Domestic Violence and Child Abuse
Ms Lee FitzRoy
Changing Men
Best Practice in Violence Prevention Work with Men
Dr Michael Flood

Giving Children a Voice
Proposed Improvements for Child Complainants in the Victorian Law Reform Commission’s Final Report On Sexual Offences
Ms Nicky Friedman

Women’s Family Violence Support Groups
Exploring Alternative Pathways
Ms Susan George and Ms Margaret Brown

A Gender, Power and Sexual Entitlement Project
RESPECT – Getting it Together
Mr Rob Gerrie, Mr Rick Flynn, Mr Rob Crawley, Mr Derek Forbes

There’s No Pride in Domestic Violence
Developing the Gay and Lesbian Community Awareness
Mr Brad Gray

Using the Media to Combat Sexual Violence Against Women and Children
Ms Lynne Harne

Working with Children – Tools to Assist the Process
Ms Andie Holland

Who’s the Boss?
A Group for Parents Who Have Been Abused by their Adolescents
Ms Jo Howard and Mr Shane Weir

The Health Impact of Violence
A Disability Perspective
Ms Chris Jennings

Developing Partnerships to Serve Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women and Children
Ms Radinka Kavedzic and Ms Hang Pham

The Option of Staying at Home
Ms Vanessa Kearney

Prisons, the Perpetrators of Violence and Discrimination Against Women
Ms Debbie Kilroy and Ms Amanda George

Tales From the Darkside
Ms Maggie Lawson

Twenty Years of Prostitution Law Reform. Where Have We Come?
Ms Kathleen Maltzahn

Speaking of Creative Arts Therapy
When Words are not Enough: Recovering through Art, Movement, Drama, Music and Play
Ms Kylie Martin

Feminist and Rural? You Bet!
Ms Robyn Mason

Successes and Challenges in the Development of an Integrated “One Stop Shop” for Women Escaping Family and Domestic Violence in Perth, Western Australia
Ms Chelsea McKinney, Ms Julie Dixon, Ms Joanne Spark

Working Towards Self Determination Within the Confines of Bureaucratic/Colonial Constructs and Systems
Ms Lorna McNamara, Ms Mailin Suchting, Ms Kelly Ramsden, Ms Mareese Tātārare, Ms Catherin Clarke
Schools and Family Violence and Prevention. A paradigm shift?
Ms Carla Meurs and Ms Bernadette Wright

Engaging the Frontline
A School-Based Approach to Addressing Violence
Ms Peta Millard

The Story of Naming “Maternal Alienation”
New Research Enters the World of Policy and Practice
Ms Anne Morris

Pallert Tooree Larr (Strong Black Women’s Camp)
A Program for Indigenous Women and Children Based on Respect, Rights and Reconciliation
Ms Julie Oberin, Ms Lyn Charles, Ms Katie Christensen, Ms Muthama Sinnappan, Auntie Lyn Warren

A Powerful Journey
Research Report: Women Reflect on What Helped Them Leave
Ms Debra Parkinson, Ms Jacqui Coupe, Ms Kylie Stevens

Family violence in the News – A Project Report
Ms Kate Peglinkhouse and Ms Vicky Lee Thomas

Pacing the Floor!
Ms Fleur Phillips and Ms Jillian Murray

DART
An Innovative New Approach with Police and Child Protection Services
Working Together to Reduce Domestic Violence
Ms Sue Prosser, Ms Maree Sykes, Ms Chelsea Wheele

Children Seeking Justice
Can Justice be Sought by NSW Children?
Ms Margaret Roberts

Addressing Domestic Violence for Women with Mental Health Issues through Collaborative Partnerships
Ms Kathy Russell

Moving Towards an Integrated Response to Family Violence and Sexual Assault in Victoria
Ms Fiona Sharkie and Assistant Commissioner Leigh Gassner

Kinks, Cubes and Cyberspace
Working with Young People to Prevent Sexual Violence
Ms Chris Smith and Ms Jenny Huxley

Long-Term Physical Health of Women who are Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse
Ms Cindy Smith

Girl’s Talk – Group Treatment and Sexual Abuse
Marina Steward

Researching Men’s Use of Violence as Feminists
Improving Safety Management of the Men's Stopping Domestic Violence Program
Ms Betty Taylor and Ms Christine Potito

The Nest Egg
You Can’t Put an Expiry Date on Rape
Ms Jenna Tuke

The Most Important Person to Engage is the Women
Mr Greg Yee
APPENDIX 4

FINAL WAYS FORWARD

The following “final ways forward” were drawn up by the Home Truths Conference Planning Committee.

- All levels of government and the general community are responsible for and must take action to prevent violence against women and children.
- The Home Truths conference calls on the Federal Government to prioritise the development of a national strategy to address violence against women and children. This strategy must be informed by the voices of victim/survivors.
- In line with the findings of the VicHealth Burden of Disease report, which identified serious health consequences for women as a result of domestic violence, we call on Federal and State governments to allocate the same level of funding to the prevention of violence against women, as is currently allocated to the prevention of road trauma and smoking.
- We want funding that reflects the real level of sexual assault and domestic violence in our community.
- Interagency collaborative work and community awareness activities must be recognised as part of the work.
- The diversity of needs of women and children must be recognised in all responses to violence.
- We call on Federal and State governments to appropriately fund services for Aboriginal women and children and Aboriginal services, including safe houses. Aboriginal workers must be paid according to the relevant awards.
- We resist the mainstreaming of support services for women and children who are victims of sexual and family violence.
- We call on the Federal Government to establish a National Domestic Homicide Death Review Committee.
- We call on the Victorian State Government to take on the recommendations from the Victorian Law Reform Commission’s review of the Sexual Offences legislation and introduce appropriate legislation.
- We call on government to implement the Recommendations of the Senate Enquiry into Forgotten Australians.
- We support the establishment of a National Indigenous Secretariat, that will develop and monitor programs for women and children, where safety is paramount and which will include the resourcing of a National Indigenous Conference.

Readers are reminded that many of the conference papers are available on the Home Truths conference website: www.hometruths.com.au