

From Shame to Pride

Access to Sexual Assault Services for Indigenous People

**A Partnership Project between Elizabeth
Hoffman House and CASA House**

CONSULTATION OUTCOMES REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAV	Aboriginal Affairs Victoria
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CASA	Centre Against Sexual Assault
DVIRC	Domestic Violence Incest & Resource Centre
EHH	Elizabeth Hoffman House
AFVPLS	Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service
MCATSI	Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
RCIADIC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
SNAICC	Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-Operative
VACCHO	Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.
VAHS	Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
VALS	Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

COUNSELLOR/ADVOCATE:

Counsellor/Advocate acts as a 'resource' to victim/survivors to support a range of needs that might arise following an experience of Sexual Assault. The advocacy component covers the preparation of reports, negotiating on behalf of victim/survivors with police, lawyers and the courts, or perhaps assisting victim/survivors in gaining financial or housing assistance. (<http://www.casahouse.casa.org.au/>)

VICTIM/SURVIVOR:

The person against whom a Sexual Assault has taken place. The term 'survivor' gives emphasis to the enormous strength victims demonstrate as they go on to *survive* the experience of Sexual Assault. **(Victorian Law Reform Commission. Sexual Offences Interim Report. Executive summary pg. 16-17)**

SEXUAL ASSAULT:

The term "Sexual Assault" covers a range of sexual offences including:

- rape
- attempted rape
- indecent assault (eg unwanted touching or fondling)
- indecent behaviour (eg masturbating in a public place)
- indecent exposure (eg flashing)

(<http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/yarrow/what.htm>)

RAPE:

Rape is sex with another person without their consent.

But there is more to it than that. Oral sex without consent is rape. So is penetration of the anus or labia majora (outer lips of the vagina) to any degree with an object or any part of the body (eg penis or fingers).

Having sex with someone who can't give consent is also rape. This includes:

- being "too drunk" or "too out of it" to give consent
- being asleep or
- anything else that means the person can't give consent.

Sex without consent is rape. Rape is a criminal offence!

(<http://www.wch.sa.gov.au/yarrow/what.htm>)

PAEDOPHILE:

Paedophiles are people who sexually abuse children of either or of both sexes. They are usually men who are sexually attracted to children and who often abuse a large number of them over a lifetime. Sometimes paedophiles are called child molesters.

MOLESTATION:

The word molest is used to mean all forms of sexual activity and includes fondling and touching private parts of the body, masturbating

and sexual kissing, as well as sexual intercourse.

http://www.cvh.com/cvh/parentopics/usr_index0.stm?topic_id=84

'SEX' OFFENDER : A person who has committed a sex crime, an act which is a sexual offence.

(Oxford Quick Reference Dictionary & Thesaurus. 1998. Oxford Press. USA. Pg.)

PERPETRATOR: A person guilty/responsible for an act (.....of violence/Sexual Assault)

(Oxford Quick Reference Dictionary & Thesaurus. 1998. Oxford Press. USA. Pg.302)

PERVERT: A person who is corrupt and depraved.

(Oxford Quick Reference Dictionary & Thesaurus. 1998. Oxford Press. USA. Pg.303)

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There are many people to acknowledge for their assistance and guidance with this Project. Thank you firstly to all those who so willingly and generously gave their time to participate in the focus groups. The success of projects such as this one relies on effective consultation with appropriate and relevant community organisations and individuals. Their experience and opinions are the foundation of this report.

The authors would also particularly like to thank the Board and staff at Elizabeth Hoffman House who provided invaluable insight and expertise in relation to Indigenous issues and organisations.

The issue of sexual assault within Indigenous communities has historically been seen as a '*taboo*' subject however; over the last 2 years, sexual assault has been raised at community forums and meetings with community members sharing their traumatic stories and demanding that the issue be put on the agenda. Whilst the initial focus of the project was to examine the gaps and barriers that prevent Indigenous people from accessing sexual assault services, it was acknowledged early in the first stage of the Project that further work needed to be done to enable Indigenous communities real opportunities that would assist them to develop long term strategies.

This project has grown from a short term project; aimed at examining the issue of sexual assault within Indigenous communities; into a larger project initiated by Aboriginal communities, which focuses on the development of longer term sustainable solutions that are culturally appropriate and assist in addressing the issues on an individual, organisational and community level.

The partnerships, networks and small projects associated to this report have been developed with the assistance and support of a range of agencies and departments such as:

- CASA House
- The Victorian Law Reform Commission
- Reichstein Foundation, Trustees and Donors
- Gatehouse Centre
- Northern CASA
- Southern CASA
- Western CASA
- VAHS Family Counselling Service
- Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service
- Domestic Violence Incest & Resource Centre

The tireless work and the endless discussions with all involved shaped the comprehensive nature of this report.

INTRODUCTION

"I don't think people understand when you say the issue [sexual assault] is out of control. Sexual abuse in our communities has to be addressed now. We are losing generations of people to this epidemic. And what sort of help is out there for the victims? What choices and options do they have if they want to get help? It has to be about working with individuals and working with the whole community around the issues of poverty, lack of housing, and the fact that racism is still an ugly part of our people's experience today. I hope this project doesn't just end up being another consultation with black fellas that takes us no where fast again. Is this going to get us the services we want?"
(Indigenous worker)

The issue of sexual violence in Indigenous Communities has been repeatedly highlighted by a number of major reports into the problem¹. The rate of sexual violence in many Indigenous communities has been reported to be very high, with many cases occurring in family situations. Racism, fear, shame, difficulty in communicating and a belief that both authorities and mainstream sexual assault services will not respond appropriately are some of the issues identified as impeding Aboriginal women from seeking assistance.² All of this however must be understood within the context of European colonisation, and its ongoing legacy as enacted through government legislation and practice.

Elizabeth Hoffman House (EHH) has long recognised the problem of sexual and family violence in Indigenous communities, and the corresponding lack of appropriate service and legal response. It is within this context that EHH, in partnership with CASA House, sought and obtained funding to undertake a project that would both seek to improve and enhance the skills of Aboriginal workers in working with victim/survivors of sexual assault, as well as explore the range of collaborative approaches between Centres Against Sexual Assault and Indigenous organisations and workers.

Delivering quality services and programs to diverse communities is a growing challenge for service providers and professionals in a range of sectors. This is nowhere more apparent than in sexual assault and family violence service provision. Organisations, such as the Centres Against Sexual Assault are increasingly accountable for outcomes. They are required to deliver accessible, culturally appropriate, quality services that meet the needs of our diverse communities, particularly Indigenous communities. Increasingly, there is an expectation that serving Indigenous and other diverse client groups must become an integral service value and a part of mainstream management processes.

As such this project sought to identify strategies that would assist the Centres Against Sexual Assault to better meet the needs of Indigenous victim/survivors of sexual assault, and identify effective training and education strategies for both mainstream and Indigenous workers in their efforts to respond appropriately to the Indigenous people who seek their assistance.

The highly consultative, and Indigenous specific methodology used by this project has ensured that the outcomes of the consultations are grounded in the experiences and realities of Indigenous organisations and the communities they service. Every effort was made to ensure that the consultative process was highly participatory and inclusive, one where local people are recognised as an integral part of identifying the needs and strategies to build their communities.

¹ A-G Department National Crime Prevention Program : Violence in Indigenous Communities (2001)

² Queensland Government: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report

This report documents the thoughts, views, suggestions and strategies of both Indigenous and mainstream organisations and workers in three key localities, including Metropolitan Melbourne, East Gippsland Region and Barwon Region. It reflects their many and varied efforts towards the development of culturally relevant and appropriate strategies in relation to addressing sexual assault and its impact on Aboriginal communities.

1. Project Background

Elizabeth Hoffman House (EHH) has long been aware of the extent and levels of family and sexual violence within Indigenous communities. Recently it estimated that over 80% of the women accessing its refuge and outreach services, or their children, have been sexually abused. Furthermore, a high percentage of those victims had never reported the abuse. In its twenty years of operation as a refuge for Aboriginal women and their children, EHH has become increasingly concerned with Aboriginal communities' inability to come to terms with issues of sexual assault and family violence.

Open discussion of family and sexual violence in Australian Indigenous communities is relatively new. In some Aboriginal communities, violence is said to affect up to 90% of families. Aboriginal men are four times more likely to die a violent death than non-Aboriginal men, and women are six and a half times more likely to die a violent death than non-Aboriginal women. There is considerable evidence that Indigenous women are much more likely to be victims of family violence than non Indigenous women and to sustain more serious injuries; in some areas that rate of family violence involving Aboriginal women is 45 times higher than for non-Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women are ten times more likely to be killed as a result of family violence. (Bonnie Robertson 'Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce' Report 2000)

The need to discuss family and sexual assault with Aboriginal workers at the forefront of these issues is seen as critical in enabling Aboriginal people an opportunity to access services that may assist them in the healing process.

It was within this context, that Elizabeth Hoffman House, in partnership with CASA House, sought and obtained funding from the Lance Reichstein Foundation to undertake a project designed to begin the important step of bringing about change within Aboriginal communities around the issue of sexual violence. Whilst the focus of the project was directed at existing programs and workers, the skills and resources gained throughout the project life will undoubtedly enhance responses as well as enhance the skills of the workers.

This report forms the first stage, of what will need to continue to be a highly consultative process, which seeks to establish long term and meaningful partnerships with relevant Indigenous organisations and individuals and the Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault. The next stage should seek to build on the foundations created by this consultative process, and begin to develop and deliver appropriate training programs.

The project (with its limited resources) did not deliver any skills development training programs. However, this report honours the strong recommendations made by the respondents, that such training be developed only in direct consultation with relevant Indigenous organisations. Furthermore, that such a plan be monitored and evaluated in conjunction with relevant Indigenous organisations. This could be done through the establishment of a Statewide Indigenous/CASA Sexual Assault Reference Group.

It is critical that offers of partnership made by each of the organisations consulted, be explored by the CASAs with the same genuineness and goodwill demonstrated by the Indigenous workers and organisations consulted, if the issues are to be progressed further.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims and Objectives of the Project

The aims of the 'Shame to Pride Project' were:

- To identify key issues in relation to sexual assault in Indigenous communities
- To identify gaps and barriers that prevent Aboriginal people from accessing sexual assault services
- To identify strategies that may improve and enhance the skills of Aboriginal workers in the human services field in identifying and developing appropriate referral mechanisms to Aboriginal clients who disclose family violence and sexual assault
- To work with Centres Against Sexual Assault in examining current practice in relation to service delivery to Indigenous communities
- To facilitate the identification and development of local working agreements and/or protocols that enable Aboriginal communities access to information, referral and support services that will assist Aboriginal families to address issues around sexual assault
- To identify relevant training that will assist in increasing the knowledge of CASAs in working with Indigenous communities around the issues of sexual assault.
- To make recommendations in relation to the continuous development of partnership strategies between Indigenous and non Indigenous services in relation to issues of sexual assault.
- To contribute this information into the Victorian Law Reform Commission's Review of the sexual offences act.

The aims of the project were addressed by the following methodology, which consisted of the collection of primarily qualitative and some quantitative data comprising the following components:

- A brief Literature Review;
- Regular Project Team Meetings
- Focus group meetings with Indigenous and CASA workers in the Melbourne Metropolitan Region, Gippsland Region and the Barwon Region
- Data analysis preparation of project report.
- Roundtable on Sexual Assault in Indigenous communities
- Indigenous-specific Roundtable on Sexual Assault

The project team have analysed the data collected at all stages of the project and prepared this report describing the consultation findings and outlining recommendations.

The report details the responses under the heading provided by the objectives outlined above.

2.2 Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies

In undertaking the research, the project team referred to the *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies*³. Essentially, the *Guidelines* require that at every stage, research with and about Indigenous peoples must be founded on a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the researcher (s) and the Indigenous people involved. Every effort was made to ensure that the process and resultant outcomes of the research were informed as much as possible by the key principles outlined in the *Guidelines*.

2.3 Importance of Conducting Consultations with Indigenous Communities

As a result of the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Responses, a number of recommendations indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities and peak bodies should be consulted in the development and implementation of policies and programs that affect them. Input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is essential when it comes to addressing and developing strategies in relation to improving service design and delivery.

Furthermore, in 1992, the Council of Australian Governments adopted the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders* (the Framework Agreement). A fundamental principle underpinning the Framework was the requirement of participation and adequate consultation of Indigenous peoples.

Therefore, it was critical that this study adopts a highly consultative and co-operative approach. As stated, every effort was made to observe appropriate protocols, and undertake culturally relevant research methodologies.

Qualitative methodology is widely used in social research of an exploratory nature and has been identified as particularly useful when working with people from Indigenous backgrounds. A qualitative approach, utilising semi structured focus group discussions with identified key stakeholders was therefore the basis of this research methodology.

In undertaking the study, every effort was made to ensure the careful observation of appropriate protocols. Lisa Thorpe (Lead project consultant), in conjunction with Elizabeth Hoffman House ensured that the project methodology was directly informed by culturally appropriate consultative processes as much as was possible.

2.4 Focus Groups

In an effort to ensure that the project was successful in meeting its objectives, considerable discussion in relation to the most appropriate methodologies took place. A great deal of discussion take place in relation to ensuring that the consultations were undertaken with workers in the field and not victim/survivors. The project team had heard repeatedly from Aboriginal workers who expressed concern about the way in which consultations in the past had engaged victim/survivors with little or no follow up support. As one worker said:

³ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies: *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (May 2000)

*"Until we know that the services are in place, then what's the point of these consultations with victims. They are dragged through the process, asked to retell their story a million times, and then at the end of it all you get one more pretty report. The workers know what the issues are."
(Indigenous worker)*

As such, there was some variation to the initial proposed methodology. It was felt that it would be more appropriate and indeed more effective to map out the issues in a comprehensive way, and identify relevant strategies and then proceed in a next phase with the development and delivery of training and other identified strategies towards the vision of improved awareness and service delivery in relation to sexual assault and its impact on Indigenous communities.

Therefore, the project team agreed to hold focus groups discussions in three regions. These were

- East Gippsland
- Barwon
- Metropolitan Melbourne

These areas were selected on the basis of a number of factors including:

- Perceived need around the issues
- Number of Indigenous services and workers
- Location of CASAs

In each of the identified regions, there would be:

- One focus group with Indigenous workers/community members
- One focus group with mainstream sexual assault providers, particularly the Centres Against Sexual Assault
- One focus group combining both Indigenous and non Indigenous participants.

Each of the focus groups were asked to respond to a series of specific questions aligned to the overall objectives of the project.

A total of fifty four people participated in the project:

- Thirty-five Indigenous participants
- Nineteen non-Indigenous participants

Whilst the majority of non Indigenous participants were staff and managers from the Centres Against Sexual Assault, two members of Police were also in attendance at the focus group in East Gippsland, with occasional attendance by other mainstream service providers.

The majority of Indigenous participants were from Aboriginal Cooperatives, Strengthening Families workers, and other Aboriginal organisations.

2.4.1 Indigenous Focus Groups

Each of the focus groups conducted with Indigenous workers and community members started with an overview of the objectives of the consultations and the project. The focus groups, whilst flexible, were nevertheless informed by some key research questions. These were:

- What issues have you identified in the community in relation to sexual assault?
- What are the core issues in your work around sexual assault?
- What skills do you believe are required for effective work in relation to sexual assault?
- What resources are immediately available to you to address some of these issues related to sexual assault in your community?
- What are some of the barriers that prevent Indigenous people from accessing mainstream support services?
- Have there been any particular strategies/ideas that have worked for you in addressing some of the issues related to sexual assault in your community? Particular relationships or networks that have been established?
- What training do you receive to support you in your work around sexual assault?
- If skills development or training was to be provided to you, what would you want the training to cover?

Confidentiality was occasionally sought by participants. This was subsequently assured in order to provide a forum for respondents to be open and frank in their views and opinions. Therefore the structure of the report reflects the key issues that emerged from the consultations, rather than attributing specific comments to specific individuals or organisations, unless otherwise stated.

2.4.2 CASA Consultations

As in the focus groups conducted with Indigenous workers, the discussion with workers from Centres Against Sexual Assault, and other related mainstream providers, began with an overview of the key objectives of the project.

The following questions were put to the group, with opportunities to explore particular issues as they emerged:

- Do you keep statistics in relation to the services provided to Indigenous victim/survivors of sexual assault?
- If not, how often do you work with Indigenous victims or with communities?
- What is the nature of the support you provide?
- What are the structural blocks that might inadvertently block Indigenous people from accessing the services?
- If training was to be provided to you to assist in your work with Indigenous communities, what would you want included in the training package?
- Can you identify other strategies that would also enhance your service delivery to Indigenous communities?

2.4.3 Joint Focus Groups

Participants from both the Indigenous and the non Indigenous focus groups were then brought together to discuss jointly the following questions:

- What kinds of initiatives would increase mutual understanding across the two sectors?
- What kind of resources would assist both sectors in better meeting the needs of Indigenous communities in relation to sexual assault?
- Would training assist in increasing awareness for both sectors? How?
- What would you want included in a training/skills development package?
- What suggestions are there for progressing the issues around sexual assault in Indigenous communities and the appropriateness of mainstream service response?

The process itself was designed to create an opportunity to enhance contact with Indigenous and mainstream services. Indeed several participants reported that they found the opportunity to begin to create relationships an important one, and one that generally would not be so readily available.

As stated the report sets out the responses under each of the key objectives outlined earlier. The report consolidates the outcomes of each of the focus groups. In this way, the issues are still effectively canvassed whilst confidentiality is maintained.

3. LOCATING THE CONTEXT: A Brief Literature Review

There is a plethora of literature on the issue of violence in Indigenous communities⁴. It is now well documented that the incidence of violence in Indigenous communities and among Indigenous people is disproportionately high in comparison to the rates of the same types of violence in the Australian population as a whole. Furthermore, that access to support services is significantly limited for Indigenous people due to factors such as racism, inappropriate service structures, fear, shame and low self esteem. The majority of literature also highlights the complexity of the issues and the lack of any ready quick fix solutions.

Given the breadth of research, it is therefore not the intention of this literature review to provide a comprehensive overview of such research. This can be found in a number of excellent research documents.

Instead, this literature review provides a brief overview of some of the literature relevant to the issues of sexual and family violence in Indigenous communities. It is not however an exhaustive analysis of the literature, but rather an attempt to locate the context within which a project such as this is undertaken.

It is interesting to note that much of the literature on sexual assault in Indigenous communities is located within broader discussions of family violence. Indeed there are very few research documents that specifically take up the issue of sexual violence outside the context of family violence.

This section includes a brief demographic overview of the Indigenous communities in Victoria, and then maps out the various literature detailing issues around sexual assault and family violence.

It also highlights the importance of the recent Aboriginal Justice Agreement in Victoria, and the framework that has been developed in relation to partnerships between Indigenous and non Indigenous organisations and service providers.

Most particularly, this section seeks to highlight the importance of understanding that the incident of violence in Indigenous communities cannot be separated from the history of European colonisations and its impact, such Aboriginal deaths in custody and the Stolen Generations, the impact of which is still being realised today:

*"The literature argues that patterns of contemporary violence among Aboriginal people have their origins in the violent dispossession of land by Europeans in the early contact period. Ongoing cultural dispossession and its consequences, taking different forms over the past 200 years, have impacted on Indigenous people socially, economically, physically, psychologically and emotionally, to the point that, today, violence in some Aboriginal communities has reached epidemic proportions"*⁵

The overall holistic approach therefore to addressing issues of violence, particularly sexual and family violence lies very much in also addressing issues of land rights, access to

⁴ For an excellent overview of the literature, see ⁴ A-G Department National Crime Prevention Program : Violence in Indigenous Communities (2001)

⁵ Ibid, page 11

affordable and appropriate housing, appropriate health services, education, employment, substance abuse services etc.

Furthermore, it is imperative that mainstream organisations, in their efforts to improve service delivery to Indigenous communities, become familiar with the broader social and political context within which the issues of sexual assault take place within Indigenous communities.

3.1 Demographic Overview

It is important that mainstream organisations have an understanding of the demographic profile of Indigenous communities in Victoria when designing and delivering programs that seek to provide equity and access to all client groups.

Today, the Victorian Aboriginal community is made up of a number of distinct communities across the State based on location, language and cultural groups, and extended family networks. Most regional communities are based on traditional associations with the land that significantly predate the colonisation of Victoria.

Aboriginal people make up about 0.5% of Victoria's total population and 5.9% of the Indigenous population of Australia. Compared to the wider community, a disproportionate number of Aboriginal people live outside the metropolitan area.⁶

57% of Victoria's Aboriginal people are aged under 25 years, compared to 39% of the total Victorian population. Only 3% of Aboriginal people are over 65 years old, compared to 12% of the total Victorian population.⁷

The Victorian Aboriginal community also relies on public housing at a disproportionate rate. Over a quarter of the Victorian Aboriginal community live in public rental housing compared to only 5% of the wider community.

3.2 Reports Relating to Sexual Violence in Indigenous Communities

The following section provides an overview of some of the more specific literature addressing the issues of sexual and family violence in Indigenous communities. In doing this, key quantitative and qualitative information is presented, and provides an important context within which to understand the outcomes of the consultations.

Indigenous communities, and more specifically Indigenous women, have over the last 20-30 years sought to identify and work around the issues around the issues of sexual and family violence. Whilst much of their work goes unreported in a formal sense, the models that they have developed are increasingly being documented as important methods of addressing these serious issues.

There is a range of formal reports that can be found in relation to issues of family violence in Indigenous communities. Most of the discussions in relation to sexual assault are however often located within the broader framework of family violence. Reports specifically addressing the issues of sexual assault are less common.

⁶ Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement 1999

⁷ ABS 1996 Census

One of the earliest reports since 1990 to be found is that written by Jane Lloyd and Nanette Rogers in 1992⁸ Lloyd and Rogers discuss the interracial rape of Aboriginal women in Central Australia and indicate the high correlation of these assaults with alcohol abuse. They survey some of the difficulties encountered by Aboriginal rape victims in the courts and propose that closed courts and support persons could somewhat ameliorate these problems. Criminal injuries compensation is also problematic due to misunderstandings about indigenous culture, and the authors believe that anthropological evidence should be included.

In 1996, the NSW Department for Women released the report, "Heroines of Fortitude: The Experiences of Women in Court as Victims of sexual assault". This report provides information about the negative experiences of Aboriginal women victims of sexual assault by the legal system. *Heroines of Fortitude* documents that Aboriginal women compared to non-Aboriginal women victims of sexual assault:

- were ten times more likely to be complainants in sexual assault hearings before the District Court;
- have particular needs in the court room and through the trial process that are different from non-Aboriginal women;
- were regularly asked questions about alcohol consumption, victims' compensation and promiscuity in order to challenge their credibility;

In 1997, the National Enquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families found that even though witnesses were not asked about physical or sexual abuse, 17.5% of witnesses to the inquiry reported sexual exploitation and abuse. The report notes a study by the WA Aboriginal Legal Service which found that 14.5% of Aboriginal children placed in foster care reported sexual abuse and 10.9% of those placed on missions.

In an effort to respond to the specific issues of child sexual abuse, the Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) produced "Through Young Black Eyes: A Handbook to protect Indigenous Children from the Impact of Family Violence and Child Abuse"⁹. This is an excellent handbook that provides guidance for workers in relation to dealing with issues of child sexual assault.

Another significant report undertaken in relation to violence in Indigenous communities was that by the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence in 1999/2000¹⁰.

The Taskforce reported that in all the consultations undertaken, there was an obvious reluctance to talk about sexual assaults. This reluctance was reported to result from fear of reprisals or shame because of the nature of the attacks. One Community survey found that 90% of rape victims were women. Non-Indigenous men committed 42% of the rapes, 41% were committed by Indigenous men and the remaining 17% were pack rapes.¹ Anecdotal evidence was given that sexual abuse of young males is increasing, and remains largely unreported, because of the hidden nature of male to male sexual attacks and the shame that is often expressed by the victims.

⁸ Lloyd, J & Rogers, N.: Crossing the Last Frontier: Problems facing Aboriginal Women Victims of Rape in Central Australia. (1992)

⁹ Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) : "Through Young Black Eyes: A Handbook to protect Indigenous Children from the Impact of Family Violence and Child Abuse (2002)

¹⁰ Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report (Chaired by Boni Robertson) (1999)

According to the many Indigenous women consulted, rape or sexual abuse is becoming a frequent occurrence in their Communities. It has been estimated that 88% of rape cases go unreported.

The report also highlighted that many cases of rape or sexual abuse occur in a family situation, yet these are rarely identified as rape by Indigenous women or addressed as such by the courts. The report identified that most Indigenous women who are victims of domestic assault have little concept of marital or relationship rape and their right to say no in such circumstances. Even if they do know their rights, they 'are reluctant to seek help from the legal system because they fear they will be abused further by male police and male lawyers who were considered to place them on trial, rather than the perpetrator'.

The rate of sexual abuse among young girls involved with the criminal justice systems is between 70% and 80%, while in one state it is claimed by the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency that 50% of the children within the court system in their region were victims of incest.

The Taskforce Report also identified that the reluctance to report a rape or sexual assault was said to have been caused by fear of the justice system, shame, and difficulty communicating with non-Aboriginal police officers, judges, prosecutors and other legal staff. Many women reported that they were aware that some judges and the police used cultural distortions of rape to legitimise men's behaviour. There have been many accounts in recent times where members of the judiciary, in their summation of sexual offences against Aboriginal women, legitimised and excused the offence as a cultural right of men.

Although the statistics for violent sexual offences are high, many Indigenous women consider that the numbers would be multiplied if the current barriers to reporting were removed. The number of unreported sexual assaults is indicated in these statistics from the Adelaide report *Aboriginal Women Speak Out*:¹¹

- 88% of victims did not formally report the rape.
- 75% of victims said they did not report because of fear, of repercussions, or of police attitudes.
- 29% of victims said they did not report because of fear of not being believed.

The NSW Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council has recently released its own discussion paper: "Holistic Community Justice, A Proposed Response to Aboriginal Family Violence" (2001). This Discussion Paper aims to provide a current position on responses to family violence in New South Wales, as well as provide some direction for future responses to family violence. The report refers to a recent compilation of data from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research which reveals the following concerning Aboriginal rates of over-representation in the criminal justice system concerning family violence as well as levels of Aboriginal victimisation:

- Approximately 270 per 100,000 of alleged sexual assault offenders in NSW are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This is in comparison with only 90 per 100,000 of the general NSW male rate. That is, Aboriginal men are 3 times more likely than the general population to be sexual assault offenders;
- At least 130 per 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are alleged child sexual assault offenders compared to only 50 per 100,000 of the general population. That

¹¹ Carter. E. *Aboriginal Women Speak Out*. Adelaide: Adelaide Rape Crisis Centre 1987

is, Aboriginal men are 2.6 times more likely than non-Aboriginal men to be child sexual assault offenders; and

- Approximately 3400 per 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander men are alleged domestic violence assault offenders compared to 550 per 100,000 of the general population. That is, Aboriginal men are 6.2 times more likely than non Aboriginal men to be offenders of (domestic) violence.

In incidents where the offender was Aboriginal, the victim was also Aboriginal in:

- in 68% of sexual assaults;
- in 72% of child sexual assaults;
- in 75% of domestic violence related assaults;
- in 47% of assaults (common); and
- in 59% of grievous bodily harm incidents

This particular issue is further illustrated in the study *Speak Out Speak Strong: Aboriginal Women in Custody conducted by the NSW Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council* which found that:

- 69% of Aboriginal women surveyed said they had been abused as a child, and approximately 75% of those women said they were sexually assaulted as children.
- Over 82 % (82.1%) of those women did not tell anyone what had happened. In some instances the women revealed that the survey was their first point of disclosure;
- Approximately 68% of women abused as children said they still need counselling and or support to deal with the abuse they had suffered as children, 7% (7.1%) were not sure if they still needed support and only 22% felt they did not need further counselling;
- Over 73% (73.3%) disclosed that they were victims of abuse as adults, 22% (22.2%) said they were not abused as adult and 4% did not respond to the question. Of those women who were assaulted as adults, 42% had been sexually assaulted, 6% of those disclosed they were sexually assaulted by a relative, 79% were physically assault (including family/domestic violence) and at least 30% of those women said they suffered systems abuse;
- 61% (60.6) of those women said that as adults they did not tell anyone what was going on at the time, and 58% of the women said that they still need support and counselling for the abuse 42% felt that they did need ongoing support and 3% were not sure if they still needed support;

Interestingly, at least 80% of the women surveyed said that their experience of abuse was an indirect cause of their offending. Some women revealed that the underlying cause of their drug and criminal habits was to avoid dealing with, or because they had not been able to address, the abuse that they had suffered as a child, in particular child sexual assault. A significant number of women interviewed suggested appropriate ways to deal with abuse, nearly all which included Aboriginal healing programs, in particular involvement with Elders.

In relation to recent Government directions, in July 2000 the Ministerial Conference on the Status of Women recommended the establishment of a National Taskforce to combat sexual assault. The first step in the establishment of the Taskforce was a Australian Commonwealth Round Table held on 27 July 2001. The Round Table was considered significant in providing a platform in establishing a new \$16.5million National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault.

Aboriginal representatives at the Round Table, argued the need to develop cultural conceptual frameworks for sexual assault issues to be dealt within Aboriginal communities. These frameworks would recognise the need for Aboriginal communities to control and develop solutions at a local level and respecting the diversity amongst Aboriginal communities to

address those issues according to their unique needs. With the current debate concerning sexual assault within Aboriginal communities, it was considered a good climate to strengthen existing programs which appeal to those principles and support the current work of Aboriginal communities in addressing sexual assault. Further, the need for leadership concerning appropriate cultural counselling frameworks and resources towards those services was identified.

The Victorian Government has also recently developed a Framework for the Development of an Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. A key feature of the Strategy is the importance of a 'community led approach' that will occur as part of a parallel and complementary 'whole of government' approach to responding to issues identified by the Indigenous community. This has led to the creation of the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce, whose main role is to support, empower and enable communities to examine the issues and develop solutions appropriate to local conditions and needs.

The Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement¹² is a key document that needs to be understood as providing an essential framework for the provision of services to Aboriginal communities in Victoria. It is critical that in considering service provision to Indigenous clients, mainstream service providers must firstly be fully acquainted with the various strategies outlined in this document.

Whilst the Agreement specifically seeks to address the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, it also provides a set of principles and initiatives to guide the Departments of Justice, Human Services and their respective agencies on how they will interact with the Aboriginal community.

Some of the key aims of the Agreement include:

- to create a shared vision and agreed priorities for action within government and community sectors;
- establish appropriate systems for monitoring Aboriginal outcomes
- develop stronger and more sustainable approaches to tackling the many issues associated with over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system
- empower local communities to become involved in policy, planning and service delivery
- increase accountability and transparency in decision making.

In developing a whole of government strategic framework, the Agreement seeks to address social and economic disadvantage. The Victorian Government has committed itself to working with Aboriginal Affairs, to develop a strategic framework that will outline responsibilities and provide linkages across the whole-of-government and co-ordinate a range of proposed and existing policies and programs. These include:

- The Aboriginal Justice Agreement
- The Koori Health Reform Agreement,
- Koori 2000 Education Strategy
- Koori Services Improvement Strategy
- Koori Recruitment and Career Development Strategy.

Again, each of these provides an important and excellent framework for the development and implementation of appropriate service responses by mainstream providers in relation to Indigenous communities and the issue of sexual assault.

¹² Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement 1999

4. KEY FINDINGS

Each of the focus groups was conducted in a semi structured format, enabling participants to canvass a broad range of relevant issues as well as providing important contextual details in relation to current developments.

As stated the report sets out the responses provided in the focus groups under each of the key objectives outlined earlier. The report consolidates the outcomes of each of the focus groups. In this way, the issues are still effectively canvassed whilst confidentiality is maintained.

What is important to remember when reading the findings of this report is that the impact of personal, family and community disintegration in many Aboriginal societies, enacted by missions, statutes and regulations, and State and Commonwealth policies, is still being realised today, and should not be underestimated if genuine and workable solutions to prevent sexual and family violence in Indigenous communities are to be developed.¹³

Furthermore, Indigenous workers, despite being seriously underfunded and working with limited resources, are developing innovative models of responding to sexual violence in the communities they work within. It is critical that further work is done to document the pioneering work currently being undertaken, with a view to formally extending these initiatives and funding them to the level at which they require if they are to contribute to real long term change.

4.1 Issues around Sexual Assault in Indigenous Communities

"The situation in our community has reached crisis point. Something has to be done. Services have to be set up and support has to be provided. We can't keep relying on bandaids solutions that don't address the real causes of what's going on"
(Indigenous worker)

Indigenous workers and community members participating in the focus groups were asked to identify the issues around sexual assault in their respective communities. Whilst there were a few issues that were specific to particular geographical areas, on the whole the issues tended to be similar across each of the three locations.

In summary these were

- The issue is widespread and 'endemic'
- Very few victims report the issue to police or seek assistance
- Child sexual abuse is till very much hidden
- There is a 'normalisation' of sexual violence that is now becoming intergenerational
- The issues have to be addressed in a holistic way if any real outcomes are to be achieved

4.1.1 The issue is widespread and 'epidemic'

"Our population is dying off and nothing is happening. We are allowing sexual assault and family violence to destroy us. Our communities are in crisis - the levels of homelessness, health disadvantage etc..... and nothing changes"
(Indigenous worker)

¹³ See The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence Report for further discussion.

Indigenous workers spoke repeatedly about what they perceived to be an 'epidemic' sweeping across their communities:

"Its just like this disease that just keeps getting stronger and stronger. Whole generations of our young people are growing up thinking that this stuff is normal behaviour"
(Indigenous worker)

Most acknowledged it was difficult to get an accurate statistical overview due to extremely limited numbers of Aboriginal people who reported the issue. However, anecdotally, and through the extensive experience of Indigenous workers, most reported that they believed the problem was both increasing in regularity and in severity:

"The injuries I think are getting worse. The sexual attacks are increasingly brutal."
(Indigenous worker)

Several workers spoke of the range of activities they had undertaken to respond to the issue. Much of this work is largely undocumented and insufficiently funded to ensure its long term sustainability. Nevertheless the feedback provided during the focus groups suggests some significant and creative work is currently being undertaken by various Indigenous workers and organisations. This often involves creating culturally appropriate opportunities for women and young people to feel comfortable enough to share their experiences

One worker talk about the workshops she conducted during camps for women and children. Over the course of the camp, several women, and some young teenage girls disclosed:

"It doesn't happen right away. Over the two or three nights, while we are sitting around doing a lot of talking and listening, some women will talk about what happened to them. For many of them it was when they were children. For others it was part of the family violence they were also experiencing. Some teenage girls also came out and talked about what was happening. Its important though that there is follow up after this. If you don't have the resources, this can really set people up"
(Indigenous worker)

Another worker suggested that more opportunities for young people to talk about their experiences without adults around would be an important strategy to facilitate greater disclosure and more opportunities to increase awareness around the issues:

"Young people have to have time to discuss the issues, without adults, or someone who is related hanging around them. This isn't easy in our communities, but it is so important if we are going to do anything about the crisis that is in our communities"
(Indigenous community member)

4.1.2 Very few victims report the issue to police or seek assistance

A number of Indigenous workers spoke of the difficulty that many victims within Aboriginal communities have in speaking about their experiences of sexual abuse:

"Women will come in and talk about their kids chroming, or drinking, but they won't talk about the sexual abuse. Sometimes they only open up when the perpetrator dies"
(Indigenous worker)

The importance of family, of kinship structures and relationships were identified as factors that increase further the difficulty in acknowledging and reporting sexual assault. Issues of poverty, lack of housing, inappropriate service response and fear of police combine to further deter victims from reporting the matter or seeking assistance.

Some workers suggested that the fear of further victimisation by either the perpetrator and his family, or by the system itself often prevented victims from feeling able to seek support:

"There is a perception that if you are a victim and you speak out, then you risk getting victimised all over again. There are also the repercussions from family members and the community. It can be anything from being isolated out or intimidated into silence"
(Indigenous worker)

The issue of reporting was also taken up by some of the mainstream participants. Two participants reflected on situations where Aboriginal women had gone to the police station only wanting an opportunity to talk about the abuse and stopping short of wanting to pursue legal options:

"There have been some many times, particularly in the last eighteen months, where more than ever women will come into the station and just want to talk. They don't want it to go any further than that. The system just doesn't seem to be able to provide them with the solution that they need"
(Mainstream service provider)

"I tend to see the women long after the event has actually taken place. They come into the station and just want someone to hear them tell their story"
(Mainstream service provider)

Several Indigenous workers also highlighted the specific difficulties for Aboriginal men who are victims of sexual abuse to talk openly about their experiences. Many suggested that more work needed to be done to address what was still very much a 'taboo' issue:

"With our men it's a whole different ball game. Women on the whole seem to be able to talk about it more openly, whereas I don't hear men talk about it all. I think men find it hard to talk about because of the shame of it"
(Indigenous community member)

4.1.3 Child sexual abuse is still very much hidden

Almost all of the Indigenous participants in the focus groups agreed that child sexual assault was either still very much hidden or simply not talked about.

Others spoke of the need to work more intensively with children around the issues of sexual abuse:

"We need to start with the kids. I remember a workshop I did once with the kids, and when they talked about what made them unsafe, it was when the adults were drinking. This was the time they said they felt least safe"

Workers talked about the urgent need to begin to break the cycle with what some identified as a generational experience:

"I have seen whole generations of families go through experiencing sexual abuse. We have to break the cycle. If we don't break the cycle kids will think its normal. This normalcy of the experience is a particular issue. Young children thinking this is just the way things are. If we don't talk about what is happening to our children, it will just continue on"
(Indigenous worker)

4.1.4 There is a 'normalisation' of sexual violence that is now becoming intergenerational

Several respondents spoke of the 'normalisation' of sexual violence in some communities, to the point where both victims and perpetrators believed that it was seen to be 'cultural'.

Another issue identified by some workers that could result in 'normalisation' of the violence was the fact that often the sexual abuse was seen as a low priority when compared to issues of poverty and unemployment or substance abuse:

"It seems that at times sexual assault within the community is a low priority compared to some of the other issues that person, or that family could be faced with"
(Indigenous worker)

4.1.5 The issues have to be addressed in a holistic way if any real outcomes are to be achieved

In discussing sexual abuse, almost all of the Indigenous participants were quick to point out the futility of addressing the issue in isolation of other factors such as health, housing, employment and education. If long term change was to take place then any response to the crisis characterising sexual abuse in Indigenous communities has to be couched within a holistic framework:

"It has to be a holistic approach, it has to be based on self determination and it has to be community controlled. It will be from this basis that we then begin to talk with mainstream agencies. If that starting point is respected, great things can happen"
(Indigenous worker)

Overall, most Indigenous participants spoke of the need for the healing process to incorporate all the stages.

Furthermore, that a holistic approach would also necessitate addressing related issues such as drug and alcohol dependency, housing, employment etc.

4.2 Gaps and barriers that prevent Aboriginal people from accessing sexual assault services

"I have to say that when I hear this question I get really frustrated. I can sit here and list thousands of gaps and barriers for Aboriginal people. I could probably draw out some really thick reports too that will say the same thing. The big difference is that will this discussion fall on deaf ears, or will it actually get heard by government and by mainstream agencies. Isn't this the real issue?. What gets done around the gaps

and barriers to me is more important than telling it all again"
(Indigenous worker)

The above quote reflects the frustration that was often expressed in discussions around the various barriers to appropriate service to Indigenous communities in relation to family and sexual violence. The strong message from Indigenous participants was the critical need for the gaps and barriers to be acknowledged and most importantly addressed by those designing and delivering service, and those formulating policy.

Another important point regularly raised by Indigenous providers was the fact that many Indigenous organisations and their staff were working beyond their maximum capacity. Numerous examples were provided by Indigenous participants of staff who were suffering from high levels of stress and ill health. This was seen to be a completely unacceptable situation and participants demanded that urgent action to address what is clearly an untenable and unsustainable situation.

A number of gaps and barriers preventing Aboriginal people from accessing sexual assault services were however identified in the focus groups. These included:

- Lack of Aboriginal specific services limiting service options for victims
- Lack of Aboriginal staff based at mainstream sexual assault services
- Little or no awareness amongst Aboriginal communities of the existence of CASAs and nature of support they provide
- Limited skills amongst some Aboriginal workers specific to sexual assault
- Inappropriate mainstream service responses
- Inappropriateness of mainstream models such as counselling/appointments etc.
- Institutional racism
- Fear of reprisals from the perpetrator/family/community
- Victims not identifying the act as an 'assault' - part of the normalising process
- Fear of police/legal system and so victims don't report

4.2.1 Lack of Aboriginal specific services limiting service options for victims

"We need the funding to ensure that outreach services are able to operate across Aboriginal communities. We work with sexual assault every day in our communities, why cant we do it openly and work together to make sure our people get some sort of service:

(Indigenous worker)

Many of the participants identified the lack of Indigenous specific services around sexual abuse as a key barrier to achieving change:

"We don't have the services to deal specifically with the issues. They get tagged on to the case management stuff we do, or the family support work. However, I think this is an issue that has to get some serious specific attention"

(Indigenous worker)

Whilst most participants were of the view that increased resources and funding for Aboriginal sexual assault services was a vital part of any long term strategy, some also highlighted that this should not be seen as absolving mainstream services of their obligation to provide appropriate services to Indigenous communities:

"Our communities should have the choice about where they go. They should have that right to decide. I know that some of our clients don't want anything to do with Koori organisations. Their relatives, or the perp's relatives might be at the reception desk. I end up doing a lot of outreach work away from the service. And then there are some who wouldn't go anywhere near a mainstream service. It does come down to the right to choose"

(Indigenous worker)

The issue of resources was also repeatedly raised as one of the most significant barriers for Aboriginal people seeking support. Whilst the importance of this issue seemed to be shared across each of the focus group locations, participants in the East Gippsland group were particularly concerned with what they often described as a 'crisis':

"We are working to the max. Its just not possible though to sustain this way of working. As Aboriginal workers we are expected to be experts on every issue that comes our way. We are so stretched. We urgently need some funding to give us some relief from this way of working. Our people aren't getting a service if all our Aboriginal workers are so burnt out"

(Indigenous worker)

A number of other workers also referred to the fact that often Aboriginal workers were sole workers, and had to travel significant distances in order to service a large geographical area.

"Given we have such a high number of stats with child abuse, and child sexual assault, why do we only have just one worker [from VACCA] for the entire region."

(Indigenous worker)

4.2.2 Lack of Aboriginal staff based at mainstream sexual assault services

A number of Indigenous participants were critical of what they perceived to be an overwhelming lack of Indigenous staff employed by mainstream sexual assault services. Several also targeted for criticism the problematic practice of employing sole workers to do as one worker put it 'all things remotely Aboriginal'. This practice, it was suggested, does little more than create impossible expectations and demands on that worker, and leads to high turnover of Aboriginal staff:

"Whilst its great to employ Aboriginal staff, its just not fair employing one and expecting them to do it all. But it is important to remember that sometimes by just having an Indigenous face (or several), then that can open doors"

(Indigenous worker)

On the whole though, many of those consulted strongly advocated the employment of Indigenous staff as an effective means of increasing access to Indigenous people. However corresponding support and appropriate infrastructure needed to go hand in hand with the practice of employing Aboriginal people:

"It's more than just employing a black face. You have to look at how your organisation works, and provide support to the Aboriginal staff you employ. Its no surprise to many of us that so many Aboriginal workers, with great experience and

knowledge, leave mainstream workers, and end up here at the Co-Op again"
(Indigenous worker)

Several of the focus groups made strong recommendations that Koori workers be based in each region, as well as one in central.

In one focus group, one mainstream organisation extended the opportunity to Koori workers to explore ways in which they could work more closely together around child sexual assault.

Along with the emphasis on the employment of Aboriginal workers within mainstream sexual assault services; a majority of participants agreed that it was essential to ensure that Aboriginal communities receive sound, professional counselling/healing services. In order to achieve this many identified that strong partnerships between Aboriginal direct service programs and, existing sexual assault services should be developed across the state.

4.2.3 Little or no awareness amongst Aboriginal communities of the existence of CASAs and nature of support they provide

"Where do our women go? Sometimes it could be just us, and we deal with it in the best way we can. Very little information gets out about the services that are out there"
(Indigenous worker)

Indigenous workers highlighted that in their view there is a significant lack of basic awareness and understanding within Indigenous communities about the role of CASAs and the services they provide. They also reported that this lack of basic knowledge also means that incorrect perceptions can develop about what CASAs actually do, increasing confusion and thereby reducing even further Indigenous people's access:

"I don't think many people in the community know what CASA stands for, let alone what services it provides. I think a big campaign needs to happen to increase awareness of the existence of these services. However if this is going to happen then you would also want to be sure that the workers have been trained and will provide an appropriate service that is relevant to Koori communities"
(Indigenous worker)

A significant number of Indigenous workers also reported their own limited understanding of the role of CASAs and the services that they provide. Workers regularly queried things such as the number of counselling sessions provided, whether CASA workers worked off site, and whether all Centres were hospital based. This suggests an urgent need for CASAs to increase their profile, not only amongst Indigenous communities, but also with Indigenous workers themselves.

Several workers, whilst commending CASA House on the appointment of an Indigenous worker, nevertheless felt that this needed to be significantly expanded to include more than one sole worker. Several participants however reported that they were unaware that there was indeed an Indigenous worker based at CASA House.

4.2.4 Limited Skills Specific to Sexual Assault

"A lot of workers are taking this issue on without the necessary qualifications. This is a big worry"
(Indigenous worker)

Several Aboriginal workers referred to the experience of 'dumped' with issues around sexual abuse by virtue of their roles as family support workers, even if they had no formal skills or training in the area:

"I doubt that non Aboriginal workers are expected to deal with the range of issues that we do without adequate training and support. I have never had any training on issues around sexual abuse but as a family worker I am just expected to deal with it. I think the way that Aboriginal workers are regarded by both government and white services is as a bit of a dumping ground. You wouldn't expect other professionals to take on stuff like child abuse and neglect, sexual assault, family support, housing, employment knowledge and everything else, and deal with the community at the same time!"
(Indigenous worker)

This was an issue that was repeatedly highlighted by almost all of the Indigenous workers consulted. Many of their positions were not funded at all to deal with issues of sexual assault, and yet increasingly significant components of their work involved dealing with sexual abuse.

A number of Indigenous participants stressed the need for dedicated positions with Aboriginal Cooperatives and other Indigenous services where the workers had skills that were specific to dealing with sexual abuse issues. Many workers stated that they felt that sexual assault issues raised different complexities to family violence, particularly when the victims were children, and that this needed to be recognised:

"How we respond to our children who are victims is so important. We need to have workers who know and have the skills to do this. To be able to pick up the effect on kids before its too late. How many have just fallen through the system because we couldn't pick up what was going for them. We need the funding for dedicated positions in our organisations"
(Indigenous worker)

4.2.5 Inappropriate mainstream service responses

A number of Indigenous participants suggested that inappropriate mainstream service responses contribute to the barriers that Indigenous women experience around seeking support. One worker stated that 'negative' experiences of seeking to access mainstream services were often quickly spread across the community, and so acted as a strong deterrence against disclosure:

"One negative experience can quickly get passed on around the place, and spread like wildfire. It doesn't take much for that service to get targeted as a service that doesn't work with Koori people"
(Indigenous worker)

The model of counselling and the duration of counselling sessions were also identified as possible barriers to access, although several participants suggested that counselling per se may not be the problem, it may be the counsellor and the extent to which she or he has an appreciation of Aboriginal culture:

"I wonder if it was an Indigenous counsellor, the word might spread like wild fire. You might find that victims are streaming into CASA for counselling. I think though that the one hour limit might need to be a bit flexible"
(Indigenous worker)

Participants also suggested a much greater need for the recognition amongst CASAs and other mainstream services of the diversity that characterises Victorian Indigenous communities. However, many agreed that this could be rectified by more cross cultural training for CASAs:

"It would seem that some of the mainstream services think that we are all the same. Regional and state differences make us very different from one another. This means that there isn't just one Aboriginal culture, in the same way that we have multiculturalism. CASAs need some more training around this issue"
(Indigenous worker)

Several participants referred to what they perceived to be a lack of flexibility about appointment times and length of counselling sessions:

"There has to be a willingness to recognise that for some women, they may not talk for about half an hour, and then get started. They don't want to then have to stop abruptly and leave because it's the end of the counselling session"
(Indigenous community member)

A small number of participants were also critical of what they suggested were 'white feminist' understanding of family and sexual violence in Aboriginal communities:

"Involving the men in our community is an important part of the healing process. Our approach to these issues has to be a community one. Sometimes I think that some of those services just don't understand that and, so they end up imposing their understanding on Aboriginal women in an inappropriate way"
(Indigenous worker).

4.2.6 Institutional racism

"Unfortunately racism is still very much alive and well. There are examples I know where women have gone to ask for help and been treated badly. In some cases it might have been just pure ignorance, but I know in others there is some serious work that needs to happen around attitudes"
(Indigenous worker)

Whilst many of the Indigenous workers consulted in the focus groups were apprehensive about specifically identifying racist acts within specific services, some spoke generally about the institutionalised racism that characterise many of the service systems, including the legal system.

However several participants did cite specific instances where attitudes identified as being racist often resulted in victims retreating and not talking about their experiences for many years:

"I had one lady who said that she had had such a bad experience at one of the sexual assault services that it took her years to come back and talk about it with me"
(Indigenous worker)

4.2.7 Fear of reprisals from the perpetrator/family/community

"There can be a lot of intimidations and threats to the victim, particularly to the kids. It stops them from bringing out into the open"
(Indigenous worker)

Many of the participants spoke of the various ways in which victims are silenced or are deterred from discussing their experiences of sexual abuse openly. Fear of reprisal was cited as one of the most common barriers to disclosure.

Communities where families were close knit made it very difficult to be able to openly disclose experiences of sexual abuse. Several participants suggested that this made it critical that whole communities were involved in the process of challenging sexual abuse, and that awareness programs were community based.

4.2.8 Victims not identifying the act as an 'assault' - part of the normalising process

Several focus group participants cited numerous cases where they had spoken with women and children who did not view the act as being one of sexual abuse, but rather as a 'normal part of life'. One Indigenous worker spoke of a situation where because the victim had grown up and been repeatedly assaulted throughout her childhood by a number of male relatives, she did not identify the assault of her child by her partner as a form of sexual abuse.

This highlighted a need in the view of many of the workers for ongoing community education programs that raised community awareness around the nature of sexual abuse and its impact on children and the community as a whole.

4.2.9 Fear of police/legal system and so victims don't report

Fear of the legal system, and past experiences of racism with police was cited as one of the key reasons Aboriginal victims of sexual abuse did not pursue formal legal action. As one worker stated:

"Last time police were called they locked her up for being drunk. She wasn't about to go and tell them about her being raped."
(Indigenous worker)

Another worker suggested that women may make an initial report, but their distrust in the system often meant that they did not follow through:

"I went to a public forum eighteen months ago. I found it very distressing with some of the stories. Police were there. There were women there where nothing had gone further than reporting and getting some counselling. Once they hit the legal side of things though, it got too hard and they just dropped it"
(Indigenous worker)

"One of our women was encouraged by the CASA to go to police, and she did. But once she got there, when she presented her story, she was faced with a lot of disbelief. She didn't go back"
(Indigenous worker)

4.2.10 Aboriginal women and their experiences within the Magistrates and Family Court systems.

Questions were raised by many workers across all communities consulted around the role of the Family Court when dealing with children who have been sexually abused. In particular, questions were raised about Family Court Orders, the enforcement of Family Court Orders and problematic hand-overs of children to the other party, when serious allegations have been made and/or when children have made allegations of child abuse.

Many participants clearly did not understand the processes used by the Family Court and; expressed their frustration with cases whereby decisions are not made for months or years.

Many women identified that applications to the Magistrates Court for Intervention Orders were also frustrating, due to the complexity of applying for an Intervention Order on behalf of the children. The *'Family Violence Act'* does allow the parent to do this however, most women stated that the process is more far more difficult than written within the act. Some found this process useful in assisting to keep the perpetrator away from the child's place of residence and school; many felt that the Family Court orders often over-ruled the Intervention Orders and this often made both orders unworkable.

Most Indigenous participants were also unaware of the Family Court Magellan List. The Magellan List is a special listing of cases within the Family Court where allegations of abuse of the children have been made. These cases are investigated through the Family Court system and processed within a specific period.

Consultation with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) confirmed the increase in the number of Indigenous specific Family Court matters. The VALS have established a Family Unit to respond to the increasing number of Family Court, Family Violence and Child Protection matters.

4.3 Strategies that may improve and enhance the skills of Aboriginal workers

A number of strategies were identified by Indigenous workers in relation to the improvement and enhancement of their skills around working more effectively with sexual assault issues.

However it is important to note that many of the Indigenous participants stressed that such strategies needed to be developed within a two pronged approach to the issue. Most were emphatic that strengthening the capacity of Aboriginal workers to respond more effectively to sexual assault needed to occur alongside a broader campaign to make mainstream services more culturally relevant and appropriate. This would also then contribute to greater dialogue across the two sectors.

A number of participants also emphasised that the ability of Aboriginal people to be self-determining must be addressed if Indigenous communities are to implement programs that come some way to addressing the issues of violence, and in particular sexual and family violence.

In identifying the range of strategies to enhance the skills development of Aboriginal workers, participants identified a number of skills that they would like to either develop or further refine. These included:

- Identifying the indicators of sexual abuse
- Understanding the range of psychological, emotional and physiological impact of sexual abuse on children and their development
- Delivering community education on issues of sexual abuse
- Legal information in relation to sexual abuse
- Working around issues of confidentiality
- Debriefing opportunities
- Information in relation to the range of mainstream services available

Several participants explained that they had actually undertaken some training at CASA House in Carlton and found it to be invaluable in increasing their awareness around sexual abuse.

Many more however reported that they had not received any formal training at all, and learned 'on the job'. Indeed, one worker spoke of how until only recently she didn't fully understand what sexual assault was:

"I was working with a client, and I took her to [service] and the worker there explained to her [and me] what sexual abuse was. It opened my eyes. I found out for the first time that it doesn't just have to be sexual intercourse. It can involve a range of different things. I think that there are so many women who might be sexually abuse, but who don't name it this way because like me they don't actually know what it is. If I as the worker didn't know, imagine what it might be like for so many women in our community"
(Indigenous worker)

A number of participants felt that an information kit for workers that described the various indicators of sexual abuse would be highly beneficial. Such a kit it was suggested could be developed in partnership with the CASAs, combining their expertise in sexual assault, with the cultural expertise of Aboriginal workers:

"Either through training or through an information kit, it would be good to have some stuff on what the indicators are. There may be kids in foster care, and I would wonder why people would say bed wetting and lighting fires might suggest sexual abuse. We

should all know this. We could work with CASA to do something that also looked at indicators for Aboriginal victims of sexual assault"
(Indigenous worker)

Most of these skills participants felt could be developed with appropriate training. However, the majority of workers were quick to point out that often their time was so limited that it simply didn't allow for extensive training to take place. For others, particularly those in rural areas of Victoria, much of the training provided was simply inaccessible:

"It would be great to see some training down this end. I just don't have time to drive three or four hours to Melbourne and back for a one day training session. And if its longer, and there's no money in the budget to stay over, then it just isn't worth it"
(Indigenous worker)

"Governments just don't understand how important training in this area is for us. If we are expected to keep dealing with the issue then training needs to be made a priority. The money we get for training at the moment is absolutely pitiful"
(Indigenous worker)

This suggests that whilst participants are able to identify their various training needs, insufficient attention is often given to the creation of an environment that makes that training possible. Furthermore, many suggested that the training needed to be provided in an ongoing way so as to ensure regular updating of information.

Several participants wanted to see the development of training that specifically addressed issues of confidentiality within an Indigenous context and how Indigenous workers can manage this:

"I want to know that if someone discloses to me about sexual abuse and it turns out that I know the perpetrator, or the perpetrator is a relative of mine, what skills and resources in me can I draw on to work through this so that I do the best I can for the victim. There is not much understanding of how this issue of confidentiality is so much more difficult for Aboriginal workers. We need to do some work around this"
(Indigenous worker)

A few focus group participants spoke of the need for debriefing opportunities as part of the strategies of enhancing their skills and capacity. Debriefing it was suggested also contributed to the sustainability of the worker:

"Debriefing is really important. If you don't have the opportunity to talk to someone then you just carry it around. It can make you really sick"
(Indigenous worker)

Several workers also suggested that they would benefit from the development of a resource kit that identified the range of services that existed. This would assist in the referral process:

"An information pack that outlines the referral resources so that we know what is around. There is a where to go book in Lifeline, but not one for the wider community. I would like something like this. It would help in being able to make appropriate referrals for Aboriginal people who want to access non Indigenous services, which

they have every right to do"
(Indigenous worker)

Legal knowledge and information was also cited as a critical area in which Indigenous staff would like further training around:

"Knowing what the legal options are would help if you were trying to explain how things would work out. I mean specific stuff, and not just the general stuff. Like what will happen if you report it, through to what happens in court around a rape case. I would also like to know stuff about how to give evidence in court and what some of the issues there would be"
(Indigenous worker)

4.4 Examining Mainstream Services and their Practice in relation to Sexual Assault in Indigenous Communities

CASAs were asked to identify aspects of their practice and service delivery that might inadvertently or explicitly block access to their services by Indigenous people. A number of participants also shared positive examples of initiatives undertaken to address access issues for Indigenous communities.

An excellent study examining access to support for Indigenous women following sexual assault was undertaken by Cripps in 1998. She identifies and assesses some of the factors that facilitate access for Indigenous women and makes a series of recommendations in relation to making mainstream services more "Aboriginal friendly". Some of these include:

- Employment of Aboriginal women
- Using artwork
- Locating services in a house rather than a more formal setting of an office or a hospital
- A preparedness for the service to allow the victim/survivors to have a support person at counselling sessions and to work with the family where appropriate
- An understanding of Aboriginal cultural issues so that the service user does not have to 'educate' the counsellor

In light of this work, the outcomes of this consultation process seem to build on some of the findings in Cripps' work.

Overall however, the key themes that emerged in relation to discussion on the issues included:

- Inappropriateness of counselling models
- Appointment processes and structures
- Insufficient cultural knowledge and awareness
- Inconsistent data collation
- Lack of awareness of referral processes to Indigenous organisations

4.4.1 Positive Initiatives

Several CASA workers identified that there are a number of positive initiatives being undertaken by their respective services to address the issue of increasing access for diverse clients. A number of Indigenous participants also spoke highly of some of the work currently being undertaken.

Some of these initiatives included:

- Joint counselling arrangements where counselling was provided at Indigenous specific sites
- Jointly organised camps for women, whereby opportunities for disclosure and follow up support were facilitated
- Information sessions for Indigenous community members
- Training provided by CASAs to Indigenous workers
- Memorandums of agreement between Indigenous organisations and CASAs
- Koori Units based at the Sexual Assault Service
- Community arts projects

A number of CASAs also stated that they prioritise Koori clients. However it would seem that despite several mechanisms put in place once a Koori client accesses the CASA the relationship may still breakdown:

"What I find is that they [Indigenous client] will come, they make a disclosure to a worker, and then there will never be an appointment time made. They are more likely to just come in when they need to. It doesn't fit very well with our appointment system at CASA, but as we are a smaller community, we can work around it, but I am sure its not done as well as it could be"
(CASA worker)

A number of workers identified that the most successful initiatives were those that were significantly less structured than the usual way of operating:

"I find if the relationship has been built up, and its not structured, and people can get to know who you are then it has a better chance of working"
(CASA worker)

4.4.2 Cultural Inappropriateness of Service Models

CASA workers identified a number of aspects of their service models that they believed could inadvertently work to deter some Aboriginal women from seeking access to their services. Appointment processes, waiting lists and structured, time limited counselling models were particularly identified as problematic. However workers also suggested that at times flexibility could be limited because variability often had resource implications. The challenge would be to explore ways in which services could be varied within existing resource limitations.

As stated, the appropriateness of the counselling model was discussed by both Indigenous and non Indigenous workers as a possible barrier to service for Indigenous people. One worker from a CASA service stated:

"It's a really big thing to disclose to someone. Once you start doing the work, they really don't want to take the next step of counselling. Maybe its too formal"
(CASA worker)

Some staff members reported their frustration in travelling out to meet with the client after having discussed the situation over the phone, and finding that the client simply doesn't turn up:

"I am prepared to go out to meet with the women, but so many times I have drive a fair distance to find that she isn't there. So it isn't about just being able to provide off site support, sometimes it might be that they just don't want to do it face to face"
(CASA worker)

4.4.3 Insufficient cultural knowledge and awareness

"I think the biggest issue for us is training around cultural issues."
(CASA worker)

The majority of CASA workers participating in the focus groups acknowledged that they had insufficient knowledge and awareness of cultural issues when working with Koori clients. Several workers spoke of the 'fear of making mistakes' that often served to immobilise them and so reduce their ability to work effectively with Aboriginal clients:

"I think the more information you are exposed to, the less fear you have about doing the wrong thing. Fear around saying the wrong thing, and as a result unleashing certain consequences can really affect the way you work"
(CASA worker)

A number of CASA workers also referred to the complexity and myriad of issues often confronting Aboriginal families and the need to work across the issues, and not just focus on the issue of sexual assault:

"One of the difficulties in working with Indigenous children is that their families have so many issues confronting them, and we only have a limited opportunity to work on the issues of sexual abuse, let alone all the other issues. The kids needs a lot, but we need to also engage mum and dad in the process. The sexual assault is seen as only one small part of the whole problem. "
(Sexual Assault Provider)

Several workers expressed their frustration at what they perceived to be the 'protection' afforded by some Aboriginal communities of 'known' perpetrators, and identified the need for further training that would assist them in understanding the reasons behind why this might happen:

"Its very frustrating when you know the perpetrator, and people talk about him, but the community protects him, or ships him to another community when the police come after him. I would like to understand why this happens"
(CASA worker)

A few CASA workers also referred to the difficulties they had in keeping abreast of staff changes in Aboriginal organisation, and expressed an interest in exploring ways in which information could be more regularly shared between agencies:

"One of the difficulties sometimes can be that because there tends to be such a high burn out rate amongst some of the Indigenous workers, who seem to take on just about

every issue there is, that the change over rate means that the relationships are always temporary. Everyone seems to change their positions and roles all the time, and this does become difficult to keep up with"
(Representative from Centre Against Sexual Assault)

4.4.5 Inconsistent data collation

CASA representatives were asked if they kept data in relation to the number of Indigenous clients that they assisted. There seemed to be a great deal of variability in relation to data collation, with several services suggesting concerns in relation to the appropriateness of asking identifying questions in relation to identity. Others expressed concern about possible confidentiality implications:

"We have a question on the intake form, but it's a bit hard to force people to answer the question. Our statistics are therefore skewed. There are also some people who simply don't want you to know that they are Aboriginal and this needs to be respected"
(CASA worker)

As a result there is no comprehensive Statewide quantifiable data available about the range and number of clients from Indigenous communities who utilise the CASAs and its services. This lack of data has implications for planning services as information is not available to assess the need for specialised services.

There may well be a need for further discussions in relation to the most appropriate methods of collecting such data, as it can be argued that this data can assist greatly in measuring the success of various programs targeted at improving access to Indigenous client groups. It is important to provide support and training to the CASA staff collecting this information to ensure that have the confidence and are skills to be sensitive and aware of about potential breaches of client privacy.

Several Indigenous workers were emphatic about ensuring that there were more ways in which mainstream services could be held accountable in relation to providing services to Indigenous clients. Some suggested that more effective data collation should be considered an essential part of delivery outcomes to Indigenous people:

"If we are not getting access to services, then we need the evidence to show that we are not. We need to document every situation where we cant access a mainstream service, and we need to be able to make mainstream services accountable by reporting on the number of clients who are Aboriginal"
(Indigenous worker)

4.5 Development of working agreements and/or protocols

The need for the development of effective and meaningful partnerships was repeatedly highlighted by all participants as the most important aspect of improving services to Indigenous communities:

"By working and learning from each other, we make it more possible for Indigenous people to feel confident that if they choose to go to a mainstream service they can expect to get a good service"
(Indigenous worker)

However, a number also stated that the partnership arrangement would have to be informed by principles of self determination and equality.

One way to ensure that such partnerships or working agreements are reflective of principles such as self determination is through the establishment of memorandums of understanding. This is currently being developed by one CASA in conjunction with local Indigenous organisations and workers. However, the experience of this process has highlighted a number of factors. These include

- Ensuring the MOU involves more than one individual within the respective services. This is to ensure that the whole process doesn't collapse with the departure of one of the members of staff
- The need for proper commitment that also include a proper assessment of resource implications
- Communication strategies to ensure effective channels of communication
- Complaints mechanism that are able to facilitate honest feedback in relation to how effectively the MOU is being implemented.
- Building in measurements that enable ongoing evaluation of the success of the project.

Several Indigenous workers and community members raised the importance of evaluating programs and actually being able to measure the extent to which there has been an increase in access to mainstream programs. As one worker stated:

"It's always up to us to do the work around getting our people through the door. I think if the arrangements are going to be equal, I want to know how effective all this work with the CASAs will be in increasing access. We have to find ways of measuring this"
(Indigenous worker)

Aboriginal workers were also emphatic about ensuring that any initiatives that were development needed to be supported in real terms:

"Unsupported policies don't work"
(Indigenous-worker)

Several Aboriginal workers stressed the importance of any working agreements or protocols to be locally based. There are a great deal of regional variations that need to be carefully considered when agreements and protocols are being considered and developed:

"What ever is developed it has to happen with the local community. Each area is very different, and those differences can play a big role in how various programs are worked out"
(Indigenous worker)

A number of participants discussed the employment of Aboriginal workers and the most appropriate location for those workers. There seemed to be considerable debate as to whether the workers should be located at the CASA itself, or at the Aboriginal Cooperative. Some suggested that there be a situation of co-location, whilst some expressed concern about issues of confidentiality. Indeed some CASA workers suggested that they had cases where some Indigenous women did not want anyone from within the Indigenous community to know that they had come to the service:

"I have had a number of Koori women who did not want to work with a Koori worker. Issues of confidentiality was a big one for them. They wanted to be able to trust the professionalism and confidentiality of the person they were seeing, and their experience was one where this had not happened"
(CASA worker)

Several Indigenous workers however suggested that this did not necessarily mean that Indigenous workers could not maintain confidentiality, but that Aboriginal women, like any other woman, or victim of sexual assault, should be given a range of options and choice about the services she can access:

"Some women want to work with Aboriginal workers, and others don't. That in itself is not the problem. The problem is that in many cases Aboriginal women just don't even get the choice. The ideal situation is when they can decide who and how they want to work through their pain"
(Indigenous worker)

Another issue that was repeatedly raised was that of ensuring that adequate resourcing of networks was almost as important as the networking itself:

"Its great to be able to network and have good working relationships with mainstream services, but a lack of resources is what stops us from doing that. We don't have time to go to meetings. We have tried to do it in the past, but things get busy, and you just loose contact".
(Indigenous worker)

"It would be good for CASAs to consider the benefits from networking with Aboriginal workers. However this needs to be adequately resourced. Stop expecting Aboriginal people to do things for nothing"
(Indigenous community member)

Several Indigenous participants also highlighted that there needed to be greater consistency in the way in which relationships between themselves and CASAs were developed. One worker suggested that much of the previous networking relied on individual workers at the Centre, and that once that worker left, the relationship itself dwindled significantly, and subsequently ceased all together:

"It can't just rely on one or two workers. It has to be an organisational thing. It has to be part of the culture of that organisation. Built into the way that it works"
(Indigenous worker)

4.6 Relevant training that will assist in increasing the knowledge of CASAs in working with Indigenous communities around the issues of sexual assault.

Participants from the CASAs identified various strategies in relation to increasing their knowledge and awareness of sexual and family violence in Indigenous communities. These included:

- Cross cultural awareness training
- Increased opportunities for dialogue with Indigenous workers in relation to the issues
- Information in relation to the development of appropriate protocols
- Information about the range of Indigenous services that are available
- Delivering information to Indigenous communities in culturally appropriate ways
- Developing community education strategies for Indigenous communities

4.6.1 Cross cultural awareness training

A number of workers wanted training that challenged the misconception that sexual abuse is 'cultural':

"I know a lot of mainstream workers don't want to 'meddle' in Koori families. A lot of them are either frightened by it, or they don't know how to deal with it. Some think that its cultural, and so don't think there is any need for intervention at all. This has to be challenged by all of us"
(CASA worker)

Other workers called for training that was more than generic cultural awareness training, but specifically focused on issues pertinent to sexual assault:

"I know the training around historical stuff is important, but I think its how that stuff still gets played out today that we need to have. How does the legacy of colonisation still impact now and how does this relate to the way we work with victim/survivors of sexual abuse who are Koori"
(CASA worker)

4.6.2 Increased opportunities for dialogue with Indigenous workers in relation to the issues

Several CASA participants reported that they found the combined session with Indigenous workers invaluable in relation to increasing the potential for ongoing dialogue between them:

"This in itself is an excellent model of how we could work together to generate better understanding of each other and the kinds of complexities we are faced with. Something like this on a regular basis would be very useful"
(CASA worker)

4.6.3 Information in relation to the development of appropriate protocols

CASA workers reported that they experienced a great deal of confusion in relation to issues of protocol, and suggested that they would benefit significantly from training that identified how protocols operate and why they are important:

"I think if we knew how to set up some of the protocols in a way that didn't offend particular families, or parts of the community, then we could work across the diversity in the community"
(CASA worker)

4.6.4 Information about the range of Indigenous services that are available

Most CASA providers admitted that their knowledge of the range of Indigenous services was not particularly high, although this varied in some rural areas, where the smaller community was more likely to be aware of the services and organisations that existed.

Several CASA participants suggested that a kit containing information on the range of Indigenous organisations and the services they provide would assist more effective referral processes, and contribute to the identification of relevant organisations with whom to network.

4.6.5 Delivering information to Indigenous communities in culturally appropriate ways

A number of CASA workers requested training that specifically addressed issues related to the most effective way of designing and disseminating community education and information to Indigenous communities in a way that was culturally appropriate.

One worker suggested that this training could also incorporate issues of language and use of artwork.

There are several excellent examples of culturally appropriate information strategies that were show cased during the consultation process. The development of posters with Aboriginal artwork, and peer based education strategies. Any training that is developed should incorporate a review of models that have been used with considerable success in the past.

4.6.6 The establishment of an Indigenous specific Child Contact Centre

Several workers suggested that a separate Aboriginal-specific Child Contact Centre should be established. This type of centre would enable children and parents a neutral place for the handover and supervision of children. In addition, in cases where allegations of child abuse have been made and/or supervised access is ordered by the court; the contact between the child and the parent is able to be supervised by an independent supervisor rather than a nominated family member who may not be able to remain objective.

Discussions around the Court specific related issues resulted in the identification of the need for Aboriginal agencies and the Courts to build relationships that result in better outcomes for the victim/survivors of sexual assault and family violence.

5. Future Directions

The consultations undertaken with the various Indigenous organisations represent an important step in the process of building effective partnerships that inevitably enhance the quality of service provision to that community.

A number of themes have emerged from the consultations. Much of the discussion relates to broader, longer term issues for the CASAs consideration. Relationship building can be slow, and should be careful, genuine and considered.

Other suggestions however, are more immediate and practical and can be achieved with minimal effort, and will assist the CASAs in working more effectively with Indigenous

It is hoped that the next stage of the project will involve the development and the delivery of education and skills development programs to Indigenous workers and cross cultural training for CASA workers across various parts of the State.

STAGE 2

'A WAY FORWARD FOR
INDIGENOUS
COMMUNITIES
IN ADDRESSING THE ISSUE
OF SEXUAL ASSAULT'

6.1 Stage 2: Overview

In 2001 Elizabeth Hoffman House- Aboriginal Women's Refuge (EHH) conducted an audit of their client files for a 10 year period (1991-2001). They found that 80% of their clients/and or client's children had been sexually assaulted at some time in their lives and of these none had received counselling nor taken any other action. As a result of these alarming findings EHH sought to explore the needs of victim/survivors of Sexual Assault further. In 2001 they conducted the 'From Shame to Pride' Project, in partnership with CASA House. Through consultations with Aboriginal community members/workers and Mainstream workers in the field, the Project sought to:

- **Identify service needs of Indigenous victim/survivors of Sexual Assault.**
- **Explore/Develop/Strengthen collaborative approaches to Sexual Assault between Indigenous organisations and Centre's Against Sexual Assault.**
- **Identify gaps and barriers that prevent Aboriginal people from reporting Sexual Assault.**
- **Provide the opportunity for Aboriginal workers in the field to enhance their skills in responding to Sexual Assault.¹⁴**

The first stage of the project was both a challenging and exciting endeavour. The sensitive issue of Sexual Assault within Victoria's Indigenous communities had never been discussed in a structured manner with Indigenous facilitators, experienced in the area of family violence and Sexual Assault. While budget restraints limited the number/area of workshops conducted, the Project provided a safe and supported environment for Aboriginal people to discuss Sexual Assault and to have this information respectfully recorded. The clear messages that emerged from the 'From Shame to Pride' Project were that:

- **Most important for victim/survivors was to be believed and supported by their communities.**
- **Repercussions from community members prevent victims from reporting Sexual Assault.**
- **Access to counselling services varied due to waiting lists (up to 12 weeks) Often resulting in victims not following through. Many victims didn't pursue counselling as they felt service was ignorant/insensitive to cultural/community issues.**
- **Continuing distrust of police/legal systems, contributing to reluctance reporting crime in general.**

Following the first stage of the 'From Shame to Pride' Project, EHH entered a partnership with the Victorian Law Reform Commission to conduct a Round Table discussion with Aboriginal community members as part of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's review of the 'Sexual Offences Act'. This was held at Parliament House, 18th October 2002. One of the recommendations from the Roundtable was to conduct an Indigenous-specific Forum on Sexual Assault with Indigenous participants only.

Given the increasing demands placed on EHH services and programs over the course of this project; EHH sought a partnership with another Aboriginal organisation to enable the Indigenous specific Forum to be held. EHH entered a partnership with the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (AFVPLS) which enabled the project the support, resources and access to equipment which contributed to the excellent organisation of the Forum itself.

EHH and the AFVPLS would like to thank the project worker Nerida Sutherland for the excellent contribution she has made to this component of the report.

The first stage of the 'From Shame to Pride' Project has achieved some remarkable outcomes to date. Partnerships have been established and; together some organisations are working in collaboration to improve access to services for Aboriginal victim/survivors of family and sexual violence. Some of these outcomes include:

- The implementation of a joint initiative between EHH and The Gate House Centre – the establishment of an Indigenous specific Children's Therapeutic Group for children who have been abused and/or witnessed family and domestic violence.
- A partnership with Northern CASA with the aim of producing a joint video targeting Indigenous communities and educating communities about the crisis care process within CASAS.
- A direct referral initiative between the Gatehouse Centre and Aboriginal services that prioritises Aboriginal child victim/survivors of family and sexual violence.
- The employment of an in-house counsellor within EHH, that enables Indigenous victim/survivors access to crisis counselling.
- In increase in the collaboration of mainstream and Indigenous services working together to develop strategies that effectively addresses these issues.

6.2 Victorian Roundtable on Sexual Assault in Indigenous Communities.

The Round Table discussion identified similar key issues across various geographic areas:

- **Sexual Assault is widespread in Communities**
- **Reporting and seeking assistance by victim/survivor remains uncommon.**
- **Child Sexual Assault remains very much hidden.**
- **'Normalization' of sexual violence within communities leading to this violence becoming intergenerational.**
- **Need for holistic approach/responses to Sexual Assault to be successful.**

From the discussion about the barriers for Indigenous victims of Sexual Assault accessing services, three main themes emerged:

- **Inappropriateness/fear of Mainstream Sexual Assault service models (including CASAs, police & legal system).**
- **Lack of Indigenous services/workers/skill in the area of Sexual Assault.**
- **Family/Community awareness and responses regarding Sexual Assault.**

Participants emphasized a dual approach was required to address Sexual Assault in communities.

- **Strengthen communities' capacity to respond effectively to Sexual Assault.**
- **Campaign for changes in Mainstream services to ensure their cultural relevance/sensitivity.**

6.2.1 Roundtable Key Recommendations

Key Recommendations from the Round Table discussions were:

- 1. Strengthen communities' capacity to respond effectively Sexual Assault.**
- 2. To hold an Indigenous only forum to discuss issues & service options for responding to Sexual Assault within Aboriginal communities.**
- 3. To explore the concept of an Indigenous Sexual Assault Service (specifically)**

7. Victorian Indigenous Forum on Sexual Assault

Victoria's Indigenous communities had not had the opportunity as yet to meet and discuss the Sexual Assault within our communities. Without having had the opportunity to talk amongst

our own, there was a reluctance to talk amongst non-Indigenous people. Participants of the Round Table discussions were adamant that in order to stimulate and engage in honest and meaningful discourse about Sexual Assault it was vital to firstly provide this opportunity. Elizabeth Hoffman House and the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service received funding from the Reichstein Foundation and the Victorian Law Reform Commission in order to host the Indigenous Only Sexual Assault Forum.

Throughout the various consultations and discussions with Indigenous community groups several ideas and strategies around effective prevention/response to Sexual Assault did arise. The broad question of 'How to address Sexual Assault within our communities' however, remained somewhat perplexing. It was for this reason that two Indigenous Sexual Assault Service Models, incorporating these ideas were drafted. These Models provided 'food for thought' during the workshop sessions of the Indigenous Only Sexual Assault Forum.

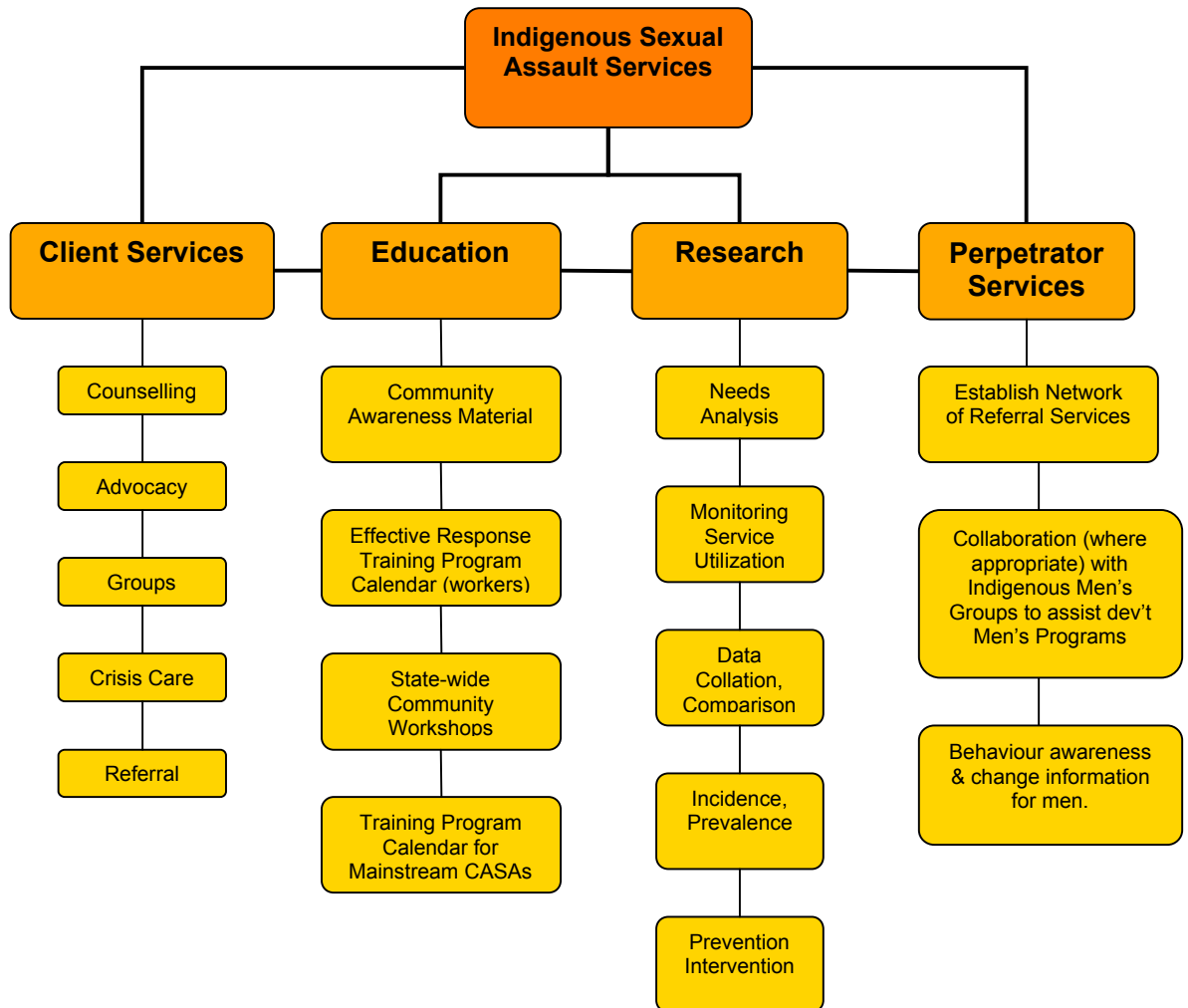
8. POTENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES.

Figure 1. illustrates a comprehensive range of possible functions that a Sexual Assault Service could provide. It was designed to stimulate thought and discussion about

responses to Sexual Assault in broader terms, that is beyond basic crisis care/ongoing support for victim/survivors and/or awareness raising/prevention programs

This flow chart, while providing a map for a ‘holistic approach’ to Sexual Assault is also multilayered. The realisation of such a plan would require staged implementation requiring the prioritisation of each phase.

Figure 1. Potential Functions Of Sexual Assault Services



9. FORUM PROCEEDINGS

The Indigenous State-wide Forum on Sexual Assault was held on Monday 27 October 2003 at the Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre, Preston. More than 64 participants from Aboriginal communities across the state registered.¹⁵ Participants were given a Forum package which contained the final forum program, a background paper, copies of the 'Potential Functions of a Sexual Assault Service' diagram, 'Sexual Assault Service Models' for work shopping and reading material that included commonly used terms and their meanings, statistics and existing Sexual Assault services -description and contact details.

Lisa Thorpe (Chairperson of the FVPLS and EHH) welcomed all in attendance. Participants were informed of the availability of two counsellors (Rose Solomon and Helen McQueen from EHH) throughout the Forum should participants become distressed or just wanted to have a talk.

Aunty Faye Carter (CEO-ACES) addressed the Forum, speaking of the need for Aboriginal people to speak up and speak out against Sexual Assault in our communities despite the difficulty and discomfort this may cause. She highlighted the challenges faced within families, confronted by competing loyalties and respect. She reiterated that Sexual Assault is wrong and that we must confront it openly and honestly and then we will know where our loyalties should lie.

An overview of the work undertaken by EHH that led to the need for such a Forum to be held; and a framework for possible functions of a Sexual Assault service was presented by Nerida Sutherland (Community Education & Training Coordinator-FVPLS)

The morning session provided an opportunity for participants to articulate issues and concerns about Sexual Assault that they are facing in their respective communities. Participants were asked to express what they believed to be the issues, gaps in existing services and community needs relating to Sexual Assault.

The two 'Sexual Assault Service Models' (contained in the Forum packages) were presented to participants by Nerida Sutherland. These 'Models' were merely idea frameworks and a tool for stimulating discussion/debate during the workshops. A discussion then ensued and questions were asked from the floor.

Participants broke into three workshop groups they had self-nominated for, for the first afternoon session. Each workshop was held in a separate room, facilitated by two people and recorded on whiteboards/butchers paper. The work undertaken during the workshops was brought back and presented to and discussed by the whole Forum.

¹⁵ Forum registration listed 64 participants; there were some participants who did not complete registration.

10. SEXUAL ASSAULT, ISSUES IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

There were common themes that emerged from the issues articulated by individual participants shared. The issues have been grouped under theme headings accordingly.

SAFETY

Issues:

- Victim's needs/safety should be paramount.
- How do we ensure the safety of Koori children placed with non-Indigenous carers?
- Rape of Indigenous men by other Indigenous men within prisons is on the increase and of great concern to the community not only because of the devastating impact on the victims but the repercussions for the communities that offenders are returning to.
- Perpetrators rely on the belief that they won't be 'betrayed' by family members.
- Homelessness and inadequate housing results in children having to share beds and exposes children to risk.
- Protecting our children when we are not aware of whom perpetrators are, many community social events.
- Difficult for victim/survivors to participate in Forum due to discomfort of discussing issues in the presence of workers/family.

Gaps/Needs:

- Only one existing Aboriginal Women's Refuge in Victoria-need for additional refuges/safe houses.
- No specific Indigenous Sexual Assault workers- need for funding, training, coordination and support for Indigenous Sexual Assault advocates.
- Need for healing centres that promote a holistic approach to well being.
- Need for Mandatory reporting for Sexual Assault of children to be supported/encouraged for all Community members.
- Need for strong members in our communities to take an open stand against Sexual Assault so our more vulnerable members might feel more supported in seeking assistance/support.
- Need for increased awareness/vigilance about Sexual Assault by parents/families. (Need to be on the look out and prepared to intervene/take action)

CONFLICT AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Issues:

- Constant challenge of dealing with conflict and ensuring confidentiality.
- Victim/survivors of Sexual Assault are often shunned and isolated because perpetrators are well known by Community organizations and members.
- Difficulty accessing appropriate support-close-knit communities-problem with knowing workers/reluctance accessing mainstream CASAs due to perceived stigma.
- Shame-people (victims survivors &/or others who are aware) are too ashamed to tell anyone.
- Perpetrators are protected in the Community.
- There is a fear of being judged, blamed and ostracized by family and community if Sexual Assault is disclosed or perpetrator named.
- The scale of family violence including Sexual Assault in our communities is often underestimated/denied.

Gaps/Needs:

Need for Communities to take strong stand against Sexual Assault-reverse the notions of 'acceptance and normalization' and support individuals speaking up.

EDUCATION

Issues:

- With limited resources, effort needs to be made to ensure strategic use of these – (most efficient/effective), breaking the cycle of violence by focusing on the education of our young people.
- Community workers dealing with Sexual Assault have not been resourced in their work in terms of specific training and support.
- Formal qualifications are often undervalued in our Communities and seen as trying to be 'clever and too educated'.

Gaps/Needs:

- Need for the development of a recognized curriculum-Family Violence/Sexual Assault.
- Need for the development of training programs that address working with disclosures of Sexual Assault and provision of effective support/advocacy, while being underpinned by practice principles that take into account cultural sensitivities.
- Need for the development of age appropriate awareness, safety and prevention programs for school age children.

- Need for development and implementation of mentoring program for young men.

RESOURCES

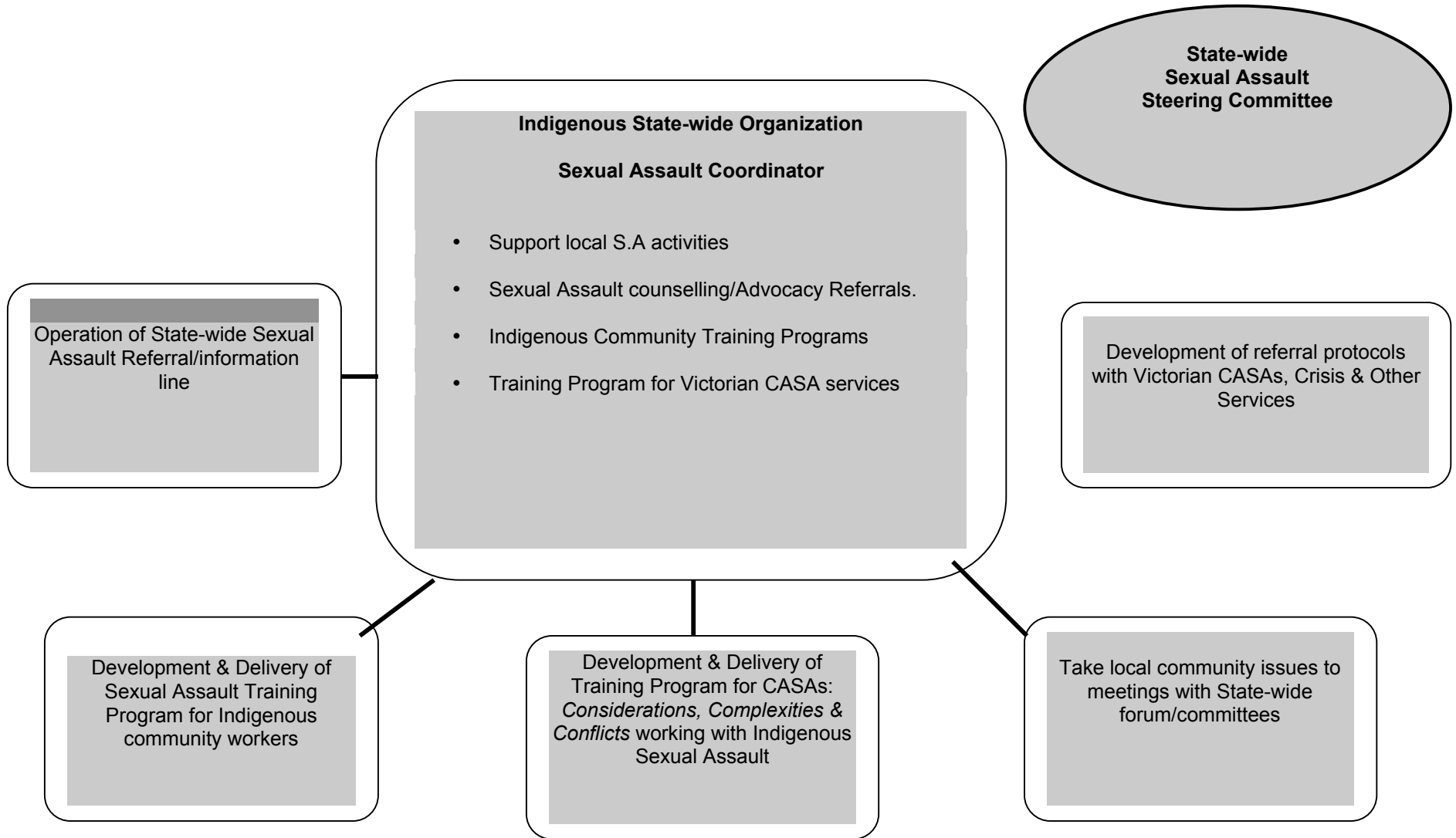
Issues:

- While there continues to be inadequacy of services in metropolitan areas, rural areas are even more disadvantaged in terms of resources and services.
- The feeling of being overwhelmed by the prevalence and difficulty in addressing Sexual Assault in our communities has provoked a sentiment of perceived complacency.
- Government policies do not reflect the true picture in Aboriginal affairs, their commitment to the priority issues of the community are not matched by adequate funding.
- Child Protection notifications relating to the sexual abuse of Koori children are increasing.
- The current approach to Sexual Assault in the community is a punitive, not healing one.
- Juvenile justice centres are inundated with youth who are perpetrators of sexualized behaviour.
- Priority should be given to victim/survivors.

Gaps/Needs:

- Need for long term counselling/support services
- Need for victim/survivors of Sexual Assault to have options of services to attend.
- Need for healing centres (for victim/survivors/workers)
- Need for effective perpetrator programs

11. PRESENTATION: OPTION 1 (Coordination, Education, Resourcing)



11.1 OPTION 1: Explanatory Notes

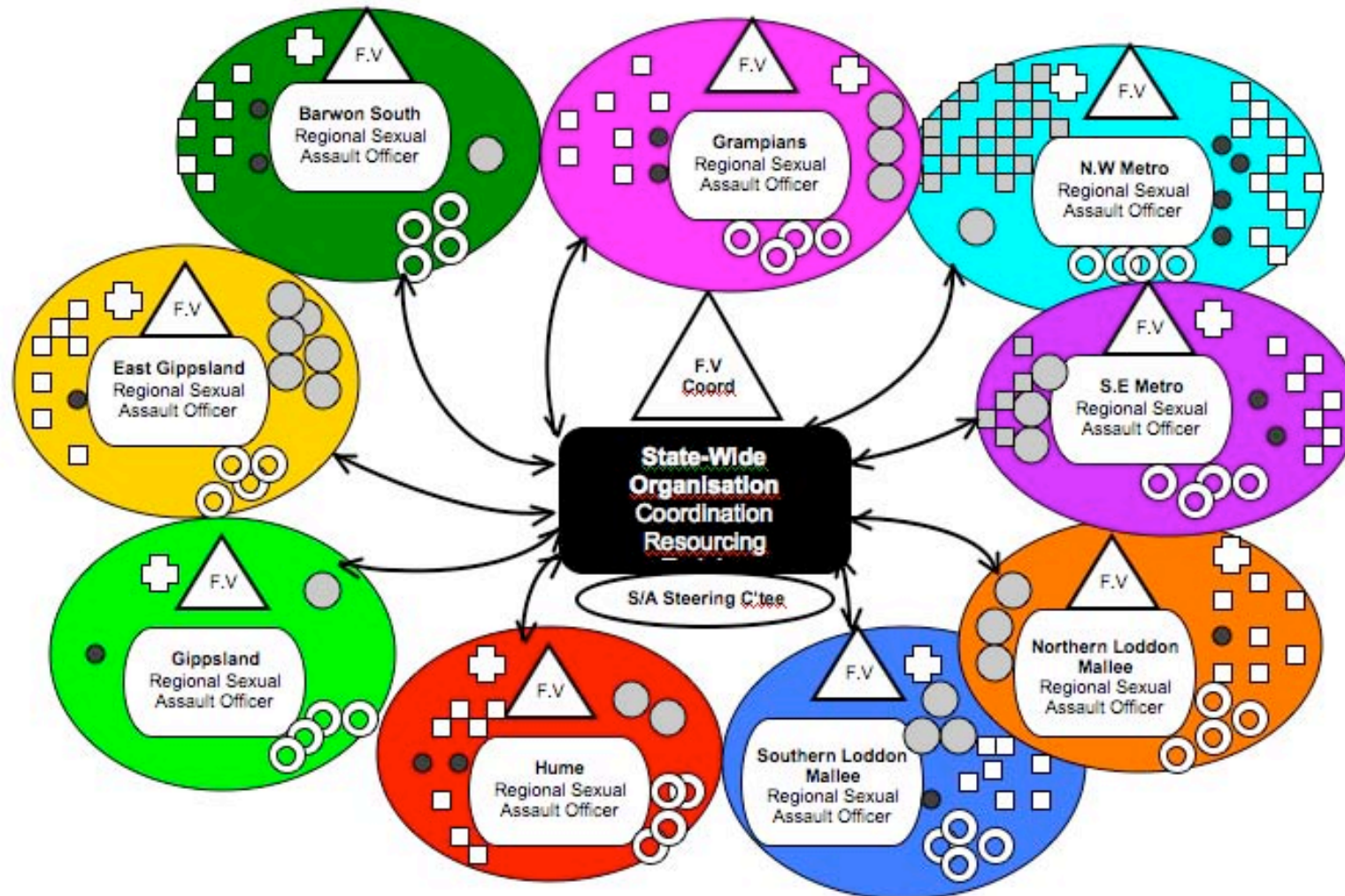
State-wide Organization: Employ State-wide Sexual Assault Coordinator.
Resource State-wide Sexual Assault Steering Committee.

To:

1. Convene & provide administrative support for State-wide Sexual Assault Steering Committee.
2. Establish referral protocols with S/A Crisis Care, CASAs, Refuges, Counsellors, Legal practitioners, Police etc.
3. Coordinate staff/operation of 24hr State-wide Sexual Assault Referral Line.
4. Provide Steering Committee with reports on Referral Line occasions of service.
5. Develop & Coordinate delivery of Indigenous Sexual Assault Training program.
6. Develop & Coordinate delivery of Training program for CASAs.
7. Initiate involvement in State-wide CASA Forum & other relevant State-wide committees.
8. Local community consultation re: identifying Sexual Assault issues.
9. Present local community Sexual Assault issues/concerns to State-wide CASA Forum & other relevant State-wide committees.(eg: State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Sexual Assault)

11.2

PRESENTATION: OPTION 2 (Direct Service, New Positions, Connected To Existing Local Community Services) 12.



11.3 OPTION 2: Explanatory Notes

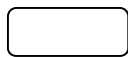
Aboriginal Organisations: Health services, Men's/Women's Recovery Centres, Refuges, Legal Services, Hostels, Child Care Services, Elders Services, Housing Services, Education Services, Youth/Sport/Rec, Neighbourhood houses, Meeting Places, RAJACs etc.



Other local community services: Police, SOCCAs, CASAs, SAAP services, Community/Health Centres, Counselling Services, Hospitals/Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers, Centrelink, DHS,

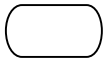


State-wide Sexual Assault Steering Committee: (*Similar to Family Violence Task Force*). Locally nominated Victorian Aboriginal community representatives to provide advice and direction on Indigenous Sexual Assault services and strategies.



State-wide Organisation: State-wide Sexual Assault Coordinator position. (*Similar role to State-wide Family Violence Coordinator*)

1. Report to Steering Committee
2. Administrative support for Steering Committee meetings
3. Arrange regular meetings & training/information sessions with Regional Sexual Assault Officers.
4. Manage dissemination of up to date information for Regional Sexual Assault Officers.
5. Coordinate & Resource Regional Sexual Assault Officers
6. Initiate involvement in state-wide CASA Forum.
7. Participation in other relevant state-wide committees, eg: Police, Legal Centres, Refuges, and Counselling Services.
8. Organise relevant training/professional development for Regional Sexual Assault Officers.
9. Provide or broker supervision/debriefing for Regional Sexual Assault Officers.
10. Organise & facilitate State-wide Indigenous Sexual Assault Advocates/Regional Sexual Assault meetings.
11. Collate monthly data and prepare quarterly/annual service reports.



Regional Sexual Assault Officers: *(Similar role to that of Regional Family Violence Support Officers).*

1. Report to Sexual Assault Coordinator-> Steering Committee
2. Establish Network of local services
3. Arrange regular meetings & training/information sessions with Network of local services.
4. Administrative support for Network of local services
5. Develop Memorandum of Understanding(s) & referral protocols
6. Manage dissemination of up to date information for Aboriginal community organisations & other local community/health services.
7. Community awareness initiatives.
8. Coordinate & Resource Indigenous Sexual Assault Advocates
9. Initiate and support collaborative working relationship between local CASA and Indigenous Sexual Assault Advocates.
10. Organise relevant training/professional development for Indigenous Sexual Assault Advocates.
11. Facilitate local Indigenous Sexual Assault Advocates Team meetings
12. Provide or broker supervision/debriefing for Indigenous Sexual Assault Advocates.
13. Report on Regional S/A Officer & Indigenous S/A Advocates work activities/Stats



Indigenous Sexual Assault Advocates:

1. Report to Regional Sexual Assault Officers
2. X4 (Minimum) on rotating 'on call' roster.
3. Work in partnership with local CASA counsellor/advocates (& state-wide Sexual Assault crisis service)
4. Crisis care advocacy
5. Counselling advocacy-> CASAs? -> *Indigenous counselling services-> Local Community Health Centre counselling services.*
6. Joint facilitation of support groups.
7. Needs assessment-linking client to relevant support services-> *safe short term accommodation, housing, finance, legal representation, childcare/support etc.*
8. Record/Collection/Report on service utilization Data.

The three workshops were identified as:

1. OPTION 1: Strategic Model (*Orange diagram in Forum material*)

Facilitators: Karen Bryant & Kelly Feldon

2. OPTION 2: Direct Service/Coordination Model (*Green diagram in Forum material*)

Facilitators: Nerida Sutherland & Wanda Braybrook

3. OPTION 3: Open Model (*To enable the issues that were raised in morning session to be developed in practical terms.*)

Facilitators: Antoinette Braybrook & Lisa Thorpe

12.2 RESPONSES TO THE MODELS

Key points of the discussion following this presentation were:

- The need to include (as addendum) to Family Violence Task Force Strategy Report the key points of discussion regarding Models.
- The need to coordinate local approach-genuine collaboration with all relevant local agencies.
- The need to utilise existing services- not attempt to duplicate or work in isolation.
- The need for coordination between local communities, region and state.
- The value of seeing family violence/Sexual Assault/community services presented diagrammatically.
- The importance of having a voice on State wide Committees.-lobbying for changes/resources
- The importance of development/delivery of education and awareness raising activities (particularly with our young people)
- The need to develop immediate, short, medium and long term strategies.

13. FEEDBACK FROM WORKSHOPS

While there was equal interest in exploring all three, service options demonstrated by the number of participants who nominated themselves for each workshop group, there was no clear or definitive preference indicated for any of the illustrated Sexual Assault service models. Throughout report back from the three workshops, there was apparent agreement on the principles necessary for a service/services addressing Sexual Assault in Victorian Aboriginal Communities. These principles are as follows:

- ❑ Focus on Indigenous victim/survivors of Sexual Assault (not perpetrators)
- ❑ Accountable to Aboriginal communities via State-wide Steering Committee.
- ❑ Coordination of local community organizations and agencies both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous.
- ❑ Indigenous input into Non-Indigenous Sexual Assault agencies to improve accessibility and appropriate service delivery for Indigenous people.
- ❑ Pressure the accountability requirements of Mainstream Sexual Assault Services to deliver services to Indigenous people.
- ❑ Link Indigenous Committees with relevant existing Mainstream Committees. (State-wide, Regional & local)
- ❑ Development of a State-wide approach to Sexual Assault that allows for the implementation of locally relevant programs.
- ❑ Development/formalizing referral pathways between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous service providers.
- ❑ Ensure the capacity to undertake research to inform and monitor program development.
- ❑ The provision of training and support for Indigenous Sexual Assault workers.
- ❑ Review distribution of all funding for Victorian Indigenous Sexual Assault and impact at local level.
- ❑ Community education-re: rights and responsibilities

14. INDIGENOUS FORUM ON SEXUAL ASSAULT RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To establish an Indigenous State-wide Sexual Assault Steering Committee.
2. For the newly established Steering Committee to feed into broader State-wide Steering Committee on Sexual Assault.
3. To develop and deliver 'Responding to Sexual Assault' training to Aboriginal Community members/workers.
4. To develop and distribute a Community Family Violence/Sexual Assault Resource Guide.
5. To develop a State-wide Sexual Assault Policy and Procedures Manual to ensure both a coordinated approach and set of practice standards throughout Victoria.
6. To facilitate a Men's Forum on Sexual Assault.
7. Undertake Community controlled research and data collection re: Sexual Assault to inform and support requests for funding the development/evaluation of appropriate services.
8. To establish an Indigenous 'Helpline' for information/referral relating to Family Violence/Sexual Assault.
9. To develop and deliver (through broad range of mediums including Community radio, newspapers, kits) a Sexual Assault State-wide awareness/safety campaign.

14. CONCLUSION

The Indigenous State-wide Forum on Sexual Assault was the first of its kind. It is the first time Victorian Aboriginal communities have come together to discuss the difficult and challenging topic of Sexual Assault. While this Forum by all accounts ran smoothly and according to most participants, provided a safe and supportive environment in which to discuss Sexual Assault, there is always room for improvement.

The organizers/facilitators of this Forum continually reminded participants that they did not profess to be experts in the area of Sexual Assault nor did they have all the answers, their role was merely to provide the opportunity to raise the questions and stimulate discussion. That's not to say that this Forum was a 'Talk-fest'. Members of Victorian Aboriginal Communities expressed their intolerance of talking for sake of talking, they are committed to addressing the problem of Sexual Assault in our communities and eager to work together to identify the most effective means of achieving this.

The organizers of this Forum are committed to pursuing the recommendations identified by the participants of the Forum. Elizabeth Hoffman House-Aboriginal Women's Refuge and The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service will express the sentiments of Forum participants at every opportunity and lobby strenuously to have the necessary resources committed to the proposed initiatives.

One of the recommendations was implemented at the Forum. A call for nominations from the floor was made for membership on the Indigenous State-wide Sexual Assault Steering Committee. There was an immediate and positive response to this request. Eleven Forum participants were nominated for membership. The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service have committed to resource this Committee in its establishing phase. The membership of the inaugural Indigenous State-wide Sexual Assault Steering Committee is as follows:

Trevor Gallagher	Phil Cooper
Jan Muir	Tania Jones
Karen Bryant	Joanne Holmes
Adeline McDonald	David Brockman
Charmaine Clarke	Linda Wordie
Matt Holmes.	

The organizers hope to hold the first meeting of the Steering Committee before Christmas, however if this is not possible due to the hectic time of year a meeting will be scheduled for February 2004.

There is much work to be done but the Indigenous State-wide Forum on Sexual Assault has provided the beginning.

15. FROM SHAME TO PRIDE REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the From Shame to Pride Project endorses the Recommendations made at the Indigenous Forum on Sexual Assault. These Recommendations portray the views and aims of the Victorian Indigenous Communities.
2. The Indigenous State-wide Steering Committee on Sexual Assault be resourced to conduct its work over the next 2 years.
3. That Governments' recognise the immediate crisis faced by Aboriginal communities, families and workers in the field and provide funding to Aboriginal Communities for long term sustainable programs. This should also include funds to debrief and supervise workers dealing with traumatic experiences.
4. The development of an Indigenous State-wide Data System that accurately measures the levels of sexual and family violence issue and; captures the type of support and services required. It is suggested that the Data System be made available across all Aboriginal Program areas and should include the legal services.
5. Aboriginal agencies develop and, implement in-house data collection that accurately records the number of clients that they are unable to support and the types of issues they are facing. This would assist them to present accurate information on the number of clients they turn-away.
6. That Aboriginal communities' be adequately resourced and supported in the ongoing development of strategies; that enables them an opportunity to self determine the manner in which they address family and sexual violence, within their respective communities.
7. That Victoria Police and Aboriginal Communities examine their relationships within their respective communities and; explore mechanisms that improve their relationships particularly in the areas of family and sexual violence issues.
8. That Victoria Police examine the issue of '*non-reporting of sexual and family violence crimes*' as a component of the Victorian Police Steering Committees on Family Violence and Sexual Assault and; develop strategies that increases the reporting of these crimes.
9. That Aboriginal Agencies be supported and resourced in the development of partnerships, protocols and MOUS'; that increases access to services and, enhances the delivery of programs for victim survivors of family and sexual violence.

10. That the Family Court of Australia undertake cross-cultural training, provide culturally appropriate information and; examine the possibility of the employment of an Indigenous Liaison Officer who's primary role would be, to establish/improve relationships between Aboriginal Agencies, and the Family Court of Australia.
11. Similarly, the Magistrates Courts should also undertake Cross Cultural Training particularly in the areas of family and sexual violence.
12. The establishment of an Aboriginal Children's Hand-over Supervision Centre as a priority; particularly to begin to address the issues associated to the number Aboriginal children who have come to the attention of Child Protection and, the number of children involved in Family Court disputes involving family and sexual violence. This will require consultation with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.
13. Funding bodies need to recognise that Aboriginal people do not have the same opportunities to disassociate themselves from the issues within their communities and hence; funding bodies need to consider the provisions for supervision, debriefing and access to adequate cultural training opportunities.
14. That CASA's further examine the development of partnerships and joint initiatives with Aboriginal organisations that increases access to their services.
15. That all CASA counsellor/advocates develop their awareness around the barriers that prevent Aboriginal people from accessing their services and, develop their cultural awareness skills to assist them in enhancing the services they provide.

APPENDIX A

MEETING WITH MAINSTREAM SEXUAL ASSAULT WORKERS: MONDAY 15TH APRIL 9AM –11AM

Attendees: Nine

Lesley Edwards – Lakes Entrance Community Health
Robyn Evans – Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative
Janelle O'Rourke: Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Coop
Karen Fox: Koori Kare – GEGAC
Pauline Gilbert GCASA (Morwell)
Margaret Uebergang G CASA – Morwell and Bairnsdale
Donna Watson: Senior Constable, Bairnsdale Sexual Offences and Child abuse Unit
Toni Redshaw – Senior Constable, Bairnsdale Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Unit
Tammy Bundle – GEGAC Strengthening Families Case Worker.

Colleen Harney – GEGAC (Gippsland and Gippsland East Aboriginal Cooperative)
Sue Billing – GEGAC – Medical
Tammy Bundle - GEGAC
Maureen Hood
Cheryl Hood
Vernus Mobourne – Tanderra
Irene Cooper – Tanderra
Cath Solomon – Tanderra
Frieda Pace – Meerindoo
Ivy Solomon Morwell

Barwon Consultations: 21st of May 2002

Meeting at Wathaurong Aboriginal CoOperative

Indigenous Consultation: 10.30-12 midday.

Attendees:

Karen Heap: Executive Office RAJAC Barwon South West
Renee Owen: Health Worker – Wathaurong
Sue Darby: Wathaurong
Kerry McCarthy
Margaret April Harpes – Wathaurong
Fay Muv: KECFO Barwon South west region
Jenny Megee: Child Services Wathaurong
Lyn McInnes: Chairperson Wathaurong
Craig Edwards A and D Wathaurong
Sharelle McGuirk: Family Violence Project Worker
Elsier Coates: Family Support Worker

INTERVIEWS WITH CASA WORKERS: 1pm – 2.30

Attendees:

Rachael Moore: Youth Outreach Barwon CASA

Marnie Daphne Community Development – Barwon CASA

Claudia Edwards: Counsellor/Advocate

Pam O’Neill: C-ordinator Barwon CASA

Victoria Ellis	CASA House	9344 2210
Maria Chatke	Sexual Assault Crisis Line	9347 3066
Stephanie Blake	Northern CASA	9497 1768
Karen Hogan	Gatehouse Centre	9345 6391
Carolyn Worth	South East CASA	9928 8741
Linette Harriott	West CASA	9667 5811
Joanne Lutterall	Marg Tucker Hostel	9482 1161
Doreen Bastow	“ “	0482 1161
Debbie Learhincin	V.A.H.S.	9419 3000
Helen McQueen	“ “	0419 3000
Karen Bryant	Elizabeth Hoffman House	9482 6005
Lyn Briggs	V.A.H.S.	9419 3000
Lorraine Nelson	“ “	“ “
Julie Phillips	“ “	“ “
Damian Goodall	Meerindoo Youth Service	(03) 5152 2188
Frieda Pace	“ “	“ “
Michelle Buchanan	Community Member	9482 6005
Shelena Bourke	Elizabeth Hoffman House	94826005
Kellyann Andy	Elizabeth Hoffman House	“ “
Eve Hudson	Elizabeth Hoffman House	“ “

APPENDIX B

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