Opening a new door:
The herstory of

beryl
WOMEN INC.

1975–2015

Opening a new door: The herstory of Beryl Women Inc. [1975–2015]

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Plaque presented at the opening of the Canberra Women's Refuge.

beryl works on ngunnawal land

We wish to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the land we work on.

We pay our respects to the Elders both past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal Australia. We remember that the land we work on, was and always will be traditional Aboriginal land.

beryl WOMEN INC.
1975–2015

Once you were my friend
Over and over again
You fogged all bad memories
And took away the pain

You seemed to help
in my despair
blotting out my mind

Taking all that was
wrong in my life
then all the happiness
I could find

Now I'm saying Goodbye to you
I don't need you anymore
Through the love and faith of others
I've opened that new door

– Former resident, 1979

Foreword

Julia Ryan

When a committee of Canberra Women's Liberation (CWL) and Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) members met in mid-1974 at Bremer Street, Griffith to set up a women's refuge we had little idea of the extent of domestic violence in Canberra. Inspired by the Sydney Women's Commission of Inquiry into Violence against Women, and the subsequent squat to establish 'Elsie' as the first women's refuge, the Canberra women began investigating the local need. We beavered away, approaching welfare organisations for information and were shaken to discover that even the most conservative considered there was a great need for a women's shelter. So we approached the Federal Government, then administering the ACT directly, for a house and, in the process admirably outlined in the first chapter of this book, were eventually given access to one in Adams Place, Watson.

The Refuge Committee, transforming into the Collective, asked Beryl Henderson to open the Refuge on International Women's Day 1975. Then in her late sixties, an active member of both CWL and WEL, Beryl had attended women's suffrage meetings in England before World War I. For a while we considered calling our Adams Place house 'Eve's Place' but the name did not stick, and in 1989 the Refuge took the appropriate name of 'Beryl.' The Refuge quickly grew out of the first modest house and has been re-housed several times, diversifying into separate locations, but providing for women with children remained the prime focus of Beryl Women's Refuge.

The first Collective set up a volunteer roster to staff the Refuge 24/7, the first in Australia to insist on training of volunteers in listening skills. We collected statistics, for both the Government and the Collective. These statistics began to track the enormity of the problems we were tackling and government began to listen. We asked for paid staff and over the years dedicated groups of staffers have worked at Beryl.

Congratulations to the 23 women who researched and wrote this book, documenting the Beryl story for the world. They are mostly volunteers from the public service and they care about combating domestic violence and promoting gender equality. We, remnants of the first Refuge Collective, are pleased to pass them the torch.

Veteran CWL and WEL members meet regularly at Tilley's and watch with anxiety the changes interstate, where hostile government policies are defunding and closing women's refuges. In a nation where one woman per week, on average, is murdered by a close family member, we hope that Beryl, founded and continuing on feminist principles, can endure for at least the next 40 years.

Woman sorting clothes in the lounge room of the Refuge, 1970s.
Source: ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection.

> I arrived here absolutely terrified that my husband was going to follow me and assault me again and get my two little boys. I don't know where I would have gone or what I would have done if I hadn't been able to stay at the Refuge.
>
> – Former resident, 1977

contents

Toys in the backyard of the Refuge in Kingston, 4 November 1982. Source: ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection, Photographer: Jane Reid.

Photo showing part of the purpose-built layout of the Refuge.

> (The Refuge) made me feel like a person again. I feel like I can cope on my own, which for many years I haven't felt able to do ... it just happened with the coordinators and roster women and women residents here – just chatting to them and listening to their problems and their plans and talking to them myself.
>
> – Former resident, 1977

beryl women inc. timeline

70s

First meeting called of interested women of the Canberra Women's Movement to establish emergency accommodation for women and children in the ACT. Canberra Women's Refuge Committee is formed from that meeting (June)

The Canberra Women's Refuge is officially Incorporated (12 March)

A two storey duplex is offered to the Canberra Women's Refuge after lobbying to the Government and support from ACT Members including Senator John Knight, John Haslem and Ken Frey (May)

1974

1975

1976

1979

The Department of the Capital Territory grants the Canberra Women's Refuge Committee the use of a three bedroom house in Watson, and $4,000 as an establishment grant (March)

Canberra Women's Refuge (now Beryl Women Inc.) opens officially and refuge begins operation immediately (8 March)

The Collective is offered the use of a house in Kingston for medium term accommodation (July)

The Refuge is renamed Beryl Women's Refuge, in honour of Beryl Henderson

80s

Toora Single Women's Shelter is set up in Canberra, to cater for women unaccompanied by children, allowing Beryl to focus upon women with children escaping domestic violence (8 August)

The name change from Canberra Women's Refuge Inc. to Beryl Women's Refuge Inc. is lodged with the ACT Corporate Affairs Commission (June)

1983

1986

1989

The Incest Centre (now Canberra Rape Crisis Centre) becomes independent from the Canberra Women's Refuge (31 October)

90s

A Half-way House, to provide transitional housing for women and children waiting for priority housing is established

Grace Coe, Refuge Staff member is named Canberra Woman of the Year 1994 in recognition of her significant contribution to women, in particular Aboriginal women, in the Canberra region

1991

1991

1991

1991

Purpose built centre is built and opened at Beryl Women's Refuge

The Coordinator's position becomes an identified Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander position, although it was not until 2005 that the position was filled by an Aboriginal woman

00s

Beryl receives a $40,000 grant to run children-focused programs such as children's camps and computers, homework and parenting classes

Office relocation to Ainslie Shops

Change from shared to independent properties

The Refuge receives funding to operate an outreach program to former clients, for 12 months

Grant from Calvary Hospital to complement existing children's program

Consensus decision is made to change from a Collective model of governance to a committee governance model (April)

Multi Business Agreement replacing the ACT Social and Community Services (SACS) Award

Robyn Martin and Sharon Williams share the NAIDOC Community Services Worker of the Year Award

2001

2002

2004

2005

2007

2008

Statement of Apology and Reconciliation is made by the ACT Community Services for Women, and a banner forming part of the apology statement, to which women's services in the ACT contributed, is created

Beryl's 30th birthday

Beryl Women's Refuge Inc. changes to the name of Beryl Women Inc. (19 December)

Beryl Women Inc. is awarded the Community Award by the 2005 ACT International Women's Day Awards panel

Staff and clients participate in a four day camp on the South Coast

Funding cuts of $80,000 results in the loss of a Support Worker position

Grant from the ACT Office for Women to attend the First International WOmen's Shelter Conference in Canada, and visits Hollow Water Reservation to learn about their Community Holistic Healing program for sexual assault victims (September)

10s

Office relocation to Weston Creek

Beryl's 40th birthday (8 March)

2010

2012

2013

2015

Beryl's 35th birthday (8 March)

Robyn Martin, Manager of Beryl Women Inc. is named ACT Person of the Year

Office relocation to the Refuge site due to funding cuts and to ensure greater service provision

Beryl has a third of its funding cut (2013–14)

See page **128** for a timeline on the women's movement in Australia during the years of Beryl's operation.

Introduction

Jane Alver and Farzana Choudhury

This is the story of Beryl Women Inc. — the crisis service, and Australia's response to domestic and family violence prevention. Beryl Women Inc. is a service for all women and their children experiencing domestic/family violence, with a strong focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from and culturally and linguistically diverse ('CALD') backgrounds.

Beryl Women Inc. practices from a feminist framework and aims to empower women and children to live a life free from violence and abuse. The Refuge's primary objective is to prove crisis accommodation to women and children escaping domestic/family violence. The service is funded to provide crisis and transitional accommodation and to provide outreach support to women and children escaping domestic/family violence. Case management is provided to families within a trauma-informed framework. By working closely with vulnerable families, Beryl is in a unique position which gives it opportunities to engage families and build relationships that promote and enhance a family's capacities and strengths.

This book shares the experiences of those involved over the last 40 years with the oldest women's refuge in the ACT, and the second oldest women's refuge in Australia. Beryl Women Inc., initially known as Canberra Women's Refuge, was established in 1975. Christina Ryan, who was a child when the Refuge was established by a group of women, including her aunt Julia Ryan, explains the Refuge's origins. (Ryan, 2014):

> *The women were generally in this space of 'we have to have somewhere safe for women to go. Okay, the English women have invented a refuge. Let's have one of them'. So Elsie got established in Sydney. Beryl [Henderson] wasn't too long after and it was this real thing about 'We'll just do it'. And so it started off happening in an informal way. And then they managed to get the Government to allocate a house and Beryl actually opened the house. She had the key and she opened the door.*
>
> *And then the women actually staffed it voluntarily … On Monday [the women] would be off to their consciousness raising group and on Tuesday they'd have their shift at the Refuge … It was part of our community, and so we'd be there and the kids would be there and the kids who were staying at the Refuge would be there, it was all just part of things. And I think in some ways that — I believed — increased the sense of safety for the women because they were suddenly in this big crowd of other women and their kids.*

Staff in 2015: Jenn, Angie, Robyn, Linda and Lina.

Beryl is …

Collaborative,
professional,
trauma-informed.

– Mirjana Wilson, Executive Director,
Domestic Violence Crisis Service

Dedicated,
inclusive,
giving.

– Jane Shelling,
former Committee member

Resilient,
committed,
non-judgmental.

– Kiki Korpinen,
former Committee member

Throughout its history Beryl Women Inc. has been part of solving the problem of increasing domestic/family violence, by supporting victims of domestic/family violence directly. Domestic violence and family violence generally describe situations in which a person tries to assert control over their partner or another family member through the use of intimidating behaviour or threats (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2011). This includes physical violence and sexual abuse, as well as verbal abuse, emotional abuse, financial exploitation, social isolation and intimidation through aggressive or violent behaviour to property (ABS, 2013a in ANROWS 2014). Family violence is generally understood as referring more broadly to violence between family members and also intimate partners. Family violence is often the preferred term for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the context of violence experienced by them, which may involve a range of marital and kinship arrangements (Australian Government, 2013).

The *National Personal Safety Survey* (ABS 2013b in ANROWS 2014) was carried out across Australia in 2012 and reported on the proportion of women who had experienced violence from a partner they currently live with or had previously lived with. The results indicated that:

- around one in six Australian women had experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or previous partner
- one in four Australian women had experienced emotional abuse by a current or previous partner, and
- 2% of ACT women reported that they had experienced violence during the last 12 months from a current or previous partner (married or de facto relationships only).

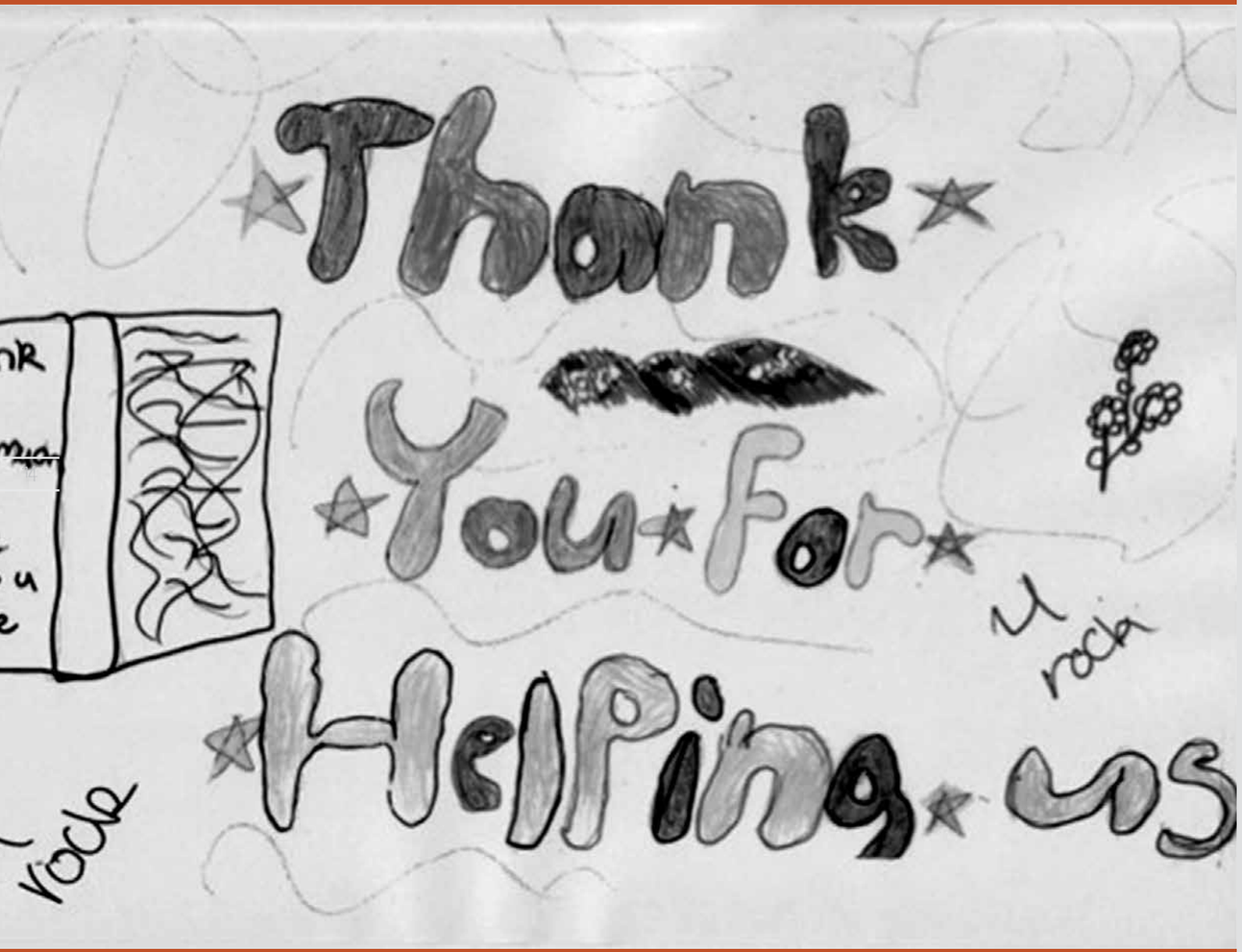
Of women who had experienced violence from a previous partner:

- 48% reported that their children had seen or heard the violence
- 58% had never contacted the police, and
- 24% had never sought advice or support.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2013, Ch 3) found that 43% of female clients in specialist homelessness services in 2011–12 reported that domestic and family violence was a factor in seeking assistance.

Presentation of a refrigerator, groceries and children's toys to the Refuge in Kingston by the women's 'Zonta' organisation. Left to right, Lady Stevenson of Red Hill (President of Zonta), baby Paul Math, 7 weeks, Pat Walker, a worker at the refuge, Beverley Thomas of Macquarie (Programme Chair) and Shirley Stenborg of Curtin (Chair of the Fellowship Committee), 11 December 1979.

Source: ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection, Photographer: Martin Jones.



A card from a former child at the Refuge.

Overview

The changing understanding of domestic/family violence, and the increasing willingness of society to intervene, legislate and speak up against domestic and family violence will be revealed in the following chapters and brought to life in the stories and interviews.

Chapter 1 (1974–80) explores the Refuge's roots: why and how it was formed, what was happening at the time, the challenges involved and the ways in which those establishing and running the Refuge engaged with the refuge movement.

Chapter 2 (1991–86) details the activism within government, with the rise of the 'femocrats', and the continuing advocacy outside of government undertaken by women's groups including refuges to create greater stability in funding, additional services for women such as the Incest Centre and, more broadly, to frame domestic violence as a criminal law matter.

Chapter 3 (1987–92) explores the changing environment emerging from early government policy initiatives relating to the Australian Government's National Agenda for Women and domestic violence related legal reforms. It highlights developments in the ACT and the ways in which the Refuge contributed to the sector, which resulted in an improved response by services to address domestic violence.

Chapter 4 (1993–98) documents the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families who used the Refuge's services during a period where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's issues were gaining political traction, and considers the impact of domestic and family violence with particular reference to the Refuge's child clients.

Chapter 5 (1999–2004) highlights the Refuge's continued support for women who were victims of domestic and family violence. During this period it also began to advocate for early intervention and prevention education.

Chapter 6 (2005–10) examines the change in structure from a Collective to a Governance Committee model diversity issues, international perspectives on domestic and family violence, as well as key challenges and achievements for the Refuge during that period.

Finally, **Chapter 7 (2011–15)** will touch on the impact of changing technologies, especially with the rise of social media and prevalence of smart phones, community attitudes around domestic violence, and issues relating to women with disabilities. It concludes by highlighting the key role that the Refuge plays in the community and the impact that it has had on those who have accessed, delivered and supported the service.

A unifying theme through the chapters is the framing ideology of shelter, domestic/family violence, mental illness, poverty, and homelessness. We have found that these issues have been intergenerational; children of previous children who accessed the Refuge's services return, knowing they are safe and supported there, and the problem of domestic and family violence continues. Importantly, clients, staff and board members have made it clear, that Beryl Women Inc.'s focus was on more than shelter alone; the philosophy of Beryl Women Inc. is based on providing a holistic experience, providing women with the tools for self-empowerment when they decide to leave, rather than just a roof over their heads.

About the Beryl History Project

The Beryl History Project was established to capture the Refuge's history, in celebration of its 40th birthday on 8 March 2015 (International Women's Day). The Beryl History Project Group comprised a dedicated group of 23 volunteers who assisted with the book's development. These women conducted research, contacted interview and survey participants, conducted and transcribed interviews, located and reviewed archived documents, sourced images, and wrote and proof-read content.

Primary research material sourced through a survey, interviews, focus groups, and client testimonies provided to the Refuge captured the experiences of a number of former and current clients, board members, staff and service providers who work with Beryl. Unfortunately, many people who have accessed and supported Beryl's services, particularly those from the Refuge's earlier years, could not be located for this project, and so this history is only part of the Beryl story. We have tried to capture their experiences and reflections through their words that were featured in early annual reports and other achieved documents.

This book has also drawn on government policy documents, parliamentary texts, legislation, consultation submissions, and publicly availably statistics on domestic and family violence, among other sources. This was to ensure that the history of Beryl is recorded against the social and political context in which it has operated.

Artwork created by clients and children at Beryl.

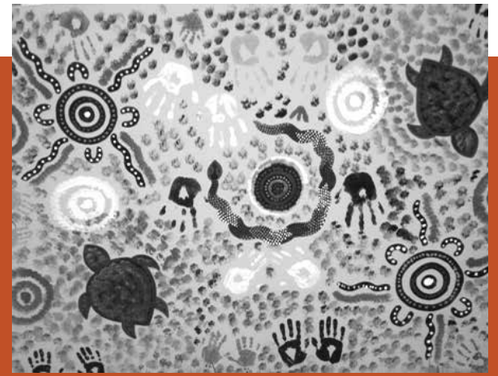
Terminology

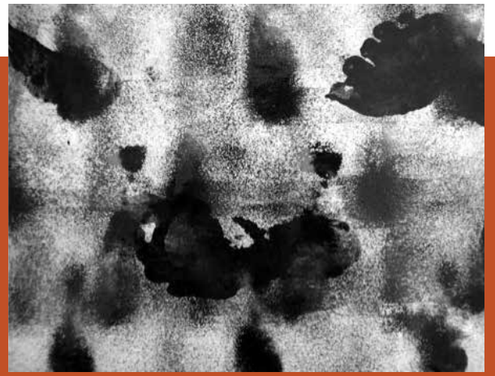
The Refuge has been known by different names over the years. It was established as the Canberra Women's Refuge in 1975, then became Canberra Women's Refuge Inc. following its incorporation in 1976. The Refuge was later renamed to Beryl Women's Refuge Inc. in 1989 to honour Beryl Henderson, and has been known as Beryl Women Inc. since December 2005. To ensure accuracy, each chapter has identified the Refuge by the name that it was known by during the time period covered by that chapter, 'the Refuge' or 'Beryl'.

When referencing interview and survey participants, we have included their position titles as accurately as possible. Reference is made to 'Staff member' and 'Board member', where the participant's specific position (e.g. Support Worker, Collective member, Committee member etc.) is unknown. Women and their children who have accessed Beryl's services were called 'residents', and have been referred to as 'clients' since the late 1990s.

Most current clients were interviewed in a single focus group, and are anonymous for privacy and safety reasons. Other resident/client contributions were taken from annual reports and general feedback provided to the Refuge. These women and children have been referred to as 'resident' or 'client' or by an initial.

We note that there is no standard national or international definition of domestic and family violence (ABS, 2013a in ANROWS 2014). Beryl Women Inc. understands domestic and family violence to mean patterns of coercive and abusive behaviour, including emotional abuse, violence, threats, force or intimidation to control or manipulate a family member, partner or former partner. To broadly capture all forms of violence covered by 'domestic violence' and 'family violence', those terms are used interchangeably throughout this book.





Artwork created by clients and children at Beryl.

beryl is...

In good times: challenging, inspiring, rewarding. In bad: frustrating, confronting, draining.

– Jan Downie, former Staff and Collective member

Rewarding, challenging and worth it.

– Former Board member

Amazing, calming, fun.

– Jacqui, former client

The future

This history is a recognition of survival, not only of the women but of the Refuge, which will hopefully continue to support women and children. As Christina Ryan reflects (Ryan, 2014):

> *Beryl [Henderson] would have been absolutely thrilled at the enormous number of women that the Refuge has supported over the last 40 years. And the work that's been done in the space with those women. But then at the same time you've got to be appalled that this is actually still happening and that we still have a need for women's refuges, and that women are still not safe in their own homes, and that this is still going on — here in the 21st century.*

We hope that publishing Beryl's story will provide policy makers with a richer understanding, through the voices of women, of the critical importance of appropriate housing in improving the safety and wellbeing of women and children who experience homelessness as a result of domestic and family violence in the ACT. Reflecting on the history of the organisation, and the situation in Australia regarding domestic and family violence, emphasises that there is more work to be done. As Christina Ryan (2014) has noted:

> *It took a lot of lobbying, a lot of work, a lot of continuous pressure for anything to happen legislatively, or for the police to start to be engaged. And they're still not all there. For the psychological abuse side of it to be remotely recognised, all of that's far more recent … The fact that there's still the need for refuges, and the fact that there's still a homicide every week in this country is a pretty good indication that we're still not quite there yet; we're still sitting in that space which is questioning just what is and isn't acceptable … We're still in the zone of expecting the victim to remove themselves or to be dealt with. Even that assumption that she should be able to stay in her own home and he gets taken out of the picture is still a difficult challenge.*

In recording and sharing the Beryl journey, we celebrate its achievements, give a voice to those who have accessed the Refuge, and recognise the work of those who have supported it. We also stress the need for continued efforts — by Beryl Women Inc., other community organisations, and government — to uphold and promote the rights of women and children to live in relationships and communities free of violence and the threat of violence.

Children play in the garden of the Refuge in Kingston 1977
Source: ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1: 1974–80

Growing and learning

Here is a whole new generation of women who are awake to what's what – they're not going to be at the mercy of men's whims or government's policies — they're not going to slave within four walls and have a baby a year, wanted or not. They are competent, many of them are well educated, they are healthy, articulate, they get things done — they can make governments hand over money for their projects.

Maria Swyrydan

– Beryl Henderson at the opening of Canberra Women's Refuge, International Women's Day, 1975

At its inception in 1974, Beryl Women Inc. was known as the Canberra Women's Refuge. It was not until 1989 that the Refuge was officially renamed Beryl Women's Refuge, in honour of Beryl Henderson, the well-known first-wave[1] Canberran feminist who delivered the above words in 1975 (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1979, p. 1). Beryl Henderson's speech captures the passion and drive with which the Refuge was established. At a time when discussing domestic violence was taboo and women's services were practically non-existent, determination to grow and learn was essential to the Refuge's success. Accordingly, resolve and openness characterised these early years. But it was not only the Refuge as an organisation growing and learning, but importantly, the women who founded it, ran it, and used it.

1 First wave feminism refers to a period of feminism in the late 1800s and early 1900s during which a primary goal was gaining the right of women to vote (Ramptom, 2008).

Image from the 1977–78 Annual Report

Women's liberation and the refuge movement

The 1970s were a dynamic time in the Australian women's liberation movement. Building on the rise of 'second wave feminism'[2] in the late 1960s, throughout the 1970s Australian feminists were becoming increasingly practical in their efforts to effect change in society (Seibert & Roslaniec, 1998). Many women who were becoming awakened to the oppressive nature of patriarchal power structures became zealous about driving a revolution.[3] Elizabeth 'Biff' Ward, one of the Refuge founders and Co-Coordinator from 1978–82, recalls a sense of enlightenment: "It was literally mind-blowing, we came from a world where we had done everything in the domestic sense … after a couple of [women's liberation] meetings we were seeing the world differently" (2014).

Deep conservatism prevailed in Australian society at this time, and gender-based violence was rarely talked about within communities, let alone recognised by governments (Beadman, 2014). Concepts such as 'domestic violence' did not exist — instead, 'battered women' was typical of the language used (Ryan, 2014). As such, feminist consciousness-raising groups were particularly important in increasing awareness about how widespread the problem of gender-based violence was.

2 Second wave feminism refers to the rise of feminism in the sixties that was underpinned by the idea that women could empower each other, and driven by key issues such as pay, career, and educational equality, family planning and domestic violence (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2008).

3 Patriarchal power structures refer to the way unequal way that power is distributed in society to favour men (London Feminist Network, 2015).

Beryl Henderson 1897–1990
Photo published on page 8 of the Canberra Times, 3 May 1973.

These groups provided women with an opportunity to share their experiences with other women. One of the Refuge founders Pamela Oldmeadow was energised to join the refuge cause after attending the 1974 Women and Violence forum in Sydney. Pamela recalls women talking about how they made up their necks and faces after being beaten by their partners, pretending it hadn't happened. Pamela says it was revelatory for many to realise domestic violence was a problem across all social strata. "It wasn't just working class blokes getting drunk and bashing up working class wives … here were these north shore women talking about it" (Oldmeadow, 2014).

Appalled by the scope of these issues, women's liberation groups began to build services addressing women's needs across Australia. Christina Ryan, feminist and niece of Julia Ryan, one of the Refuge founders, describes the women's movement at this time as "… bolshie, feral, about creating the spaces and services literally from the ground up" (2014). The first rape crisis centres were founded in Melbourne and Sydney, and the first women's health centre opened in Leichhardt in Sydney (Brentnall, 2012). Elsie, the first women's domestic violence shelter in Australia, was started in Sydney in 1974 by a group of feminists in a squat. A women's shelter also opened in Adelaide. A refuge movement had begun to build momentum in the mid-1970s that would see 50 refuges open around Australia by 1977 (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1977, p. 8).

Canberra had a very active women's liberation group throughout this period, with Canberra Women's Liberation's inception in 1970 making it one of the first in Australia (Rosenman, 2004, 20). The group was in touch with developments in the women's liberation movement across Australia. Julia Ryan, a member of the first Canberra Women's Liberation (CWL) group when it formed in 1970, says "We were very aware of what was happening in Sydney around the formation of Elsie, and that was our inspiration [for a Refuge]" (2014).

In 1974, CWL members and the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) met to discuss the possibility of forming a similar service to Elsie in Canberra (Rosenman, 2004, p. 20). Around 12 women formed the Canberra Women's Refuge Committee ('the Refuge Committee'), with the purpose of establishing a women's refuge in Canberra for women who had experienced domestic violence.

Getting started

The Refuge Committee undertook consultation with 10 social welfare groups, including ACT Housing and St Vincent de Paul, to determine the extent of need that existed in the ACT. Each of these organisations confirmed a demand for a women's shelter, especially for women escaping violence. Generalist refuges run by the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul only offered beds for a maximum of three nights and did not accept children (Macklin, Oldmeadow and Ryan, 2014). It was reported that women were staying in 'intolerable situations for a lack of somewhere to go', and those who did leave went to 'police, hospitals, hotels, relatives or even the streets' (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, p. 1).

Several community groups had expressed interest in joining forces with the Refuge Committee to run a women's refuge. Julia and Pamela (2014) recall the one 'disastrous' meeting hosted by the Commonwealth Department of the Capital Territory, which was responsible for public housing in the ACT, with Parents Without Partners, St Vincent de Paul and The Smith Family. Pamela says "They said things like, 'without men, who is going to mow your lawns?' That was a genuinely serious question" (2014). Julia remembers a Parents Without Partners member saying "It's just a collective run by women, they'll be like a hen party, they'll all be nagging at each other" (2014).

Attitudes such as these galvanised the women in the Refuge Committee to seek a house that they could run by themselves.

Image from the 1977–78 Annual Report.

While inspired by Elsie, the Refuge Committee did not consider following in its footsteps and squatting. Julia says "Being Canberra people … we thought we would ask the Government for a house … especially as it was the Whitlam Government and we thought we could talk them into it, which we did" (2014). Submissions were prepared requesting government financial assistance for the running costs of a women's refuge. The Collective was subsequently granted the use of a three-bedroom house in Watson and $4,000 to contribute to running costs.

The Refuge was officially opened on International Women's Day in 1975. Pat Bryant, wife of the Minister for the Capital Territory, gave the keys to the shelter to Beryl Henderson, who opened it on behalf of the women's movement. The Refuge Committee chose Beryl Henderson because of the link she provided with the first wave of feminism. Beryl was a senior member of both CWL and WEL, and in her youth attended suffragette meetings in England. Aged 78 in 1975, Beryl was still an active campaigner in Canberra for contraception and abortion rights. She was a mentor for Christina Ryan who noted (2014):

… Beryl [Henderson] was about women being as good as they could be, so achieving their real potential. You know, which is sort of how we word it now which is a bit naff, but back then it was much more … having your vision, getting out there and doing it; being excited by it and nobody actually telling you you couldn't. It was that thing you know — you can't tell women that they can't do something. It's their business if they want to do it … That was who she was and how she was, and you know, our bodies are our own … We can't have them being interfered with, influenced by others. And that extends to your personal space, and it extends to the decisions you make in your life. Those were the things she was really full on about. And in some ways that's what [the Refuge] is doing.

The Refuge immediately began operation, offering sleeping accommodation for 16 and three cots. After the Refuge was set up by the Refuge Committee, the Canberra Women's Refuge Collective ('the Collective') formed to run it. With a focus on consensus decision-making, the Collective allowed everyone involved in the running of Beryl 'a chance … to make an impact' (1976, p. 6). While the Refuge Collective changed over time as the Refuge developed, the first Collective consisted of volunteers from CWL and WEL, who met regularly to administer the Refuge (Ryan, 2015). Residents were also encouraged to join the Collective as part of the Extended Collective, which included local support people (Ward, 2015). The Collective was a 'vital' aspect of the Refuge's operation, and meant people who did the work and who were affected by decisions made the decisions (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, p. 6). The Collective drew up and operated a roster of volunteer women to staff the Refuge. Meetings, training and coordination took place at The Women's House in O'Connor, also opened in 1975 for use as the headquarters of the Women's Movement in Canberra (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, p. 3).

Shelter ethos

The Refuge aimed to provide women with free and safe shelter, basic food, information, support, counselling and home visits (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, pp. 6–7). These services were to be provided according to a grassroots feminist ideology that emphasised working with women rather than above them.

Image from the 1977–78 Annual Report.

The first annual report for 1974–76 lists the ideas that the Refuge was founded on:

1. **Need** – women's need for such a Refuge was significant.
2. **Self-help** – the Refuge was to promote the autonomy of each woman.
3. **Normality** – the Refuge was to feel more like home than an institution
4. **Non-professional** – it would be a lead-in or back-up service to the professional services that already existed in Canberra.
5. **A coordinator** – there would be a full-time employee with counselling skills.
6. **By women for women** – this was to promote trust 'and avoid role-playing caused by the presence of men'.
7. **Incorporation** – the Refuge needed to be incorporated as a charitable association (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, pp. 1–2).

At this point in the Refuge's history, there was little consciousness around the intersecting levels of oppression faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in particular, and also by women from diverse cultural backgrounds. Julia recalls they operated the Refuge on an 'inclusive' basis, but 'special awareness' was something that emerged over time (Ryan, 2015). Biff notes there were likely some women who did not come to the Refuge because targeted groups were not given explicit welcome (Ward, 2015). However, the Refuge operated on the principle of being open to and accepting of women from all cultural backgrounds, social classes and sexual orientations.

The 'not professional' nature of the Refuge did not mean that the volunteers were not equipped to deal with the issues they faced. Pamela asked her father, who was then the Director of Canberra Lifeline, to find someone who could run a volunteer training course. He suggested Lizi Beadman, who went on to be employed as the first Coordinator of the Refuge, and who ran the initial training course with Sybille Kovacs. Training focused on listening skills, and Pamela says "It was great training, we never forgot it" (2014).

The Collective was adamant they would avoid providing a traditional counselling service to the women who

Image from the 1977–78 Annual Report.

presented at the Refuge. Lizi recalls women who came through the Refuge telling her they had felt judged by government social welfare services (Beadman, 2014). In contrast, what they found at the Refuge was a 'sympathetic atmosphere', in which the traditional divide between patient and doctor was avoided (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, p. 7). Jess Aan, who was employed as a childcare worker at the Refuge in the late 1970s, recalls (2014):

> *There was very little that separated us from the women who were residents. We didn't have that sense of professional boundaries that people now totally work within. We saw ourselves as sisters-in-arms in a way, part of our role was to connect in a powerful, personal and political way.*

The Collective had a policy that volunteers should accept what clients said as what they meant to say, as valid, and to not make them feel educationally inferior (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, p. 7). Elizabeth 'Biff' Ward says (Ward, 2014):

> *We had a credo about supporting the woman no matter what she wants to do, even if she goes back and back – we couldn't put our frustration with that on her. I always found that amazing, that we did it. That imperative of respect and showing it and helping her with what she decided to do was a central, basic part of the function.*

A reflection from a resident called Glenda in the Refuge's 1977 Annual Report indicates that this approach resonated:

> *I'm not saying the women at the Refuge are perfect – far from it, but they're trying – some against great odds – to get their lives together. This includes residents and workers – we're doing it together, that's the important thing.* (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1979, p. 5).

Refuge Worker: New Job in the Spring

Razor blade along curve of face;
Broken ribs and wheezy breath
Spell death, denied by hazel eyes
Smiling through the pain and shock
of her battered body

When friends gulp wine,
glory in fights observed,
make splatting sound of fist on jaw:
just like the movies, I speak
of battered women – and I am dismissed.

All the people of my summer:
all floating in a blur of tears
streaming down the car window.
Red lights and green smudge my eyes.
Tears falling to parched grey grass.

A long, dry summer, living inside
an undelivered drop of water.
The leaves of my heart curl brown,
fearful of autumn,
when rain brings only wet rot.

– Biff Ward, one of the Refuge founders and Co-Coordinator, 1979

Early challenges and solutions

Under-resourcing was a constant challenge in the early years. It wasn't long before the original house in Adams Place, Watson proved too small to cope with demand. In July 1975 the Department of the Capital Territory became concerned by complaints from neighbours about noise, overcrowding and messiness (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, p. 3). This prompted Minister for the ACT Tony Staley and Senator Susan Ryan to meet with the Collective. Lizi recalls they were horrified at the cramped conditions, and the great need for the Refuge that underlay this (Beadman, 2014).

As a result, the Refuge was promised more suitable accommodation. The Collective was approached by a Canberra businessperson who offered the use of one of his investment properties rent-free for two years to be used for women and children in need of medium-term low-cost accommodation (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, p. 10). In May 1976 the Refuge was offered a two-storey duplex in Kingston, double the size of the house in Watson.

Part of the reason for such crowding was that while the Refuge was originally established to deal with women and their children escaping violent homes, the wide-ranging need for a women's shelter meant residents were far more diverse than this. Pamela says while domestic violence was the focus, "That was an important part of getting the house, that we had to be open to all kinds of homelessness" (2014). There were single women with serious mental health issues turning up at the Refuge, as well as many homeless adolescent girls who had been in girls' homes. The 1976 annual report noted the complexities of dealing with these residents: "We only wish we had the time, energy and people to adequately meet their needs; we cannot but try" (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, p. 7).

Statistics in the Second Annual Report in 1977 demonstrate the extent to which the shelter dealt with different issues. In that year, 35% of women presenting at the shelter were there due to violence, and an equal 35% of women came to the shelter due to homelessness (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1977, p. 11). The diversity of issues women at the Refuge experienced, sometimes added a difficult dynamic between the women who were staying there.

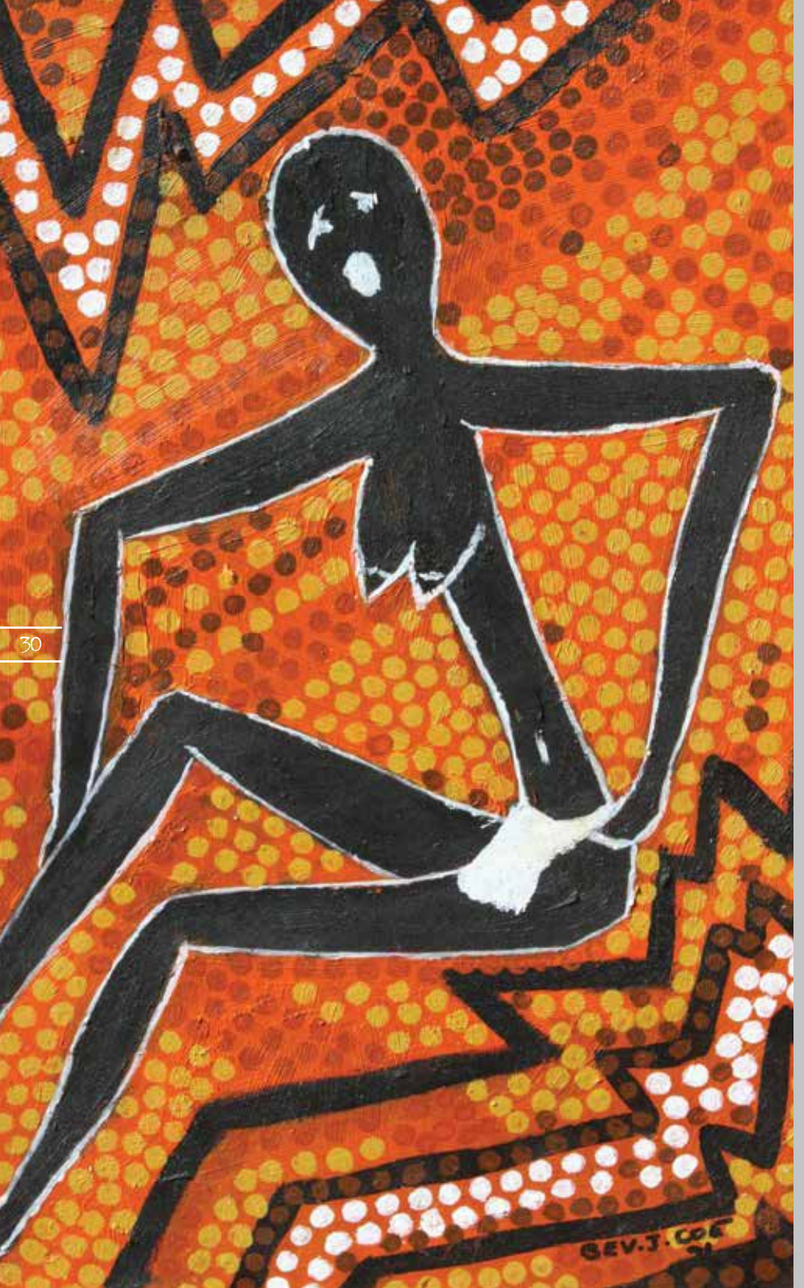
Lizi remembers while there were inevitably issues that arose between the women, residents often also banded together and helped one another (2014). In dealing with residents, Pamela says they had a policy of never creating rules to address single incidents (2014). This was to avoid creating the feeling of an institution, even in cases where women were disturbing other residents with their behaviour. Instead, an approach of persisting in talking things through with individuals involved on a case-by-case basis was used.

In the early days of the Refuge, children numbered around the same as the adult residents. Providing adequate support for distressed children was a particularly confronting challenge. It was decided early on that childcare workers were needed. Jess Aan, a 20-year-old who had just finished studying in the late 1970s, was employed by the Refuge as one of these childcare workers. Jess recalls that the suffering of the children who came to the Refuge was an exceptionally difficult issue for workers and residents alike to deal with, and one that was perhaps never dealt with fully (2014).

As the first paid staff member and Coordinator, the complexities of running the Refuge presented particular issues for Lizi. By October of the first year, it was obvious that another woman would need to be employed to take care of administration. As a result, Susie Outram came on board as co-coordinator. When Lizi left the Refuge in 1976 it became clear that the 60–80 hour weeks she had been working were taking their toll (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, p. 8). Later it was decided that women would only be allowed to work at the Refuge for two years to prevent burnout.

Nappies on the clothes line in the backyard of the Refuge in Kingston, 14 November 1982. Source: ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection, Photographer: Jane Reid.

> (The Refuge) made me realise that I am a person now, and shouldn't have to be bashed around and helped me get on my feet. It made me believe in myself for once and not what other people tell you.
>
> – Former resident, 1977



> You know, you think you're the only woman with that kind of problem ... I've never been game to admit I'd been bashed up or anything. That's the thing, you don't tell other people. It was a shock (to hear other women had been bashed too).
>
> – Former resident, 1977

Painting 'Dotted Lady' by Bev. J. Coe.

Refuge growth and personal growth

As the Refuge offered up constant challenges in terms of its day-to-day operation, the women involved grew in terms of their capacity to deal with sometimes unsolvable problems, to support other women, and as feminists.

Federal Member of Parliament, the Honourable Jenny Macklin, who volunteered with the Refuge between 1976 and 1980, says being part of the Refuge Collective fed into her personal growth as a feminist: "I got so much out of being a member of the Collective. I was able to really learn and grow and understand what women's liberation was really about and I think that's a critical part of the story" (Macklin, 2014).

Biff recalls the extent to which the members of the Collective adhered to the adage 'the personal is political': "We were living it, everything in our lives we questioned" (2014). Living this meant the women sought to understand the problems they were encountering on a deeply personal level. For example, as the first children presented at the Refuge having experienced sexual abuse, a group of the women volunteering at the Refuge in 1979 undertook an intensive exploration of this subject. In weekly meetings, a group of women deepened their self-awareness in relation to this subject. This resulted in "the beginning of a completely new self-awareness and acceptance" for some of the women involved (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1979, p. 11).

To Jess, this kind of "raw and honest" self-exploration made her time in the Women's Liberation Movement and working at the Refuge life-changing (2014). While Biff reflects that such questioning was "exhausting", women supported each other through this process (2014). Christina Ryan notes, "The women did support each other because that's all there was, the broader community infrastructure didn't exist" (2014). For Lizi, the support she found in other women during her time working at the Refuge has stayed with her throughout her life: "It was exhausting and upsetting, but I had never felt the support of women so much in my life as then. And it is my natural inclination still. That's where I go in my heart" (2014).

The way in which the women who worked at the Refuge supported each other was echoed by the residents. An annual report notes that the residents provided "their own community by supporting each other, talking and sharing experiences and information. Each woman is autonomous in deciding their own course of action and many gain the strength to do this after discussion with women in similar circumstances" (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1976, p. 5). This kind of interaction meant many women found their time as residents with the Refuge similarly life-changing. Over the first six years of the Refuge's operation, several residents returned to volunteer as Collective members (Aan and Ward, 2014).

> I have learnt that basic assistance can go a long way. Many women and children who are escaping DV will continue to live with DV unless there is access to immediate and safe accommodation.
>
> – Former Board member

Cartoon about incest, from the 1984–85 Annual Report.

Engaging with the wider political context

At the frontline of unchartered issues, the Collective grew to play an important advocacy role. Raising issues around funding for Refuges, domestic violence, women's rights, the law and housing with government agencies such as Legal Aid, the Commonwealth Employment Service, ACT Emergency Housing Committee and other agencies became an integral part of the Collective's work (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1977, p. 10).

Due to connections in the Women's Unit of the Prime Minister's Department, women from the Refuge were able to leverage meetings with the then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and Treasurer Phillip Lynch to push for funding for women's refuges (Macklin, Ryan and Oldmeadow, 2014). This is representative of the persistence and influence of the women in the refuge movement. Jenny says she is somewhat incredulous when she looks back on how she, as a young woman, was able to meet with the Prime Minister: "Now knowing what I know about meetings with PMs and ministers … (I was) some pipsqueak from the Canberra Women's Refuge (and) could get a meeting with the PM, I still find that quite extraordinary" (2014).

Women who worked at the Refuge in this period gained groundbreaking insights into different forms of violence. They drew attention to these issues at a time when concepts such as child sexual abuse, incest and violence against women were not spoken of. For example, partly as a result of meeting a family that came through the Refuge, Biff authored a pioneering book on incest called *Father-Daughter Rape*.

Many women involved in the Refuge continued to engage in and advocate for the issues that underlay the Refuge's existence after their direct involvement finished. Pamela Oldmeadow, while working during the Fraser Government in the then Department of Environment, Housing and Community Development as the Secretary of the Women's Issues Policy Committee, left the Collective in 1977 to focus on national research into 'Women in Last Resort Housing'. The research gathered Australia-wide statistics from women's shelters and examined policies of departments of public housing. The report went on to inform the funding that departments contributed towards women's housing.

Jenny Macklin went on to be on the board of the Centre Against Sexual Assault in Melbourne, and then eventually became the first woman to be the Deputy Leader of a major Australian political party. Jenny says her experiences with the shelter have stayed with her throughout her political career, with her "ground-up" knowledge of working in women's organisations reinforcing the importance of a feminist approach that "supports women to be able to make their own decisions about their lives" (2014).

At the end of the first six years of the Refuge's operation, many women who had been involved in founding the Refuge had gone onto other ventures, taking their experiences and knowledge into new spheres. However, as the Canberra Women's Refuge moved into the 1980s, the foundations of the Refuge as an increasingly in-demand service for women in crisis throughout the ACT had been well and truly established.

Cartoon about incest, from the 1984–85 Annual Report.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2: 1981–86

The coming together of the women's movement and the rise of the femocrats

Elise Perry and Rebekah Conway

With sisters I have learnt
with sisters I have cried
with sisters I have laughed and loved
and with sisters I will fight and shout.

– Canberra Women's Refuge 1980 Annual Report.

The 1985 *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women* stated that "success will depend in large measure upon whether or not women can unite to help each other to change their … secondary status and to obtain the time, energy, and experience required to participate in political life" (United Nations, 1985, p. 14). This chapter demonstrates that this was already occurring in Australia, largely due to the grassroots passion of those in the women's movement working for services including women's refuges, and the rising role of 'femocrats' within government institutions.

Edna Ryan and Beryl Henderson on the steps of Glebe Town Hall, 15 December 1984.

The political activities of the refuge movement in the 1970s jolted both Australian and State Governments into action in the 1980s, with Refuge workers finding sympathetic responses from feminists and others in government. This activism both within and outside government initiated the framing of domestic violence as a criminal law matter, laying the foundation for the legal and policy changes that occurred from the late 1980s onwards, including the introduction of civil penalty orders that remain the cornerstone of domestic violence policy today.

This struggle was felt on a day-to-day basis by those feminists fighting to bring the issue of domestic violence to the attention of lawmakers and the police, and to secure vital funding for emergency and long-term services for victims of this violence. The work of staff and volunteers at the Refuge throughout this time was indicative of the determination and strength of the broader women's movement. Despite ongoing budget restrictions and difficult working conditions, these women continued to provide immediate and ongoing support and services to victims of domestic violence and their children. These women also sought to carve a space for meaningful gender analysis and find solutions to new issues as they arose, such as incidences of child abuse.

United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, development and peace

During the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1976–85) Australia witnessed the introduction of a range of policy initiatives for women's services.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Australian Government led by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (1972–75) generated a receptive political environment for feminist initiatives. The creation of a Women's Advisor role, initially held by Elizabeth Reid, demonstrated the Government's intention to recognise and address the needs of women in all areas of policy. This was supported by the creation of the Women's Affairs Section (later to be known as the Office of the Status of Women) in 1974 in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Australian Government's main coordinating arm.

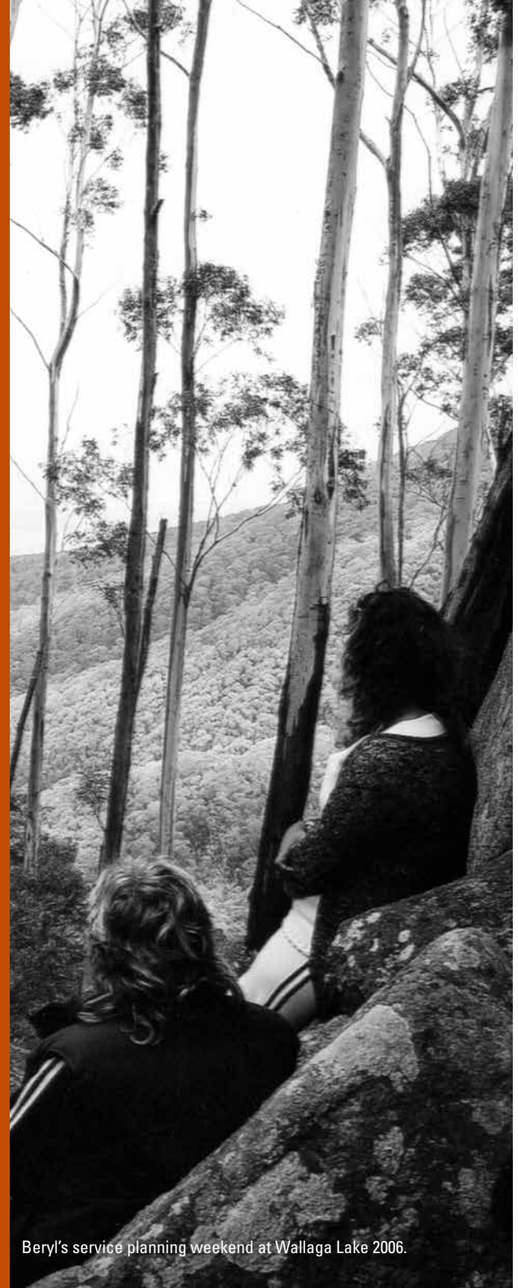
In 1981, under the Liberal-Country Coalition Fraser Government, accountability for refuge funding (which had been an Australian Government responsibility) was handed to the states as part of broader efforts to reduce overall expenditure of the Australian Government. Under this arrangement, refuges in some states such as New South Wales enjoyed increased funding, while other states such as Western Australia and Queensland were forced to restrict services and even temporarily shut down (Melville 1998). During this period the Women's Affairs Section was also de-centralised to the Department of Home Affairs and Environment, and the Australian Government retreated from national women's programs in areas such as childcare.

The Office of the Status of Women (OSW) was reconstituted into the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in 1983 under the Hawke Government, with Anne Summers appointed as the new head. Through the OSW, the Hawke Government developed the National Agenda for Women, a five year plan through which a range of national women's policies were established including the *National Women's Health Program*; the *National Domestic Violence Strategy*; the *Australian Women's Employment Strategy*; and the *National Childcare Strategy*. The development in 1984 of 'the gender budget', or Women's Budget Statements, became an international example of good practice, as it recognised that budgetary measures in areas such as tariff, tax or industry routinely had gendered effects due to the differing experiences of men and women in the social and economic division of labour (Sawer and Groves, 1994).

Cover image from the 1981–82 Annual Report.

> To me, domestic violence is all about breaking the cycle. Cause it's been generational for us, for me, it's that my kids won't grow up and repeat – not my mistakes, but get into situations similar to the ones that I've been in. And, to do that, you need a service like Beryl — that is across the board well-rounded.
>
> – Client, 2014

> They are saying they are empowering women to leave, and once you leave, you are lucky if you come to a place like this — most places aren't like it. But what you are really doing, is you are empowering the men to stay. Because my ex was at home; he didn't lose his house, he didn't lose his car, he didn't lose his money, he didn't lose anything. He didn't lose his friends, he didn't lose his family, he lost nothing. Whereas here I am, running for my life going state to state hiding with my kids, who's been empowered? Certainly not me. And that's something the Government needs to look at, there needs to be such severe deterrents that instead of a women having to hide and change her name, he should get publicly named and shamed so he has to go hide and change his name. Rather than the victim being the one who has to.
>
> – Former client



Beryl's service planning weekend at Wallaga Lake 2006.

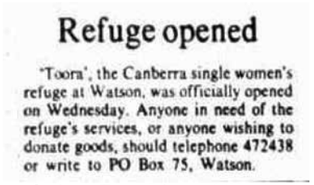
In January 1985, the Hawke Government introduced funding for refuges across Australia through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) (Commonwealth of Australia, 1985). This umbrella program for women's emergency services, youth services and general accommodation services was jointly funded by the Australian and State Governments, but returned the responsibility for the administration of refuge matters back to the Australian Government. Refuges during this period had to be resilient to the fluctuating political environment despite gaining recognition from the federal government of the importance of their work.

Separate refuges for different situations: New refuges in Canberra

The existence of a stable source of funding was an ongoing concern for the Canberra Women's Refuge throughout the early 1980s. Limited funding restricted staffing numbers and physical space, making it impossible for the Canberra Women's Refuge to retain its 'open door policy' of catering to all women in crisis. As previous Collective member Pamela Oldmeadow stated, "we couldn't deal with half the women we were seeing … We couldn't deal with drug addicts and alcoholics and what to do with long term homeless single women who didn't have kids" (2014). Problems were also raised with catering to the needs of different groups of women, with single women and women with children living in the same house generating extremely stressful situations and causing friction in the close confines (Canberra Women's Refuge 1983–84, p. 13).

This led to the decision in September 1984 to narrow the scope of service of Canberra Women's Refuge to only women with children who were escaping domestic violence (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1984–85, p. 2). The particular needs of single women was the focus of a Single Women's Shelter Collective, established by three women (Gillian Shaw, Di Lucas and Pat Walker) who had been involved in varying capacity with the Canberra Women's Refuge. The Collective was initially heavily reliant upon the Canberra Women's Refuge for experience and resources including, for example, adapting the Canberra Women's Refuge constitution by "crossing out references to children and adding the qualification *single* women where appropriate" (Rosenman, 2004, p. 29). However, recognising the need for a separate shelter targeted solely at single women, the Collective took on a more independent identity from the Canberra Women's Refuge, becoming incorporated on 6 April 1982. Following a successful funding application, the doors of the Toora Single Women's Refuge opened in August 1983.

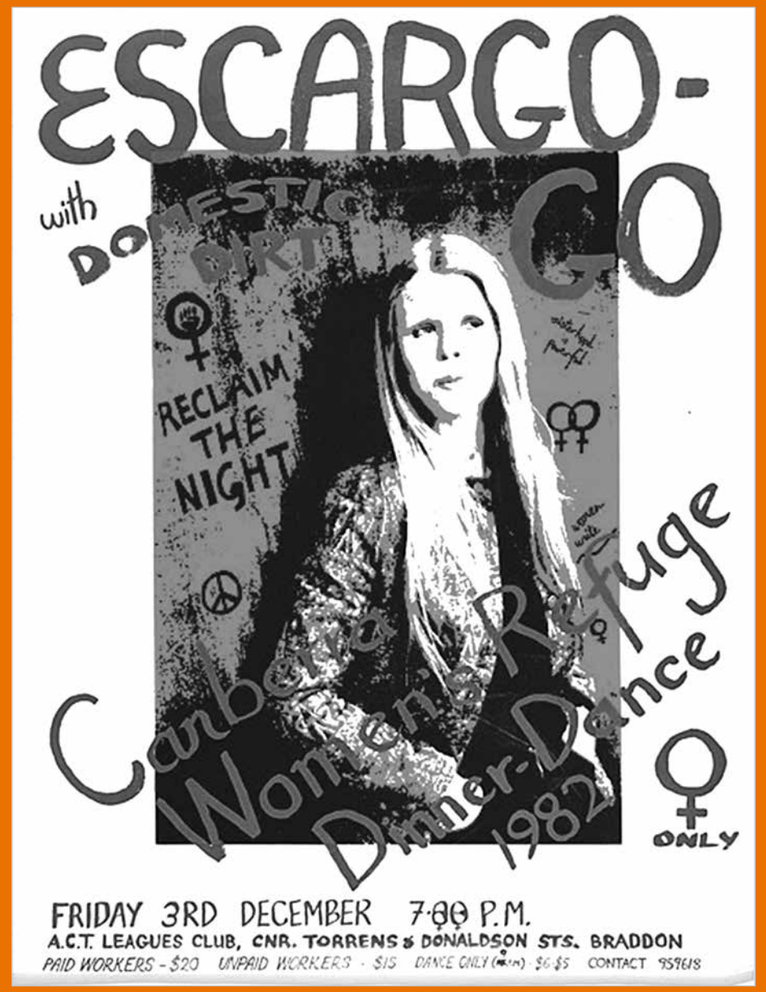
This stricter focus of the Canberra Women's Refuge was also possible due to the existence of other new refuges in the region that allowed for referrals between the refuges, including the Canberra Youth Refuge (established in 1978) and the Louisa Women's Refuge in Queanbeyan (established in 1979). The Doris Women's Refuge would later be established in 1987. As former Collective member Julia Ryan described it, there were now "separate refuges for different situations" (2014).



Refuge opened

"Toora", the Canberra single women's refuge at Watson, was officially opened on Wednesday. Anyone in need of the refuge's services, or anyone wishing to donate goods, should telephone 472438 or write to PO Box 75, Watson.

Canberra Times, 5 August 1983.



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MEGALO INTERNATIONAL SCREENPRINTING COLLECTIVE

Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, Australia commenced 1980

(organization)

Escargo-go with Domestic Dirt ...

Canberra Women's Refuge Dinner Dance 1982

1982

screenprint

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Gift of the Canberra Contemporary Art Space 1993

The power of femocrats

> *In no country … have avowed feminists assumed such a wide range of high-ranking policymaking positions* (Steinburg, 1992, p. 577).

A key bridge between feminists in government and feminists working at a grassroots level, such as Collective members of the Canberra Women's Refuge, were 'femocrats' — feminists who had entered both the Australian and state levels of government from the 1970s onwards in an effort to influence public policy.

The engagement of femocrats was not, however, without ambivalence. Anne Summers understood the system's distrust of femocrats and their distrust of the system:

> *The relationships between women's units and other governmental agencies will never be a relaxed one … because the interests of women's units are by definition wide-ranging and thus threatening to the entrenched territorial views of other departments* (Summers 1986, p. 67).

Similarly, there were tensions between femocrats and the feminist community. As explained by Rosenberg, "the position of a femocrat is often one of tension and contradiction: femocrats must navigate loyalties to feminist movement goals and the constraints of working within rigid government institutions" (2009, p. 324). Critics of femocrats argued that their role diluted feminists' commitment to the goals of women's liberation, profiting from women's disadvantage (Thorne, 2005, p. 85). For those in the refuge movement, there were dilemmas about government funding, and whether requirements to be met in order to receive this funding could be accommodated within the collectivist principles on which the services were based. Femocrats put pressure on the refuge movement to become a national organisation to enable it to deal more effectively with the Australian government and its institutions.

This formal national organisational approach was rejected, with feminists preferring to operate at a "low key, grassroots level" (McFerren, 1990, p. 194).

Despite these difficulties, Australia is recognised as having significant success in lobbying government successfully for feminist-inspired policies. The pragmatic nature of femocrats brought about, for example, the passage of Commonwealth legislation including the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth), the *Public Service Reform Act 1984* (Cth), the *Equal Opportunity Act 1987* (Cth), and the *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986* (Cth). Funding programs initiated by femocrats during the early 1980s also enabled new groups of women, including women with disabilities, Muslim sex workers, immigrant women and lesbians, to achieve their own national peak organisations (Sawerer, 2007).

A deep-seated national problem: Government taskforces and inquiries

The existence of women's policy offices and women's advisory councils, as well as feminist activism outside government, triggered the establishment of state government taskforces into domestic violence across all states and territories in Australia during the 1980s.

New South Wales was the first state government to appoint a taskforce to conduct an inquiry into domestic violence, becoming a template for the work of the other Australian states and territories (NSW Taskforce on Domestic Violence, 1981). The New South Wales Taskforce noted that domestic violence was a deep-seated national problem (NSW Taskforce on Domestic Violence, 1981, p. 4).

Shortly after in South Australia, seminars on domestic violence were held in 1978 and 1979. A 'phone-in' service, through which people could contact the newly-created South Australian Domestic Violence Committee anonymously to discuss their experiences of domestic violence, was hosted in 1980. The South Australian Domestic Violence Committee released a related report in November 1981 (South Australian Women's Adviser's Office, 1981). The Northern Territory undertook an inquiry into domestic violence at the request of the Committee on Domestic Violence and the Northern Territory Department of Community Development in 1982 (D'Abbs, 1983). In 1983, the Tasmanian Department for Community Welfare initiated a review focusing on legislation pertaining to domestic violence (Hopcroft, 1983). Simultaneously in Victoria, a Domestic Violence Committee was charged "to investigate problems associated with domestic violence" (Women's Policy Coordination Unit, 1985, p. 1). The Western Australian taskforce report was completed in 1986 (Western Australian Taskforce on Domestic Violence 1986), followed by the Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force in 1988 (Queensland Domestic Violence Taskforce, 1988).

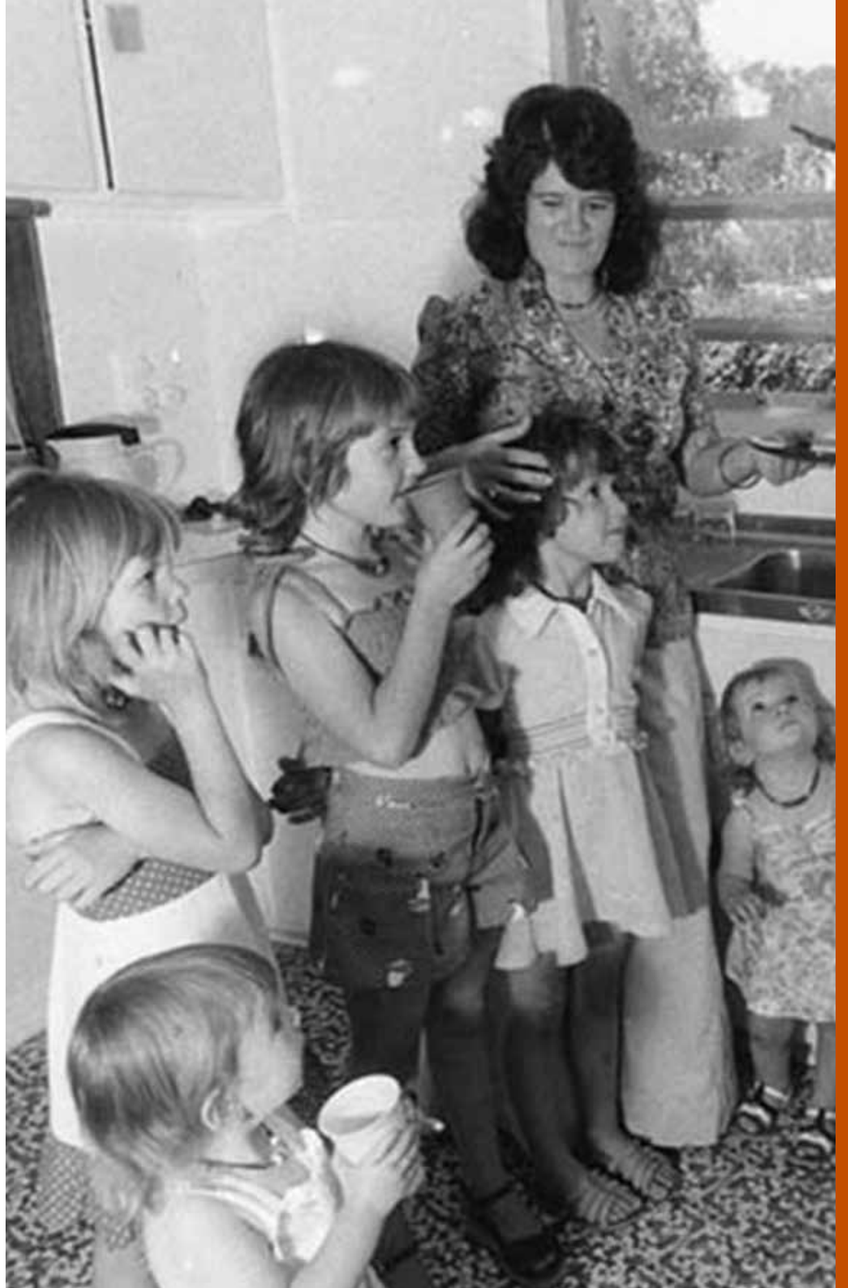
Simultaneously in Victoria, a Domestic Violence Committee was established 'to investigate problems associated with domestic violence' (Women's Policy Coordination Unit, 1985, p. 1). The Western Australian taskforce report was completed in 1986 (Western Australian Taskforce on Domestic Violence 1986), followed by the Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force in 1988 (Queensland Domestic Violence Taskforce, 1988).

Representatives of the refuge movement sat on these taskforces and were able to contribute crucial information about the lived experiences of women and their children who had fled their homes because of domestic violence. Their leadership in contributing to the establishment of these taskforces, as well as their participation in them, paved the way for changes to occur over the next two decades, including in the areas of the law and policing. In particular, the Victorian report, titled *Criminal Assault in the Home,* reflected that attention should be paid to the criminality of domestic violence (Women's Policy Coordination Unit, 1985). Subsequently, the Law Reform Commission in the Australian Capital Territory reviewed laws relating to domestic violence and found that "an assault in the home is not a private matter" (1985, p. 2). These taskforce reports all concluded with a strong commitment to making public policy changes to assist those affected by domestic violence, and acknowledging the broad range of public policy areas relevant to domestic violence, including but not limited to policing, civil, criminal, family law, housing, health, education and income support. As emphasised by Murray and Powell, "this, then was the challenge for the following decades" (2011, p. 19).

Children in the Refuge

> *We became advocates for children in their own right.*
>
> – Jess Aan, former childcare worker for Canberra Women's Refuge, late 1970s

The challenges in addressing the widespread nature of domestic violence articulated in these taskforce reports were felt on a day-to-day basis by the staff and Collective members at the Canberra Women's Refuge. The primary concern of the refuge movement at this time was the safety and empowerment of women to make their own decisions (Murray and Powell, 2011) — "there was an absolute centrality of women" (Ward 2014). However, women escaping situations of domestic violence were often accompanied by their children, generating a range of new and more complex issues for the Collective members and staff. As former Collective member Helen Seaton remembers, "We certainly did a lot of childcare for each other. But we weren't talking about the effect of violence on children in the beginning" (2014).



"To me, domestic violence is all about breaking the cycle. Cause it's been generational for us, for me, it's that my kids won't grow up and repeat — not my mistakes, but get into situations similar to the ones that I've been in. And, to do that, you need a service like Beryl – that is across the board well-rounded.

– Client, 2014

Women and their children occupy a vacant house next door to the Refuge which could not accommodate them due to overcrowding, 26 November 1977. Source: Act Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection, Photographer: Steve Schultz.

Many of the children had either seen their mothers being victims of male violence, or were themselves victims. Childcare workers described in the 1984 Annual Report how children would cope with this violence through three main ways: "aggression, fearfulness or withdrawal and indifference" (p. 13).

To encourage children to express their feelings in a more positive way, a 'Kids House' was created at the Refuge. 'Kids meetings' were also introduced as an opportunity to "open up the lines of communication between the children and the adults who try to co-exist within the refuge" (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1983–84, p. 13), and to create a physical and emotional safe space. As previous Childcare Worker Jess Aan described, "if there were disputes in the house [we would] sit down and talk about it … [we were] trying to foster and mentor different ways of relating and dealing with anger" (2014). Specific workshops were also held for Collective members and mothers on childhood, anger, and aggression, to develop mechanisms to support children (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1982). This highlights how the staff members were constantly required to pioneer new ways of coping and supporting their growing range of victims of domestic violence.

Cartoon from the 1984–85 Annual Report.

That wasn't a word; it wasn't a concept: The Canberra Incest Centre

With this increasing attention on the specific needs of children it also became "impossible to ignore the alarmingly high percentage of … children coming to the Refuge … [who] had experiences of child sexual abuse in their families" (Ward, 1981). This was an issue that had not yet captured significant public or academic attention. As former Collective member Julia Ryan explained, "new words came out of the women's movement of feminism … like child sexual abuse, that wasn't a word, it wasn't a concept" (2014).

Biff Ward, one of the Refuge founders and Co-Coordinator from 1978 –82 (2014), who went on to author a book titled *Father Daughter Rape*, retold her difficulties in finding resources on family sexual abuse or incest, when she started working with a family escaping what would now be known as child sexual abuse. Biff Ward explained that the limited literature available consisted of clinical texts discussing Freud and the Oedipus complex, rather than any feminist analysis of this issue. Yet as she explains, "with the sharing of stories a gradual understanding developed, not only about the incidence and effects of such experiences, but also about the political function of the silenced abuse of overwhelmingly girl children within our families" (2014).

To provide this much-needed information and support to women who had experienced sexual abuse within their family, the Refuge sought funding to set up a specialised centre dealing with incest. The establishment of this service was relatively rapid with work on the funding submissions beginning in December 1983 and the Incest Centre officially opening in July 1984 at 81 Kennedy Street in Kingston. Funding for two full-time salaries, operating costs and the establishment of a reference library was covered by the allocation of $9,000 of the $25,200 assigned to the Canberra Women's Refuge in the 1983–84 Federal Budget as part of the Women's Emergency Services Program (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1983 – 84, p. 3). The Incest Centre was structured as a subsidiary agency of the Canberra Women's Refuge, with its own advisory and policy collective meeting regularly to review and direct work undertaken by the two employees.

The service provided individual counselling, group work, community education and inter-agency training programs. It aimed "to break the silence about the prevalence of incest within the community and stimulate discussion and understanding of the causes of child sexual abuse within the family" (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1983–84, p. 14). As former Childcare Worker Jess Aan described it, "that was a huge thing, to not keep those secrets anymore" (2014). Although the Incest Centre separated from the Women's Centre on 31 October 1986, the Centre continues to work closely with the Refuge, as well as other services, such as the Rape Crisis Centre.

Cartoon from the 1984–85 Annual Report.

Women leaving the Refuge

> *Should I go back? I don't know. Then I think again. What about me? I can start a life for my kids and me.*
>
> – Client's reflection in Canberra Women's Refuge 1983-84 Annual Report

Moving from the Refuge "to the anonymity of suburbs [was] … a lonely and depressing experience" (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1980, p.11). A Family Support Service Scheme, funded by the Australian Department of Social Security (Office of Child Care), was introduced for two periods of eighteen months to mitigate these difficulties by offering continued support to women and their children after their time at the Refuge. This involved an optional three follow-up visits for the first four to six weeks after a woman had moved out, including assisting in obtaining household goods (usually from charitable organisations such as St Vincent de Paul and The Smith Family), and introducing them to the local community resources such as health care, schools, and community centre activities. Further contact beyond the first two months was ad hoc, through telephone conversations where appropriate, or where women dropped back into the Refuge "for a cup of tea" (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1983–84, p. 8).

Throughout this process, and in all the work undertaken at the Refuge, Collective members followed the credo of "supporting the woman no matter what she wants to do … helping her with what she decided to do was a central basic part of the function [of the Refuge]" (Ward, 2014). This ongoing support of women and children is indicative of the strength and commitment of the Collective members and staff at the Refuge.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3: 1987–92

Shaping the future, a changing environment

Amber O'Shea

It was a period of exciting social and political change and I felt privileged to be actively involved in promoting the rights of women and their children who lived with domestic violence and changing the systems and community attitudes that worked against them. We were presented with some difficult challenges that in hindsight were part of that change. On the one hand we were known as trouble-makers and it was not unusual to hear ourselves described as 'man hating lesbians' and 'radical feminists'. While I had no objection to either of these labels, they were used against us in ways that undermined not only our credibility but our cause. On the other hand there were more and more strong feminist women in key Government positions who understood and supported our cause.

– Jan Downie, former Staff and Collective member

Domestic violence was identified in the 1980s as a significant issue affecting Australian society that drove government policy and reform over the following decade. Set against the Government's broader National Agenda for Women, domestic violence was recognised as epidemic, facilitated by entrenched attitudes and the economic and politico-legal inequalities between men and women. Legal reforms focused on the criminality of domestic violence, and sought to change societal perceptions and improve the justice system's response to domestic violence.

Bedroom at the Canberra Women's Refuge in Watson, which is being used by an adult and five children, 7 May 1975.
Source: ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection.

> Women's refuges face great challenges, especially when there is a national shortage of affordable housing.
>
> – Marie Coleman, former Committee member

I think (the Government) should make a national register for domestic violence. Because if I knew that my ex had had three intervention orders taken out on him by three previous partners, and had violently assaulted them and their children, I would never have had anything to do with him.

– Client, 2014

Women's refuges were often the only safe option for women and their children escaping domestic violence, particularly women limited by socioeconomic constraints. Refuges provided pivotal support where the broader community, criminal justice and other services had failed them. Over the 1980s the sector grew rapidly, and its galvanism nationally, and locally, provided greater opportunities to strengthen service provision.

The Collective was a strong advocate and contributor to developments in the ACT. Staff at the Refuge were at the coalface. They had long recognised the issues and risks for women and their children escaping domestic violence, and the critical need to provide protection and support in a safe home environment that would enable them to restore their dignity and gain confidence to live their lives free of violence and abuse.

The Australian Government's National Agenda for Women

In July 1985, governments from around the world came together in Nairobi to mark the end of the United Nations Decade for Women. This conference reviewed their achievements in raising the status of women and set out a plan for progress to the year 2000 (Hawke, 1985). The 'Nairobi Looking Forward Strategy' challenged governments to develop comprehensive and coherent national policies, in order to abolish obstacles to the full and equal participation of women in all spheres (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office of the Status of Women, 1988).

On 28 November 1985, Prime Minister Bob Hawke announced in parliament the Australian Government's direction for its National Agenda for Women. He outlined a commitment to ensure the equality of opportunity for women that recognised the complex economic and social factors that impacted women's status in Australia. After consulting more than 25,000 women, in 1988 the Australian Government released 'A say, a choice, a fair go', the Australian Government's National Agenda for Women.

The National Agenda for Women (1988) provided the vision for wholesale change. It sought to eliminate sexual discrimination and drastically improve women's participation in education, employment and leadership; improve women's quality of life through adequate housing, income security, health and leisure; better support vulnerable women, victims of violence and special groups (such as single mothers, young women, women with disability, older women, migrant and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women); and positively change cultural attitudes and the portrayal of women in the media.

Domestic violence: A national policy concern

The National Agenda for Women recognised for the first time that addressing domestic violence against women and children was a government priority and elevated 'the causes' and its 'widespread prevalence' as a national concern.

By 1985, the refuge movement had resulted in the establishment of more than 165 refuges over twelve years. Hawke stated this 'was testimony of the toll of domestic violence' (1985). Of the 45,000 women assisted by refuges in 1985, it was conservatively estimated that 27,000 were escaping domestic violence, with many turned away (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Office of the Status of Women, 1988, p. 38). When the Agenda was released, the Government quoted funding under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) totalled $47.4 million in 1986–87 supporting 190 refuges, which had increased tenfold since 1983 (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office of the Status of Women, 1988, p. 6).

Alarming evidence was also emerging about the scale of domestic violence against women and children. Police acknowledged domestic violence was a significant part of their workload, second only to traffic incidents. They were providing round the clock assistance to victims, often to the same households time and time again. Although there was no national data, it was understood that a significant number of homicides were the result of domestic violence (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Office of the Status of Women, 1988; McCulloch, 1988; Mugford, 1989).

In 1985, the Hawke Government asked the Australian Institute of Criminology to convene a conference on domestic violence and formulate recommendations. Denise Simpson, former Staff and Collective member (1985–88), recalls that "while the conference was a step forward in ensuring the place of domestic violence on the national agenda", there was frustration that "speakers were all academics, professionals and researchers with no grassroots input." In response, "Beryl in collaboration with other women's services nationally, staged a protest at the conference to highlight the lack of women's voices who had either lived with domestic violence or worked at the coalface, such as in refuges" (Simpson, 2015).

Painting 'Lizard Dreaming' by R. Murray 1991.

Photo showing part of the purpose-built layout of the Refuge.

Consultations for the National Agenda for Women in 1986 were important in informing a national conversation about the issue of domestic violence. These consultations identified that physical, sexual and emotional abuse in the home was widespread. Evidence of this came from media and phone-in campaigns, ad hoc data and anecdotal evidence from legal, health and welfare agencies that were being looked at collectively for the first time. The full extent of domestic violence was, however, difficult to estimate because of the lack of systematic or national data (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Office of the Status of Women, 1988, pp. 37–38).

In 1987, the Hawke Government allocated $1.6 million for a National Education Campaign on domestic violence over three years (Mugford 1989, p. 1). The Australian Institute of Criminology was commissioned to undertake research to guide the development of the campaign. The findings were reflected in a report by Jane Mugford (1989) that pulled together the most recent research, data and survey results to examine domestic violence in contemporary Australian society.

Mugford's (1989) report highlighted the various forms of physical and non-physical abuse often sustained by victims over long periods of time and normalised across generations. The report also demonstrated the extent to which domestic violence was 'fully sanctioned in Australian culture' and even permeated into support services. Significant gaps of knowledge were identified across health, welfare and criminal justice services. For example, service professionals commonly lacked sympathy, even to the extent of blaming the victim, and were perceived to perpetrate the trauma for victims. Refuges were seen as the only service that had a positive image. Based on these findings, Mugford advocated the importance of a multi-targeted campaign to raise awareness of the devastating impact of violence on victims and emphasise the criminality of perpetrators. She argued that although domestic violence occurred in the home and was perceived as a private matter, it came at a significant social and economic cost. One study estimated this to cost $1 million for 20 victims (Roberts, 1988; Mugford, 1989). The cost to state, territory and federal governments was later estimated at $1.5 billion a year (Clack, 1992).

Work from this period set the precedent for national and state frameworks to address domestic violence in future years. It also contributed to the international recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation (Mitchell, 2011). The Hawke/Keating Government's National Committee on Violence against Women ran for three years from 1990, delivering a national strategy on violence against women in 1993. In the same year, the UN General Assembly unanimously passed the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (Mitchell, 2011).

> It wasn't just our family who had struggles and ... people do care and want to help.
>
> – Jacqui, former child client

Legal and criminal justice reforms

Australian legal reforms designed to assist in the management of domestic violence cases were first introduced in NSW in 1983. The ACT introduced its reforms in 1986. By 1989 all states and territories had introduced similar legislation. These reforms included a widening of the offences that could constitute domestic violence, protection orders for those affected by it, including children, and an extension of police powers to enter the home and to lay charges rather than relying on victims to report crimes. Changes included making a breach of a protection order a criminal offence and automatic grounds for arrest (Mugford, 1989).

At the time, Mugford (1989) observed that, historically, legislation that could be used for domestic violence cases was underused in Australia and that these new reforms provided greater support for victims and alerted enforcement agencies to the seriousness of the offence. Law Lecturer at Macquarie University, Jane Moore (1988) felt that these reforms had "gone a long way to correct the serious misconception which traditionally held sway in our legal system that women were property" and focused on the criminality of domestic violence.

A feature of the ACT legislation allowed magistrates to order the offender from the home, rather than placing the onus on the victim to find alternative temporary accommodation. This meant that staying home safely could be a real option for some women and children, resulting in fewer going to refuges. This cultural shift occurred in the ACT much earlier than in other jurisdictions (McFerran, 2007).

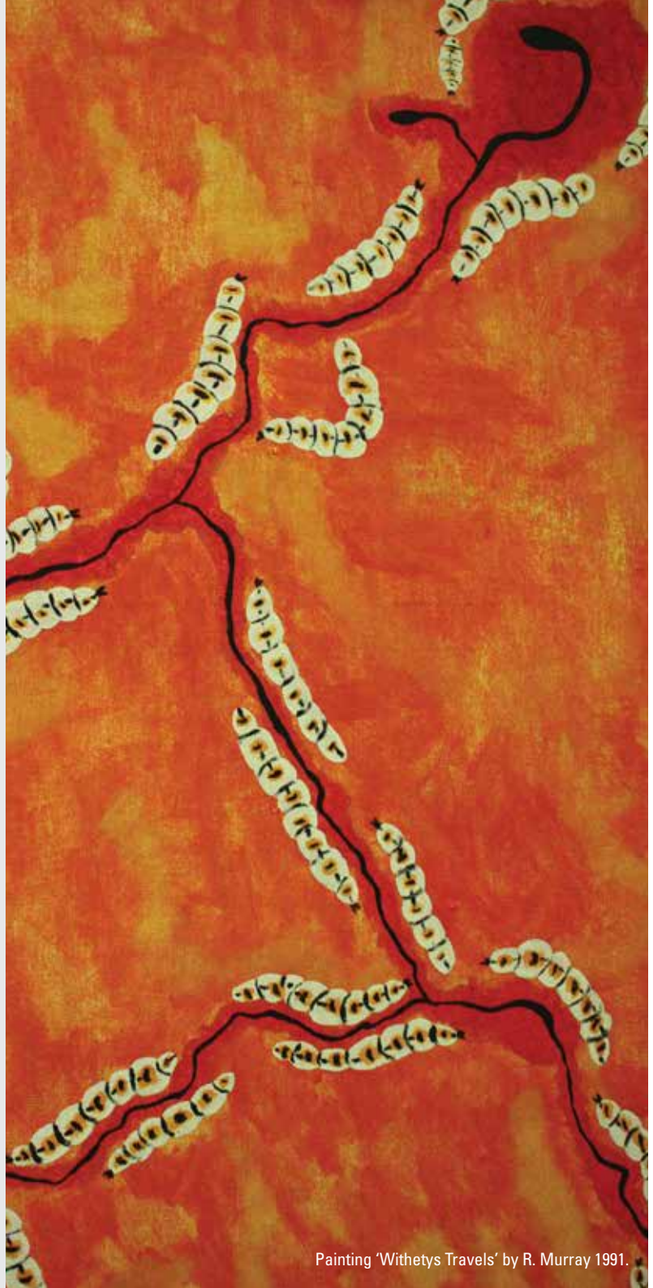
Domestic violence dominated the ACT's family and magistrates courts and Legal Aid resources but this was just the tip of the iceberg, considering that hundreds of incidents did not reach court (Clack, 1992). "In 1989 there were 2208 separate judgements, 556 new orders, 493 interim orders, 222 extensions, 396 protection orders" (Clack, 1992). This compared to (up to) 200 calls a month received in 1993 by the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (Clack, 1992).

When the ACT Community Law Reform Committee reviewed the domestic violence reform in 1992, police still only laid charges in a very small percentage of instances, but there was considerably more pressure on the criminal justice system to take the issue more seriously (McFerran, 2007). The Committee recommended a coordinated criminal justice and community interagency response, which was accepted by the ACT Government (McFerran, 2007). Participating agencies included the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, the Australian Federal Police, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Magistrates Court, Corrective Services, Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victims of Crime Coordinator, and Legal Aid (McFerran, 2007). This approach proved to be effective. Over the following decade, evaluations found a significant increase in community confidence, positive intervention, order enforcements and efficiencies by police, courts and other services (McFerran, 2007).

Simpson (2015) provides comment on some of the issues around the reform based on her experience working in the sector, which included managing the Domestic Violence Crisis Service in the ACT from 1999 until 2013:

> *While the legislative reforms focused on the criminality of domestic violence, the enforcement of the legislation in the ACT did not have this focus for at least another decade and significantly longer in most other jurisdictions.*

She explains that "in reality, the availability of protection orders meant that domestic violence was rarely treated as a crime. Generally the obtaining of a protection order by the victim was the preferred, and encouraged, option of police. While the legislation included breaches of a protection order and automatic grounds for arrest, this very rarely occurred. Refuge workers were reluctant to encourage women to obtain a protection order without ensuring that the women understood that the order was only a piece of paper and would and could not keep them or their children safe unless firstly police acted on breaches and secondly, it was taken seriously by the court. Based on the experience of the refuge workers, these actions were highly unlikely."



Painting 'Withetys Travels' by R. Murray 1991.

Canberra Women's Refuge

By the late 1980s the refuge sector had grown considerably in the ACT. By then it included six crisis refuges for women. The Canberra Women's Refuge Collective, which formally changed its name to Beryl Women's Refuge in 1989 (Assistant Commissioner, 1989), were strong advocates that resulted in key changes in the sector and at the Refuge during this time.

Doris Women Refuge was established in 1987 after years of lobbying for a second feminist domestic violence refuge in the ACT by a group of dedicated women from the community sector, with the support of the Collective (Downie, 2015). This enabled more women and their children access to safe, supportive accommodation and strengthened advocacy in the sector (Downie, 2015). In 1991, "Beryl, Doris and Chisolm [collectively] provided 8641 bed nights and received $1.5 million in SAAP funding" (Lamberton, 1993). Staff were also active in the ACT Domestic Violence Interagency and in working towards the establishment of the Domestic Violence Crisis Service in 1988 that radically improved the response to domestic violence in the ACT (Downie, 2014a; Downie, 2014b).

The growth of the sector in the ACT provided new employment opportunities for staff as they had developed sought-after skills and experience. This resulted in a significant turnover in staff and change at the Refuge. The Collective harnessed this as an opportunity to focus on employing a culturally diverse team of workers, in order to better represent the diversity of women they supported, which included designating two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander positions (Downie 2015, Downie, 2014a; Downie, 2014b; Cruz Zavalla, 2015).

As the sector sought to provide better services, adequate funding was a source of ongoing tension. Competition increased for funding and despite the establishment of more refuges over the 1980s, there was still a shortage of crisis accommodation. Canberra Women's Refuge documents from 1985, 1987 and 1990 recognised that adequate housing was a key issue in addressing domestic violence. The lack of options, the poor conditions of available temporary accommodation, and delays in placing families in priority housing left some women with little option but to return with their children to the situation they were escaping from.

In 1985, the Refuge was under considerable pressure. It was the only refuge in the ACT that provided a 24/7 service for women and their "children escaping domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and life threatening situations" (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1985a). Women and their children came to the Refuge in flight themselves, or by referral from the interagency of services or police. Staff estimated that at the time, they were accommodating 700 women and children a year, with a third of victims being turned away. At any given time there were up to eight women and 25 children housed in the six-bedroom converted double duplex house (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1985a). The overcrowded and poor living conditions in the house further exacerbated families' distress, and were a hotbed for illnesses. With such a high turnover of families, the house was in more frequent need of maintenance from the extra wear and tear thn the Government cyclical maintenance afforded (Canberra Women's Refuge, 1985a).

Applications to the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) stressed the need for a secure residence and a clean, comfortable home environment, with adequate space for personal privacy, communal areas, play areas, office and storage space. The Collective submitted a number of desperate applications and letters during the period from 1985 seeking to improve conditions. This included applications in 1990 to create a purpose-built five-bedroom house with an enclosed courtyard, play area and office. The plans by architect Anna Pender were developed in consultation with staff, residents and ex-residents (Beryl Women's Refuge Collective, 1990; Downie, 2014a). This application was successful and the tenancy agreement for the building commenced on 6 September 1991. The new Refuge was a celebrated achievement and is testament to the commitment of the Collective. It significantly improved conditions for residents and staff at the time and has provided a home in need in the years since.

Simpson (2015) stresses that "while turn-away statistics were high for the Refuge and remain high nationally, the … statistics during this period at Beryl did not mean a woman and her children would not be assisted to find safe accommodation. There were many occasions when women and their children were given temporary bedding in the lounge area rather than leaving them with no alternative but to return home to their violent partner. All efforts were explored to ensure short term safety was the first priority while working towards longer term safe solutions."

Most importantly the Refuge was, and continues to be, just that. As Simpson (2015) notes, "many hundreds of women and their children achieved safety for the first time in many years. For many children, it was the first time in their lives they had lived without violence or the threat of violence. Children connected with other children and women established strong friendships with each other. Many women became empowered by gaining an understanding of the politics of domestic violence including that they were not alone in what they had experienced; other women had similar stories of the abuse and violence they had lived with. Some women went on to work, paid and unpaid, in similar areas [such as] domestic violence, child abuse and sexual assault."

The Refuge in Watson, 1976.
Source: ACT Heritage Library, Department of the Capital Territory.

> And you've got kids that have to go to school, you've got everything in the whole world to rebuild, and you need support, you need encouragement, you need people who know what you're talking about who aren't looking at you going 'suck it up and get over it' sort of thing.
>
> – Former client

Painting ‘Ocean Dreaming’ by Maaurice Shipp.

Beryl Women's Refuge Halfway House

The efforts of the Collective were not limited to the provision of crisis accommodation. They played an important role in assisting women in achieving long-term outcomes. The Beryl Women’s Refuge Halfway House (‘the House’) was established as an annex to the Refuge and was set up to provide transitionary housing for women and their children for three to six months, who were approved and waiting for priority housing. This was an important step for moving families into private housing, whereby tenants managed the house themselves within a budget (Beryl Women’s Refuge Halfway House, 1990).

The House was administered independently and managed by a Coordinator, a position which was rotated every 12 months amongst Collective members. The Coordinator managed the recordkeeping and accounts for the House and provided important support for the women and their families to establish a new life. This involved showing women local facilities, and developing community links with local services, schools and counselling services (Downie, 2014c).

Jan Downie, former Staff and Collective member from 1986–90 explains how important follow-up support is once women move into their houses:

> *Women were often so vulnerable just after they left. Loneliness, isolation and dealing with the reality of single parenting and access can be challenging, and even more so for women with limited English.*

Downie would often organise home tutors, TAFE literacy classes and assist with children’s enrolments to schools (Downie, 2014c).

The demand for accommodation also meant that the House dealt with the overflow from the Refuge. The House was small but accommodated up to three women and nine children at one time. There was no space for children to play and the office space was the kitchen table. In 1990, the Collective sought funding for a larger five-bedroom house (Beryl Women’s Halfway House, 1990). This was unsuccessful and in 1991, the Collective sought funding from CAP to extend the existing house instead, using plans again by Anna Pender (Beryl Women’s Refuge Collective, 1991).

The next step for women transitioning into private housing was also frequently frustrated by bureaucracy. In 1987, the Collective wrote a letter to the Minister for Territories seeking a review of priority housing processes due to delayed, lost, misplaced or incorrectly processed applications in the ACT. The Collective advocated that this ‘inefficiency’ showed ‘a lack of sensitivity and awareness of the problems women and children face when trying to flee violence and in some cases incest.’ These delays, along with overcrowded conditions at the Refuge, in some instances, resulted in women ostensibly forced to “return to violent and abusive relationship” due to having no house to live in (Canberra Women’s Refuge Incorporated, 1987).

> I hope Beryl stays strong and has all the support needed to continue their tireless work.
>
> – Sage Uhr, former Administrator and Casual Support Worker

Support service

Staff at the Canberra Women's Refuge were committed to providing both emotional and practical support to women and their children in crisis and transitioning into a new life. Staff were on call at all hours to provide immediate support (Downie, 2014a; Downie, 2014b). Before the Domestic Violence Crisis Service was established in 1988, staff also provided this service, answering phones 24 hours a day (Downie, 2014a; Downie, 2014b). Practical support included assisting women to access health, police, legal, housing, immigration, education, counselling and community services and to navigate everyday life through a traumatic period. In some cases this included helping women change their identity and move interstate (Downie, 2014a; Downie, 2014b).

Providing this level of assistance required a team of staff at the Refuge but funding remained an issue. Dedicated staff were determined to provide the best service they could and as a result worked many unpaid hours. In 1985, the Refuge had funding from SAAP for three full-time Women's Workers, funding from the Office of Childcare for two Childcare Workers, and funding from the Department of Social Security for one Follow-up Worker. An application by the Collective (1985b) outlined their ongoing efforts to improve conditions within limited resources. They sought funding for an additional Women's Worker to meet the minimum requirements under the SAAP guidelines and proposed that this be consistent with other staff salaries, which were an hourly rate of $9.48 for 27.5 hours a week (about $261 per week and $18,174 per year). The Collective argued that although staff salaries had recently increased to bring them in line with the Victorian Award, staff still worked an "unacceptable number of unpaid hours" and funding did not cover leave loading, Relief Workers, or the full Award conditions (Canberra Women's Refuge Collective, 1985b).

By the time Downie commenced working with the Refuge in 1986, staffing had increased to eight. Four staff worked for three days with a hand-over meeting mid-week. Night and weekend shifts were rostered among staff members. Downie (2014c) explains that it was a demanding and all-encompassing position for workers, but extremely rewarding. Staff were employed from various backgrounds but shared a commitment to feminist ideals and social justice principles (Downie, 2015). Downie was a single parent and had just returned from teaching in Queensland when she started. She said that getting the job with the Refuge was a life changing experience and had inspired a further 28 years of learning and working with women affected by violence (Downie, 2014b):

> *In this job, I met the most amazing and dedicated women, who were passionate about women's rights and many remain my best friends … I had no particular experience working with women, supporting and advocating for them, or any experience on a collective but I loved it. It required an incredibly diverse skill set from crisis work, facilitating house meetings, developing and running psycho-educational groups for residents, organising legal and counselling support, liaising with police, housing, legal aid, social workers, immigration and defence, charities, child care centres and schools, and Marymead if respite was needed, writing support letters and submissions for funding, managing petty cash, paying bills, salaries, providing community education and committee work. We transported people to appointments, provided after school activities for kids, and organised family days. Some women we helped disappear because of extreme safety concerns.*
>
> *… I will never forget a woman who had been beaten up during the night, telling me, with no emotional expression at all, of a past miscarriage, and how her partner had 'kicked the baby out of her'. She had apparently left before and was considering returning. I had a poor understanding of the psychological impact of complex trauma and did not understand disassociation at the time. Women like this inspired me to spend the rest of my professional life acquiring more knowledge and skills to work with women impacted by trauma.*

In the late 1980s, the Collective focused on employing women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD backgrounds. Downie (2015) recalls that at one time, there were workers from five different countries. Theresa Monaghan and Isobel Collins were employed at the Refuge around 1987–88 to help make the Refuge more accessible for Aboriginal women (Downie, 2014d). Elba Cruz Zavalla, former Staff and Collective member (1989–2007), was one of the first CALD support workers at the Refuge, which by 1989 was a team of eleven. Cruz Zavalla (2015) recalls "at the time there were no strict roles." Staff worked closely together and rotated responsibilities. They shared their experience and learnt from each other (Cruz Zavalla, 2015). This dynamic combination of collective experience meant the Collective was in the position to advocate on many complex and sensitive issues facing women at the time.

These workers provided extremely important support and advocacy for women and their children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who were especially vulnerable when escaping domestic violence because they faced cultural, language and economic barriers. Most experienced prejudice from the community and had difficulty accessing health and legal services, housing and employment (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office of the Status of Women, 1988).

Many women with CALD backgrounds at the Refuge had no support network and were isolated from their families and countries of origin (Cruz Zavalla, 2015).

Sculpture made by the 'Making Safe Connections' group.

Some were refugees. Some did not have residency in Australia, making the situation even more complex (Cruz Zavalla, 2015). In the late 80s and early 90s a number of women escaping domestic violence at the Refuge were Filipino and Vietnamese. Many were brides to Australian men (Cruz Zavalla, 2015). Domestic violence and homicide in these cases was such a significant problem it was the subject of national campaigns and media at the time (Cruz Zavalla, 2015). Downie (2014b) recalls one such case. She helped a refugee from Vietnam who had escaped with her five children from Sydney where she was held hostage and tortured in her new home in Australia.

The Refuge was client-focused and provided whatever support was needed equally to all women. Elba Cruz Zavalla (2015) recalls that this once involved raising money for one woman and her children to return to Mexico. Some women had drug and alcohol addictions, health issues and disabilities (Cruz Zavalla, 2015). Some women had large families of children. Sharing the house with little privacy while waiting for housing could be very challenging at times for families from different backgrounds (Cruz Zavalla, 2015). While balancing many needs, the most critical of these was the safety and security of all women and their families at the Refuge. Assessing and managing risks to women and their families, and to other clients and staff, was a crucial part of the service. Confidentiality of a women's situation, whereabouts and identity was paramount to protecting women and their families. This could include immediate and future threats to safety, as well as for legal and privacy concerns. Some situations were more complex where perpetrators were in positions of authority or had high profiles in the community. For example, Cruz Zavalla (2015) recalls some frightening cases where women were hiding from the police and where police officers were the perpetrators themselves. Other cases involved a politician and a diplomat that required greater discretion.

When Cruz Zavalla started, her taking the job was met with disapproval by some of her Filipino community. The work of the Refuge was viewed as 'helping to break marriages'. Many women "did not engage because of family pressure and lack of education" (Cruz Zavalla, 2015). Much of her work since has focused on building understanding, raising awareness and maintaining positive relations with communities over the years. "Now it is slightly more acceptable to seek Refuge services" (Cruz Zavalla, 2015). Whilst much has changed since she started in the sector, Cruz Zavalla notes that in many cultures domestic violence is prevalent and a hidden issue, and stresses that "Education has to continue" (Cruz Zavalla, 2015).

> (I hope) that the funding increases and more housing is brought into the Beryl framework. That more women are able to be offered help. And that, one day, Beryl will no longer be needed.
>
> – Nadia Dean, former Staff and Committee member

Tapestry by clients for the Centenary of Canberra celebrations.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4: 1993–98

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, reconciliation, and the impact of domestic and family violence on children

Ishani Das

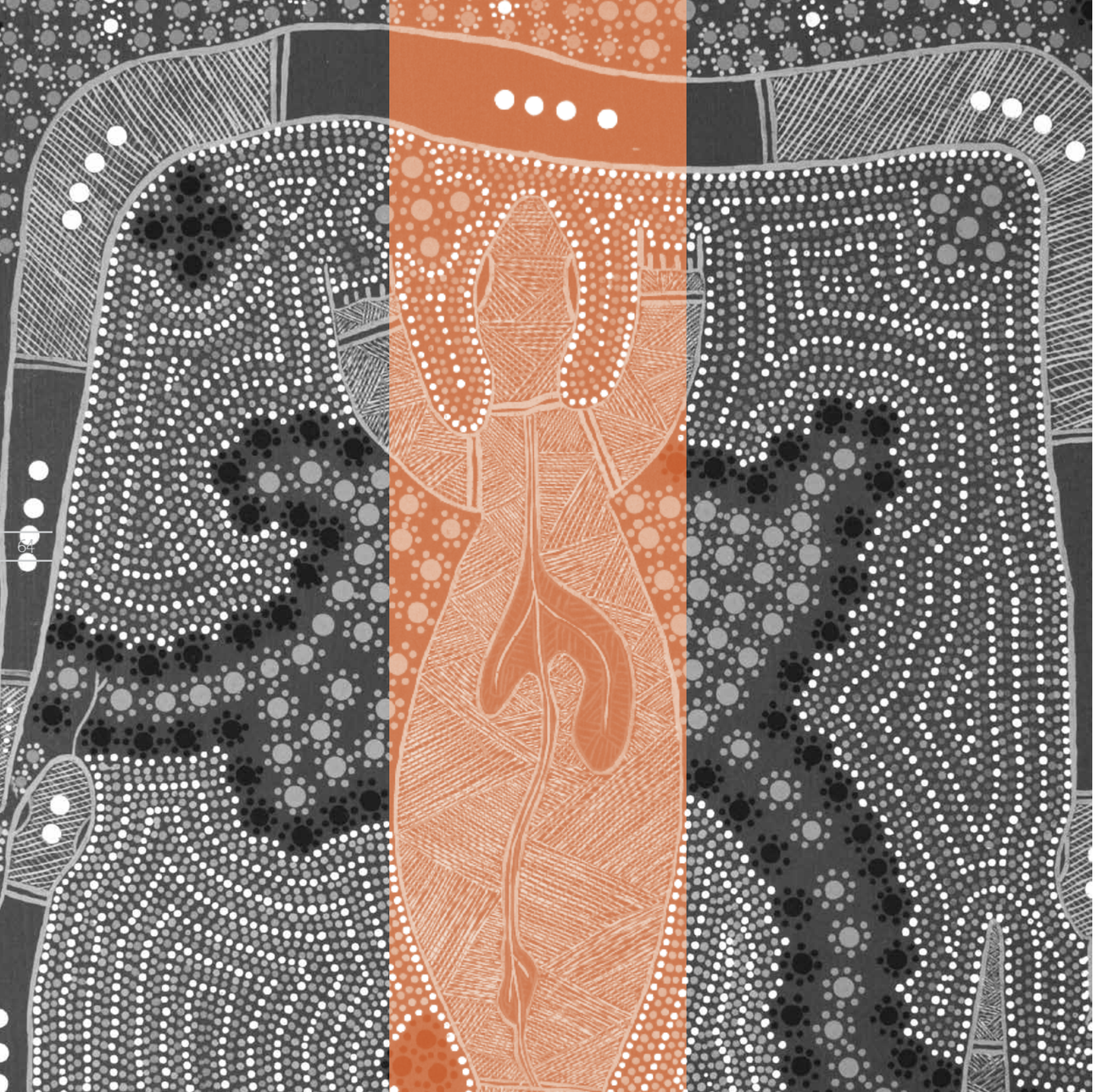
I watch, I listen
in amazement and awe
to the coming of the new day
no traffic, no voices, no anger
just peace, serenity, beauty and calm.
Listen to the birds and the silence,
rain whispering on the roof
I am one with nature and the earth
Tomorrow I can watch and listen again
Witness the dawn
for each day is the same but
somehow different, more beautiful
I wonder! What will I learn today
what challenges will I face and overcome
I have gained strength from the dawn
I can achieve anything
I have seen the wakening of the earth
and my inner strengths
Tomorrow I will grow stronger again, I thank the earth.

– A poem authored by a client, while participating in one of the 'Empowering Women Workshops' organised by Beryl Women's Refuge Inc. in 1998

Staff member Grace Coe, Canberra Women of the Year 1994, in recognition of her significant contribution to women, in particular Aboriginal women, in the Canberra region.

"You know what my ex did? He came — he got served an intervention order after stabbing me, he came straight from receiving it to my house, kicked my door in, ripped it up in front of me, dragged me at knife point to the toilet, wiped his arse with it and flushed it down the toilet. And said "that's what I think about your intervention order, cause it won't do nothing".

– Client, 2014



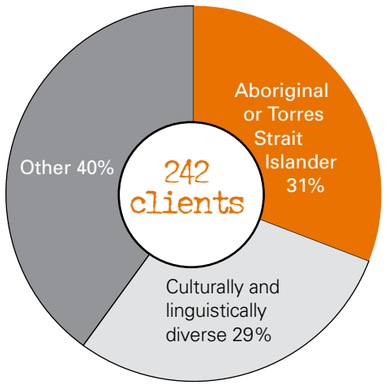
Painting 'Lizard Dreaming' by R. Murray 1991.

1993–98 was an era where developments in social policy on a global and national scale had flow on effects for the Refuge (known as Beryl Women's Refuge Inc. during this period) and the services offered to its clients. Domestic and family violence, children's issues, and issues central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples received particular attention.

Though there is no specific data readily available for the earlier years of this era, the majority of clients would use the Refuge's services for approximately two weeks in the later part of this period (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1998).

Building on the establishment of the Women's Emergency Services Network (WESNET) in 1992, which was the national peak body representing women's domestic violence services across Australia, the Refuge continued to provide supported accommodation to clients, with a significant portion of clients from diverse backgrounds (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Beryl Women Inc.'s client base in 1998.



Krishna Sadana, former Staff and Collective member (2014) remembers that the Refuge saw more Canberra-based women during the 90s. In addition, more women would be brought into the Refuge without formal case management referrals during 1993–98. It was also a time where advances were being made in social policy, and women's issues were prominent in the community psyche.

However, there were challenges for the Refuge resulting from this progress not always being aligned with the level of support received from government bodies. The Refuge's external environment impacted services through increased accountability and expectations, in a climate where no growth funds were provided to the Refuge (or similar organisations), despite political awareness of domestic violence. Essentially, more was expected for less (or the same), which led to insecurity for service providers (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1996).

The Refuge at a glance: 1993–98

The Refuge had a feminist collective structure with no hierarchy during the period (Mirtha Abello, 2014). The concept of the 'Extended Collective' – an approach with a coordinator model, where workers from community organisations as well as the Refuge drove the services – appears to have been formally recognised in 1996. This transition to a new management structure was welcomed, as a way to share skills and knowledge and establish clear roles and responsibilities, in order to provide the best level of care for clients (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1996).

Given the diversity within the Refuge's client base, staff members would traditionally provide women and families with holistic services. For example, staff members would accompany families to Centrelink, familiarise clients with bus routes that children

could take to school, or speak to the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (which would later become the Department of Immigration and Multicultural affairs during the period).

Linda Hayden, current Support Worker (2014), explains that the holistic service delivery championed by the Refuge was an approach that was much more empowering to women than simply providing a roof over clients' heads: "These women have been told many times that they can't do something, so we have to support them … help them see they can."

In 1993, the *National Committee against Violence against Women* provided training for members of the police force, the judiciary, and doctors in all Australian jurisdictions. This sought to raise awareness into the nature and effects of violence against women among frontline professionals who would have the most involvement in cases of domestic and family violence.

Similarly, the Refuge had an emphasis on community education during this period, with activities such as a series of 'empowering women' workshops being held for clients (past and present) and a Domestic Violence Support Group run with the Women's Information and Referral Service in 1998 (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1998). Judy Hammond notes that the Refuge also ran 'Discoveries', an 8 week program which educated clients about the patterns and elements of violence and the effects of domestic and family violence on others, through narrative therapy (Hammond, 2014).

The Refuge also contributed significantly to commentary and dialogue on broader social issues and policies affecting women and children during 1993–98, after a number of notable events in the women's liberation movement. These events included the release of the *Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women* paper in 1995 by the Office for the Status of Women, which demonstrated that a significant sector of Australian society harboured unhelpful attitudes about violence against women, and the establishment of the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* Australian Government program in 1997, which focused on working to break patterns of violence through education, protecting vulnerable persons through legislative reform and improvements to responses by law enforcement and the legal system, and investigating areas to support violence prevention (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2001).

The Refuge provided advice to government and the community through representation at various steering committees and consultation mechanisms, notably representing the ACT at the WESNET National Committee and at the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations National Committee. The Refuge also put together submissions, reports and papers on a range of issues pertinent to the correlation between domestic violence and homelessness (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1998). For instance, the Refuge provided a response to the Prime Minister's *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* package when it was announced. They outlined concerns that the Refuge had not been consulted during policy development and that issues regarding women from CALD backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were not specifically addressed (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1996).

The Refuge also experienced a number of physical challenges in this period. In particular, there was a violent incident and a fire in the Refuge in 1996 (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1996).

However, the highlights for the Refuge were significant and paint a picture depicting the values of justice, equality, respect and acceptance underpinning the Refuge during 1993–98. For instance, activities such as the children's therapeutic program, Women's Workshop, and Art therapy workshop greatly contributed to clients' self-determination, participation, empowerment and a sense of caring between workers and clients (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc, 1996).

"They were like a family for me. Like I think for everybody. They were like a family, more than a family, they will help you, but they have more, you know. I was really surprised by the things that I have seen, and I have received here. That's why I'm clinging on them – I don't want to let go!

– Client, 2014

Staff members Mary Gianakis, Shona Chapman, Karen Harbus, Teresa Monaghan, Grace Coe, Elba Cruz Zavalla, Eva Thompson and Penny Coventry in the mid-1990s.

> Beryl is the only Aboriginal-focused women with children shelter in the ACT. Its clients are women from all walks of life and its existence is central to the safety of many women and their children.
>
> – Nadia Dean,
> former Staff and Committee member

Elba Cruz Zavalla, former Staff member and Collective member recalls the camaraderie between clients and workers during this period fondly, and that many women and children who used the Refuge's services during the period have still remained in touch with workers, often expressing that the Refuge empowered them when they needed it the most (Cruz Zavalla, 2015).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and reconciliation

1993–98 marked a significant period of milestone reconciliation events:

- In 1993, the United Nations declared it the International Year of the World's Indigenous People
- In September 1993, the first National Week of Prayer for Reconciliation was supported by Australia's major faith communities
- In 1996, following on from the National Week of Prayer for Reconciliation, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation launched Australia's first National Reconciliation Week
- In 1997, the *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* was tabled in Federal Parliament
- On 26 May 1998, the National Sorry Day was commemorated for the first time

Against this political backdrop, the Refuge continued to provide specialised services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families. In terms of staffing, the Refuge upheld its strong tradition of having at least one position identified for an Aboriginal woman, and committed the Co-ordinator's position in policy and practice also. Notably, Robyn Martin, who is now the Refuge's Manager, commenced as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Worker in 2000. Further, the Refuge's internal policies stipulated that recruitment was conducted on the principle of positive discrimination in order to employ a suitably skilled and diverse workforce that reflected the diversity of the client base. Consequently, there was a significant emphasis on the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from CALD backgrounds.

This fulfilled the Refuge's strategic aims of improving access to services by Koori[1] clients and providing flexible and responsive service delivery which individual clients needed (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1998).

A significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families sought the Refuge's services due to its strong ties to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, despite the Refuge not being funded as a specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' service. Sharon Williams, Staff member since 1996 (2014), explains that the Refuge was well known in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, with many women seeking refuge because they were aware that some staff members were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent:

> *There have been some great success stories come through, especially young Koori mums. It's great to hear where they are now and what they've done.*

1 The Koori (from Awabakal language *gurri*, as spoken in the area of what is today Newcastle, adopted by Aboriginal people of other areas) are the Aboriginal people that traditionally occupied modern-day New South Wales and Victoria. It is a geographical term that is used by the Aboriginal people of Victoria, parts of New South Wales and Tasmania.

Painting created by clients and children at the Refuge with the support of Linda Huddleston, local Aboriginal artist and former Staff member.

Staff Christmas Party in 1997. Sharon Williams, Mary Giankas, Margie Coe, Elba Cruz Zavalla, Ara Cresswell.

> That essence of the feminist approach ... is to support these women to be able to make their own decisions about their lives. Yes we wanted to provide a house and support for them and their children but we also wanted them to be able to have the strength that came from a group of women who were overtly feminist. That we would be able to give them something of ourselves and I think that stayed with me.
>
> – Jenny Macklin, former volunteer

Arguably, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children have unique experiences that are not often contemplated through mainstream feminism. Historically, while the women's liberation movement grew in momentum during this period, the position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women remained stagnant (Huggins, 1994).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are a particularly vulnerable group. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 45 times more likely to experience family violence than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Mulroney, 2013). Family violence – a term used by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as it "encompasses all forms of violence in intimate, family and other relationships of mutual obligation and support" (Gordon, Hallahan and Henry, 2002) – is a significant issue in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Refuge was a Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) agency during 1993–98. The 1996 *Census of Population and Housing* conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicated that, at the time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 1% of the Australian Capital Territory population. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 8% of SAAP clients (SAAP, 1998).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 13 times more likely to seek the assistance of a SAAP agency than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006).

In 1998, a three day camp was run by staff members for Koori women and children who had experienced domestic violence (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1998). A nine-week series of workshops for Koori youth who had experienced domestic violence was also organised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Support Workers Margie Coe and Dorothy Charles, which covered a range of topics such as mental health, alcohol, and drug use.

Staff members also attended a variety of community forums in order to facilitate client access to a range of advocacy and education opportunities. For instance, the Refuge was represented at the Koori Women's services forum in 1998. It was also a Refuge policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to be involved in the 'Koori Women's Support Workers in SAAP' Group (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1998).

Elba Cruz Zavalla (2015) recalls that the Refuge was very politically involved with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and staff were passionate about the personal experiences behind these causes:

> *One example that comes to mind, that I've never forgotten … we went to a conference in Wagga about Aboriginal people and [Margie Coe] had an Uncle who was from the stolen generation. He spoke in the conference about how his family was looking for him and he was looking for his Mum and he couldn't get in touch with them because he was told that his mother was dead, and she was told that he was dead. I didn't know much about the stolen generation before that conference, and it just breaks my heart. He did say that he found his mother. He met her about three months before she died.*

Consequently, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Support Workers at the Refuge were essential in providing support and a safe, comfortable environment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

Artwork created by children clients at the Refuge. Used for the cover of the 2002-03 Annual Report.

The impact of domestic violence on children

1996 was a watershed year in the area of domestic violence, as the *Women's Safety Australia Survey* ('the survey') was published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). This was the first compilation of data on the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence in Australia, using a sample of 6,300 women, on a national scale.

In particular, the survey focused on sexual and physical violence suffered by Australian women and quantified the significant number of children who were exposed to domestic violence through witnessing violence and abuse being perpetrated against their mother, intervening to protect their mother, being present in a household filled with violence and terrorising behaviours, and being subject to direct abuse themselves.

The survey found that 38.3% of women who had experienced violence from a current partner indicated that children had witnessed the violence, and 45.8% of women who had experienced violence at the hand of a previous partner indicated that children in their care had witnessed the violence (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996).

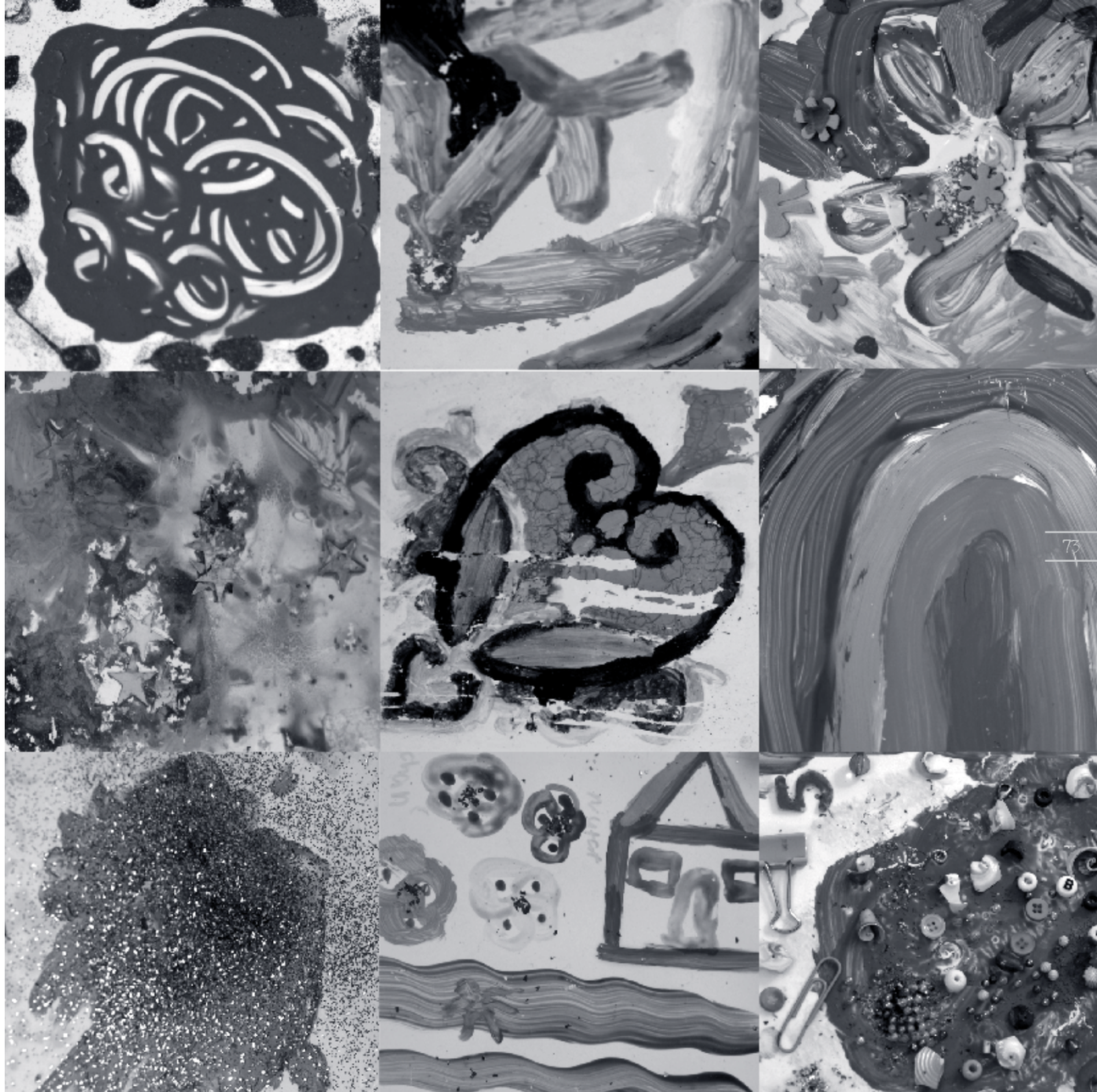
The impact of domestic violence on children was also considered in the findings of a parliamentary inquiry in 1994. The influence of children's family and home environments on violence in schools was considered in *Sticks and Stones: Report on Violence in Australian Schools* by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training ('the report'). The report indicated that children were more likely to display violence at school where they had witnessed or experienced domestic violence at home, and that policies would need to take preventive measures into account.

The report also stated that "violence in schools reflected the same gendered patterns as violence in the broader community. Statistical and anecdotal evidence identified boys as the main perpetrators and victims of violent acts and bullying in schools" and encouraged schools to explore awareness programs for boys (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1994).

Though these important publications were raising awareness of domestic violence in general, domestic violence policy was becoming increasingly de-gendered during this period and the political focus on keeping nuclear families together and establishing men's services posed challenges for the Refuge (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1998). The distribution of resources, which were far and few between, for the clients of the Refuge was a key focus of the Collective during this period.

Domestic violence shaping the behaviour of child clients who passed through the Refuge was keenly felt by staff members during the period. Krishna Sadana (2014), former Collective member from 2005–06, recalls that one of the most profound experiences in her time with the Refuge was watching children, particularly boys, mimic their father or other male role models and almost behave as perpetrators in their interactions with others:

> *Witnessing domestic violence can have huge impacts on children … even when they haven't been physically abused themselves. I sometimes lose confidence that they can regain their true nature because so much damage can be done. In the refuge sector in general, children can take a backseat, and the mother is often the focus. Right at the bottom of the list is therapeutic support for the children over a long period of time. I think the children lose out in the system, not a criticism of Beryl, but the refuge system as a whole. The long term effects on children is what most concerns me.*



Paint on tiles created by children at the Refuge.

Remembrance Quilt titled 'Not One More'. Created by women and supporters in the community, including women at Beryl Women Inc., as part of a national project to honour and remember women and children who have been killed in domestic violence in their community.

The Refuge had specific policies specifying that children must be treated as clients in their own right. 'Kids meetings' were held and 'kids rules' booklets were developed to educate child clients on the Refuge's philosophy and objectives (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1998). In light of this, the Refuge provided specialised services to children during the period. For instance, two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members, Margie Coe and Dorothy Charles, ran a series of workshops for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents (mostly boys) to address the effects of domestic violence. There were also a significant number of dedicated Children's Support Workers with the Refuge (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 1998).

Art therapy was also a success with children who stayed at the Refuge during this period. In 1998, child clients at the Refuge helped to make a quilt for the 'Crying out loud' art exhibition at Tilley's (a venue in Canberra). The quilt was chosen to represent safety and nurture in the children's everyday lives, which is compromised if they are living with domestic or family violence in their homes and/or lives. Adult clients also designed images that were transferred onto screens and then printed onto handkerchiefs and quilt pieces. The handkerchiefs were hung along a clothesline as part of the exhibition along with the quilt. This activity enabled the women participating in the project to develop skills and knowledge in the process of printmaking, with at least one participant using these skills in her future practice as an artist. Not only did this art program assist clients in learning new skills, it also provided a safe and supportive environment for them to create and forge new friendships. Judy Hammond, former worker and art therapist (2014), explains that the main focus of this was on empowering women and children: "[the exhibition] was about domestication and every day things we do at home … we wanted to create a sense of community rather than just say these women and children were victims of domestic and family violence. We wanted to shift the experience to one of education and communication."

1993–98: Shaping the Refuge's legacy

The Refuge played a significant part in women's crisis accommodation and emergency services in the ACT from 1993–98, particularly in a period when women's issues were receiving mass attention in academic and community spheres. The subsequent period saw the impact of multiculturalism on the demographics and services rendered at the Refuge, the broadening of channels of service available to clients, and a similar pattern of challenges as previous eras in an environment where resources continued to be limited.

However, the gains that the Refuge made for the empowerment of its clients during this period were profound. Sharon, current Staff member (2014) summarises the ethos of the organisation best:

> *It was meant to be, don't know how I would have coped, they taught me so much, I was such a scared little person – they really nurtured me, taught me that I could stand my ground … Beryl's helped me in my personal stuff, empowered me, some of these women have taught me a lot. When you've grown up where you don't speak, not worth it, when you've got people wanting to hear what you wanna say.*

> I left with the clothes I was wearing, I have no ID, nothing.
>
> – Client, 2014

Chapter 5

Chapter 5: 1999–04

Sarah Spottiswood

Supporting, advocating, changing

At least 23% of women in Australia have experienced domestic or family violence ... this accounts for 2.2 million women. Current data also shows that 56,100 women accessed a refuge in 2002–2003 and 53,700 children were accommodated. These figures don't include the turnaways of 4,354 women with children. Reports also show that somewhere between 80–95% of women who experience domestic or family violence do not access help from any service ... there is a serious crisis in this country

– Veronica Wensing, former Relief Worker and Collective member (2004–05), media release following meeting with Mark Latham, federal Opposition Leader, in Canberra in March 2004

Beryl Women's Refuge Inc. continued to assist victims of domestic violence from 1999-2004, despite experiencing a period of organisational challenges. Importantly, the Refuge continued its tradition of welcoming and assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from CALD backgrounds. It also began advocating for early intervention and prevention education, important steps in the fight to end violence against women at both a local and national level.

Staff members Sharon Williams and Yola Melgarejo, accepting donations of handmade rugs and beanies at PCYC, Turner, ACT in 2002.

> Fighting for women, by women – along with friendship, support and shelter, it's what a refuge is all about. We have to fight for better houses, more houses. We fight to educate bureaucracies, the police, politicians and the community in general. We fight to change laws and the oppression of women.
>
> – Lizi Beadman, former Coordinator, 1977

Boys camp at Wee Jasper, NSW in 2002.

Supporting women from diverse backgrounds

Beryl Women's Refuge Inc. supported over 250 women during this period, including more than 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and more than 40 women from CALD backgrounds. Offering flexible services for women from diverse backgrounds was one of the Refuge's strengths. Rhonda Adlington, a Collective member from 2002–03 and the Refuge's Coordinator from February 2003, recounts that "one size never fits all." The diverse client base required "ideas that would directly impact and empower women and their children rather than try and make them fit your model" (2014).

Ara Cresswell (2015), the Refuge's Coordinator from 1999–2003 observed that in her 30 years of running not-for-profit organisations in Canberra, "Beryl was unique in its interaction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and women from CALD backgrounds." Cresswell recalls that Beryl was also unique in that it had an equal number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD and Caucasian workers. When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from CALD backgrounds came to the service, they would "open the door, see something familiar and feel safe."

Women from CALD backgrounds who experience domestic violence face compounded disadvantage. For example, language barriers may prevent women from accessing support services and understanding their legal rights with respect to domestic violence, family law and migration matters. Women may also face family and community rejection if they decide to take their children and leave an abusive husband. Additionally, women from CALD backgrounds may feel isolated due to family members living overseas, financial dependence on an abusive husband, or their role as a full-time carer in the home (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2003). Research suggests that women from CALD backgrounds are less likely to report domestic violence to police or access mainstream services (Mitchell, 2011). Beryl reported in 2003 that some women may not have been aware that domestic violence was a crime in Australia and that they could get support to leave an abusive relationship

Women accessing the Refuge's services hailed from many countries including Fiji, France, Vietnam, Macedonia, Chile, Thailand and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2003). These women were provided not only with a safe place to live, but a supportive community to help them rebuild their lives. The women 'gained insights and understanding into each other's lives. They shared the cooking of some of their traditional food with each other, telling stories and sharing cooking secrets handed down through the generations' (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2003). At one stage, Beryl had two Vietnamese families, including one with a 90-year-old grandmother, sharing a house with a young pregnant woman. It was reported that the young mum–to–be became a part of the large extended Vietnamese family (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2003).

A successful program that ran during this time (due to a one-off grant from the Supported Assistance Accommodation Program) was employing an Outreach Worker to assist isolated women who had left the Refuge. The role was designed to be a flexible, 'out of office hours' support role to link isolated women and build a sense of community. One task the women did together was grocery shopping. The Outreach Worker identified women who would be well-matched and collected them in a van to go and buy fruit, vegetables and groceries in bulk. This program helped victims of domestic violence to create connections and also taught women how to budget and shop economically. According to Rhonda Adlington, "through shopping, cooking and doing craft and relaxation activities, women forged valuable friendships and ongoing relationships" (2014).

> My ex got off on a technicality. Because they mailed it to him (the intervention order) and he didn't receive it. So therefore it wasn't valid. He got off on breaking my face, because he didn't actually receive the order.
>
> – Client, 2014

To admit that I was in an abusive relationship and needed help for my children and myself was very, very emotional.

This particular day my ex was drunk, yet again screaming 'get out, get the fuck out, I don't care if you go to the refuge, take the kids and just go.

– Former client's speech at Beryl's 30th birthday celebration, 2010

Promoting the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from CALD backgrounds

In addition to providing a safe house and sense of community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from CALD backgrounds, the Refuge also actively promoted the interests of these women through lobbying the ACT Government for targeted support. The Refuge worked together with other women's refuges in the ACT, including Inanna Inc., Doris Women's Refuge Inc., the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and Toora Women Inc. to make a submission to the ACT Government's inquiry into *Priorities for service delivery in the 2002–2003 ACT Budget*. The submission stressed the need to urgently attach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outreach workers to crisis accommodation, develop community housing aimed directly at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and provide services and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to ensure early intervention and support (Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, 2002).

In a submission to the Select Committee on the Status of Women in the ACT in 2002, the Refuge described the problems with gambling faced by its residents, and lamented that 'there are no specific gambling intervention programs for women in the ACT Gender specific counselling is essential.' The Submission also highlighted the importance of "gambling education that reaches low-level gamblers (frequently women, and frequently those who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or of CALD backgrounds)" (Select Committee on the Status of Women in the ACT, 2002).

During this period, Beryl Women's Refuge Inc. continued to be part of the ACT Women's Services Network, a network of services and organisations that support women in Canberra, as it had been since 1986. The Women's Services Network "worked hard to keep domestic violence high on the agenda" (Martin, 2015; Cresswell, 2015). This included lobbying, advocacy of women's issues, drafting submissions and participating in committees.

Client camp on the South Coast during the late 1990s.

Advocating for early intervention and violence prevention education

The 2002–03 Annual Report stated that housing a large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander extended family was 'insightful, exciting and tiring' for staff. The report records the progress and challenges for this family as well as the way that domestic violence can cause complex interconnected and inter-generational disadvantage for women and children:

It has been good to see this woman and her children make some progress since their last stay at Beryl, although with the lack of skills still apparent, low self-esteem, living skills, parenting skills, literacy etc., I wonder what will be different for her six children. The parenting they receive is barely good enough and the likelihood of success in life seems limited. I have a real sense of hopelessness with this family and have an expectation that they will re-enter a Supported Accommodation Assistance Program service in the future (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2003).

Staff members Leanne Williams ('Mrs Clause'), Sharon Williams and Robyn Martin delivering presents at the Client's Christmas Party in 2003.

Cases such as these drew attention to the need for early intervention and preventative community education campaigns about domestic violence. Alarmingly, during 1999–2004, the Refuge began to see women who were third-generation clients of family violence.

The Refuge argued that funding was necessary to break down such intergenerational patterns (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2001). In line with this early intervention and preventative focus, the Refuge received a $40,000 grant to run children-focused programs such as children's camps, computer, homework and parenting classes in 2001 (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2004a). Children who had been beaten or neglected by their mother or father were given time, skills and care (Cresswell, 2015). Looking back, former Coordinator at the Refuge, Ara Cresswell, felt that the most successful programs were those that involved working with children: "If I had my time again, I would shift most of the resources into the children."

The need to change community attitudes to violence against women was also coming into focus nationally at this time. The Australian Government's *Home Safe Home* Report (Chung, Kennedy, O'Brien and Wendt, 2000) observed that "family violence is more likely to be prevented if it is better understood and less accepted in the community." Important media movements aimed at changing cultural attitudes towards women and violence also began in the early 2000s. These included the 'Violence against Women – Australia Says No' campaign in 2004, and the 'White Ribbon Day' campaign run by UNIFEM (now UN Women) which began in Australia in 2003 (Donovan and Vlais, 2005).

Most memorable Beryl experience...

Meeting some of the most beautiful children.

– Former Board member

Overcoming organisational challenges

Despite increasing awareness of domestic violence through these national campaigns, funding for the sector continued to be stretched. Annual Reports from this period consistently report strained resources as a key obstacle for the Refuge in 2002–03, and statistics showed that the average length of stay for each woman was noticeably longer due to a housing crisis in the ACT and the January 2003 bushfires (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2003). Demand for the Refuge's services proved to be ever–increasing. An ABC News article in 2004 records that women's refuges were "expecting a doubling of demand for crisis accommodation in the days after Christmas" with Veronica Wensing, the Refuge's spokesperson at the time, describing a "sharp rise in demand for assistance" over the holiday period (ABC News, 2004). To assist women over this period, the Refuge participated in the 'Christmas Crisis Accommodation Initiative', which began in 2005 and continues to provide crisis accommodation for women for up to 55 days over December and January (Martin, 2015).

In 2001, the service started raising concerns around the communal model of accommodation not being conducive to women's and children's ability to heal (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2001–2002). In 2003–04, the Refuge was understaffed at times and the organisation's output was reduced from six families to two. This reduction was planned to provide more personal space for families and to allow workers to offer a more comprehensive case management approach (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2004a). According to former Coordinator, Ara Cresswell, "the communal houses were tough, everyone sharing bathrooms and kitchens" (2015). The lack of space and privacy for women and their families in the communal model meant that women "either went back to the violence or moved onto other unsuitable accommodation" (Beryl Women's Refuge Inc., 2004b).

Staff at the launch of Beryl's 2008–11 Strategic Plan, 2008.

For these reasons, the Committee began to explore alternative accommodation models that were later realised (see Chapter 6).

The Refuge's original Collective structure also began to restrict the organisation. Although that structure served the Refuge well during its early years, as the organisation developed, decision-making became more difficult under this model. Up until 2008, the Refuge had operated with the support of the Collective, which included paid workers and unpaid volunteers, making up a community of the Refuge's members, known as the 'Extended Collective' (as mentioned in Chapter 1). The Extended Collective would meet every 4 weeks to make decisions about the Refuge's activities and operations. This process was viewed as favourable to some as it ensured autonomous, collective decision-making in line with feminist principles of equality. At the same time, there were concerns among some Collective members that the process was time-consuming and thus inefficient.

For Robyn Martin, who joined the organisation in 2000, the Collective model was confidence-building because "every opinion was valued and no one would judge you for it" (2015). However, the collective structure also had limitations. All decisions were required to be made with 85% consensus of up to 15 collective members who "all had opinions and agendas" (Martin, 2015). Rhonda Adlington recalls that although the Collective members were very well intentioned, "decisions kept being deferred it could be months and a decision still wasn't made it only took two women to hold up the process Beryl went through a time of losing the focus, from being 'client focussed' to 'worker focused'. That was a disaster as too much time and too many resources were wasted on staff" (2014).

Former Coordinators Ara Cresswell and Rhonda Adlington started the process towards Beryl's transition to a management committee model that was realised in 2005 (see Chapter 6). Other women's organisations in the ACT, such as Inanna Inc. and Toora Women Inc. that had already undergone a similar transition provided helpful guidance to the Refuge in this process (Bryant, 2004).

Staff at the launch of Beryl's 2008–11 Strategic Plan, 2008.

> The hard work and dedication of the Beryl women is something to look up to. Not just anyone would have to courage to work in the domestic violence line of work. They are strong women through and through.
>
> – Sage Uhr,former Administrator and Casual Support Worker

Lessons learned

Having experienced various challenges, Rhonda Adlington's advice for current and future managers at the Refuge is pertinent. She believes that the key to the organisation's ongoing success is a "strong, decisive and diverse board of management with a broad skill set who are willing to devote time and careful consideration to issues, policies and practices. The Board must ask questions and stay up to date on innovative practices occurring in Australia and overseas to ensure that Beryl remains viable and continues to exist" (2014). Ara Cresswell also hopes that the Refuge can "move with the times" and that it continues in a form that "thrives with enough funding to continue what it does best" (2015).

Chapter 6

Chapter 6: 2005–06

Governance change, an international adventure and a special celebration

Emma Shaw

There are always going to be hard times in people's lives, and the services Beryl provides are building blocks in creating positive changes and structure to one's life. The support Beryl provides Canberra changes many lives for the better, no matter how great or small.

– Sage Uhr, former Administrator and Casual Support Worker

Staff members Maria-Eleni Alesandre, Sharon Williams, Elba Cruz Zavalla, Anne Burnett, Molly Wainwright, Robyn Martin, Eva Gilbert, Elsa Gonzalez, Veronica Wensing, Ros Thorne, receiving the 2005 ACT International Women's Day Awards Community Award 2005 for Women making a difference in the ACT, 8 March 2005.

Throughout the 2005–10 period the Refuge, which changed its name from Beryl Women's Refuge Inc. to Beryl Women Inc. in November 2005, a number of government policy responses to domestic violence, by the Australian Government in particular, occurred. In May 2008 the Australian Government established the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children ('NCRVWC'), to advise on measures to reduce the incidence and impact of violence against women and their children. The NCRVWC found that there was "considerable scope for greater cooperation and collaboration between the Australian Government and the states and territories in developing a unified, national approach to one of Australia's most pressing social issues", but a key challenge to a unified approach was inadequate funding of services (Mitchell, 2011).

"I gained a much clearer understanding of the complexities around family violence, and the importance of gender specific and culturally safe services. The women who came to Beryl are survivors and so brave, and I felt privileged to be a part of that.

Aboriginal women in particular face so many barriers to getting support. They have experienced generations of discrimination and marginalisation, and it is so important that there are places like Beryl where they can go and feel safe, supported, listened to and believed.

– Brooke McKail, former Committee member

"During my time working in administration, Beryl become important with the community in how the service reached so many families. I learnt that my small role was and is part of a bigger picture."

– Luisa, former Admin Worker

At the same time, the problem of domestic violence continued. In 2005 the *National Personal Safety Survey* found that 15% of Australian women had experienced physical or sexual violence from a previous partner, and 2.1% from a current partner, since the age of 15 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, p. 11). Throughout the 2005–10 period, the number of families supported by the Refuge gradually increased. This increase was due to a number of factors, including changes in service provision made as a result of the reviewed governance model (discussed below); an increase in the influx of interstate clients; and a general increase in the Refuge's profile, especially in relation to similar services in New South Wales. Beryl Women Inc. worked to maintain and in some ways enhance its position as one of the ACT's strongest support resources for women and children escaping domestic and family violence. In March 2005, and coinciding with its 30th birthday, the Refuge was awarded the ACT International Women's Day Award for Women Making a Difference in the ACT. That award recognised the Refuge's crucial work towards eliminating domestic and family violence.

ACT International Women's Day Award

Community Award 2005

Women making a difference in the ACT

Beryl Women's Refuge

Awards proudly sponsored by:

ActewAGL

Katy Gallagher

Katy Gallagher MLA
ACT Minister for Women

8 March 2005

The Refuge's service review and shift to a governance committee model

The Collective described the 2006–07 period as a challenging time for the organisation, mainly due to a reduction in government funding which resulted in the loss of one permanent worker position (Beryl Women Inc., 2007). In response, from 2006–08 the Refuge employed well-known local feminist Di Lucas to conduct a comprehensive review of Beryl's service ('Service Review'). This involved a review of a number of the Refuge's practices, including a review of its governance model. Noting some perceived shortcomings of the Collective structure, one of Lucas's recommendations was for the Refuge to transition from its 'Collective' model, to a structure of committee governance, where decisions were made by an external committee. It was acknowledged that the Refuge was demonstrating strength in its commitment to provide appropriate support for its clients, and particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, (Lucas, 2007). Nevertheless, Lucas's recommendation was made in a climate in which the ACT Government was keen to identify efficiency measures, and wherein collaboration between services, improved accountability and reporting requirements, and innovative service delivery models were viewed as priorities for the sector.

Bronwyn Smith (2015) reflects on this period of change for the Refuge as 'extremely challenging'. It forced members of the Collective and workers alike to reflect on the prospect of sustaining the feminist ideology, and on the principles underpinning the running of the Refuge:

> *Emotions were high, women (Collective members and Workers) were being asked to let go of some of their most tightly held principles around feminist collectivity and women's solidarity there were different philosophical views and personal agendas. Some women were torn between upholding their principles and feminist ideologies and the survival of the service.*

Bronwyn Smith (2015) explains that there were "long meetings that went into the night — women resigned, from their jobs and the Collective — leaving the service in an extremely vulnerable position."

Beryl's service planning weekend at Wallaga Lake, attended by Staff and Collective members, on Mount Gulaga in September 2006. This is a significant women's site for the Yuin people of the South Coast.

Ultimately, the prospect of significant funding cuts influenced the Collective's unanimous decision in April 2007 to instigate the new governance structure (Beryl Women Inc., 2007, p. 5). To facilitate the transition, the Refuge conducted a major membership drive, which sought to engage women who had valued feminist ideals and had an understanding of domestic violence, and also had governance, change management and finance skills. Bronwyn Smith (2015) reflects:

> *As I recall this was the turning point — at the end of this drive we had our first Committee under the new Governance model. It included a diverse range of women with varying skills, backgrounds, cultures and interests — all connected by a strong commitment to eliminating violence against women and children. Rhonda Woodward was the first Chair of the newly formed Committee, and as an Aboriginal woman, this was seen as a significant event in Beryl's history. Our new Constitution also included an Apology to illustrate Beryl's commitment to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

There were several changes associated with the new structure, including the need to more clearly define roles and responsibilities, and major updates to the Refuge's corporate infrastructure took place (Smith, 2015). Although there was a lot of grief around what the Collective was losing as a result of its new governance structure, there was also "excitement and relief that Beryl had survived this time of adversity and was finally moving forward" (Smith, 2015).

Paintings on tiles created by children at the Refuge.

Increased awareness, and a more connected service approach

While these extensive governance changes were taking place, the Refuge was operating in an environment of increasing community awareness about domestic and family violence-related homelessness. In 2008 it was reported that "the population of Australian women who are homeless because of domestic violence and family violence is increasingly becoming a group with complex and multiple needs" (Johnson et.al, 2008). In 2009, the National Community Attitudes to Violence against Women Survey uncovered positive attitude changes, in comparison to data gathered in 1995 by the Office of the Status of Women. These included greater recognition of the range of behaviours which constitute domestic violence; greater recognition that domestic violence is a crime; and greater community willingness to intervene in domestic violence situations (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2009). In 2010, Homelessness Australia reported that 'domestic violence is one of the typical pathways into homelessness for Australian women' (Homelessness Australia, 2010). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported in 2011 that the 'single greatest reason people present to Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (SAAP) is domestic or family violence, accounting for 22% of support periods' (AIHW, 2011).

The Refuge maintained working relationships with other community and women's services. For example, Beryl contributed to the Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative, a partnership between Housing ACT, the Social Housing and Homelessness section of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS), the Anglicare Housing Program, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS), and other refuges, including Inanna Inc. and Doris Women's Refuge Inc. (Beryl Women Inc., 2007, p. 9). Also, with input from SAAP funded services — including women's, men's and youth services — and with ACT Government support, the Refuge worked towards implementing a common referral process known as the 'Any Door is the Right Door' approach. The 'Any Door is the Right Door' model aimed to ensure that people in need would avoid a situation in which they approached the 'wrong door' (e.g. where they are told they cannot receive assistance from a particular service), and that they would only need to make one contact with the system in order to have their needs met (Pickles, 2007). That model aimed to minimise additional stress and trauma from having to contact multiple services when seeking support. This model was reported to have improved Beryl Women Inc.'s relationship with a number of other similar and linked services (Beryl Women Inc., 2007, p. 8).

> The needs of women in domestic violence situations are often very complex and one size does not fit all. The expectations of a Board are very different from those of a [Collective]. The transition from a [Collective] to a Board is not an easy process and can be quite challenging for former members of the [Collective].
>
> – Lyn Valentine, former Board member

Performers at Beryl's 30th birthday celebrations at Tilley's Devine Cafe Gallery.

Meeting increased demand: A new accommodation model

The women who came to Beryl are survivors and so brave, and I felt privileged to be a part of that.

– Brooke McKail, former Committee member

In 2005, with the support of the SAAP, Beryl Women Inc. changed its accommodation model to improve its accessibility for clients and flexibility in catering for crisis, medium and long-term stays (Beryl Women Inc., 2006, p. 4). Up until 2005, the Refuge had operated through three shared properties: one larger premises located at North Lyneham which accommodated two families with older accompanying boys, known as 'Niandi', and two three-bedroom houses which accommodated three families per house. As a result of the transition, three of the Refuge's properties, including Niandi, were replaced with five independent properties. The additional properties now enabled the Refuge to provide additional accommodation to women with boys over the age of 12, which was not possible before. The Refuge maintained one existing purpose built property (which it still occupies today) which accommodates two families in each property. The Beryl Women Inc. office also moved to Ainslie shops, so it was only longer in the same location as the main accommodation property.

The transition involved the Refuge momentarily reducing the number of families it could support from nine to four while replacement properties were sourced. This created a temporary gap in the sector in terms of the availability of crisis accommodation. Additionally, the new model meant that the Refuge's staff had to take on the dual roles of support workers and tenancy managers (Martin, 2015a). Despite those challenges, the Refuge viewed the change as beneficial for both clients and staff, with families reporting that they felt more settled and had a greater sense of belonging as a result (Beryl Women Inc., 2005, p. 4). It also provided clients and staff with more privacy and confidentiality (Martin, 2015b). At the same time, then Shadow Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Indigenous Affairs and Women, Jacqui Burke MLA, lobbied the ACT Government, stating that Beryl Women Inc. was under increasing pressure and stress because they had to turn away families in need due to the limitations of the then over-crowded premises. Burke called on the ACT Government to deliver "the long awaited promise to provide Beryl Women's Refuge with three new additional properties" (Burke, 2005).

Most memorable Beryl experience ...

Being able to work through difficulties to grow and strengthen the Beryl support team to keep Beryl going.

– Lindee Russell, former Committee member

Following numerous lobbying activities, various further changes were made to the Refuge's accommodation model. In addition, as the Refuge's running costs increased, some clients made small monetary contributions towards the Refuge in exchange for their stay (Martin, 2015b). Overall, the transition has enabled Beryl Women Inc. to provide better accommodation options for families, especially for women who had boys over the age of 12.

Client programs

The Refuge continued to run a number of effective client programs, including supported Play Group, School Holiday, After-School Group and Youth Group programs for children. These were aimed at providing a range of different activities for clients who were children, and opportunities for social, communication, sharing and coping strategy development. The Refuge's Holiday Program involved a number of clients attending a Nature Reserve, swimming and musical activities, and a visit to the cinema. The Primary School Group for children aged 6–12 continued to be the service's largest group, and catered for children from diverse cultural backgrounds (Beryl Women Inc., 2008, p. 13).

Beryl Women Inc. also organised a number of client events and outings, including attending an Aboriginal Hostels luncheon in commemoration of National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee ('NAIDOC) Week; a children's SAAP family fun day; community events organised for Youth Week; ballet and theatre outings; quiz nights; visits to Floriade; and, in 2009, a children's camp on the South Coast of New South Wales, funded by a grant received from the ACT Office for Women. This excursion is remembered as being a positive bonding experience for all involved, and a distinct improvement was noticed in the behaviours of the children involved and their relationships with their mother after the excursion (Beryl Women Inc., 2009, p. 3; Martin, 2015b). Additionally, a number of clients partook in significant art projects around the properties, including painting one mural named 'Celebrating Culture', and another in celebration of NAIDOC.

From 2008-09, children sat the Refuge also made kites which were then hung by workers in the Canberra City, alongside a banner created by their mothers for White Ribbon Day.

In 2009, the Refuge worked with the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Housing ACT, and homelessness services in running a Christmas Crisis Accommodation program, which is still in place today. This six to eight-week program was designed to better tackle the increased demand for support experienced by a number of sector services during the holiday season. Additional accommodation (including hotels and motels) was made available for families in need of assistance. As soon as families were accommodated, the Refuge would commence working towards arranging an appropriate exit point for them. The Refuge continues to participate in this program, today (Martin, 2015b).

Mural painted by Beryl Women Inc. staff and clients, with the assistance of artist Linda Huddleston, in commemoration of NAIDOC Week, 2009.

Most memorable Beryl experience ...

> Watching the women on their journey through the refuge through to their new houses with them changing and becoming stronger women.

– Melissa Martin, former Support Worker

> I commend Beryl Women Inc. for its ability to stay funded and operational for 40 years in changing political and social climates. I am privileged to have been part of the story of Beryl Women Inc. and broader social and feminist movements it is grounded in.
>
> – Melissa (Molly) Wainwright, former Collective member

Embracing diversity

Mitchell reports that in 2008–09, Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander women accounted for one in four women escaping domestic violence who accessed support services like Beryl Women Inc. This is an alarmingly high figure, given Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women make up approximately 2% of the Australian female population (Mitchell, 2011).

During the 2005–06 period, Beryl Women Inc. was unable to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to Support Worker positions. To ensure as best as possible that staff could support its diverse client base in a culturally sensitive way, all Support Workers who did not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander undertook cultural training specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The training aimed at ensuring that the Refuge could connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients to services that specialised in supporting them in Canberra and Queanbeyan.

Being an Aboriginal woman, throughout this period the Refuge's Manager Robyn Martin made a concerted effort to engage in a number of community consultations affecting services specialising in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and encouraged its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients to participate fully in each of the programs offered at the Refuge. These efforts were made in consideration of the significant disadvantage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families were continuing to suffer in the community.

Although the service did not have an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Support worker employed during this time, all clients who identified as such were informed that the Manager was an Aboriginal women and was available to provide support to them from a cultural perspective. Robyn continues to inform clients of her Aboriginality and that she is available to support them in this regard. In planning activities conducted throughout this period, other Refuge staff members were also encouraged to reflect on how their individual cultural identities affected the way workers fulfilled their roles (Beryl Women Inc., 2006, p. 14).

During the 2007–08 period, Beryl Women Inc. experienced an influx of refugee families arriving in Canberra, a large proportion of which were from African countries. This caused the Refuge to develop a closer working environment with the Migrant Resource Centre and Companion House, so as to ensure a holistic approach to support for these clients.

Staff members Robyn Martin, Mary Wasiu, Maria-Eleni Alesandre and Sharon Williams.

> We saw ourselves as sisters in arms in a way, part of our role was to connect in a powerful and personal and political way.
>
> – Jess Aan, former Childcare Worker in the late 1970s

Throughout the 2005–10 period, staff at the Refuge participated in a range of training, targeted at emergency management and Aboriginal and Torres Islander leadership and law support, but also, in recognition of the Refuge's increased interaction with clients of CALD backgrounds, advocacy for immigrants and working with refugee clients. The focus for staff training throughout 2007–08 was on the 'ongoing support and service provision to clients as well as the review of the service' (Beryl Women Inc., 2008, p. 7).

The Coming Home Program alliance

In 2010, the Coming Home Program was developed through an alliance between Toora Women Inc., Beryl Women Inc. and Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. The Program aimed to combine the breadth of the service and expertise each organisation offered, to provide the best options for women exiting the Alexander Maconochie Centre, an ACT prison. The alliance worked from a platform of empowerment, in assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in particular to overcome the various challenges associated with reintegrating into the community, including homelessness, recidivism, social isolation, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and trauma (Beryl Women Inc., 2010, p. 1).

The Coming Home Program was implemented with the support of the ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, as a transitional housing and outreach support program for women exiting the ACT prison system. It worked in line with targets specified by the National Partnership on Homelessness by supporting the reduction of women exiting institutions into homelessness (Beryl Women Inc., 2009, p. 4). As part of the Program, Corrections staff at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, a prison and remand centre in Hume, ACT, and the Coming Home Coordinator refer five women to the alliance at any one time, who are then actively case managed, along with up to 15 outreach clients, who are supported after having secured accommodation outside of the services (Beryl Women Inc., 2009, p. 7). Out of 130 women supported by the Coming Home Program, only two have returned to prison.

An international experience

In September 2008, Manager Robyn Martin obtained a grant from the ACT Office for Women to attend the 1st World Conference on Women's Shelters in Canada. There, Robyn Martin attended a number of client and worker-focused workshops, and learned about the different support approaches of the 51 countries represented. This was documented as a valuable opportunity for the Refuge to network with family violence prevention workers from around the world, to share proven innovations, and to learn on an international stage about best practice (Beryl Women Inc., 2009, p. 7).

While in Canada, Robyn Martin also visited Winnipeg to visit Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal government-funded services set up to support women with dependent children escaping domestic and sexual violence (Martin, 2008). At the conference, she learned about Canada's approach to domestic and

> Everyone deserves a second chance at a better life.
>
> – Jacky Cook, former Board member

> I have to say here – it's not as fancy as some of the refuges I've been in as far as décor and that, and it probably needs a bit of maintenance, but that's probably a housing issue. But the actual service itself, I think is fantastic.
>
> – Former client

Linda, Support Worker .

family violence in its Indigenous population, and a range of issues including but not limited to the European Women's Shelter Movement, Vienna's Domestic Abuse Interventions Program, human rights perspectives from Palestine and Egypt, and international views on domestic and family violence. Additionally, Robyn visited the Hollow Water Reservation to learn about their Community Holistic Healing program for sexual assault victims, perpetrators and non-offending partners (Beryl Women Inc., 2009, p. 7). These experiences were reported back to the ACT Office for Women (Martin, 2008).

Challenges and lessons learned

Following changes to the Refuge's accommodation model, Beryl Women Inc. identified a number of gaps in service during the 2005–10 period. These included a lack of awareness in the community, and within linked services, of children and young people as individuals with their own complex issues and problems separate from those of their parents (Beryl Women Inc., 2006, p. 18). Additionally, due to an increase in clients from refugee and CALD backgrounds, Beryl Women Inc. formed a better understanding of the complex needs of refugee families escaping family and domestic violence, who often have a history of trauma, requiring intensive support.

Additionally, the Refuge continued to struggle with cuts to staffing and difficulty in recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women into staff positions. This placed additional pressures on the Refuge's ability to provide culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. In 2006, the Refuge dealt with

> We should not forget that battered women are only the most obvious victims of a violent society. Lack of freedom, never having your own money, being confined to playing the role of a 'Wife' or 'Mother' only instead of being accepted as a person in your own right, all these pressures constantly limit what a woman can be or do in our society. Refuges were opened with a consciousness of many more subtle oppressions than that of physical brutality alone.
>
> – Canberra Women's Refuge Collective, Feedback, The National Times, 31 October, 1977

the consequences of changes to Housing ACT policy and practice, which included women seeking support at the Refuge from interstate having to go to extra lengths to prove their eligibility for priority housing allocation. In response, the Refuge identified and implemented a number of points of negotiation with Housing ACT, to increase collaboration with medium term women's supported accommodation services (Beryl Women Inc., 2006, p. 6). One benefit which arose from these circumstances was the increased collaboration amongst medium-term women's supported accommodation services in the ACT (Beryl Women Inc., 2007, p. 11).

Throughout the 2005-10 period, Beryl Women Inc. also noted that due to the increasing lack of affordable housing, women were often being forced to return to unsafe situations because they were not eligible for public housing, or able to afford private rentals. The Refuge reported at the time that the women of Beryl embraced and accommodated the mix of interests and strengths amongst different staff members, and worked as a team towards overcoming these challenges (Beryl Women Inc., 2006, p. 5).

A celebration to remember

In 2010, Beryl Women Inc. celebrated its 35th anniversary. Brooke McKail, former Committee member, Treasurer and Deputy Chair, recalls the event as involving "a wonderful mix of clients, workers, management and board, supporters in the community and prominent women (including the Minister for Women who spoke at the event)." Brooke remembers the event as having a "fantastic feeling", and being "a mix of fun and passion for the work of Beryl – it was great evidence of the strong role Beryl plays in the community and how many people have been impacted by its existence" (McKail, 2014).

This sentiment was reiterated by Sage Uhr, former Beryl Women Inc. Administrator and Casual Support Worker from 2008–10, and daughter of former Beryl Women Inc. Support Worker, Mavis Rangiihu-Uhr. Sage recalls her time working with Beryl Women Inc. as being very insightful. It educated Sage about the real, lived experience of domestic violence in her community, and the enormous assistance the organisation provides to women and children from a variety of backgrounds, in seemingly helpless, desperate situations, in order to rebuild their lives. For Sage, the 35th anniversary celebration was also a moving reminder of how her beloved Mum had touched the lives of many vulnerable families, and in her role with the Refuge (Uhr, 2014b):

Staff members at Beryl's 30th birthday celebrations .

Chapter 7

Chapter 7: 2011–15

Looking forward

Beryl has been through some really challenging times – funding cuts, losing staff members, policy changes from government. I hope Beryl continues to survive everything that is thrown at it, and come out a stronger organisation. I also hope it is able to maintain its unique character – a standalone service with a rich history and a strong group of supportive women.

– Brooke McKail, former Committee member

Isabelle Burns

Overview of the last five years

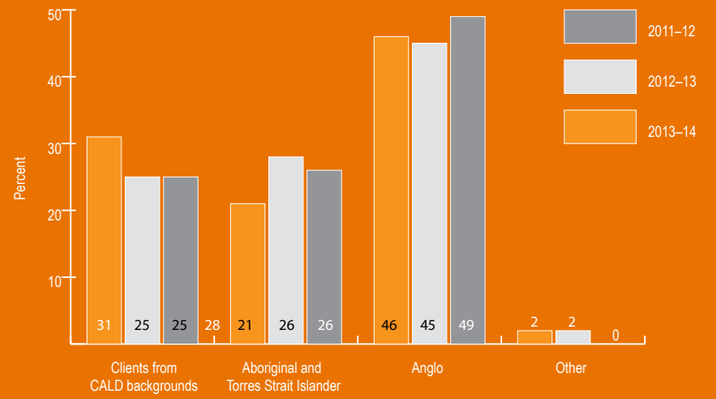
Over the last five years Beryl Women Inc. has faced ongoing challenges regarding funding and related staffing and capacity issues. As a result of the funding environment, the Refuge has consistently had a greater number of women and children referred to the service than can be accommodated. This has been further exacerbated by the cutting of worker positions within the Refuge. In August 2013, the administrative office returned to the main refuge site, primarily as a way to reduce rent costs and travel time. A positive aspect of the move was that clients have easier access to workers because the office is once again positioned at the same location as much of the accommodation.

The Refuge has continued to work closely in partnership with Toora Women Inc. and Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to deliver the Coming Home Program, which, as discussed in Chapter 6, provides a range of services to support women leaving the prison system to prevent homelessness and recidivism (Beryl Women Inc., 2014a). Beryl Women Inc. also continues to support a large proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from CALD backgrounds and their children who consistently make up approximately 50% of clients (see Figure 2 below) (Beryl Women Inc., 2014a).

The Refuge continues to be actively involved in consultations, events and advocacy within the ACT community, both as an independent organisation and as a member of the ACT Women's Services Network. Members of the network range from services for women and children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness particularly due to domestic/family violence, such as Beryl Women Inc., to services that work in fields including advocacy, research, health, rights and equality, sexual assault and the criminal justice system. The ACT Women's Services Network has been an important resource and support for Beryl Women Inc., as the community sector in the ACT is quite small and the network, which provides a peak forum for women to share information and develop responses on common women's issues, is "a way to have a stronger voice for women and children" in the face of common issues and goals (Martin, 2014).

In addition to contributing to submissions made by the ACT Women's Services Network, Robyn Martin spoke at the 2013 ACT Roundtable for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and their Children hosted by ACT Policing in her capacity as Manager of Beryl Women Inc. The Refuge has participated in numerous significant committees, and has been an active contributor to International Women's Day events. The Refuge was also involved in the development of the *Guides for ACT Media — Reporting on Violence against Women and Children in the ACT* (Beryl Women Inc., 2014a). The guides were developed to ensure that the media has a greater understanding of the complexities and underlying concerns related to domestic violence, sexual violence and family violence when reporting on these issues. The media plays a vital role in raising awareness and providing information to the community, and the guides provide factual information to better support sensitive and factually correct reporting of domestic violence.

Figure 2: Cultural background of Refuge clients, 2011–14



Technology and social media: Changing the domestic and family violence landscape

The social and political landscape in which the Refuge operates has seen many changes since 2011, not only because of funding limitations, but also due to factors such as the pervasiveness of social media and other technologies which have changed the dynamics of domestic violence. One of the factors that has changed the domestic violence landscape in recent years is technology. Smart phones can be used to track a victim through Facebook posts, phone-location apps and GPS coordinates. Recently in Australia, there have been instances where a perpetrator has secretly downloaded spyware onto their partner's phone, enabling them to read emails and texts, monitor who they talked to and see what they searched on the internet (Ireland, 2014). In a 2013 Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria survey, 97% of workers from the domestic violence sector stated that perpetrators were using technology to stalk women in the context of domestic violence, and that the most used technology to stalk women was mobile phones and social media (Woodlock, 2013).

Beryl Women Inc. staff have had to be flexible and adaptable in order to deal with this new challenge. Jennifer Dunkley, current Administrator at the Refuge, has indicated that consideration of social media and technology has been integrated into standard risk assessment processes that are conducted with each client to try to reduce the chance of harm (Dunkley, 2014). Now, as part of the standard orientation upon arriving at the refuge, women are informed on how to protect themselves and their privacy through social media and technology (Dunkley, 2014).

But social media and the internet can of course be a bonus to women experiencing domestic violence, as they can be used to access support networks and information on how to escape an abusive relationship. However, the consequences for women whose partners discover they have been accessing such information can be severe.

Social media campaigns

The women working at the Refuge have, since its establishment, proudly identified themselves and the service as feminist. Though the social context in which the refuge operates and the attitudes towards feminism are very different in our current climate, the challenge of highlighting women's lived, and often day-to-day experiences of sexism and harassment, still remains for many women.

Social media has allowed feminists to put the spotlight on issues that until recently have not received widespread coverage. The #YesAllWomen hashtag gained widespread attention after the Isla Vista shooting in May 2014, when a young man in California killed six people and wounded 13 more, citing the hatred of women as a contributing factor in his actions. Through this hashtag and across social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, women were able to draw attention to their fears and experiences and share their strategies to protect themselves from abuse.

The growing focus on anti-domestic violence campaigns, such as White Ribbon, Australia's only national, male-led campaign to end men's violence against women (White Ribbon Australia, 2014b) has spurred discussion on the topic from politicians, senior military leaders, the private sector and the media. This campaign has become one of the largest male-led anti-violence programs in the world, and was started by a handful of men in Canada in 1991 following the massacre of 14 women at École Polytechnique in 1989. In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly declared November 25 the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopting a white ribbon as a symbol of the day. The White Ribbon campaign came to Australia in 2003 and has gained significant political and media focus in recent years.

The impact of social media campaigns on women's lived experiences and the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual abuse is unclear. Studies of community attitudes on violence against women certainly indicate that there have been some improvements in the way domestic violence is understood in Australian society, but that there remain a large number of myths and misunderstandings around the issue.

What have you learnt from Beryl?

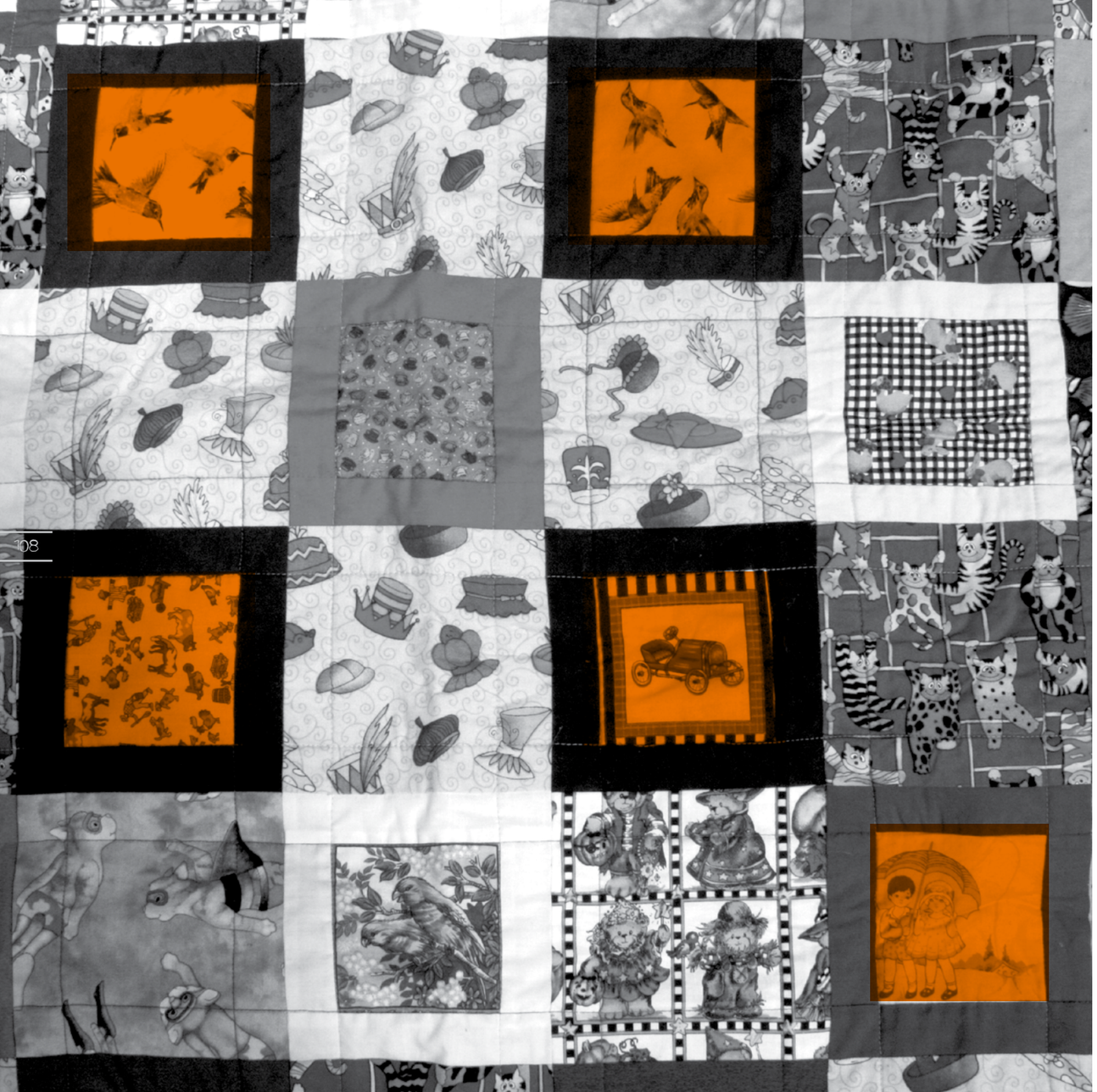
> So much … to be a feminist, that enduring friendships can develop in challenging environments, that laughter, caring and support sustain life, that there are many very courageous women out there.

– Jan Downie, former Staff and Collective member

What have you learnt from Beryl?

> How strong women can be in all aspects of our lives and continue to be no matter what race, religion, or wealth.

– Melissa Martin, former Support worker



Community attitudes towards violence against women

The 2013 *National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey* involved more than 17,500 20-minute telephone interviews with a cross-section of Australians, aged 16 years and older. The survey found that people tend to see violence as caused primarily by the characteristics of individual men using violence. This is in contrast to the evidence, which shows that violence is learned behaviour and that social factors such as the media, laws and the attitudes of others are strong influences.

It also revealed that although most people believe that violence against women is serious, people are more inclined to rate obvious physical behaviours as more serious than psychological, social and economic forms of abuse, such as repeatedly criticising one's partner to make them feel bad or useless, or controlling their social life or finances. For example, while 97% recognise "slapping or pushing the other partner to cause harm and fear" as a form of partner violence, fewer (85%) recognise 'controls the social life of the other partner by preventing them from seeing family and friends' as a form of violence (VicHealth, 2013, p. 43).

A majority of Australians understand that partner violence is committed by men or mainly by men (71%) and that women are most likely to suffer physical harm (86%). However, only a small majority (52%) recognise that the level of fear is worse for women. The proportion recognising that domestic violence is more likely to be perpetrated by men has declined by 15 percentage points since 1995 (VicHealth, 2013, p. 48).

What this means for Beryl Women Inc. and other domestic/family violence services is that there is still a lack of understanding in the community regarding the severity and impact of domestic /family violence. Without this understanding, gaining the political will to make legislative change and redirect funding back into the sector is difficult.

Addressing the needs of women with disabilities

In a report for the Australian Government Department of Social Services, the Flinders Institute for Housing, Urban and Regional Research identified a number of "emerging groups of women in need" for the domestic/family violence sector. These groups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, CALD women, and women with disabilities. These groups were found to experience barriers to accessing services or are less likely to use existing domestic violence services (Tually et al., 2008).

There is limited data on the extent of violence against women with disabilities in Australia, though research by Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) suggests that women with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic and family violence than women without a disability. They also experience violence more frequently and tend to be subject to violence for longer periods of time, often because they have fewer pathways to safety (DVCS et al., 2010).

The vulnerability of women with disabilities is compounded not only by discrimination in the housing market, but also by the overrepresentation of women with disabilities among those living in poverty, with poor levels of education, and in poorly skilled, low paid employment. Women with disabilities often face accessibility issues in refuges and shelters, not just with physical access but also sometimes with communication and aspects of self-care (DVCS et al., 2010).

As part of its regular strategic planning, Beryl Women Inc. has identified 'women with disabilities escaping domestic/family violence' as a service and sector gap for the organisation, to be explored further in the coming year. As Christina Ryan (2014) puts it:

Children's quilt donated by ACT Quilters Association.

What have you learnt from Beryl?

> That [the Refuge's] commitment to work collaboratively to support women and children subjected to violence is to be commended.

– Mirjana Wilson, Executive Director, Domestic Violence Crisis Service

Beryl's actually become extremely specialised around Aboriginal women and I think that's fantastic. I think we need something similar going on for women with disabilities. Rather than just expecting them all to mainstream women with disabilities and do that, why don't we realise that in the same way we recognise that Aboriginal women need to be worked with appropriately, and women from diverse cultural backgrounds, we also have older women and younger women's refuges, we need to get into women with disabilities. So we've still got a truckload to be doing.

Demand and funding

Despite advancements in gender equality in many areas across Australian society since Beryl Women Inc. was first established in 1975, the need for the services provided by Beryl is still shockingly apparent. In 2013, the Australian Institute of Criminology reported that 36% of all homicides take place in a domestic setting, and that 73% of those involve a woman being killed by her male partner (AIC, 2013). This equates to almost one woman per week who is killed by a current or former partner.

The *2012 Personal Safety Survey*, undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, found that 16.9% of Australian women – or more than 1.47 million women – had experienced some physical form of domestic violence since the age of 15 (ABS, 2012). The survey, which did not include violence committed by any partners that the victim wasn't living with, also found that more than 1.36 million women had suffered sexual domestic violence over the same period (ABS, 2012). The need for emergency accommodation for women and children escaping violent situations is clear.

Despite this need, government funding cuts through the National Affordable Housing Agreement, an intergovernmental agreement between the Australian, State and Territory Governments, saw annual funding to the ACT for homelessness services cut by $3.7 million in 2013–14 and a further $2.2 million in 2014–15 (Connery, 2014). Beryl Women Inc. and other women's refuges and shelters are funded as homelessness services, rather than being recognised as women's or health-related services. The Canberra Times reported that in 2012, 80 families sought emergency accommodation support to escape domestic violence through First Point, the centralised homelessness service in the ACT, but that just 37 were placed. In the same period in 2013, 116 women and their children approached the service for help. Only 36 were placed in ACT refuges (Connery, 2014).

For the Refuge, the funding cuts have translated to an annual reduction of $80,000 – a third of their funding. The Beryl Women Inc. submission to the current Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence in Australia states:

> *As a result of those funding cuts, Beryl Women Inc. has had to make considerable changes to the level of support provided to women and children accessing the service, including not filling two vacant positions. These impacts to service delivery mean that we are not in a position to deliver the same level of support to women and children, the level of practical and financial support has been reduced as the need to continue providing trauma informed care to our clients is the priority as a means to addressing longer term healing as well as addressing the initial crisis of domestic/family violence and homelessness and reduces our capacity to provide a specific service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as we previously have.* (Beryl Women Inc., 2014b, p. 10).

The cut to funding in the ACT is part of a broader trend for refuges across Australia. In Sydney in 2014, a number of women's refuges were flagged for closure following changes under the NSW Coalition Government's *Going Home, Staying Home* housing reforms. The emphasis of the *Going Home, Staying Home* tender packages has been on refuges and other homelessness services being based on a mix of young people, men, women and families (McMurray, 2014). Many smaller specialist services, including independent women's only services, have been unable to compete with bigger agencies. Faith-based groups have taken on the management of many shelters, including Elsie Women's Refuge, Dolores Single Women's Refuge in Sydney, and the Wagga Wagga Women's and Children's Refuge (St Vincent de Paul, 2014). Many in the sector are now concerned that these shelters will no longer be able to focus on providing specialist services for victims of domestic violence, as they have been rebadged as 'homelessness services' open to men, women and children.

Funding cuts affect not only clients, but also staff. Juggling tight budgets with staff entitlements is an ongoing challenge, but the Beryl Women Inc. management realise that "it is important to ensure there is a good balance between staff being recognised and rewarded for the work they do and staying within the budget requirements" (Beryl Women Inc., 2014).

Artwork by a child at the Refuge.

Angie Piubello,Child Support Worker.

However, sometimes this isn't possible. During recent funding cuts, staff have agreed to forgo certain workplace conditions and entitlements that were previously over and above the award to ensure the service remains viable. Former Treasurer Lynette Grigg (2014) says: "The strength I did see [in the Refuge] was it made this incredible loyalty and gave drive and dedication and belief that no matter what we will keep this thing happening, we will keep doing it for these women who have been suffering. It's a wonderful thing, Beryl's success is driven by that".

Beryl Women Inc.'s ability to continue operating and meeting the needs of women and children escaping domestic violence for 40 years is a testament to the resilience of the service and its staff. It is particularly notable that the service has continued, uninterrupted, in spite of challenges posed by the changing social and political environment, including technological developments, the increased role of social media, and substantial funding cuts.

Client support and programs

Despite limited funding, Beryl Women Inc. has continued to provide additional programs to the ACT community outside of its key role as a provider of emergency accommodation. Between 2010–11 and 2013–14, the Refuge was involved in the ACT Government 'A Place to Call Home' program. This involved supporting clients in new housing provided by the ACT Government, helping them to connect with the local community and providing support both face-to-face and over the phone (Martin, 2014).

The 'Christmas Crisis Accommodation' program, which has been running annually in Canberra since 2005, was set up to provide additional accommodation to families who need support and somewhere to stay over the Christmas and New Year period. This time of year typically sees an increase in women seeking support. Robyn Martin points out that with "the domestic violence, alcohol, sexual violence, it's a bit of a melting pot and things just happen over that period" (2014). That program runs for 6–8 weeks and through it Refuge staff provide support to women and children accommodated in motels provided by the ACT Government.

The support provided to women and children through these programs, as well as to those staying at the Refuge itself, ranges from not only mental and emotional support, but also practical support. Workers assist women in activities like communicating with Centrelink and navigating the various child protection and social services systems, showing women and their children the bus route to go to school, and helping them to find a translator and communicate with the Department of Immigration (Williams, 2014). For women who leave a violent environment, sometimes with nothing but the clothes on their backs, this assistance is invaluable. Some women might need to establish new bank accounts or get copies of key documents like identification or Medicare cards. As Robyn Martin says, "these are the kind of things you work on straight away, you can't just let her sit back and process stuff, you can't afford to do that. Some of these things take time and you need to get the process started ASAP" (2015b).

> I've learnt that you're not always on your own and that there is always someone to help.
>
> – Former client

What Beryl means to people

What is abundantly clear upon speaking to any of the staff at Beryl Women Inc. is that they are incredibly passionate about what they do. Many of the workers interviewed for this book indicated that some of the best parts of working at the Refuge were the friendships that they developed, and the opportunity to work with other women who felt equally strongly about the work:

> *One of my fondest memories of working at Beryl was about working with like-minded women. When there's such pressure on the service from funding constraints etc., the bonding gets stronger as you have to be stronger to push back* (Wensing, 2014).

For clients, staying at the Refuge can, quite literally, be life-saving. As Jacky Cook (2014), former Committee member reflects, "Women speak of escaping violent situations and having to move interstate in order to keep themselves and their children safe. The service provided by Beryl can mean the difference between a woman and her children successfully establishing themselves in a new home, or returning to a violent situation because they don't have any other option." It gives women and children who have experienced domestic/family violence the capacity to rebuild their lives, as well as starting them on the process of deeper healing to recover from the trauma they have experienced.

For 40 years Beryl Women Inc. has displayed longevity and resilience in continuing to help women to rebuild their lives and support their children in the face of significant challenges. As Jacky Cook puts it (2015), "Beryl is the foundation and the heart of the women's service sector in the ACT. This needs to always be remembered and honoured".

The women I worked with at the time all contributed to my own personal growth with their own stories and skills.

– Robyn Martin,
Manager of Beryl Women Inc.

Robyn Martin, Manager of Beryl.

Q&A with Robyn Martin

(Manager, Beryl Women Inc.)

Robyn Martin is the current Manager of Beryl Women Inc. Robyn joined the Refuge as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Support Worker in 2000, and moved into the Manager's position in 2005. She shares some of her thoughts from her 15 years working at the Refuge.

What was it like working at Beryl Women Inc. when it was still a collective model?

When I came here, Beryl was practising collectivity – there were nine employees at the time, four of Aboriginal descent, four from non-English speaking backgrounds and the Coordinator's position was filled by an Anglo woman. Working in a team like that and working collectively I learnt a lot around my own personal management style; it gave me the skills to step into a Manager's position. I really love collectivity — being an Aboriginal person and growing up the way I did, especially with what was happening in Aboriginal affairs during my childhood, I was invisible, I didn't have a voice. But coming here and working as a part of a collective – where your opinion was valued, and it was expected you would express your opinion and no one would judge you for it — was confidence building and increased my self-esteem. The women I worked with at the time all contributed to my own personal growth with their own stories and skills. Then you've got the clients on top of that — I have met some really resilient women with incredible strength. I've always been amazed by how easily they will tell their stories to complete strangers, there's trust in us and our service from the moment they enter the service, which is very humbling.

What was it like working with the Collective?

When the Collective worked well it was fantastic, but when it didn't Imagine sitting here with nine staff members and eight extended members from the community. Together, all of us were the Collective at Beryl. There'd be sometimes 15 women sitting around here, who all had opinions around what was being discussed, some of those women had their own agendas as well, and all managing this service. To make decisions, I think back then it was consensus decisions, but in the Refuge's constitution at the time this was defined as 85%. It just needed one person to hold up the process — some decisions took a long time to make.

I think on one occasion we sat around till 11:30pm, passionately debating. Even though it was time consuming when those big decisions were being discussed, with sometimes no decisions being made and the process held up all the time, I learnt a lot from that. I still miss that type of collectivity. We don't make the time for it anymore, that's the one thing I miss, we do get into conversations here but we're very conscious of the time and we can't spend half an hour debating something that's important and might inform some change, or change the thinking around a particular issue, because there's so much more that demands our time. Those conversations from the 70s, 80s and 90s just don't happen anymore. Not as much as we'd like.

How do the workers interact with clients?

We've seen lots of second and third generation clients. Most have been Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, but I can't say they've all been that. I've seen young women coming in who were here as young children when I first started. It's really, really sad because I later learnt that the perpetrators of that violence had also been children in our service. It raises questions around the crisis nature of accommodation and the level of support we're giving families. For some women it works really well, for other women, not so much.

When I began working at the Refuge we were addressing the immediate needs of families, we were doing some therapeutic stuff but our case management has changed drastically since then. We're much more trauma-informed and the case management we're doing is trauma-framed, so we're getting better outcomes for children and families. There was a five-year period where we didn't have any clients who were repeat clients, from around 2010 until 2014.

Trauma is the buzz word at the moment, it wasn't happening four or five years ago. I think we hadn't labelled what we were doing as trauma-informed case management until just recently, but when we look at the definitions and at models from America and compare them to what we're doing here, trauma-informed case management is pretty much what we have been doing. The thing that's allowed us to work more comprehensively with women is that families are staying in the service for longer periods and it's taking them longer to leave the service. We're funded to provide crisis accommodation for up to three months. You can't do much with women and children who have layers and layers and layers of trauma, often from when they were born, in three months.

We don't want to see women and children, who were child clients, come back to the service in 5 years' time. We recognise we can't address every trauma a family has experienced, but we can start them on a process of healing.

Most memorable Beryl experience...

In Autumn when Angie (Beryl Staff member) took photos of us in the tree.

- Jacqui, former child client

Quilt art by children at the Refuge.

Support for Indigenous women

By Kate Filer

THE history Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with government agencies impacts on their willingness to use domestic violence services, according to the ACT refuge worker Robyn Martin.

Ms Martin works at Beryl Refuge where about 30 per cent of the women and children coming for help are Indigenous.

She shared her experience with Queanbeyan workers from a variety of community service organisations last week at the first of three forums this year designed to explore cultural barriers which can prevent women from getting help.

Ms Martin said the forced removal of children, which lasted until about 1970, resulted in a distrust of police and family services departments, such as the Department of Community Services (DoCS).

She said the mandatory notification required in the ACT and NSW if children were involved when a domestic violence incident occurred sometimes led to reluctance to report an incident by the family involved, or caused discomfort for Aboriginal workers in the area, and sometimes resulted in a lack of action by the government department notified.

Ms Martin said forced removal was a firsthand memory for many Indigenous people.

She said government agencies, such as DoCS, did not want to seem too heavy-handed, and sometimes this led to frustration at a lack of action once an incident was reported.

"Most women do not want to press charges — they just want the violence to stop," Ms Martin said.

"Because of the deaths in custody there is a real fear that if their man is locked up he won't come back out again," she said.

Different parenting techniques and perceived final language were sometimes issues once a woman and her children accessed a refuge, especially in group living situations.

Ms Martin said to improve trust and access for Indigenous people her refuge had changed its employment practices, doing away with lengthy and jargonistic duty statements and introducing information sessions for would-be employees — Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

She said every effort was made to link Aboriginal women with Aboriginal services except where they were concerned about confidentiality.

Because many women, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, return to their partner Ms Martin said there was an emphasis on ensuring women knew the door was always open.

She said women and children were encouraged to have a safety plan in case they needed to leave.

Spokeswoman for the Queanbeyan Domestic Violence Interagency Forum, council's social planner, Philippa Moss, said the message was coming through loud and clear that domestic violence was a crime and it was not acceptable in any culture.

The next forum will be held on Wednesday October 26, and will discuss cultural barriers within the Macedonian community.

Beryl Refuge worker Robyn Martin spoke at a domestic violence forum in Queanbeyan last week.

International W

Refuge a haven in troubled times

Refuge marks 30 years helping the abused

BERYL Women's Refuge got a present for its 30th birthday — the ACT Government's 2005 Community Award for International Women's Day.

The refuge's coordinator Robyn Martin said the award was recognition that the service was doing good work.

She said in its 30 year history Australia's second oldest service had given refuge to thousands of women and children.

Women were staying longer at the refuge now because of the difficulties in accessing public housing.

"This has meant fewer families were accommodated in the past financial year than ever before.

"There are no exit points — its a nine to 12 month wait for housing," Ms Martin said.

In 2003/2004 116 women and their children were accommodated at Beryl.

Ms Martin said many of the women using the service were indigenous, 31 per cent, or from non-English speaking backgrounds, 24 per cent.

She said the over-representation of some ethnic groups in the figures could result from the social isolation some women experience away if living away from family and friends.

"We're pretty well known in the indigenous community and our working team offers culturally sensitive support," Ms Martin said.

She is looking forward to the next stage in the evolving life of Beryl.

She said approval had been given for Beryl to take over some ACT Housing Department properties so there were options other than shared accommodation.

"Communal living can be problematic and create added stress and trauma for families already going through enough," she said.

"I believe this change will mean more women won't go back [to] the abusive situation[] because it will be their house while they are in it."

Ms Martin said Beryl was waiting for the housing allocation which could take about three months.

Ms Martin thanked the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services for funding.

Beryl Women's Refuge co-ordinator Robyn Martin and family support worker Molly Wainwright celebrate 30 years of the refuge. Picture: Melissa Stiles

Some of the print media relating tothe Refuge.

What are some of your highlights from working at the Refuge?

It's hard to pick particular moments of working at Beryl that have been highlights as there have been so many: working and getting to know the women and children who access the service, and seeing the positive changes and life choices they make and the impacts this has on their lives. Working with all the workers, extended Collective and Committee members has been so rewarding and has enhanced my own growth as a women which has influenced my values and beliefs and how I choose to live my own life.

I can say that when I got nominated and awarded the ACT Person of the Year during NAIDOC Week in 2012, as this was based on my work here, so that's probably another highlight.

Another was when Beryl got the ACT International Women's Day Award (Community Award 2005), for Women Making a Difference in the ACT, and sharing the NAIDOC Community Services Worker of the Year (ACTCOSS Award) with a colleague and friend Sharon Williams in 2007.

Having the opportunity to have my first overseas trip, going to Canada, to go to the First International Women's Shelter Conference is another highlight. There were delegates from all around the world. I went with Sandra Lambert (Executive Officer, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services) and Betty Connelly, another Aboriginal woman from the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. We went to the conference, which was three days, but prior to going I had made contact with a heap of women's services over there and had set up meetings to go and see their services, and we also met with their funding body. I also got in touch with an Aboriginal Reserve because they had developed a program around sexual assault. We had lots of conversations and visits, around how their programs work. We went and saw a couple of mainstream services but most were run specifically by Aboriginal women. It was really exciting.

> I am from Philippines, and I don't have family here. Staff at Beryl helped my confidence grow.
>
> – Former client

What are your hopes for the Refuge in the future?

My hopes for Beryl's future are that we continue to provide such a valuable service to women and children escaping domestic/family violence, and that additional funding is available to allow us to provide additional programs that support women and children who are still living with violence in the community.

I also hope that Beryl continues to be in a position to provide prevention and intervention programs to break the cycle, so that children who have been child clients of the service do not access the service as young adult women with their own children, having the resources to provide long-term, unlimited support that is based on trauma-informed care to assist in the healing process, to continue to work respectfully and to do no further harm to the client.

Robyn Martin.

Acknowledgements

As far as Beryl is concerned – I would like to say continue what you're doing and thank you very, very much for three lives – for my son, myself and my daughter.

– Client reflection during a focus group, 2014

Farzana Choudhury
Editor/ Project Coordinator

First and foremost, we'd like to thank everyone who has been part of Beryl Women Inc.'s rich history, including the women and children who have accessed the Refuge's services, the staff who have worked tirelessly to support those women and children, the Governance Committee (previously the Collective), and other service providers who have worked with Beryl to support the women and their accompanying children who were made homeless due to domestic and family violence. In particular, we'd like to acknowledge two amazing women who, during their time at Beryl, made a huge difference to the lives of women and their children, and to the Refuge – Mavis Rangiihu-Uhr and Grace Coe.

We'd especially like to thank the women who shared their experiences for this book, through focus groups, interviews, surveys and client feedback. Your contributions are invaluable, especially given how difficult conversations around domestic and family violence can be, particularly for those who have experienced it. Hopefully this book captures your perspectives, assists others experiencing domestic and family violence to seek support, and encourages continued advocacy to eliminate domestic and family violence.

It would not have been possible to produce this book without the contributions of the Beryl History Project Group over the last nine months. The Group comprised women interested in gaining an understanding of domestic violence and gender equality, and giving back to the community. Some women were also involved for personal reasons. Thank you very much to the Group members – Jane Alver, Julie Ayre, Isabelle Burns, Rebekah Conway, Ishani Das, Alice De Marchi, Nicole Doughty, Julia Driver, Nicole Fogarty, Monica Gill, Chi Chi Huang, Priscilla Kan John, Marzieh Nowrouz Tafreshi, Amber O'Shea, Johanna Parker, Elise Perry, Emma Shaw, Nikita Singh, Sarah Spottiswood, Zulpha Styer, Maria Swyrydan, Rachel Wilkie and Bronwyn Wyatt. We hope you've enjoyed gaining some insight into the issue of domestic violence through this project and have found the experience rewarding. Thank you for your time and dedication in between work, family, personal and other commitments. We also extend our thanks to Delene White for designing the book, and Robyn Martin and Angie Piubello for their guidance. It's been great working with you all, and we really appreciate your efforts.

The publication of this book was funded by the ACT Office for Women, through the 2014-2015 Participation (Women's) Grants Program. We are very grateful for your support, thank you.

Congratulations to Beryl on 40 years of providing a safe space and support to women and children escaping domestic and family violence. Although domestic and family violence remains a problem, and in spite of the challenges experienced by the Refuge and those accessing its services, this book tells a story that is certainly worth acknowledging and celebrating.

Most memorable Beryl experience ...

The friendships I made there which are still in my life 30 years later, the attempt to make collective decisions ... and willingness to explore new ways of being at work.

– Brigid Donohoe, former Staff member

The women's movement in Australia: A timeline

1973	Anne Summers and Jennifer Dakers call a meeting at Women's House in Sydney to discuss the establishment of a refuge to provide one or two nights' free accommodation for women in various distress situations, and with four other women they initiate the women's refuge movement in Australia (10 November)
1974	The Australian Government officially recognises International Women's Day
	Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre, Australia's feminist women's health centre, opens (8 March)
	The first women's shelter in Australia for women leaving violent homes, Elsie Women's Refuge opens in Glebe, Sydney (16 March)
	The first Rape Crisis Centre in Victoria commences operation, formed by one of the women's liberation groups, Women Against Rape (September)
	The first Rape Crisis Centre in Sydney commences operation from Women's House in Sydney (28 October)
	The Whitlam Government appoints a women's adviser (Elizabeth Reid) and an Office of Women's Affairs in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (relocated to the Department of Home Affairs in 1977)
1975	International Women's Year
	Australia ratifies the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) is passed
	The Canberra Women's Refuge (now Beryl Women Inc.) opens officially and refuge begins operation immediately (8 March)
	Australia's first sex discrimination law, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SA), is passed (takes full effect from August 1976) (later replaced by the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA))
	Australia ratifies the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (10 December)
1976	UN General Assembly Resolution 31/136 adopts the period from 1976 to 1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (16 December)
	Canberra Rape Crisis Centre opens
	South Australia becomes the first Australian jurisdiction to make rape within marriage a crime, and by the end of the 1980s, it has been made a criminal offence in all Australian jurisdictions
1977	*Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW) is passed*
1979	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is adopted by the United Nations General Assembly
	Louisa Women's Refuge in Queanbeyan established (30 May)
1981	Sixty-one women arrested in Canberra on ANZAC Day during a protest against rape in war (April)
1981	*Crimes (Domestic Violence) Amendment Act 1982* (NSW) is passed, defining a 'domestic violence offence', introducing specific apprehended domestic violence orders, and confirming the right of police to enter private premises to investigate domestic violence complaints when invited
1983	Prime Minister Hawke re-establishes an Office of the Status of Women within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
	Australia ratifies the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (28 July)
	Toora Single Women's Shelter opens (8 August)
1984	*Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) is passed, giving effect to CEDAW
	Equal Opportunity Acts introduced in Victoria, WA and SA
	The National Women's Consultative Council is established, comprising members from 17 national organisations to advise the Government on national women's policy
	The Incest Centre opens
1985	The Australian Government introduces funding for refuges across Australia through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)
1986	*Domestic Violence Act 1986* (ACT) passes, providing for civil protection orders
1988	Domestic Violence Crisis Service opens in the ACT
	'A say, a choice, a fair go': The Government's National Agenda for Women is released
1989	Lowana Young Women's Refuge opens in Canberra to provide specialist accommodation and support to young women aged 13-18 escaping domestic and family violence, in recognition of their unique needs not able to be met through adult women's services
1990	Australia signs and ratifies the Convention on the Rights of the Child – soon to be added to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986 (Cth)
	The National Committee on Violence Against Women ran for three years from March 1990 and delivered the National Strategy on Violence Against Women
	The Government also make contributions internationally, recognising violence against women as a human rights violation
1992	*Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) is passed and a Disability Discrimination Commissioner is appointed to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
	Heira House opens as a house for single women escaping domestic violence
	Women's Emergency Services Network (WESNET) is established
1993	The UN General Assembly unanimously passes the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women
	International Year of the World's Indigenous People
	First National Week of Prayer for Reconciliation
1995	Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women paper is released by the Office for the Status of Women
1996	The Australian Government convened the National Domestic Violence Summit, which resulted in the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) initiative
	Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation launches Australia's first National Reconciliation Week
1997	The Australian Government establishes the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence is Australian Government program
	Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families is tabled in the Federal Parliament
1998	National Sorry Day is commemorated for the first time (26 May)
2000	The Australian Government releases the Home Safe Home report
2003	January bushfires in Canberra increase the number of women asking for assistance
	White Ribbon Day campaign run by UNIFEM (now UN Women) begins in Australia
2004	'Violence against Women – Australia Says No' campaign begins
2008	Introduction of Domestic Violence and Protection Orders 2008 (ACT)
	National Apology to the Stolen Generations by the Australian Parliament, 13 February 2008
	Introduction of the National Affordable Housing Agreement
2009	The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children releases Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009 – 2021 (March)
2011	The Australian Government releases the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022, and endorsed by Australian, State and Territory Governments on 15 February
2012	Lowana Young Women's Refuge (now Lowana Youth Services Inc.) is closed by the ACT Government in March as part of their 'Modernising youth housing and homelessness services in the ACT' project. There is no longer any gender or skill specific Safe-House type accommodation for young women or men in the ACT
2014	The Australian Government releases the *Second Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* 2010-2022 (27 June)

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Statement of
Apology and Reconciliation

To all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women, your families and communities.

We, non-Indigenous people of this land, apologise for the human suffering and injustice that you have experienced as a result of colonisation and generations of discrimination and marginalisation that has resulted from that.

We recognise ourselves as the beneficiaries of this colonisation process and we share with you our feelings of shame and horror at the actions and atrocities that were perpetrated against your people.

We acknowledge that the removal of children devastated individuals, families and entire communities and that the intention of those policies was to assimilate Indigenous children. We recognise this as a policy of genocide.

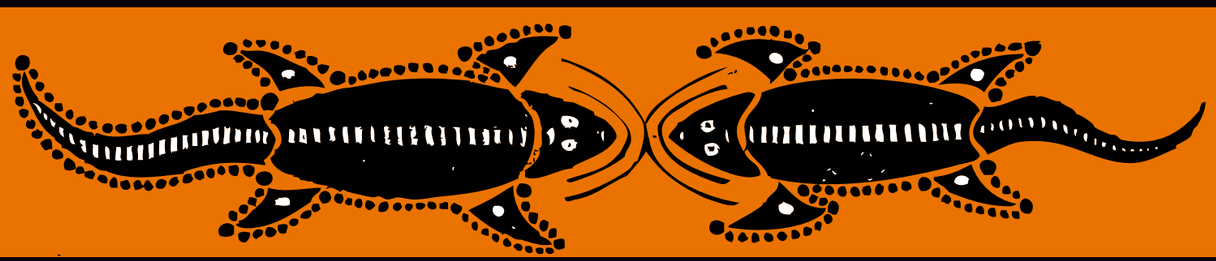
We collectively feel a sense of outrage, and feel a particular sense of responsibility around these racist policies as their implementation required the active involvement of community welfare organisations. We unreservedly apologise to the individuals, families and communities for these acts of injustice.

We acknowledge your human right to self-determination.

We commit to working in solidarity with you in ways that you choose and determine.

We work with many people who are affected by disadvantage, prejudice, poverty, violence, marginalisation, trauma and social circumstances out of their control. We understand the long-term damage to communities when these issues are unaddressed.

We recognise your leadership, we honour your visions and we join with you in your hopes for your future and for our futures together.



Artwork by Ceretha Skinner.

Artwork by Ceretha Skinner.

> If you took Beryl away you'd be taking away basically any opportunity for any of us to have a life and to be safe and for our kids to break away.
>
> – Former client

WOMEN INC.

Opening a new door:
The herstory of Beryl Women Inc. 1975–2015

On International Women's Day in 1975, a new door was opened for women escaping domestic and family violence in the ACT, in the form of the Canberra Women's Refuge, now known as Beryl Women Inc. This book is about how opening that door 40 years ago has impacted on the lives of those women and their accompanying children (who have since opened their own doors), and those working at and supporting the Refuge.

The changing understanding of domestic violence, and the increasing willingness of society to intervene, legislate and speak up against violence against women and children are revealed, and brought to life in the stories and interviews that these pages chart.

This history will also outline Beryl Women Inc.'s resilience and adaptability since its inception. Key influences on the operation and maintenance of the crisis service will be evident in this history, including the women's liberation and refuge movements, legal and government policy reforms, resource constraints, and the Refuge's professionalisation over time.

Importantly, it provides a vital snapshot of the women's sector in the ACT that highlights the ongoing importance of the work of Beryl Women Inc., and the continued need to eliminate violence against women and children.

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