

'WORKING WITH CHILDREN' PROJECT

Children and young people living with domestic violence have been called the 'silent or forgotten victims'.

Children experience domestic violence in a number of ways. In addition to seeing, hearing or directly experiencing domestic violence, children can be traumatised by the aftermath of a violent event. This can include the impact of police intervention, witnessing the mother's need for medical attention, departure from home, friends and school, and feelings of disempowerment and vulnerability.

Many parents believe that their children are shielded from domestic violence because 'it only happens out of earshot', or 'when the children are in bed'. However, research shows that around 90% of children from violent families do directly witness the violence and that children often recall detailed events that they were not intended to have witnessed.

In Queensland, 68% (580 of 856) of respondents to a phone-in conducted by the Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force reported the presence of dependent children in the household during the course of the violent relationship. Ninety per cent of these respondents reported that the children had witnessed the domestic violence (Queensland Domestic Violence Taskforce, 1988).

The effects on children of living with violence have recently been given widespread attention. However, even though the awareness of the problem and knowledge of the difficulties experienced by children has grown markedly over the last 20 years, most children do not get the help and support they need.

Unfortunately there are not enough services specifically targeted and available to children who have experienced domestic violence. Whilst there have been preventive and education measures adopted in schools across Australia, with varying degrees of effort, access to specialist services for those children who have experienced domestic violence is limited (Smith, O'Connor & Berthelsen, 1996 2; Bagshaw, Chung, Couch, Lilburn & Wadham, 1999 3, cited in Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, 1999).

To assist service providers throughout Australia to better meet the needs of children living with domestic violence, the *Working with Children* project was initiated. It is funded by the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence initiative, coordinated through the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women. Leslie Gevers Community Management Services is undertaking the project.

The aim of the *Working with Children* project is to scope and map existing services, resources and interventions within Australia for children living with domestic violence. Information received from service providers will contribute towards the compilation of a national database of services specialising in this field. The database will include a broad range of services from community based to private practitioners, and will be inclusive of services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Working with Children will develop the following resources for service providers across Australia who come into contact with children living with domestic violence:

- a comprehensive database of service providers which will be available on the internet as well as in book form;
- an annotated bibliography of publications, resources (eg training kits, practice materials), and web sites both within Australia and overseas;
- a report presenting practice standards and quality tools for service providers; and
- a report describing best practice approaches with examples of services and programs from Australia and overseas.

Information on available services is of great value to all service providers who come into contact with children living with domestic violence. It can provide them with a referral point or with information to develop their own service. The resources of this project will be available to all service providers after the completion of the project in November 2002.

The project also aims to document examples of Australian and international best practice in this field, and to develop best practice standards and quality management tools. In June and July this year, a series of forums for service providers was held in each state and territory. The purpose of these forums was to gain feedback on proposed practice standards, identify tools for quality assurance, identify the needs of children in specific age groups, and provide services with an opportunity to network.

To ensure that resources are relevant to service providers it is important that we make contact with all services working with children living with domestic violence. Please contact us if you work with children or have knowledge of services or resources for working with children.

All service providers, including private practitioners, who are working with children living with domestic violence, are invited to participate in this project. You can visit the project website at www.lgcms.com.au or contact Leslie Gevers Community Management Services on 08 9336 7717 or email kidsproject@lgcms.com.au

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REFERENCES

- Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 1999 *Meta Evaluation Bulletin* #2, September, p.2.
- Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force 1988, *Beyond These Walls*, report to the Honourable Peter McKechnie, M.L.A., Brisbane.