

# Partners in Prevention Network Meeting

Thursday 18 June 2009, Ross House

This network meeting featured an information sharing session and a discussion of violence against women with disabilities. Guest speakers were Rebecca Feldman from the Youth Disability Advocacy Service and Kate Hood from the Victorian Women with Disabilities Network.

## Information sharing

- DEECD/VicHealth scoping project now finished, waiting for report - likely to be in the next two weeks
- Michael's forum presentation now available to download in mp3 format from <http://partnersinprevention.wordpress.com>
- State plan to prevent violence against women:–
  - Recent focus has been internal - developing partnerships with government departments that don't appreciate the relevance of VAW prevention to their portfolio.
  - Now moving into content development, working groups will be convened July/August
  - Currently intending to launch the plan on or near White Ribbon Day
- Federal plan :–
  - Still no official announcement about the details of the 6 programs that will be piloted. Word on the street is that one is a violence prevention program targeting young people with intellectual disabilities, run by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society.
- Working groups
  - Modern Media Messages – script finalized, now shooting video
  - Risk and Reality pornography project – up and running, received all funding they applied for.
  - When Love Hurts update – a redevelopment of DVRCV's website targeting young women is in the works, plan to launch in December this year.
- Evaluation Mentor Program– I now have a list of volunteers in the community and academic sectors who can answer technical questions on evaluation. Contact Kiri (03) 9486 9866 if you are interested in accessing the program.
- Feedback from PiP forum, generally the day was very successful/ inspiring
- Resources for working with people with intellectual disabilities on sexuality and healthy relationships:
  - Looking After Me resource kit developed by Penrith Women's Health available in pdf format at [http://www.whnsw.asn.au/Looking\\_After\\_Me/Resource-Looking\\_After\\_Me.htm](http://www.whnsw.asn.au/Looking_After_Me/Resource-Looking_After_Me.htm)

- Hillary Dixon (UK) [www.me-and-us.co.uk](http://www.me-and-us.co.uk) variety of resources available

## **Violence against women with disabilities and primary prevention**

### **Rebecca Feldman, Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS)**

YDAS is based at the Youth Affairs Council in Flinders St. They work with young people between the ages of 12 and 25. The service employs three staff to provide individual and systemic advocacy for young people with a disability. Current work includes:

- Partnership with Youthlaw to help people get attendant support at university and TAFE.
- Looking at linking in with schools on transition from secondary to tertiary education, creating a DVD to send out to secondary schools.

How can violence against women prevention practitioners be proactive about including young people who have a disability?

- Check with teachers about composition of student needs within the class.
- Develop/provide copies of resources in a variety of formats eg larger print, on white paper, in 'easy English.'
- If delivering material to students at a special school
  - break it down to key messages,
  - send content to a teacher beforehand,
  - use 'easy English' - SCOPE have done work on this see: <http://www.scopevic.org.au/Easy%20English%20writing%20style%20guide%20August%202005.pdf>
- Test resources with a group of young people who have disabilities

There are generally big issues with making the world accessible for people with disabilities. Whitehorse Council did a project on accessibility and now have communication boards available at Box Hill Centro.

The scope for violence in situations where a person is highly dependent on a carer is frightening, particularly where they are unable to communicate without assistance.

- Victim/survivors in these situations tend to be passed from disability services to women's/DV services and back again.

### **Kate Hood, Victorian Women with Disabilities Network**

The Victorian Women with Disabilities Network is located at Women's Health Victoria, more information available from their website at [www.vwdn.org.au](http://www.vwdn.org.au) Kate is the 'violence against women with disabilities' policy officer for VWDN.

There is a huge diversity of disability, 20% of the Australian population lives with disability, as our population ages disability will increase. Defining disability is a contentious issue. It is largely defined in medical terms and rarely includes the views of people who have a disability.

VWDN subscribes to the social model of disability ie disability only becomes an issue when society has failed to accommodate a particular individual's needs. Some disabilities, like myopia, are readily accepted and accommodated by society but others aren't. Disabling environments prevent access to housing, work, education and support.

## **Violence**

There is a dearth of knowledge on violence against women with disabilities. However we do know that:

- They are twice as likely as able bodied women to be assaulted.
- 83% of women with an intellectual disability have been sexually abused.
- Very little is known about the help seeking experiences of these women.
- Current family violence law does not cover violence by a carer.

Women with disabilities often live and work in situations that make them vulnerable to abuse. They are also vulnerable to particular forms of violence such as taking away a wheelchair or communication aide. Women with disabilities are targeted by perpetrators of violence because of their vulnerability. This is an issue that is endemically turned away from by society.

### **Access**

Human rights conventions require services to be inclusive and make themselves accessible.

Access is usually understood as physical but barriers can also be generated by people's attitudes. Many people/services don't see working with people with disabilities as part of their work. It is surprisingly difficult to get disability and family violence services to work together.

Physical access issues impact women's ability to reach a service as well as facilities within that service.

Women need information in a variety of formats – braille, large print, sms, telephone

It is incredibly important to have a full appreciation of the impact of individual disabilities.

### **Actions**

There needs to be education for women with disabilities and also for the broader community. Young women with intellectual disabilities are particularly vulnerable.

VWDN is currently mentoring a number of women to become advocates and represent women with disabilities on committees eg the state plan to prevent violence against women working groups. It is important to address the invisibility of women with disabilities – out of sight out of mind.

VWDN is running a practice forum on 21 July 2009 about family violence and women with disabilities, including a panel of women with disabilities.