

Profile:

Julie: intensive family violence case manager, Traditional Owner and proud Wurundjeri woman

Julie is a Wurundjeri woman who advocates for Aboriginal women's rights through her work supporting Aboriginal women experiencing family violence. She carries the strength of her family, Country and her culture with her, giving her the strength and capacity for leadership through community health and wellbeing.

Describe your role at Eastern Domestic Violence Service

I work with Aboriginal women who are experiencing family violence. I work in the intensive case management team which covers any woman who is at high risk of fatality, not just Aboriginal women.

I raise awareness with other organisations about family violence in Aboriginal communities as well as strengthening connections through Aboriginal network meetings.

I also ensure EDVOS supports cultural inclusivity by doing things like recognising significant days for Aboriginal people and installing a plaque acknowledging the Traditional Owners.

Do your upbringing and life experiences inform your work?

Being a Traditional Owner makes it a lot easier. I can perform Welcome to Country, I know the correct protocols and I can refer to the appropriate local services. They're passed from generation to generation, I learned through my mum and grandmother, and other elders in the community.

What do you do to help you after a particularly challenging work week?

My workplace offers yoga once a week. I exercise, keep myself healthy, meditate, that really helps because you go home with things on your mind the whole time. My team debriefs about our clients every morning so that it doesn't build up by the end of the week. It really helps to talk with colleagues because you can't talk about it at home.

Who influenced you the most growing up?

My mother. She's a strong Wurundjeri woman. She was my role model, I looked up to her. She was always helping people, guiding me through life. And my grandmother, as well.

Can you share a story of a client that filled you with hope?

One client with MS has experienced significant family violence, she's lost everything. She's homeless but safe steps have put her in a hotel. She's not very mobile and stays connected with friends and family through Facebook.

The perpetrator took her iPad because he knows how important it is to her. We were able to buy an iPad and a phone using the Flexible Support Package. Just buying those things was really important to her. I was able to set up security for another unsafe client. We got her a safety watch with a button that immediately dials 000. Twice he's been at the front door and she's pressed the button and the police have arrived. She said that's helped her sense of relief from danger. Stories like that show there is hope.

You've been doing this work for years, does it seem different now?

You can do more things to help the women escape; private rental brokerage money to establish women and stay in their home, money to fix the car to get the kids to school. The government has realised you need some money sometimes to help with small things.

What would your ideal family violence service look like?

An ideal family violence service would be a one-stop-shop, and it would provide outreach services too. I had to meet a client at Boorndawan last week because she lived too far away. Not everyone has a car so if it's safe we go out and see them in their environment or meet them somewhere.

What's the ideal system for this ideal family violence service?

Housing is in crisis. Take the woman in the motel room, for example – there's no housing for her. The Andrews government is putting more money into housing; there are twenty

new properties scheduled for the inner city. But yes, women need somewhere to live and not be stuck in a motel or a refuge. A refuge keeps you safe but it's not always ideal.

What advice would you give about how to provide culturally safe responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Understand intergenerational trauma, don't be judgemental. You need to understand the history to be able to understand the woman. For example, she's not going to give up her kids because she might have been given up as a child. Try to understand how lost you might feel growing up with parents from the Stolen Generation who lost their culture and identity.

Understand the importance of their connection to the land, to culture. Aboriginal people didn't have rights to vote until 1967 so understand that too. My mum didn't have the right to vote, to access education.

How would you say that lived experience impacts on individual clients?

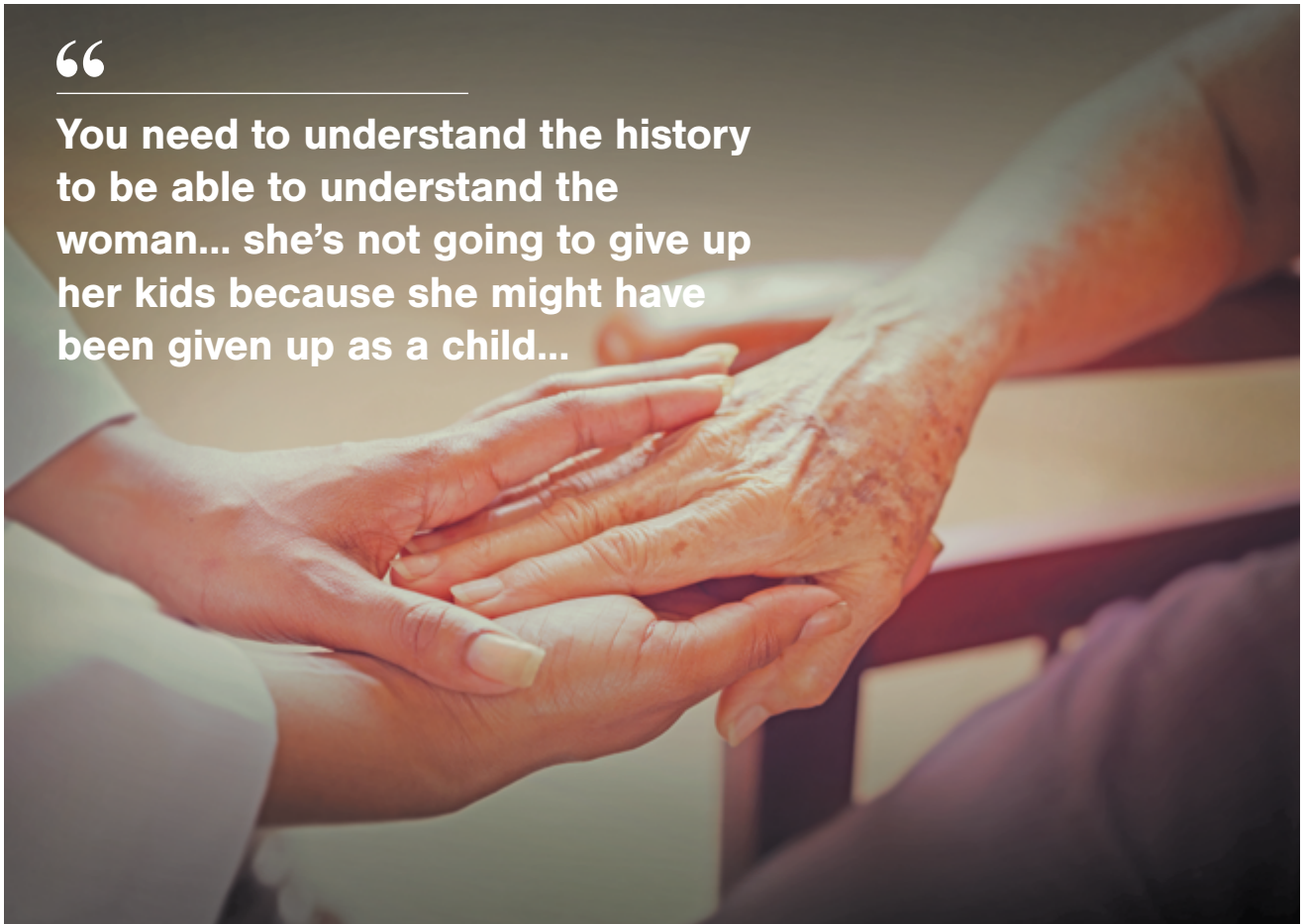
There was a lot of teasing growing up as an Aboriginal person. You mightn't have had a good start in life because Aboriginal people were really looked down on; you couldn't use a lot of services. They weren't citizens, so they didn't have rights. A lot of our people are married to non-Aboriginal people so – even though it's not part of our culture – the family violence was significant. And it was worse because the police didn't step in then, so you might have experienced a lot of family violence when you were young.

What would you say to other people coming into the sector and aspiring to have a role like yours?

Go for it! There's great training available and supports to help women escape the violence including commitment from police to hold men accountable. It's a great job and you will be making a difference in Aboriginal women and children's lives. ■

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HOW TO CREATE A CULTURALLY SAFE WORKPLACE FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

- Consult with the Traditional Owners in your area
- Listen to the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- Celebrate and recognise significant days including National Sorry Day, NAIDOC Week, National Reconciliation Week
- Physical acknowledgements can signal a warm welcome e.g. prominently display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and a plaque acknowledging the Traditional Owners
- Include an Acknowledgement of Country on website, email signatures and publications
- Establish protocols for Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country for events and meetings
- Seek cultural guidance including cultural awareness and safety training
- Strengthen connections with the Aboriginal community in your area by attending events, building partnerships with Elders, individuals and community controlled organisations
- Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan
- Employ Aboriginal workers

The Eastern Domestic Violence Service (EDVOS) is a specialist family violence service for women and their children who are currently living with or have experienced family and domestic violence.

www.edvos.org.au