# Improving service responses to violence against women with disabilities

Keran Howe
Executive Officer
Victorian Women with Disabilities Network

# context

women with disabilities  experience violence is at least 40% more likely to occur at twice the rate of violence against non-disabled women

women with disabilities  often experience forms of violence that are uniquely linked to their disability

women with an intellectual  disability are 10.7 times more likely to experience sexual assault

# context

Sustained policy failure means services are not responsive to  women with disabilities

# The Building the Evidence Report

analysed the extent to which current Victorian family violence policy and practice recognises and provides for women with disabilities who experience violence.

made recommendations to improve responses to women with disabilities dealing with family violence

# What do we mean by family violence ?

# Findings of the Building the Evidence

➤ Most WWD do not have access to the resources they need to protect themselves from violence

➤ Family violence, family services, courts, police etc. are not able to meet the needs of women with diverse disabilities

➤ Disability services are not equipped to identify or respond to experiences of family violence

# findings

# Data collection !!

# Standards and codes

# Workforce development

Most family violence workers had minimal or no training

Training opportunities increased but…

Workforce development provides opportunities for cross-sector collaboration

# WWD experiences of seeking help

Hard to seek help*
- Nature of disability
- Nature of violence
- Low self esteem
- Lack of economic independence
- Social isolation

Lack of services and support
- No active referral until woman in crisis
- Post-crisis, women lost to the system
- Crisis in alternative accommodation options
- Inability of police to ensure safety of women with disabilities (exclusion orders)

# Workers experiences

Lack of confidence

Want more input

Want more opportunity for networking

Isolation

# cross sector collaboration

Workload demand prevents networking

Needs leadership from senior management

Training initiatives for disability and family violence workers

Risk assessment: includes the presence of disability

➢ Disability units in refuges

➢ Development of Disability Action Plans

# Outcomes of this approach?

- A body of evidence on policy and practice

- An advocacy tool

- a resource for service providers

- Cross sectoral collaboration is in its infancy

# What are we doing now ?

Advocacy

More research

Support to workers in the field

Influencing risk assessment strategy

Supporting new relationships

Building the Evidence

# Resources

- vwdn.org.au/clearinghouse.htm (for a copy of the *Building the Evidence* Report go to http://www.vwdn.org.au/violence.htm)

- www.dvrcv.org.au

- www.wwda.org.au