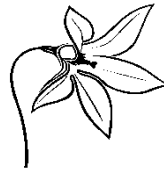


# Women with Disabilities Accessing Domestic Violence/ Crisis Services in the ACT

*A project to assist domestic violence/crisis services  
in the ACT to better support women with disabilities  
who are escaping domestic and family violence*



**WWDACT**



# Background

- The project aimed to
  - explore current practices;
  - raise awareness about the barriers;
  - assist domestic violence/crisis service organisations in the ACT; and
  - develop a set of best practice principles.so that services become more accessible for women with disabilities.
- It was a collaboration between Women's Centre for Health Matters, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) and Women with Disabilities ACT (WWDACT).
- Funded by a grant from WESNET which focussed on increasing the capacity for service providers to support victims of domestic and family violence.

# Why this focus?

- Despite the high incidence of violence experienced by women with disabilities, services are frequently non-existent, inaccessible or inadequate to meet the needs of these victim/survivors. (Strachan 1997).
- ‘It is recognised that women with disabilities are more likely to be subjected to abuse or violence than are other women. It is also acknowledged that discrimination, lack of access to financial and other resources to enable independence, and a lack of accessible services makes escaping abuse or violence extremely difficult.’  
(Domestic Violence Resource Centre, Victoria).
- ‘The lack of inclusive services and programs for women with disabilities experiencing or at risk of experiencing violence, is well documented and is widely recognised as a barrier to women with disabilities escaping the violence perpetrated against them.’

(Women with Disabilities Australia, Response to the Australian Government’s Consultation on the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children, July 2008)

# What did we do?

- An initial **workshop** was conducted with domestic violence / crisis services.
- A **literature review** was undertaken. Research papers, books and the internet were used to identify:
  - The key barriers identified by women with disabilities which limited their accessibility to services
  - Principles to address the barriers, with a focus on best practice
- Worked with 8 service providers to **audit the accessibility** of their services against the principles and their elements – using women with disabilities as auditors.
- **Individual reports** were prepared for each service identifying the key service provision issues and barriers for women with disabilities accessing their services.
- **Workshop with services conducted** to disseminate the findings, to highlight the overall themes identified about the ACT service system, and to identify possible next steps.
- **Future actions / steps identified** by services and action plan to ensure support for improving access for women with disabilities continues.
- **A final report** developed for WESNET about the overall findings of the project.

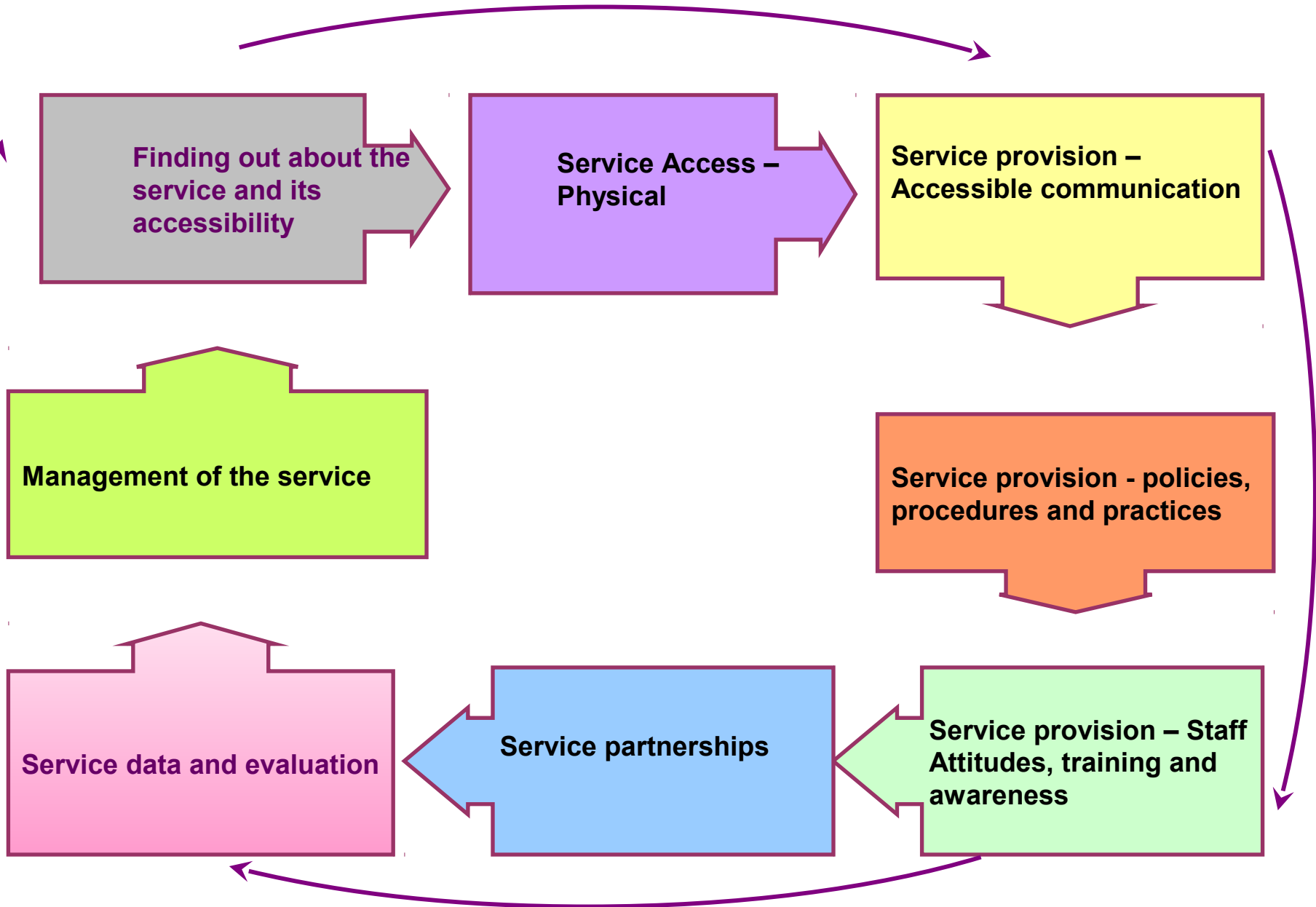
# What did we find internationally?

- There is world wide recognition of the need to address the accessibility issues for women with disabilities to services overall.
- There is also a focus on how to provide services that address the unique needs of domestic violence victims who have a disability.
- The key areas highlighted across most studies and reports were:
  - The physical aspects of accessibility
  - Programmatic aspects of accessibility
  - Effective communication
  - Limitations in staff awareness and training about accessibility and disabilities
  - The importance of networking with other agencies and services
  - The need for statistics on the number of women with disabilities who call or use the service to improve or adapt service delivery
- More recent research also highlighted the need for:
  - The employment of WWD in these services
  - The need for involvement of WWD in managing/designing services
  - The development of accessible communication and information for women with disabilities via promotional material and websites
  - The important of good management practices

# What did we find in Australia?

- The Office of the Status of Women, National Committee on Violence Against Women (1993) publication on access to services for women with disabilities, identified that the broad barriers to their access to services:
  - Lack of knowledge of the issue, and lack of information about services
  - Absence of physical access
  - Inappropriateness of services offered
  - Inappropriate values/philosophy of management
- From most research in Australia, the main barriers to women with disabilities experiencing in accessing services can be grouped into the following areas:
  - Communication with WWD
  - Information for WWD
  - The physical environment
  - Procedures for accessing/using a service
  - Attitudes /skills of workers
  - The involvement of women with disabilities in policy development, service planning and delivery
- Research conducted by the Victorian Women with Disabilities Network Advocacy Information Service found that where individual staff and agency commitments hampered their ability to build capacity, by using collaborative partnerships in which expertise is shared between service sectors the financial and resource demands were shared.

# The Barriers to Services



# Overall conclusions from the research

- For women with disabilities, access to a domestic violence/crisis service includes:
  - knowing how to contact an organisation and get help;
  - entering the service and being able to move around the premises safely;
  - having access to all the necessary information in appropriate ways while accessing the service;
  - having policies and procedures in a service that don't impede a women with disability gaining access and that help women with disabilities to participate fully;
  - staff who are appropriately recruited, trained and supported to understand and meet the needs of women with disabilities accessing the service;
  - service collaboration and networking means there are links with and referrals to other appropriate services;
  - management practices aim to plan for and involve women with disabilities; and
  - statistics should be collected and used to improve a service's ability to meet the needs of women with disabilities.



# The Best Practice Principles and their elements

- ***Principle 1. Service information about the service is accessible to women with disabilities***
  - Information available about the accessibility of services
  - Information available in alternative formats
  - Website and promotional material available and inclusive
  - Information disseminated to linking organisations
- ***Principle 2. The physical environment is appropriate and accessible for women with disabilities***
  - Getting to the service - parking/drop-off areas, entrance/ramps, doors, accessible transport
  - Getting around inside the service – halls, doorways, lighting, kitchen, bathroom, laundry, safety alarms and fire equipment, call bells, outdoor areas
- ***Principle 3. Communication with women with disabilities meets their different access needs***
  - House rules, policies and procedures in alternative formats
  - Communication and assistive devices
  - Access to interpreters and translators
  - Phones accessible

# The Principles and their elements (cont.)

- ***Principle 4. Service policies, procedures and practices are inclusive of and appropriate for women with disabilities***
  - Disability specific policy
  - Intake and assessment procedures reviewed and adapted
    - Sight, hearing, psychiatric, cognitive and speech
  - Access for children /caregivers / support animals
- ***Principle 5. Domestic violence service workers have an awareness of the issues of domestic violence for women with disabilities, and the skills to work with women with disabilities***
  - Training for staff on disability awareness/rights
  - Staff access to support
  - Job descriptions and recruitment processes

# The Principles and their elements (cont.)

- ***Principle 6. Partnerships exist between the service and disability services to ensure improvements in access for women with disabilities escaping domestic violence***
  - coordinated, linked services
  - referrals from other agencies
  - Cross training with other/ disability agencies
- ***Principle 7. Data is collected on the use of the service by women with disabilities***
  - Statistics kept on the users of the service
  - Data collected for planning
  - Feedback from women with disabilities
  - Service evaluation used to improve services
- ***Principle 8. Leadership and management practices are in place that show a commitment to access for women with disabilities***
  - Disability Discrimination Act Action Plan
  - Women with disabilities on management committee
  - Consultation with WWD
  - Funding specifications/agreements budget for needs of WWD

# Overall findings summarised

## **1. Service information**

Getting the message out about the service X  
If a service has not developed information for women with disabilities

## **2. Physical environment**

Getting to the service  
Getting around inside the service

## **3. Communication and assistive devices**

M

## **4. Service policies, procedures and practices**

policies and practices include WWD X  
simple intake steps  
Intake information available in alternative formats X  
house rules, policies available in alternative formats X  
Access for children/support animals  
Support workers for WWD

## **5. Staff skills and awareness**

Training/support for staff on disability awareness/rights  
Job descriptions and selection processes X

## **6. External partnerships / networks**

## **7. Data collection**

Statistics on WWD collected X  
Feedback from women with disabilities / service evaluation  
Evaluations in alternate formats X

## **8. Leadership and management**

Disability Action Plan X  
WWD in management committee/consultative arrangements X

# Overall Findings of the Audits

1. Overall the services did not have information about the service's accessibility that would allow for Women With Disabilities to know if the facilities were appropriate to their needs.
2. Services for the most part were physically accessible to women with disabilities and their children.
3. While many of the services audited did not have the full range of assistive communication devices available, most services used a variety of alternatives to ensure communication with WWD.
4. Overall:
  - There were simple screening and assessment procedures in place and these enabled early identification of a self disclosed disability
  - children and support animals were accommodated
  - There was an absence of formal organisation-level policy and procedures for working with women with a disability around violence. (While none of the services consulted had formal policy and procedures included for working with women with disabilities, most staff adapted their approach as they worked with the client.)

# Overall Findings of the Audits

5. Most of the services identified areas of need for, and an interest in, training of staff to meet the needs of women with disabilities accessing the service, and none of the services included an understanding of issues for women with disabilities in job descriptions or ensured that the selection process demonstrated where this skill existed.
6. All of the services make referrals to, and have linkages with, a variety of other organisations:
  - most services referred clients based on the ability of the client to act independently
  - here was lots of informal networking with other organisations, but there were limited formal interagency protocols with disability services, or across the service network.
7. The data of service use of women with disabilities experiencing violence was mostly absent from services, and very few had a formal process for service evaluation by WWD.
8. None of the services audited had a Disability Action Plan in place, or included WWD in management committees or consultative arrangements.

# Next steps

- Hanna (2004) said we need to approach accessibility enhancement to programs and services from domestic violence agencies for women with disabilities, “as a process, not a one-time task.”