

# Women and the Criminal Code Chapter 2

## COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES AND SUPPORT

### PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Many agencies are involved in the delivery of services and support for women who come in contact with the criminal justice system as either victims or offenders. These services can be divided into two categories:

Internal services - these are part of the system. They include the Queensland Police Service (QPS), the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), Legal Aid Queensland (Public Defender's Office), and the Victim Support Service (VSS). Government is the exclusive provider of all of these services. Internal support services are discussed throughout the Report but particularly in Chapter 3.

External or community based services - these operate independently of the system but work closely with participants in it. They include sexual assault and domestic violence services, refuges, counselling services, community legal centres. Most are in the non-government sector, are community-based, and are wholly or partly funded by government. These services are the concern of this Chapter.

Community-based services are an integral part of the criminal justice system. They are fundamental to facilitating women's access to the system. Without that access the criminal justice system becomes meaningless as a protector of women's rights.

The importance of services was reflected in community consultations and submissions. In all of our consultations on the criminal justice system we found that the issue women most wanted to talk about was services: services that give them information; services that give them options; services that support and assist them; and services that represent them.

### PART 2: COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES AND WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE

To appreciate the role of these services, it is necessary first to map women's progress through the criminal justice system, and then to critically analyse the system's underlying assumptions.

Diagram 1 presents a chronology charting the path of women victim/survivors of violent crime through the criminal justice system. It identifies the assumptions implicit in the effective operation of the system - that is, how in the absence of external support the criminal justice system is assumed to work. The diagram then gives examples of situations where there are gaps between the assumptions and realities. The examples are not exhaustive. They are used simply to illustrate the complexity and diversity of women's realities. Diagram 2 on the following pages undertakes a parallel analysis where women are offenders.

Diagram 1: The Progression of Women Through the Criminal Justice System - as victims/survivors (pdf)

[Taskforce on Women and the Criminal Code: Ch2 - Diagram 1 \(pdf only\)](#)

Diagram 2: The Progression of Women Through the Criminal Justice System - as offenders

[Taskforce on Women and the Criminal Code: Ch2 - Diagram 2](#) (pdf only)

When a crime is committed (Figs.1a & b)

The clear result of women not knowing what behaviour amounts to a criminal offence is that criminal acts go unpunished and unremedied. Perhaps more critically, there is no stop to the perpetrator's behaviour. When it is considered that the majority of violent acts against women are committed by persons within their domestic sphere (partners, ex-partners, carers), there is no end to the cycle of violence within those women's lives.

Services that provide information to women about the criminal law, their rights, and options available to them to escape violence are therefore fundamental to women's exercise of autonomy over their lives.

Reporting the crime and police investigation (Figs. 2a & b, 3a & b)

The extent to which violence against women remains unreported is documented throughout this Report. Yet there is no criminal justice response unless and until a report is made.

Some of the reasons why women do not report crimes of violence, or do not report them until some time after the event, are illustrated in Figs.2a&b. Many women do report violence against them, but discover that the criminal justice response (or lack of it) does not assist them to stop the violence, and so do not report it the next time.

Yet too often the response of the criminal law is to punish women for experiencing these barriers. For example, the belief upon which the law of fresh complaint is based is that a genuine and credible victim/survivor of sexual violence will report the offence against her immediately (see Chapter 7). We have also noted the failure of the laws of self-defence and provocation to respond adequately to women who have resorted to violence as the only way to end violence (see Chapter 6).

The extent to which legislative reform of the criminal law can address these issues is a major focus of this Report. However, an integral part of the reform process is the vital role which appropriate community-based services can play in increasing women's access to the criminal justice system and in minimising the perpetuation of the "real and deserving victim" stereotype.

Services can (and many already do) assist women to:

- deal with other priority issues resulting from the crime, such as safety, accommodation, care of children, care of themselves - both in the short and the long term;
- deal with the police, by helping women to achieve the state of emotional and mental preparedness necessary to tell their story;
- tell their stories, by advocating to police to provide appropriate supports, for example interpreters, support persons, women police officers, and appropriate interviewing techniques.

The committal, trial and sentencing (Figs.4a & b, 5b)

The problems with the rules of evidence to the telling of women's stories are discussed later in this Report. Clearly, however, even with the most liberal evidentiary laws, without appropriate support throughout the criminal justice process, women may still have extreme difficulty retelling their stories to the court.

Support needs must be addressed throughout the criminal justice process. A woman who has been struggling for months with trauma, isolation, ongoing fears for her safety, and difficulties with housing and income support, cannot be expected to suddenly regain her confidence, self esteem, and assertiveness just because she needs to give evidence in court. Certainly, the presence of court support workers during the trial can assist - but their true value lies in being part of a broader supportive framework.

Community-based services can provide:

- ongoing emotional and practical support to women;
- a therapeutic process to deal with trauma;
- information about court orientation and presentation (not coaching).

After the trial (Figs.5a & 6b)

While the delivery of a verdict and/or sentence ends the formal criminal justice process for women, the extent to which they continue to live with it, particularly if they have suffered secondary trauma from the process itself, can be significantly reduced if appropriate therapeutic support continues to be provided. Such support must come from outside the system, since the criminal justice process has ended.

### **PART 3: SERVICES THAT WOMEN NEED**

The Taskforce addresses women's service needs by analysing their needs prior to, throughout, and after completion of the criminal justice process. The discussion is general - we do not suggest that all women share all of these needs.

Women need access to information

The need for information about legal rights, the criminal law, the criminal justice system, support services, and available options, both prior to and after the commission of an offence, have already been identified. Access to information is critical to women's ability to make free and informed choices about the paths they take.

It involves two separate issues:

- the availability of information
- the dissemination of information.

What information resources are/need to be available?

The Taskforce recognises that there is already a large body of written material (pamphlets, booklets, fact sheets) aimed at informing women about their rights and options. This material has been produced over the years by a variety of government departments and community agencies. Whether this material is in a format accessible to everyone in the community is a separate issue. For example:

- is it published in multilingual format?
- is it culturally appropriate for different groups of women?
- is it published in braille?
- are audio/audio-visual formats available?
- is it age appropriate?
- is it appropriate to the areas in which women live?

Furthermore, unless service providers (government and non-government) are aware of the totality of material available, it is difficult for agencies to:

- locate and resource themselves with material; and
- identify gaps in the available information.

For these reasons, the Taskforce believes there should be a single body responsible for the collection, collation and storage (not production) of information resources relating to all violence against women, in the model of a statewide clearing-house.

## **Recommendation 1**

1.1 That, after consultation with relevant stakeholders, an appropriate body be funded to perform an audit of existing information resources on all violence against women for the purposes of collating a resource reference guide; identifying gaps/needs in the format of information resources; and identifying gaps/needs in the availability of information resources.

1.2 That, after consultation with relevant stakeholders, an appropriate body be funded to act in an ongoing manner as a statewide clearinghouse for information resources on all violence against women, and as a distributor of these information resources to service providers and the community generally.

How should information be disseminated to women?

In every way possible.

The Taskforce believes that measures aimed at increasing women's access to information should not be targeted solely at the period following the commission of an offence (either by them or against them). Information to improve a woman's awareness of her rights and options, and her autonomy in decision making, must be available throughout her life.

For women to access information, it must be available in the places where their lives are lived. Unsurprisingly, therefore, our community consultations have

suggested a range of locations where information on violence against women should be available:

Centrelink, public transport, public toilets, taxis, shopping centres, public telephones, bus shelters, hospitals, telephone books, charities, libraries, accomodation centres, police stations, newspapers, courts, lawyers, community centres, internet, doctors, hairdressing salons

## **Recommendation 2**

2.1 That all Queensland Government departments and agencies be encouraged to display information about violence against women and relevant, local support services:

- in their workplaces; and
- in areas where they have direct interaction with clients or the public have access.

2.2 That the Queensland Government encourage local government agencies to display information about violence against women and relevant, local support services:

- in their workplaces; and
- in areas where they have direct interaction with clients or the public have access.

2.3 That the Queensland Government liaise with business organisations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, to encourage their members to display information about violence against women and relevant, local support services:

- in their workplaces; and
- in areas where they have direct interaction with clients or the public have access.

The production and distribution of a wide range of appropriate written material is not the only way to get information to women and should not be an isolated strategy. Written material alone does not allow women to clarify issues or explore avenues in more detail - women can't ask pamphlets questions. Often, written material is most useful if it is used to confirm/affirm/retain information which has been provided to women orally - over the telephone or through direct contact.

For example, when information is provided to women soon after an act of violence has been committed against them, their capacity to take in information may be limited by the shock and trauma of the assault. While women need to digest some information immediately to enable them to make decisions, they must be able to revisit issues and ask questions later.

An issue raised frequently in consultations was confusion about the number of 1800 telephone numbers available to access information services; a lack of clarity about what each number was for; and difficulty in ascertaining telephone numbers in the first place. Part of this confusion has been caused by the distribution of government telephone numbers throughout directories and the constantly changing names of government departments and agencies.

### Recommendation 3

That the Queensland Government fund a collection of telephone numbers for women, comprising government and non-government agencies, in the beginning of telephone directories, including the TTY telephone directory. Included with this information should be the contact number for the Telephone Interpreting Service and Australian Communication Exchange.

In a similar vein, several written submissions and participants at Taskforce consultations expressed a desire for the creation of a single centralised service which is well and broadly advertised and funded to respond by free phone 24 hours a day. Women believed that such a service should be able to offer phone counselling in a variety of languages and make appointments for victims/survivors with appropriate local services throughout Queensland. It was suggested that funding such a service would avoid unnecessary duplication of resources and mean that only one service need be advertised widely.

The Taskforce recognises the attractiveness of such a proposal to the community, particularly for women in rural/remote areas, and those using telephone interpreting/TTY services. One option discussed was the possibility of expanding the existing information and referral capacity of Women's Info-Link. However, several members of the Taskforce expressed serious reservations about the feasibility of such a service operating effectively, and believed that what appears on the surface to be a good idea would pose enormous difficulties in implementation. Some of the concerns expressed were:

- a "One Stop" telephone referral service would be futile unless it is able to directly connect women to other agencies. If women are provided with a list of telephone numbers which they must write down and call one by one, the service is self-defeating. Accordingly, a referral agency of this nature would have to have facilities to directly transfer calls to all other agencies, government and non-government, in Queensland;
- enormous resourcing would be needed for the service to maintain a comprehensive, regularly updated data base of all women's services in Queensland and exactly what they provide;
- the majority of women's services (other than refuges) operate during business hours, so there would be no agencies open after hours or on weekends to which women could be connected;
- any referral agency of this kind would inevitably have to perform a level of crisis intervention. Therefore, staff of the service would have to be highly skilled and trained, and debriefed regularly;
- the provision of 1800 telephone services (generally) is perceived to have become a pro-forma response of government to meeting the needs of rural and remote communities, without additional strategies;
- 1800 and other telephone services may present safety issues for women as their usage can be recorded on telephone bills.

Notwithstanding these concerns, the level of community support for such a concept demands that its viability be further investigated.

### Recommendation 4

That as part of providing an integrated response to the women of Queensland, there should be investigation into the viability of creating a single centralised telephone service which is well and broadly advertised and funded to respond by free phone 24 hours a day, and which has direct links to appropriate local services throughout Queensland. The Taskforce stresses that any funding for such a service must be additional to and not detract from the current services available to women in Queensland.

The final, and perhaps most effective, way that women obtain information is through direct contact with community-based service providers who have expertise in the area of need identified by the women. The Taskforce considers this to be the most effective way of giving information to women - the use of skilled workers trained to respond to victims/survivors of violence ensures not only that appropriate information is conveyed, but that it is conveyed in a supportive environment. For example, a woman may need different information depending on the crime (for example, sexual assault as opposed to domestic violence) and her capacity to absorb information will vary according to the stage of shock/trauma she is experiencing.

Women with intellectual disabilities may need additional support to access and understand information. While more accessible formats help, there is also a need for opportunities for dialogue and discussion of the issues. Women with intellectual disabilities absorb information and learn best when issues are located within their own context and explained to them. The same could be said for women with low literacy levels and mental health issues. Direct service providers can also convey information very effectively to women through discussions with small, language-specific and culture-specific groups.

Women in rural and remote areas often require discussion and assistance to understand the relevance of information to their own life experiences. This is particularly important because their geographical isolation can produce a profound disconnectedness from the mainstream consciousness of contemporary society.

The role which community legal centres play in meeting women's needs for legal information about their rights and options is critical. Community legal centres are able to both:

- reach women directly - women can discuss their concerns and ask question face to face; and
- provide legal information to women in a holistic context with appropriate information about, and referral to, support networks.

Providing information is a core function of many community-based women's services. However, as these services provide more than information and referral, further discussion of issues relevant to them appears throughout this Chapter.

### Women need safety

The primary concern for many women trying to escape violence perpetrated by a partner, ex-partner or carer is finding alternative safe accommodation. While some women find this with family or friends, many rely on refuges. The availability of safe, secure refuge accommodation is essential to the survival of women.

However, for many, refuge accommodation is not an option. In rural and remote areas, refuges are virtually non-existent particularly from south of the Gulf down to the NSW border. Ironically, the smaller the community, the greater the need for refuges, as a woman's alternative options for confidential, secure accommodation may be extremely limited (if any).

#### **Recommendation 5**

That additional and discrete funding be provided to transport women and children in situations of domestic violence from remote/rural areas to safe environments, and to provide for their appropriate relocation.

For other women, there may be refuges close by, but not accessible. There is a lack of refuges tailored to meet the specific needs of women, such as women with disabilities, women from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Indigenous women, and women with mental health needs. This is examined in more detail in Part 4.

For women leaving refuges, there can also be few options with long waiting lists for public housing.

#### **Recommendation 6**

6.1 That the Queensland Government gives a clear commitment to addressing:

- Alternative safe accommodation needs for all women victims/survivors of violence; and
- Long term housing needs for all women victims/survivors of violence.

6.2 That the Queensland government commission research on the needs and options for women in relation to safe accommodation beyond the refuge.

#### **Women need support**

Many women need emotional and practical support throughout the criminal justice process, and continue to require support after it has ended. This is the case both for women who are victims/survivors of violence and for those who offend, particularly since the majority of women who commit extremely serious crimes of violence have themselves been subject to (frequently long term) abuse. For this reason, many of the issues raised in relation to women as victims/survivors are equally applicable to women who offend. It should also be noted that submissions to the Taskforce stressed the support needs of secondary victims of crime, such as the partners of homicide victims.

Community-based services can and do provide a wide range of support. They can:

- provide information about their options and entitlements;
- assist with accommodation;
- assist with obtaining income support;
- facilitate women's access to other services, agencies and support through advocacy;

- facilitate their communication with other services, agencies and support through advocacy;
- provide a therapeutic environment and counselling process to assist women to recover from trauma; and
- provide therapeutic support throughout the criminal justice process to reduce the occurrence of secondary trauma.

In relation to this last point, it is important to distinguish between the support provided to women by community-based agencies (such as domestic violence and sexual assault services) and that offered by the Victim Support Service (VSS), which is located within government. The issues relevant to the VSS are discussed in Chapter 3. For the moment, it is important to highlight that the support provided by the VSS consists of liaison (with the prosecutor) and providing information, not therapeutic or counselling support. For some women, this is sufficient as they have support outside of the VSS. Where women require therapeutic support, however, the VSS can refer and link women with other appropriate agencies.

To do this, of course, there must be accessible and appropriate agencies to which VSS can refer women. Access to services can be limited by geography, and also by the inability of services to respond to particular women's needs. The latter point is addressed in the next part of this Chapter.

It is clear from our consultations that in rural and remote areas there is a dire shortage of community services and workers who are equipped and trained to respond to violence against women. Even where such services do exist in regional cities, women pointed out to the Taskforce that acting on sexual offences involves many more financial difficulties for victims/survivors who live outside of urban centres.

Many women in remote and regional areas believe that access to telephone counselling services could help to reduce their sense of isolation. While the Taskforce supports the establishment of telephone services, it also recognises that they provide limited support and assistance since there is no continuity of care and no establishment of a therapeutic relationship. The preference must be to enable women to access services directly where possible, on a regular and ongoing basis if required.

#### **Recommendation 7**

That the feasibility of establishing a 24 hour free telephone counselling service for women experiencing all forms of violence be explored as part of an integrated response to meet the needs of women throughout Queensland.

#### **Recommendation 8**

That additional and discrete funding for travel expenses be provided to:

- (a) domestic violence and sexual assault services in regional areas; and
- (b) other community-based services in regional or remote areas where no domestic violence or sexual assault services exist, where those services are available to provide appropriate support to women;

to assist women in outerlying areas to access support on an ongoing basis, when required.

Women have made it clear to the Taskforce that they prefer, and need, continuity of support throughout the criminal justice process.

This does not mean that women only ever wish to deal with one worker. Clearly the assistance which they expect to receive in a counselling session is quite different to the advocacy/liaison role they require of a court support worker. What women have stressed is that they require the movement between different types of workers to be fluid and, preferably, to occur within the one agency (or at least be coordinated by the one agency). The intensity of the trial experience and the risk of further traumatisation by it make this essential.

Support needs are not limited to complainants; many women offenders are also victims/survivors of violence. It is important that access to appropriate support is available when women are imprisoned, or released from prison. For many women, post-release reintegration into society involves a return to a situation of cyclical violence. In the last 24 months, 16 women have died within three months of their release. Causes of death included drug overdose, suicide, and violence committed against them by their (pre-prison) partner. This extremely high mortality rate, and the causes of it, demand further investigation.

The Taskforce was also made aware of the particular support needs of Indigenous women from remote communities moving through the system as offenders. The degree of remoteness and sense of separateness from information providers can result in Indigenous women not knowing the importance of court appearances and the repercussions of non-appearance.

#### **Recommendation 9**

That there be continuity of support for women victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence, up to, and including the end of, the court process, and ongoing support as required.

#### **Recommendation 10**

That specific funding for court support be provided to:

- domestic violence and sexual assault services; and
- other community-based services in regional or remote areas where no domestic violence or sexual assault services exist, where those services are available to provide such support to women

#### **Recommendation 11**

That appropriate community-based services be adequately funded to enable them to provide ongoing support to women who are victims/survivors of domestic violence and/or sexual assault:

- in prison; and
- post-release, for a period of at least three months.

#### **Recommendation 12**

That the Queensland Government commission research into the mortality rates, and the causes thereof, during the three month period following the release of women from prison.

### **Recommendation 13**

That Indigenous women be supported throughout the legal process as offenders so that they can properly understand the importance of being in court and the consequences of non appearance.

The idea of a "seamless process" for women going through the criminal justice system was a recurrent theme in the Taskforce's community consultations. Women clearly felt stressed by the "start, stop, start" experience of dealing with multiple agencies, government and non-government, at such a traumatic time. They felt it was particularly traumatic to have to tell their story and articulate their needs over and over again to different people. There was virtually universal support for agencies involved in the criminal justice process - internal and external - to provide an integrated response to women who have experienced violence.

The Taskforce fully supports coordination between agencies, and explores this issue further in the next Chapter. We stress, however, that community-based services simply cannot develop integrated response strategies unless they are able to carry out longer term strategic planning - this means having certainty about their future funding.

### **Recommendation 14**

That all sexual assault services, domestic violence services and refuges receive their funding on a recurrent basis with three year funding cycles, to enable them to fully implement strategic plans for integrated responses to violence against women.

Women need legal advice

In its submission to the Taskforce, the Bar Association of Queensland proposed:

...that proper funding should be available to the Legal Aid Office to ensure that all persons charged with criminal offences, whether of a sexual nature or not, should receive adequate legal support at all stages of the process, including the committal process.

While the Taskforce supports such a recommendation, our particular concern is for women charged with homicide offences where there has been a history of domestic violence.

The defences of provocation and self-defence, and the inherent difficulties in applying them to the experiences of women, have been major concerns for this Taskforce. The majority of women who have committed homicide:

- killed their partner;
- experienced long term violence and abuse perpetrated by that partner;
- believed that violence was their only escape from violence.

In many cases, the woman herself reports the homicide to the police, however, this is not always the case. Sometimes, because they have no understanding of the legal defences available to them, they hide the homicide or their involvement in it, and lie to the police when questioned. The woman is then trapped in a "story" which makes it even more difficult to establish legal defences at trial, even when she could otherwise have relied on them.

The Taskforce considers it imperative that women in these situations receive legal advice and representation as soon as possible, and certainly before they participate in a police interview.

#### **Recommendation 15**

That legal information be provided to accused persons at all stages of the legal process.

#### **Recommendation 16**

That legal aid be available to all persons charged with criminal offences, particularly women charged with homicide offences, from the time of police interview until completion of the criminal justice process, and that additional funding be provided to legal aid for this purpose if required.

#### **Women need childcare**

Numerous submissions to the Taskforce highlighted the difficulties for women with responsibility for children, going through the criminal justice system. For them, the question is - where do they leave their children during police interviews, prosecutor interviews, committal proceedings and the trial?

There should be child care facilities at court and in police stations. How can a single mother concentrate on her charges/case with a child demanding her attention?

Rural women often have particular difficulty in arranging alternative care arrangements.

#### **Recommendation 17**

That the Queensland Government investigate flexible options for free childcare for women involved in the criminal justice system (including jurors), having regard to the fact that women remain the primary care-givers for families.

#### **Women need structural advocacy**

The criminal justice system deals with individual cases in isolation. It is only when cases are examined collectively that structural trends are revealed. It is crucial to the improvement of women's experiences for there to be permanent mechanisms to identify and address systemic biases in the criminal justice process. Specialist women's services have a crucial role to play in this, given their extensive experience in working directly with thousands of victims/survivors of violence, and their analysis of the root causes of the violence. This Taskforce is an excellent example of this.

#### **Recommendation 18**

That the Queensland Government give a clear and definitive commitment to an independent and autonomous community services sector which responds to violence against women, including recognition of the sector's role in socio-policy development and law reform.

An integrated approach to achieving systemic reform begins with closer coordination of the sectors themselves. This is discussed in more detail in the next Chapter.

#### **PART 4: RESPONDING TO WOMEN'S DIVERSITY**

In 1993, the (then) Women's Policy Unit recognised that it is counter productive to encourage women to come forward for assistance if there are inadequate and inappropriate support services to meet their needs.

The inability of general community services to respond to the needs of women who are victims/survivors of violence has been a constant theme throughout our consultations. Similarly, specialist women's services (such as sexual assault and domestic violence services) are often perceived to be inadequate in responding to the needs of particular groups of women. In the rare cases where there are women's services for a particular group, they are under-resourced and unable to meet all of the needs of their target communities.

For example, there are few services for women with disabilities who are victims/survivors of crimes of violence, especially sexual assault. In the Brisbane metropolitan area, special support services are provided by W.W.I.L.D - S.V.P. and the Family Planning Association of Queensland. There is also some support available through the VSS. From our consultations with the disability sector, it is apparent that these services are extremely stretched. Domestic violence services are not able to respond to the needs of these women, although many are acutely aware of the need to do so:

Fears abound within domestic violence services because they think they are inadequately skilled and resourced to deal with the needs of women with disability and their children. Women with disability are not aware of services and in many cases do not seek any form of assistance until they are literally on the brink, when they may be supported by a concerned acquaintance. Conversely, workers in disability services appeared unaware of the phenomenon of domestic violence and its possible legal and service remedies.

The situation is similar for women from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For example, many ethno-specific services have not had contact with their regional domestic violence or sexual assault service. Many community workers within the Community Refugee Resettlement Scheme and ethno-specific agencies do not feel they know enough about domestic violence or sexual assault services - either their services or their philosophy. At the same time, domestic violence and sexual assault services rarely (if ever) employ bicultural or bilingual workers. The Immigrant Women's Support Service and Sexual Assault Service is the only one to do so, and its limited resources mean that it can only provide crisis intervention - not the long term therapeutic support which so many of its clients require.

Lesbians, too, reported feeling isolated from mainstream service provision:

Government and community service providers, unions, private employers and other public and community organisations are either unaware or uninterested in the existence of lesbian issues and problems. Lesbian clients usually have to make do with inadequate, inappropriate and even hostile service. Consequently, even after vicious attacks, they often decline to seek help.

These examples are by no means exhaustive. Indigenous women, rural women, older women, young women - the complexity and diversity of women's needs illustrate the breadth and depth of skills which services must have to be able to provide appropriate responses. It is tempting to urge a rapid and significant statewide expansion of services for women and, unquestionably, this would be the ideal response. However, the Taskforce recognises that it is unlikely that such a proposal would or could be implemented.

How then can we address the issue of inequitable service provision to women in Queensland? The Taskforce has adopted the position throughout this Report that where structural barriers exist in the criminal justice system, it is the structures that must change. This is equally true of community-based services.

To respond to these issues it is necessary to develop supports across sectors and between agencies, and to provide professional development and ongoing training for:

- general community services in rural and remote areas where specialist services do not exist;
- specialist (but non-gender specific) community services;
- specialist (issue and group specific) women's services.

To achieve the necessary level of multi-skilling across a range of services, there needs to be significant ongoing training. Further, it is easy for new skills learned to remain academic or be lost unless support for their implementation is provided systemically through networks and cross-sectoral interaction. This requires significant administrative support.

Community-based services have no capacity to fund such training and support needs out of existing budgets; government must commit additional resources.

#### **Recommendation 19**

That the Queensland Government give a clear commitment to enhancing the ability of existing community-based services to respond to the diverse needs of women who are victims/survivors of violence.

#### **Recommendation 20**

20.1 That funding be provided to develop, and deliver on an ongoing basis, appropriate training and professional development to:

- workers with expertise in violence against women;
- a broad range of workers with expertise in areas of marginalisation of women (such as disability, linguistic or cultural diversity, sexuality); and

- workers in generic community-based services in rural and remote areas, to enable all community sector services to respond adequately and sensitively to the diverse needs of women victims/survivors of violence.

20.2 That the nature and form of this training, and models for its delivery, be developed in close consultation with relevant community sector agencies.

20.3 That to maintain and promote awareness of, and response to, the diverse needs of women who are victims/survivors of violence, funding be provided to establish a mechanism to facilitate the exchange of information and support between:

- workers with expertise in violence against women;
- a broad range of workers with expertise in areas of marginalisation of women (such as disability, linguistic or cultural diversity, sexuality); and
- workers in generic community-based services in rural and remote areas, through regular forums which monitor the appropriateness of services and strategies.

Finally and particularly, it must be recognised that women with severe to profound levels of intellectual disability may never be able to access these services. A relatively small number of women live within disability service systems in which they are totally dependent upon paid carers. In such cases, disability workers require specific training in issues of women and violence. Such training should include recognising effects of abuse and violence and ways of responding to such abuse.

#### **Recommendation 21**

21.2 That appropriate training be provided to disability workers on violence against women with disabilities, especially women with high support needs, to skill them to recognise and respond to indicators of abuse.

21.2 That sex education and protective behaviour programs for women with intellectual disabilities be expanded.