



The NSW Women's Refuge Movement (WRM) came out of, what is commonly referred to as the "second wave of feminism" in the seventies and the analysis that domestic violence and other forms of violence against women are directly related to a patriarchal system that accepts and promotes an unequal power relationship between women and men.

When the feminist movement started to address domestic violence in the 70's, there were no crisis services to support women and children escaping domestic violence.

The issue of domestic violence, as well as sexual assault was brought into the open at feminist consciousness raising meetings. After the 1974 International Women's Day celebration, a group of women established the first women's refuge in Australia, now Elsie Refuge for Women and Children.

As soon as a few refuges were established, they came together and supported each other in the various campaigns for funding, housing and better services for women and children escaping domestic violence. Refuges started sharing ideas, resources and practices.

The first state conference was held in Bathurst in February 1979, and since then NSW refuges have met regularly to exchange information and ideas, the establishment of regions followed.

In 1983 NSW Women's Refuge Working Party was created to carry out work and make decisions in between state conferences.

It was not until January 1985, eleven years after the founding of the first women's refuge, that refuges received secure funding through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments.

The NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre (WRRC) opened in 1986, to support and resource the Working Party and the WRM.





The NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre (WRRC)

From its inception, the WRM recognised the need for a resource centre to support the activities of the Working Party and to provide a point of contact between the movement and government, community organisations, media and the general public. A submission for funding was made for a resource centre. Funding was secured and the WRRC was established in 1986 with pay for one worker.

With the introduction of SAAP in 1985, and more adequate, reliable funding, each member refuge of the WRM started to pay a small membership fee. This money was used to hire a part time Administration Officer for the WRRC.

The WRRC has historically filled a crucial role in assisting women and children escaping domestic violence to access refuges. It has also functioned as a women's information service.

Although the role of the WRRC moved away from organising crisis accommodation, the WRRC received many calls from refuges, organisations and the general community who required assistance with accommodation, or information on a myriad of issues, including legal, immigration, social security benefits and housing.

The WRRC acted as a point of contact for the WRM. It provided resources and information on issues related to domestic violence and refuges.

A focal point of the service was to promote government and community awareness on issues relating to the needs of women and children escaping domestic violence and to advocate for improved responses.



Functions

- Provided resources and information regarding domestic violence.
- Facilitated the interaction and networking between the NSW Women's Refuge Movement and other relevant services at both the state and national levels.
- Provided resources for the NSW Women's Refuge Movement members in broader issues such as government policy, legislation and special projects.
- Raised community and political awareness of domestic violence.
- Advocated for a considered, effective response to the needs of women and children escaping domestic violence.
- Liaised with the media on behalf of the NSW Women's Refuge Movement.
- Undertook special projects to coordinate consistent policies and approaches across a diverse range of service models.

Over the years the structure of the NSW Women's Refuge Movement evolved to ensure as far as possible, that all refuges have the opportunity to be involved with policy development and lobbying for change.

Based on equal representation in policy development and decision making processes, the NSW Women's Refuge Movement was used as the voice of all but a small number of refuges for women and children escaping domestic violence in NSW.

In recognition of the evolution of services provided by members - from "refuge" to holistic specialist domestic violence services - members voted in July 2013 to expand the membership to all specialist domestic and family violence services, operating within a feminist framework and adopt a name change to Domestic Violence NSW. The name change and membership expansion further articulates our focus on our advocacy and representative role in relation to domestic and family violence.



Historical Achievements of WRM/WRRC:

Influence on Government

Throughout its history members of the NSW Women's Refuge Movement have represented it on government and interagency working groups, steering committees and advisory councils to provide advice and influence policy and legislation. In this manner, the NSW Women's Refuge Movement has had significant input into improving the overall responses to women and children escaping domestic violence and sexual abuse. The influence our Movement has had on the government sector and community would fill a book of its own.

Lobbied State and Federal Governments for SAAP Funding

SAAP funding came out of the Women's Emergency Services Program (WESP). While other states also lobbied to secure 5 year funding under the Crisis Accommodation Assistance Act, NSW and the WRM in particular were the strongest and played a big part in the successful negotiation of funding. For example, the WRM demanded to have input into the funding policies so that we could ensure the funding would be appropriate to our needs.

Lobbied the Department of Housing to house single women with children

In the early 1970s the Department of Housing (DoH) did not recognize single women with children as a family, and would therefore not house them. The NSW Women's Refuge Movement lobbied the Department of Housing, including marching in protest, with the result that the DoH definition of what constitutes a family is much broader, allowing single mothers and lesbians etc. be deemed eligible for DoH housing.

Representatives of the WRM contributed to a 1978 interdepartmental working party to look at how to best care for victims of sexual assault. This involved a lot of meetings with government and out of this the Sexual Assault Taskforce was established.

1979 Canberra Rally to lobby for increased funding

Representatives from all WRM refuges went to Canberra and had a peaceful protest regarding the lack of refuge funding for women and children's services by taking picnic baskets and children and having a sit in at Parliament House. From 1979 – 1990 WRM delegations went to Canberra at least twice a year to be consulted by Ministers on issues to do with women and children escaping domestic violence, as well as to lobby for their rights.

1981 Amendments to the Crimes Act

The WRM was represented on the taskforce that developed the Sexual Assault Amendment Act that made changes to the Crimes Act regarding sexual assault offenses.

1981 Government Taskforce on Domestic Violence and Monitoring Committee overseeing legislative changes

The WRM was represented on the 1981 government taskforce set up to investigate domestic violence. In 1982 a Monitoring Committee was set up to oversee legislative amendments which lasted 10 years.

1983 Sexual Assault Committee

The WRM contributed to the Sexual Assault Committee which coordinated government policy and programs and services for victims of sexual assault and to monitor the operation of the 1981 amendments concerning sexual assault offenses.

1985 Government Taskforce on child sexual assault

This taskforce was established partly in response to refuges who worked closely with children bringing to government attention the number of children disclosing sexual assault. The WRM was represented on this taskforce from the very beginning. In the final report published in 1985 there were 65 recommendations made for law, health, welfare, police reform and education. A comprehensive set of law reforms were passed by Parliament in November, 1985.

1985 Child Protection Council

Children's issues were taken on passionately by some WRM members such as Sally Steele, Maureen Lacy and Barbara Kilpatrick. In response to their lobbying for the recognition of children's issues the Child Protection Council was

established to overview the child sexual assault legislation and to look at legal reform, as well as training and health services. The council went for 10 years and was responsible for a lot of legislation to protect the rights of children and oversaw aspects of government portfolios to do with children. Funding for refuges, including funding for 20 refuge worker positions was obtained, as well as providing training in mandatory reporting.

1986-1987 Recognition of the need for Aboriginal Services

In response to Aboriginal services not being significantly funded, the WRM held various meetings with the state government and lobbied for Aboriginal services being funded and run by Aborigines for Aborigines. The WRM later looked at separate funding for Indochinese and Muslim women's refuges.

1990 Court Assistance Scheme

In 1987, Bringa Women's Resource Centre started an informal Court Assistance Scheme. The WRM was represented on the first committee to propose assistance for women at courts, along with the Redfern Legal Centre. The Court Assistance Scheme, founded in 1990 is the direct result of this committee's lobbying on this issue.

1995 Women's Action Network

With the 1995 election of the Carr government, the Domestic Violence Council was disbanded and domestic violence was not recognized as an issue with the Labor government of that time. In conjunction with the Domestic Violence Advocacy Group and Women's Legal Services, the WRM formed the Women's Action Network. The government was strongly lobbied to reconsider their stance on domestic violence and in response government agreed to set up the Violence Against Women Unit that would encompass other government portfolios under the one umbrella, housed in the Attorney General's Department.

Lobbied for separate services for women with mental health issues

Historically women with mental health needs and their families had been left in limbo between the options of inappropriate institutionalisation and the lack of community based support services. The WRM, along with community based mental health workers, lobbied for separate services for women with mental health issues. Charmian Clift Cottages was established in response to this lobbying to provide a residential program for women who have a mental illness can live with their dependent children and receive support.

1989 Diverta Box led to NSW DoCS Domestic Violence Line

The Diverta Box was the first after hour service for women and children escaping domestic violence. The central contact number was diverted, on a roster system between three 24 hour services. Subsequent lobbying for an expansion of this service led to the establishment of the DoCS Domestic Violence Line.

Family Law Kit

When problems started arising with Legal Aid, the WRM lobbied for the development of a resource to help services guide women through the Family Court proceedings. This project was funded by the Law Society and employed a lawyer, Catherine McKenzie, who worked with the then Chief Justice Elizabeth Evatt of the Family Law Court to develop this resource.

Input into AVO legislation

Barbara Kilpatrick has represented the WRM in providing input into every amendment to the AVO legislation that has occurred over the years.

1985 Goulburn Police Academy

Barbara Kilpatrick lectured at the Goulburn Police Academy and other refuges were subsequently approached to speak to various other branches of the police services in their areas on the importance of Police response times to reports of DV.

Ministerial Advisory Committee

Yvonne Wilson, was one of the first members on the Ministerial Advisory Committee. This committee provided the WRM with a voice on policies relating to all SAAP funded programs. It also provided an avenue to raise concerns with DoH, DoCS and Health directives so that information went directly through the Director General.