



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In the last few years, the national spotlight has been firmly fixed on domestic and family violence. Evidence shows that despite under-reporting, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience domestic and family violence at higher rates and at greater severity than non-Indigenous women.² Domestic and family violence is a significant issue in the communities in which the Commission works and it is more important than ever to support families experiencing domestic and family violence.

In February 2015, the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence, whose membership included Aurukun Commissioner Ada Woolla, delivered the 'Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an End to Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland' report. The report recommended that the Queensland Government amend the FRC Act to require a court to notify the Commission when a protection order is made naming a welfare reform community resident as the respondent.

Previously, the Commission only received a Court notice when a domestic violence protection order had been breached. Since the amendments to the FRC Act were passed in December 2015, the Commission has been able to provide support to families experiencing domestic and family violence at an earlier stage, when the domestic violence protection order is first made. Since the amendments to the FRC Act, the Commission has received 32 notices for domestic violence breaches and 79 notices for domestic violence orders within jurisdiction.

To equip staff and Commissioners to better assist families experiencing domestic and family violence, the Commission has taken up a range of education and networking opportunities. In March 2016, Commissioner Glasgow and Client Manager Camille Banks attended the Overcoming Indigenous Family Violence Forum in Brisbane. During the Local Commissioner Development week in May 2016, training was provided to all Commissioners by White Ribbon Australia and the Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service. In June 2016, Commissioner Glasgow attended a conference hosted by the Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration on Improving Court Practice in Family Violence Cases.



Whilst the conferences and training have been invaluable to our understanding of the complex issues surrounding domestic and family violence, and have provided us with tools to support Commission clients, they have highlighted the significant gap in targeted support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander families living in remote communities.

Services, tools and strategies targeting domestic and family violence are almost universally designed for metropolitan or regional settings. Mainstream domestic and family violence responses focus on removing women and children from the domestic situation and dealing with the legal repercussions for perpetrators. Where available, these elements can help to provide options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, however, they are not always the most effective way of responding. Separating families and relying on policing and court responses is not always practical or possible in remote communities. Women's shelters or other crisis services are not always available. As an example, Hope Vale families only have access to the Cooktown Women's Shelter, 45 kilometres away. Whilst services in communities are able to provide general counselling, there are not often sufficient resources for specialised professionals or programs specifically targeting domestic and family violence. There is no structured support for either perpetrators or victims when perpetrators are returning to community on release from prison and wish to re-enter community life and the family home.

These are gaps that desperately need filling if we are to tackle domestic and family violence in welfare reform communities. The Commission is committed to assisting families experiencing domestic and family violence and looks forward to working with government and community service providers to ensure that targeted services are available to its clients.

2. Olsen, A., Lovett, R. 2016, Existing knowledge, practice and responses to violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities: State of knowledge paper, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, viewed 30 August 2016, <http://anrows.org.au/publications/landscapes/existing-knowledge-practice-and-responses-violence-against-women-in>