

Northern Crisis Advocacy Response Service - **CARS**

A Pilot Model

Felicity Rorke

A collaboration of six agencies have been involved in the planning, development and implementation of the NCARS. Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Berry Street – Northern Family & Domestic Violence Service, Salvation Army – Mary Anderson Family Violence Service, Women's Health In the North, Georgina Women's Refuge, Martina Women's Refuge, and Victoria Police worked through a planning process facilitated by Therese McCarthy. Therese also assisted with the development of the protocols and a training program for over 40 crisis support advocates.

The Service Partnership

In the Northern Metropolitan sub-region, a partnership formed through the Integrated Family Violence Service System Reforms, has resulted in a new collaboration called NCARS. The CARS service model seeks to offer women the opportunity to explore the full range of available options for safety without necessarily being dislocated from their home and community. The agencies involved recognised the rights of women to make informed choices about the alternatives available to enable them to live free from violence.

The pilot service commenced operation on February 1, 2008 and will run for six months. The partnership agencies are offering this enhanced service within existing funding allocations, with some funds having been made available to develop partnership protocols and a comprehensive evaluation. All of the agencies involved have been generous in their various contributions to the development of the service and the donation of the physical space from Salvation Army – Mary Anderson Family Violence Service has made the pilot service possible.

CARS Service Rationale

The partner agencies involved in CARS determined that the current face to face crisis response offered through the family violence service system heavily relies on women leaving their homes and being accommodated in crisis accommodation or refuge. The primary concern about this approach was the message that it communicates to women and children – that it is not their right to remain in their home or to be able to return safely to their home. It requires women and their children to uproot themselves to enter a refuge or emergency accommodation, in order to be free from violence. For some women, this is the response they require but the resulting loss of vital social connections and the disruption to their own lives and the lives of their children can exacerbate the impact of the violence they have already experienced. Providing women with the necessary information to activate their legal rights was also considered to be an area requiring development in the current system.



It is anticipated that the CARS will enable women experiencing family violence to make more informed decisions at the point of crisis. The CARS pilot service draws upon the crisis service model successfully implemented by the Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault. In this model the focus of the intervention is on improved crisis intervention based on sound understanding of trauma theory. As part of the CARS model, accommodation will be provided when necessary as an adjunct to, rather than as the focus of, the intervention. The CARS intervention aims to focus on the restoration of the woman's rights.

The CARS recognises that there are times when women need to leave their violent partners. However the model supports the notion that this period could be shortened with a more focused intervention at the point of crisis. The CARS service will provide a twenty-four-hour, seven-day-a-week face-to-face crisis counselling, information, support and advocacy service.

The CARS model recognises that for some women permanent relocation will be the only option and the service will promote an efficient means of assisting these women to move and settle in to more permanent safe accommodation as soon as possible. Assistance to women who are in poverty, unemployed, or who lack other family resources will be of paramount importance in terms of re-housing. The CARS partnership will explore relationships with all relevant regional and statewide specialist services to enhance seamless service provision to women with diverse sets of needs.



CARS Objectives

The CARS service has the following objectives:

- To enhance integration within the family violence service system in the northern metropolitan sub-region
- To develop and implement a 24/7 face-to-face crisis counselling, information, support and advocacy service to women and children experiencing family violence regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, age, (dis)ability or sexual orientation
- To provide access to accurate information about legal and health options, including the possible recording of injuries in support of any police action
- A safe, secure and welcoming environment in which to make decisions about any future involvement of the police and legal systems
- Safe accommodation until such time that women and children can return home (subject to exclusion orders) or implement other housing and relocation options
- A series of emergency housing options at a range of security levels
- Facilitate referral and access to on-going counselling and support, education and information sessions
- Assistance with VOCAT applications, housing and Centrelink entitlements, in addition to support to access the private rental market as required
- Referral to specialist programs as required.

The Anticipated Outcomes

The anticipated outcomes of the CARS services are outlined below:

- Informed decision making for women
- Informed consent to police and legal intervention resulting in increased cooperation with these systems, thereby reducing repeat offences (and femicides)

and ensuring women and children's long-term safety and quality of life

- Improved levels of information and support for women at the point of crisis that will lead women to being more likely to follow through with prosecution
- Increased reporting and criminalisation of family violence
- Increased long term prevention and reduction of the recurrence of family violence incidents
- Increased police interventions with the agreement and the cooperation of women
- Increased prosecutions – (prosecutors informally cite victim non-cooperation, reluctance, or outright refusal to proceed as the major reason for the lack of criminal prosecution)
- Reduced demand for longer-term housing and support through advocacy for women and children to return safely to their homes. This would be facilitated through the implementation of the Police Code of Practice as envisaged by the introduction of the Integrated Family Violence Reforms and the Crisis Protection Framework
- A new access point to the crisis services system in the northern metropolitan sub-region. The CARS service is located in a property provided by Mary Anderson Family Violence Service
- Improved outcomes for children
- Increased service and resource awareness, and personal leverage among women who decide to return to their abusing partners
- Decreased use of the long-term housing stock and reliance on the community support services



The CARS service commenced operation on February 1 and will operate until July 31, 2008. Funding has been secured to document and evaluate the service model, the outcomes from women using the service and future challenges for the implementation of the model. The findings of this evaluation will be available in late 2008.

For further information contact Felicity Rorke, Berry Street on 03) 9458 5788 or Jean Cameron, Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria on 03) 93779611.

New Guide for Workers

Getting Safe Against the Odds

A guide for service providers in the family violence and disabilities fields on supporting women with disabilities experiencing family violence will

soon be available. This guide is based on learnings gathered from interviewing women with disabilities about their personal experiences of surviving violence. It contains practical tips based on the actual accounts of the women's experiences.

Hard copies of the guide are available by contacting DVIRC on 9486 9866 or dvirc@dvirc.org.au Alternatively download the PDF from the DVIRC website at www.dvirc.org.au

