



**MIGRANT  
WOMEN'S  
EMERGENCY  
SUPPORT  
SERVICE INC.**

Annual Report 2012-2013



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## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT - RAQUEL ALDUNATE

The last 12 months have been busy and challenging for all involved in the organisation. The service has been extremely busy and has seen a high volume of client referrals who present with multiple and complex issues. This has required that caseworkers provide skilled, timely and quality response to these high need clients.

In order to enhance the responses the service has focused on streamlining and implementing systems that will assist with the required quality service delivery to women from non-English speaking background and their children experiencing domestic and/or sexual violence. To this effect the service has fully implemented the integrated service delivery model which is an innovative, effective and efficient, short/medium term model which focuses on client needs. The management committee also completed the recruitment process to ensure the successful implementation of this model. As a result Carla de Simone was employed as the senior caseworker on a permanent basis.

This year, as predicted, we saw the introduction of output-based funding, Cecilia Barassi-Rubio, the Director, was responsible for managing these negotiations where careful consideration of expectations and capacity had to be balanced to achieve an acceptable result for all.

The management committee and key staff also completed the strategic planning for 2013-16. We are confident that we complied with all of the funding and legal requirements. I would like to acknowledge the time and effort of all of the management committee and senior staff members involved in these processes.

The other big ticket item for this past year was the review of the Constitution as part of an action that stemmed from the strategic planning process. The proposed changes will bring the Constitution in line with the Model Rules of the *Associations Incorporation Act 1981 (Qld)*.

In the industrial arena we reviewed the Certified Agreement and implemented all of the salary increases as per industrial requirements.

As this is my last report as the Chairperson of MWESS Inc. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the members of the management committee, Meeta Iyer, Tracey de Simone, Grace Gatabnton and Christine Munsie. It was through their commitment, support and reliability that we managed to complete the agreed work plan.

I would also like to say thank you to all the staff who day in and day out provide a valuable service to women who are experiencing domestic and/or sexual violence and who show a strong commitment to ending violence against women. Lastly my thank you to Cecilia Barassi-Rubio for providing the support needed to the staff and management committee and I on behalf on the management committee wish her well with the challenges and opportunities that the next year will bring.

I would not like to finish my report without acknowledging the women who come to our service seeking assistance and support and who at extremely difficult times in their lives show resilience and hope for a future free from violence and abuse. I believe it is their life experiences that guides the work of MWESS Inc.as a whole.

## **MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE 2012-2013**

The Migrant Women's Emergency Support Service Inc. is incorporated as an Association and operates within the legal requirements under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1981 (Qld)*. As such, the Management Committee provides a governance role and is responsible for overseeing the overall management and administration of the affairs, property and funds of the Association.

### **Raquel Aldunate** – Chairperson

Raquel is originally from Chile. She graduated from the University of Queensland with a Bachelor of Social Work in 1988.

She is currently the Director of the Refugee and Immigration legal Service (RAILS). Prior to this she worked at Women's Legal Aid, Legal Aid Queensland; the Violence Prevention Team, Department of Communities and at the Immigrant Women's Support Service (IWSS). Raquel has participated in many committees at community, State Government and Commonwealth Government levels including the QLD SAAP CAP Ministerial Advisory Arrangement (MAA), the Queensland Domestic Violence Council, the SAAP Ministerial Advisory Committee, and the Commonwealth National Council of Violence Against Women. She has authored numerous papers, some of which have been published. Raquel's involvement with IWSS dates back to the origins of the organisation. Raquel was the Coordinator of IWSS for approximately 14 years between 1988 and 2002.

### **Mythiley (Meeta) Iyer** – Secretary

Meeta is a feminist of Indian background from Malaysia, who has worked for over 25 years in the struggle for women's human rights.

Meeta has worked in paid and unpaid roles in community, civil society and government roles in the areas of violence against women, women's health and women's human rights, including in the role of Director, Domestic Violence Resource Centre for 8 years. She has also served on a number of violence against women/ domestic violence advisory forums both at state and federal government levels in Australia. She is a strong advocate on the rights of refugee and non-English background women and has also served as an Executive Council Member in the Association of non-English Speaking Background Women of Australia. Meeta has served in various capacities on the MWESS Inc. Management Committee for over 10 years cumulatively. She presently works in the Queensland Government.

### **Tracey de Simone** – Treasurer

Tracey de Simone is a principal lawyer with the family law practice at Legal Aid Queensland.

She has a Bachelor of Arts and Law from the University of Queensland. She has worked in various roles at Legal Aid Queensland for the past eleven years including as the coordinator of Women's Legal Aid, as the strategic policy coordinator, and as the senior solicitor of the Woodridge office. She has recently spent two years at the Department of Justice and Attorney-General working on legal reforms in the justice system and legislation.

Tracey's commitment to increasing women's access to legal services is one of her professional priorities, in particular for marginalised groups. She volunteered herself to various organisations such as Women's Legal Service roster for six years and the management committee of Children by Choice for three years, and has previously served on the Immigrant Women's Support Service management committee.

**Grace Gatbonton-Prince- Member**

Grace Gatbonton-Prince is a Filipino-Australian born in Bangkok and lived in Seoul, South Korea. She immigrated to Australia with her parents and siblings.

Grace holds a Bachelor of Arts degree with Honours in Modern Asian Studies from Griffith University and a Masters in Social Welfare Administration and Planning from the University of Queensland. She has been working in the multicultural sector for over 25 years in the community and public sectors. Grace's first job in the sector was with MWESS as a bilingual worker! After many years in the public sector Grace established a private consultancy business, Migration & Diversity Solutions in 2006 providing cross-cultural training and immigration advice and assistance. She is currently a Caseworker with the Refugee and Immigration Legal Service. She has been an advocate for women of immigrant and refugee backgrounds for many years, especially in the field of family violence.

**Chris Munsie – Member**

Chris is currently a domestic violence consultant with Mission Australia with the Inala Goodna Referral for Active Intervention Team.

She has a Bachelor of Social Science from the Queensland University of Technology and a Bachelor of Social Work from Monash University. Chris has worked in the area of domestic and family violence since 1989. Her experience includes as a women's refuge support worker, women and children's counsellor, and policy and program roles in the Department of Communities.

She has worked in numerous voluntary roles within the community including as a committee member, housing support worker, financial counsellor and lay advocate with the Welfare Rights Centre.

**Acknowledgements**

Our thanks to Prue Conaghan (resigned in August 2013) and Chris Oberhardt (resigned in September 2013) for their valuable contributions and support during their time with the committee.

## TREASURER'S REPORT – TRACEY DE SIMONE

The 2012-2013 Audited Financial Report was completed by Andrew G. Marshall from Andrew G. Marshall Chartered Accountants. This report will be tabled at the Annual General Meeting and is available upon request.

The Migrant Women's Emergency Support Service Inc. acknowledges the funding from

- Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services to provide quality Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault service responses.
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs for the Emergency Relief Service.
- Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust and
- Zonta Club of Brisbane Inc. to enhance the Emergency Relief Service.

### Core funding

FUNDER	AMOUNT	ACTIVITY
Department of Communities	\$479,367.50	Domestic Violence Service
Department of Communities	\$240,675.50	Sexual Assault Service
FAHCSIA	\$ 14,400.00	Emergency Relief Service
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$672,199.00</b>	

### Non-recurrent funding

FUNDER	AMOUNT	ACTIVITY
Zonta	\$3,000.00	Emergency Relief
Lord Mayor Charitable Trust	\$1,500.00	Emergency Relief
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4,500.00</b>	

### Finance Summary

	2012-2013	2011-2012
<b>Income</b>		
Grants	731,762.11	685,671.90
Donations	3,445.27	15,926.02
Fundraising	1,586.00	2,229.00
Other	11,531.81	28,666.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>748,325.19</b>	<b>732,492.94</b>

## DIRECTOR'S REPORT – CECILIA BARASSI-RUBIO

The Migrant Women's Emergency Support Service Incorporated (MWESS Inc.) is funded by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. The service operates as the *Immigrant Women's Support Service*, also known as IWSS, a specialist domestic violence and sexual assault service for immigrant and refugee women of non-English speaking backgrounds and their children in the Greater Brisbane area. Services are provided by telephone and face to face and include –

- Crisis support
- Case management
- Counselling/advocacy
- Information and facilitated referrals
- Community education
- Specialist support to service providers

IWSS also provides an Emergency Relief Service funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

### The IWSS team

Director	Cecilia Barassi- Rubio
Senior Caseworker	Carla de Simone
Information and Administration Worker	Ranjika
Caseworkers	Hrisoula
	Sally
	Caro
	Caroline
Relief Workers	Jess
	Vilma

*Thanks to Carla, Caro and Vilma for their assistance with the annual report*

## INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY

From July 2012, IWSS began the implementation of an integrated service delivery model informed by a feminist approach, the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*<sup>1</sup> (*National Plan*), the *Practice Standards for Working with Women Affected by Domestic Violence*<sup>2</sup>, the *Interagency Guidelines for Responding to Adult Victims of Sexual Assault*<sup>3</sup> and the knowledge acquired by IWSS over the past 27 years of providing services to immigrant and refugee women in Queensland.

The National Plan recognises that domestic violence and sexual assault are the most pervasive forms of violence experienced by women in Australian society. Furthermore, in 2013 the World Health Organization launched a report that named violence against women as “a global epidemic”. The report found that 35% of women around the world have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse by an intimate partner or non-partner. There is also evidence that refugee women who have experienced rape/sexual abuse during war and civil unrest are placed at higher risk of further abuse or sexual exploitation in country of origin and are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence on re-settlement (Allen & Devitt 2012; Rees 2004; Pease & Rees 2008; Pittway 2004; Schmidt 2005 cited in Zannettino, 2013).

### **Integrated Service Delivery Model**

Through the implementation of the innovative, integrated service model, IWSS is delivering best value service, as it is operationally and financially efficient, short/medium term focused and delivering outcomes that are based on client needs. IWSS has well-established, collaborative relationships across the domestic violence and sexual assault sectors. These relationships enable the implementation of a pathways approach to service delivery that aims to assist immigrant and refugee women to move seamlessly between services whilst focusing on enhancing their resilience and independence.

### **IWSS provides**

- A Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Service response (Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 4:00pm)
- A holistic service response to women presenting with domestic violence and/or sexual assault issues
- A timely service response, staffed by specialist Caseworkers offering crisis intervention, case management, counselling/advocacy, information and facilitated referrals
- Access to face to face or telephone support including emotional and practical support
- A service response with an emphasis on providing initial and ongoing support and assistance with a view to supporting the women whilst drawing on their own sense of agency through:
  - Non-judgmental support to facilitate the women’s decision making process by providing information about options available to them (e.g. safety, legal, housing, financial)
  - Support for women affected by recent or past domestic and/or sexual violence
  - Information and assistance to report sexual assault as well as access to alternative reporting options
  - Risk assessment and safety planning
  - Support to access safe and secure accommodation, legal advice and other relevant services
  - Assessment of security and support needs
  - Family violence assessments

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Human Services and Indigenous Affairs

<sup>2</sup> Department of Communities

<sup>3</sup> Queensland Health, Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Queensland Police

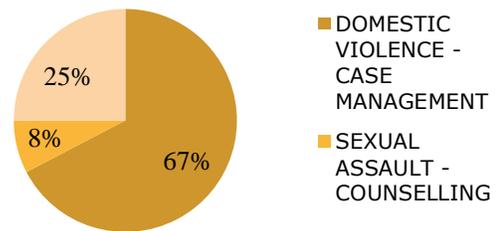
## SERVICE DELIVERY FOR 2012-2013

This year the IWSS team provided core services and facilitated referrals to a range of service providers to address the multiple and complex needs of the women and children accessing the service. For this financial year, the number of files for ongoing support increased by 25%, that is a total of 97 additional new referrals. However, the most resource intensive interventions involve the sourcing of additional funds and services to provide food and shelter for the women without income and their children.

### Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence services

Every year, over the last 27 years, immigrant and refugee women have trusted us with their stories and their hopes for a future without violence in their lives. This year, a total of 539 women and 441 accompanying children accessed services from IWSS, including information and referrals, ongoing case management, counselling and crisis support services. Of these, 363 women received ongoing case management services for domestic violence, whilst 41 women accessed counselling/advocacy services. The remainder 135 women were supported on a one-off basis with information, emotional support and referrals.

SERVICE DELIVERY

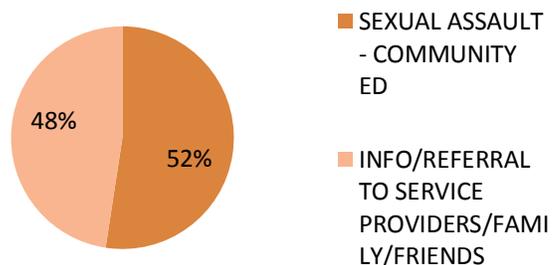


### Community Education

For the current financial year, a total of 601 people participated in a range of activities aimed at raising awareness about domestic and sexual violence, supports available and barriers to reporting/seeking support. These activities included -

- 11 community education/information session activities with 315 participants.
- One-off assistance to 286 people, including information, referrals and specialist knowledge to service providers and family and friends of women who have experienced domestic and/or sexual violence.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION & INFO/ REFERRALS



### Emergency Relief Service

A total of 194 emergency relief responses were provided for 2012-2013. Of these, 142 responses were funded by Department of Families, Housing, Human Services and Indigenous Affairs (FAHCSIA). The remainder of the responses were sourced from Zonta Club of Brisbane and Zonta Club of Brisbane Breakfast (37 responses) and from Brisbane City Council Lord Mayor Charitable Trust (15 responses). IWSS acknowledges the core emergency relief funding from FAHCSIA; however without the additional resources provided by our supporters it would not have been possible to respond to the high demand for financial assistance, particularly for women without income.

## ISSUES AND TRENDS

Living with domestic violence or experiencing sexual violence presents incredible challenges to the women and children we meet every day at IWSS. Unfortunately, many of the women and children are also confronted with a range of additional barriers that make their journey almost impossible.

IWSS continued to support women who are affected by domestic violence or sexual assault whose temporary visa class impacts on their ability to seek support, to escape from violence, and/or maintain an income. This includes women arriving in Australia on a temporary Skilled Visa: New Zealand Citizen Family Relationship Temporary Visa; Student Visa; Tourist Visa; and those applying for a Protection Visa (refugee claimants). As these visa classes fall out of scope of the Family Violence Provisions, *Migration Regulations 1994*, it can result in women remaining in a violent relationship where sexual assault may be a prominent feature of the abuse, or returning to their country of origin to an uncertain future.

Although there is very little documented information and evidence about the situation for these women, IWSS has identified a number of key issues -

- Women waiting for a determination of their migration status or changes to their visa can experience significant barriers to accessing services such as health care, crisis accommodation and long-term housing. Other issues and barriers include difficulty in finding employment, limited educational opportunities for their children and lack of access to income support from Centrelink.
- Uncertainty regarding a woman's student visa status can increase vulnerability to violence and impact on her ability to address or leave a violent relationship as doing so could potentially result in deportation and/or loss of income.
- The lack of affordable housing for international students and other temporary visa holders may result in women resorting to shared accommodation arrangements, which may leave them vulnerable to sexual and other forms of violence and exploitation.
- A woman without access to income can be living in crisis accommodation (if she is fortunate enough to be accepted for it) for long periods of time, may rely on emergency relief funds, may need to access donations of food supplies, and/or may be forced into prostitution against their wishes.

This year, once again, lack of access to income and limited accommodation pathways were the main additional presenting issue for the women who were provided with support from IWSS. At any given time during the support periods provided, lack of access to income affected over 25% of the women. The limited availability of accommodation pathways coupled with the lack of affordable private rental stock also represented barriers to immediate safety for at least 50% of the women requiring housing and accommodation. We continue with our efforts to support the women with financial assistance as well as advocating on their behalf to promote policy change to prevent further victimisation of the women and children experiencing violence.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### ***Women's improved access to support services from IWSS***

From November 2012, IWSS commenced operating from four days a week to Monday to Friday, which resulted in improved access for women requiring support and service providers making referrals or requiring specialist support. For the 2012-2013 financial year IWSS assisted an additional 97 women with ongoing case management support, i.e. an increase by 25% in the total number of files compared to the previous financial year.



### ***Implementation of the Integrated Service Delivery Model***

The commitment of the IWSS team was vital to the implementation of the Integrated Service Delivery Model. Carla led the implementation of the new model with great dedication and through her work she translated the practice framework into service delivery outcomes. The Caseworkers Hrisoula, Sally, Caro and Caroline did an excellent job in maintaining a high quality and responsive service; and Ranjika provided great administrative support to the team.

### ***Social inclusion project – Know your City***

The *Know your City* social inclusion project was developed to provide a safe space for women accessing support from IWSS to meet other women and participate in meaningful social activities that promote a sense of belonging in the community. Activities were attended by 8-10 women between October 2012 and January 2013. As a result of this activity, women who participated learnt about free activities and useful facilities in Brisbane, as well as overcoming social isolation through new friendships.



### ***Changes to the Family Violence Provisions***

IWSS submitted a written response on the proposed amendments to the *Migration Regulations 1994* seeking to improve the assessment of family violence by providing a wider range of evidence to support such claims. IWSS also participated in a face to face consultation with representatives from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

### ***Still a Matter of Interpretation***

As an active member of the *Queensland Access to Interpreting Working Group (QAIGW)* IWSS contributed to the second report generated by QAIGW, *Still a Matter of Interpretation*, launched by the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Mr Kevin Cocks on 30 October 2012. The report is a useful tool for promoting the engagement of interpreters by government and non-government service providers.

### ***Overseas Visitors***

This year we had the privilege of meeting some international visitors who kindly made time in their busy schedules to meet with the IWSS team to share stories in the struggle of advocating for women's rights as human rights; and for the elimination of violence against women. Regardless of where the visitor came from, we shared the same passion in advancing the status of immigrant and refugee women.

Visitors included:

Dr Shamita Das Dasgupta, one of the pioneers in the establishment of Manavi (New Jersey), the first organisation in the US to focus on violence against South East Asian immigrant women.

Maria Baretto, Director of FOKUPERS, a non-government organisation in East Timor working with women and children who have been subjected to domestic and/or sexual violence.

Sophia Munamua came to Australia on an AusAid Leadership scholarship. She is from the Public Solicitors' Office in the Solomon Islands and was researching the Queensland model for the establishment of a service for women and children in the Solomon Islands.

### **Thanks to**

- Heather Nancarrow (Qld Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research) for helping us organise the meeting with Dr Shamita Das Dasgupta;
- Barb Crossing and Caroline Fitzpatrick who invited Maria Baretto to Queensland; and
- Fiona Fairbrother (Legal Aid Queensland) for organising an agency visit with Sophia Munamua.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### **To the Women and Children**

*To the women and children who choose IWSS to share their stories, pain, happiness and hopes for a future without violence; we learn every day from your resilience and from the many overt and covert ways you resist violence.*

### **To our funders and supporters**

Abbey Richards, Lawyer, Holding Reich for pro bono advice and representation

Brisbane City Council – Lord Mayor’s Charitable Trust for donation of children’s toys and Foodbank Vouchers

Brisbane City Council- Lord Mayor’s Charitable Trust for donation of \$1500

Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services for the core funding for the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs for the funding for the Emergency Relief Service

Dr Ian Mannion, Health First Medical Centres, for his timely and free medical services to women without income

DVConnect for financial assistance to meet the safety needs of women and children without income

Individuals for their kind donations through GivIT

Steven Forrest, Barrister-at-Law for pro bono legal advice

Zonta Club of Brisbane Breakfast Inc. for providing gifts for the End of the Year Party and replenishing the ‘women’s food cupboard’

Zonta Club of Brisbane Inc. for the donation of \$3000 for gift cards for women without income

Thanks to the many service providers who worked alongside the IWSS Team for their support in our efforts at improving the lives of women and children who sought assistance from IWSS this year.

### **To the Team**

Thanks to Ranjika, Caro, Caroline, Sally, Carla and Hrisoula for their ongoing professionalism, commitment, and for making IWSS a great workplace.

### **To the Management Committee**

Special thanks to the outgoing Management Committee members, Raquel, Meeta, Grace, Tracey and Chris for their direction, support, commitment to good governance and for their vision in adopting a new organisational structure with a view to providing a more effective, holistic and coordinated service.

