 Disability Action Plan 2013-2016

*“There is always a different way of thinking about things, a new way which offers more inclusive, more respectful and productive possibilities” quote Susan Brennan1*

The Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service (WDVCS) Disability Action Plan (DAP) identifies and commits WDVCS to implementing specific initiatives over the next three years. This plan will ensure the organisation continually improves the accessibility of its service to women and children with a disability.

**Forward**

Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service acknowledges that the experience of violence against women and responses to it are affected by gender, race, sexuality, class, age and dis-ability. Having a Disability Action Plan helps us fulfil our commitment to provide services to Victorian women experiencing family violence.

In 2009/2010 17.5% of the women seeking services from Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service identified as having a disability2. We know that women with disabilities experience higher rates of violence, at the hands of a greater number of perpetrators and are less likely to report the abuse they experience3. So it is important to consider the unknown numbers of women with disabilities who do not enter the system in part because of the barriers to access.

The development and integration of WDVC’s Disability Action Plan into organisational policy, planning and service delivery will lead to more equitable outcomes for women and children with a disability experiencing family violence. A DAP helps uncover hidden assumptions and values that if left unchecked, may unintentionally perpetuate inequalities. In ensuring that the diverse needs of women and children experiencing family violence are comprehensively addressed; a DAP contributes to the creation of an equitable and inclusive crisis service response.

The WDVCS Disability Action Plan aims to create a supportive environment where the whole organisation from the Board, CEO, Leadership Team and Crisis Support Advocates engage in a process of continuous improvement. The DAP can guide the whole organisation to work towards the elimination of barriers to service access experienced by women and children with a disability.

The responsibility for challenging attitudes and improving service responses to women with a disability belongs to WDVCS as a whole. WDVCS aims to demonstrate leadership and build awareness and understanding around the impact of family violence on women with disabilities within its own organisation and the broader community. A unified approach to engagement with the Disability Action Plan is critical for WDVCS to make real progress.

Becoming an accessible organisation requires changes to the way WDVCS goes about its day-to-day business. We need to create an environment in which it is safe to explore any existing prejudices and attitudes to access. We need to build the confidence and capacity of staff to take opportunities to share and develop knowledge and resources across WDVCS and through collaborative partnerships with other organisations.

WDVCS accepts its obligation to take positive action to reduce structural disadvantage and to give appropriate support to women with a disability to ensure their human right to live free of violence.

*Annette Gillespie*

*CEO*

**Background**

It is well established under international human rights law that domestic and family violence is a violation of human rights, with grave and far reaching repercussions for victims and survivors and for their children4. In Australia, domestic and family violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in women aged 15 to 44 years, and is responsible for more of the disease burden in women than many well-known risk factors5. Moreover, approximately one woman is killed by her current or former partner every week in Australia, often after a history of domestic violence6. Recent research has also demonstrated the enduring mental health problems that survivors often experience as a result of such violence7.

The first *World Health Organisation World Report on Disability* (2011) aggregated findings from different sources of research to show that on all measures of social and economic participation people with disabilities in developed and developing countries are significantly disadvantaged. The report found that Australians with a disability have significantly worse life outcomes to other Australians, and people with a disability in similar countries8. The report highlighted that disadvantage was particularly acute for women and girls with disabilities who experience gender discrimination, heightened by risks of poverty and violence.

The neglect in research of women with disabilities has been highlighted by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in both its 2006 & 2010 assessments of Australian government’s implementation of the Convention.

Women with Disabilities Victoria reports 20% or approximately 500,000 Victorian women have a disability. A disproportionately high number of women with a disability are subject to family violence, sexual assault and institutional violence9.

Women with a disability are not a homogenous group. They may or may not identify as having a disability10. Their identities will also encompass their gender, culture, religion, sexuality. Recognition of the diversity of the lived experience of disability by women needs to be extended to include an understanding that: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians experience higher rates of disability than do other Australians11, women with disabilities from culturally diverse backgrounds can be particularly vulnerable to experiencing multiple disadvantage.

**Definitions**

For the purposes of this plan, the definition of disability contained in the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* has been adopted. This includes disabilities that are physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory and neurological, and covers disabilities that currently exist, may exist in the future, or are imputed to a person.

WDVCS will frame our understanding and action on the experience of disability within a social model which sees disability as a social construct, in the same way that gender is a social construct12. The social model of disability recognises that attitudes, practices and structures are disabling and can prevent people from enjoying economic participation, social inclusion and equality.

**WDVCS Disability Action Plan Objectives**

This Disability Action Plan articulates organisation-wide change in order to address the barriers encountered by women with a disability in accessing a crisis response to family violence.

As a crisis service WDVCS aims for all women with a disability to receive at least a core set of supports at the point of crisis that addresses immediate needs for safety.

WDVCS DAP objectives are:

* Eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability.
* Ensure that women and children with a disability have a right to equal treatment in receipt of a family violence crisis response.
* Build professional capacity to increase understanding, support and advocacy for Access and Equity principles
* To promote awareness in other family violence services and the broader community of the family violence experienced by women and children with a disability

**Legislative Framework**

The WDVCS Disability Action Plan is underpinned by a human rights framework. Women with disabilities are explicitly recognised within International, National and State Law:

* UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability 2006
* UN Convention to Eliminate Discrimination against Women (1997)
* Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992
* Victorian Disability Act 2006
* Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
* Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010

The above legislative and human rights instruments provide the foundations from which WDVCS as an organisation and its employees, through their advocacy, can empower women and children, further marginalised by their experience of family violence, by providing them with the information support they need to make informed choices.

**Consultation**

Whilst developing this plan WDVCS undertook regular consultation with women with a disability.

WDVCS is committed to continuing that consultation and working with women with a disability in the delivery of all aspects of the plan. Initiatives contained within the plan will be further developed and implemented in consultation or in partnership with Women with Disabilities Victoria.

**Implementation**

The development and implementation of an effective DAP relies on the ability of an organisation to demonstrate leadership. With this in mind the WDVCS CEO will be responsible for reporting on the progress of the Plan to the whole organisation.

WDVCS recognises that the effectiveness of our Plan will exist in its implementation, ongoing improvement and achievement of actual outcomes. Therefore WDVCS undertakes to not only prioritise our Plan, but also monitor and review it on a regular basis, to ensure it is as effective as possible.

WDVCS Disability Action Plan objectives will be integrated into the WDVCS Operational Work Plan and be, measured within the Quality Improvement Framework.

Through the ongoing process of implementation, review and improvement, opportunities will exist to significantly innovate WDVCS work practices and to move towards a more inclusive organisational culture.

The Coordinator Quality and Training will report regularly to Staff and the CEO on progress achieved against the Plan. This process will be used to gain feedback and implement further improvements to the Plan.

WDVCS will report on the implementation of its Plan in its annual report, as required by section 38 of the Disability Act 2006.

WDVCS Disability Action Plan will be lodged with the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission to further demonstration our commitment to its implementation.

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| **Action on Disability** |

**Outcome 1:**

**Reducing barriers to women with a disability accessing WDVCS managed goods, services and facilities**

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| **Method/ Outcome** | **Performance measure** | **Time frame** | **Responsibility** |
| Conduct an access audit of WDVCS facilities | Audit completed and presented to Leadership Team. | Dec 2012 | DAP Project worker |
| Explore and determine the best method for consistent and periodic access auditing of WDVCS facilities | Method developed for auditing accessibility status of WDVCS facilities | July 2013 | Coordinator – Quality and Training |
| Ensure that future building relocations/works  /renovations are undertaken in accordance with statutory and regulatory requirements | All refurbishments are complaint with the Disability Discrimination Act and other related building codes  WDVCS adopts a policy of universal access | ongoing  June 2013 | CEO, Direct Services Coordinator  Accommodation  Coordinator – Quality and Training |
| WDVCS events will be held in accessible venues. Access features and the positive inclusion of women with a disability promoted | WDVCS procedure guidelines advise that all events take place in accessible venues, and support people as appropriate. For example sign-Language interpreters are available on request | ongoing | Leadership Team |
| Ensure information on WDVCS website about services and events is user-friendly and includes information for women with a disability. | Online visibility of advice and information on WDVCS website is inclusive of women with a disability  WDVCS website improved and compliant with W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) | Dec 2013  Feb 2014 | CEO, Communications & Media Advocacy Coordinator |
| Ensure WDVCS electronic information is accessible to adaptive technologies | New WDVCS documents are available in accessible formats: Word, HTML | ongoing | Leadership Team |
| Scope the capacity to establish a SMS crisis call service for women who are deaf or have hearing or speech impairments needing a crisis response | Seek advice from other emergency services that utilise SMS to scope feasibility of its use at WDVCS. | Dec 2013 | Coordinator - Quality and Training |
| Scope the feasibility of WDVCS developing an online advice and information source that is inclusive of women with a disability | Findings and recommendations of the scoping project are prioritised for Board of Governance endorsement | Dec 2014 |  |
| Systematic recording of whether a women has a disability and about her ‘accessibility needs’ | Strengthened data sets collected by SHIP in relation to women with a disability |  | Coordinator - Quality and Training Direct Services and Coordinator Referral Pathways |
| Manage timely access to assistive aids and/or personal assistance to women who identify support needs | All Leadership and on call workers have a strong working knowledge of the Disability FV Crisis Response Initiative  Crisis Support Advocates are competent in completing CRAF supplementary questionnaire  CRAF supplementary questionnaire is part of induction for all new staff | September  2013 | Coordinator - Quality and Training Direct Services  Direct Services Coordinators Referral Pathways & Accommodation |
| Invest in the improvement of Victoria’s state wide crisis responses to women and children with a disability affected by family violence | WDVCS raise issues impacting on women and children with a disability at all stakeholder forums  WDVCS to participant in any governance arrangements supporting the DHS Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative | ongoing | CEO, Leadership Team |
| Reduce service barriers experienced by women with age acquired, temporary or mental health related disabilities | Advocate to government and all relevant stakeholders a cross-departmental approach for the expansion of the Disability and FV Crisis Response Initiative | ongoing | CEO, Leadership  Team |
| Partner with specialist support services to improve the quality and accessibility of WDVCs crisis response | WDVCS has, in place, established protocols with Disability agencies who brokerage personal support  WDVCS share practice knowledge with sector encouraging other agencies to establish similar protocols in local areas | Dec 2013  ongoing | Coordinator - Quality and Training Direct Services  Leadership team |
| Provide motel accommodation that has disability access | Maintain accounts with motels with accessible units  Maintain positive working relationships with motel proprietors | ongoing  ongoing | Administration Coordinator  Direct Services Coordinators Referral Pathways & Accommodation |
| Women with a disability housed in motel accommodation (if requested) are safely orientated to the area | WDVCS outreach orientates women to the motel and surrounding area to move around safely and independently    If after hours: CARS worker contacted to orientate women | September2013 | Direct Services Coordinators Referral Pathways & Accommodation |
| Systematic review of WDVCS policies and procedures which demonstrate that they are effective and being followed | WDVCS staff meetings review effectiveness of policies and procedures on a regular bases  Crisis Support Advocates are supported to explore their professional practice within supervision | ongoing | CEO, Coordinator - Quality and Training Direct Service Coordinators, |
| Women with cognitive impairments are supported to better understand their rights and responsibilities in WDVCS accommodation | An induction package for Trish’s Place using appropriate language for women with cognitive impairments is developed  Induction package includes information for women accommodated in motels | June 2013 | Direct Service Coordinators |
| Increase Crisis Support Advocates capacity to support women who identify as having a mental illness | WDVCS develop a clear process for Crisis Support Advocates to seek internal and external expertise through consultation as required  Develop a relationship with a General Practice with expertise in mental health for women staying at Trish’s Place to access as required  Improved outcomes for women with mental health support needs accessing family violence crisis response | July 2014  July 2014  ongoing | Coordinator - Quality and Training  Direct Service Coordinators  CEO, Leadership Team |

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| **Action on Disability** |

**Outcome 2:**

**Reducing barriers to women with a disability obtaining and maintaining employment with WDVCS**

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| **Method/ Outcome** | **Performance measure** | **Time frame** | **Responsibility** |
| Ensure WDVCS recruitment and selection policies do not discriminate and comply with the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act | Review and update recruitment procedures and associated processes, including job advertisements, to ensure relevant information is captured and is non-discriminatory. | June 2013 | CEO |
| Produce and implement a *reasonable adjustment* policy which allows an employee with a disability to carry out the tasks for which she was hired | Employees with a disability receive the appropriate support and modifications to work at WDVCS. | June 2013 |  |
| Adopt an innovative approach to recruitment and retainment of employees with a disability | WDVCS investigate the possibility of adopting affirmative action employment policy.  Outcome documented and share with all employees | Sept 2013 | CEO, Leadership Team |
| Ensure Leadership Team is aware of *reasonable adjustment* policy and workplace modifications | Required workplace modifications are not seen as a barrier to attracting potential employees with a disability. | ongoing | CEO |
| All Leadership Team have expertise in equal employment and anti-discrimination policy and legislation | Coordinator - Quality and Training to attend regular training in equal employment and anti-discrimination policy and legislation to help support organisations understanding of obligations prior to conducting interviews. | ongoing | Coordinator - Quality and Training |
| Support employees with a disability | Workplace modification required by staff member is provided promptly and monitored for appropriateness.  Induction program meets access and other needs of staff with a disability. | ongoing | CEO |

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| **Action on Disability** |

**Outcome 3:**

**Promoting inclusion and participation in the community of women with a disability.**

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| **Method/ Outcome** | **Performance measure** | **Time frame** | **Responsibility** |
| Promote leadership roles for women with a disability by recruiting women on to WDVCS Board of Management | Invite and support the representation of women with a disability onto the WDVCS Board | April 2014 | CEO, Board |
| Ensure that women with disabilities unique perspectives are informing WDVCS planning, policy and service delivery | Continue and maintain a collaborative partnership with Women with Disabilities Victoria | ongoing | CEO and Coordinator –Quality & Training |
| Increase community awareness of issues and barriers for women with a disability experiencing gender based violence | WDVCS Media Project uses the media to raise awareness and inform debate on the impact of family violence on women with a disability | ongoing | Communications & Media Advocate coordinator |
| Ensure that women and children with a disability rights and needs are incorporated into all aspects of family violence policy, governance and law reform | WDVCS utilises its position within the Victorian Integrated Family Violence Response service system to promote the inclusion of  the rights and needs of women and children with a disability | ongoing | CEO Leadership Team |
| Promote research, evidence generation, data collection and documentation regarding women and children with a disability affected by family violence | WDVCS prioritise resourcing participation in initiatives which build an evidence base on the impact of family violence on women and children with a disability | ongoing | CEO, Coordinator – Quality and Training |
| Advocate for the inclusion of both gender based violence in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) | WDVCS through its peak body Domestic Violence Victoria advocate the inclusion of gender and family violence in the NDIS | June 2013 | CEO |

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| **Action on Disability** |

**Outcome 4:**

**Achieving organisational culture change in attitudes and practices which discriminate against disability.**

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| **Method/ Outcome** | **Performance measure** | **Time frame** | **Responsibility** |
| Align all relevant WDVCS policy, procedures and plans with the Disability Action Plan | Disability Action Plan is integrated into WDVCS operational and strategic plans | Each scheduled policy and planning review | CEO, Coordinator – Quality and Training |
| Raise awareness of WDVCS commitment to respecting and valuing diversity and the elimination of discriminatory behaviours | A disability policy statement outlining WDVC’s commitment to enhancing access for women and children with a disability is developed and publicly available | December 2013 | CEO, Coordinator Quality & Training |
| Incorporate disability awareness in WDVCS Board and staff induction, professional development for employees to better understand disability | Disability incorporated into PD schedule  Induction of new board members and employees be reviewed to incorporate reference to the Disability Action plan  Leadership Team and Crisis Support Advocates demonstrate an understanding of disability and support accessibility | Annually  June 2013  ongoing | Leadership Team  Coordinator – Quality and Training  Leadership Team, Crisis Support Advocates |
| Work with Crisis Support Advocates to raise awareness of how to work with women with a disability | Crisis Support Advocates and Coordinators through supervision identify opportunities to build confidence and the skills needed to improve service practice | ongoing | Leadership Team,  Crisis Support Advocates |

**Endorsement**

The Board, CEO, Leadership Team and Crisis Advocate Supports were all briefed on the Disability Action Plan 2013-2016. The Plan was endorsed at a meeting of the Leadership Team on 5/12/2012, Crisis Advocate Support Workers on 13/12/2013 supported in principle by the Board on 12/12/2012.

Review Dates 30 June 2014 and 30 June 2015

References

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6. Jack Dearden & Warwick Jones, cited in Australian Human Rights Commission *Supplementary Submission to the Attorney-General’s Department: Consolidation of Commonwealth Discrimination Law* January 2012

7. Susan Rees *et al.* cited in Australian Human Rights Commission *Supplementary Submission the Attorney-General’s Department: Consolidation of Commonwealth Discrimination Law* January 2012

8. World Health Organisation (WHO) *World Report on Disability* .Geneva: Author 2011

9. Women with Disabilities Victoria (WDV) Submission to provide comment on the *Victorian Government Action Plan Consultation Framework for Addressing Violence Against Women and Their Children* March 2012

10. Jennings, C. (2003) *Triple Disadvantage*: Out *of Sight, Out of Mind* Domestic Violence Resource Centre Melbourne

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