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Executive Summary

Final Evaluation Report on the 'Why Didn't You Ask?' – Project of the Family Violence Project of Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre

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Background

This report is for the Legal Service Board and Commissioner Grants Program and the Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre (LCCLC), a program of the Advocacy & Rights Centre Ltd, Bendigo (ARC). It evaluates the Family Violence Project of LCCLC entitled 'Why didn't you ask?' which was funded by the Legal Services Board (LSB) in 2011 after an application by the LCCLC. **Why didn't you ask? (WDYA)** aims to improve the safety, social and health outcomes for women at risk of or experiencing family violence (FV). The project aims to target family violence in the Central Victoria region. It provides a family violence duty lawyer, advice and ongoing case work across the Loddon and Campaspe region, currently constituting 46.5% of the service's case work. This project focused on giving voice to women that have experienced family violence and the legal system. The funding has enabled LCCLC to dedicate the type of resources to family violence work that is needed to respond to demand and to identify systemic improvements.

Overall Findings

This project has achieved its aims and the significant majority of the deliverables. In some areas the project has achieved what it indicated it aims to achieve and gone beyond its aims with additional innovations.

Clearly valuable research by LCCLC and findings from its research, as detailed and evidenced in this Evaluation Report have resulted from the LSB funded 'WDYA Project'. This work ought to be continued, given the momentum and valuable findings from this project and the expertise of staff that has been developed by virtue of this project.

LCCLC has extended services for family violence assistance and representation. It has provided a venue for women's experiences of violence, the court system and the legal process and support system, to be heard. LCCLC is working to ensure these views in form policy and practical responses and has advocated for systems enhancements to protect safety for women and children and improve service delivery and court processes. This culminated in the release of the report *Will Somebody Listen to Me?* on 5 May 2015 which has been provided to decision-makers, media and community with pragmatic suggestions for change.



The LCCLC project has demonstrably led to a greater understanding of family violence service, referral pathways and the role of the law and family violence orders with health and allied professionals. Evaluations of training with medical practitioners evidence an 'intention to change practice' as a result of training conducted by LCCLC around family violence.

As a result of this WDYA project, LCCLC has laid the ground work to identify barriers and enhancers for better collaboration between health and legal professionals through the development, conduct of a Health Survey Tool 2 and preliminary analysis of findings from the 'Supporting Clients Better through Good Professional Collaborations' Survey which closed on 31 March 2015.

Conclusions and Summary

The WDYA Project has provided valuable (evidenced by survey feedback from the women experiencing family violence about the research process) and much needed services where there was not only a gap but where women and children without access to good legal information advice, collaborative support and court representation are placed at great personal risk. The project has seen court representation expanded at a number of regional courts and outreach services provided in areas where there was previously none or insufficient services to people experiencing family violence and their children.

Evident in gathering data for this project and in discussions with all staff at LCCLC was a clear dedication and commitment to clients and improving community outcomes that was demonstrated by all staff from the lawyers, administration support, social workers, volunteers, reference group members and their agencies and the management team. They facilitated this evaluation by being ready with data and timeliness in their responses to requests. It was clear that throughout the project LCCLC team was able to work effectively in many different partnerships to build and sustain reciprocal and respectful relationships. Ongoing funding for the project would enable this important work to continue in its clearly evidenced momentum, especially on the cusp of the launch of the WDYA Project Report and in view of the important data emerging from the recent Collaborative Survey.

It would also be good, in future, to see some additional research by LCCLC funded to enable them to look at the broader impacts of family violence on children protected by or mentioned in IVOs. This research was unable to focus on this aspect but clearly children were listed on many orders or ought to have been. The WDYA Project Report raises this issue and the failing of police and the court to consider this aspect and problems in the interface between the Federal Family Law and the State based IVO system.

A key strength of the WDYA Project Research has been its success in the recruitment of participants of people who have experienced family violence which as noted in the body of this Evaluation Report is a failing in many past research studies on family violence. The steps, empowering approach and processes adopted by the LCCLC to recruit in a way that is inclusive of women are all methods that ought to be considered by other projects which seek to recruit participation from vulnerable groups or people experiencing family violence and other forms of trauma such as physical, psychological and sexual abuse. These were explained in more detail under the heading 'A. The Survey, In-depth Interviews and WDYA Report' above.

The collaborations started and the detailed information from the survey on barriers to effective service delivery ought to be the subject of further ongoing work. These include the need for further training and professional development which includes clarity of roles and understanding of ethical professional obligations and limitations and how people can work better together. Workarounds that respect the various difference in roles and improvements to communication styles and mutual respect and transparency that the collaborative survey discussed under heading 'E. Health Surveys' are feasible if a problem solving collaborative approach is taken by multi-disciplines with the patient/client as a central focus providing safety and responsiveness. These are worthy of ongoing resourcing and support so that effective intervention can continue and be expanded upon and improved which can only lead to more effective service delivery and a better reaching of people in need of support and family violence protection and prevention.

In summary, a key finding of this evaluation report, given the overall success of the WDYA Project and through

- the rich data;
- expanded service coverage in regional and rural areas where there has been a gap;
- ideas for service improvement;
- practical steps for systemic change to how the legal system responds and approaches family violence detailed in the Draft WDYA Project Report launched on 5 May 2015

is that LCCLC's work ought to be enabled to continue through resourcing and provision of further funding into the future. It would be a pity if the relationships and collaborations being built and the services being provided through the greater ability to retain and hire staff were not sustained into the future. To provide ongoing funding to continue the work enabled by this LSB grant would also be in line with recent stated commitments by State and the Commonwealth Governments to the National endeavours to end family violence.



This project is commended to those with funds to ensure its continuance given the importance of family violence prevention and responsiveness is a priority of both government and national concern.

A key suggestion from the evaluator, Dr Liz Curran of ANU is that the work undertaken by the WDYA Project by LCCLC ought to be brought to the attention, as soon as possible, of the Neave Commission of Inquiry so that the important findings of the LCCLC WDYA Project can also be advanced drawing on its findings both in the WDYA Project Report and the recent 'Collaboration Health Survey Tool 2' by the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence established in December 2014.

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