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Support, Help & Empowerment (SHE) Inc.

Submission to the fiscal allocation - Tasmania's Family Violence Action Plan

September 2015

Executive Summary

Issue:

Tasmania's Family Violence Action Plan 2015-2020 is a powerful demonstration that the Government is making serious attempts to reduce domestic violence in our community, and its arrival at a time when there is already an upsurge of interest in domestic violence is welcome and necessary. However, with an increased government and media focus on domestic violence comes an increase in demand for specialist domestic violence services like SHE, as well as a desperate need for better understanding of domestic violence throughout the community.

What SHE can do:

In order to develop the community's capacity for preventing and responding to domestic violence, we believe there must be a greater emphasis on building community capacity regarding domestic violence, and stimulating changes in culture with respect to women and violence. As we will detail in this submission, SHE has already been offering this support to our community, but is currently limited in what we can achieve with our current resources. The formation of a specialised Community Liaison Project to create this capacity is what we will achieve with additional funding. We are the ideal organisation to initiate the development of this role, since we possess:

- Values and expertise that privileges knowledge from both academic and lived experience, that have been developed throughout years of experience with domestic violence in the Tasmanian community,
- The trust of women in the Tasmanian community who have experienced violence, who often face a number of barriers in accessing support and are not adequately consulted in domestic violence policies, and,
- A respected position in the community generally, including strong relationships with local service providers and community organisations.

Outcomes for Tasmania:

The Community Liaison Project will hold the elimination of violence against women as the core of its mission. SHE will increase awareness of the causes and consequences of domestic violence by *changing attitudes and behaviour that lead to family violence and supporting families affected by violence*. With this new allocation of resources SHE will be able to deliver more effective services, whilst valuing adding to our service outcomes for women and families in Tasmania.

Investment:

\$73 644

Community Liaison Project Includes wages, superannuation and other remuneration	67051.40
Administration 20%	12274.08
TOTAL INVESTMENT	73644.48

About Support, Help & Empowerment (SHE)

Support, Help & Empowerment (SHE) Inc. is a community based, not for profit organisation that provides specialist counselling services for women who are currently, or have previously experienced family and domestic violence and/or other violations. SHE's mission is to work towards the elimination of abuse and violence in Tasmania by providing an integrated response to domestic violence.

SHE's practice is informed by the ecological model of intimate partner and sexual violence. This model conceptualises violence as a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in interplay among individual, family, community and societal level. Key determinants of violence against women include gender roles and relations, social norms supporting violence, inequality and access to resources.

SHE aims to address the attitudes and norms supporting abuse/violence by providing community education on healthy and respectful relationships through a gendered lens.

SHE is an advocate against family violence and all violence against women. We recognise that community change will not come about without social inclusion, education and opportunities for growth. SHE takes a leadership role in lobbying for social change to increase women's status and eliminate violence and abuse.

SHE is committed to providing a quality counselling service for women affected by family and domestic violence and/or abuse. The service extends to include education and advocacy where counsellors provide case support to clients on an as needs basis. Evidence shows that the specialised empowerment-based model provided by SHE significantly assists women affected by family violence in the long term. For example, feminist approaches to counselling have been consistently recommended as the most appropriate and effective forms of intervention with victims/survivors.

SHE staff all engage in a practice framework that seeks consistent engagement with academic literature and research (nationally and internationally) that describes evidence based initiatives arising from the spectrum of responses into violence prevention. As an organisation we are informed, connected and current.

Current environment

This past year has been characterised by a rise in interest in domestic and family violence compounded by a highly public murder of a woman by her partner. Concurrently, SHE has actively sought to raise its profile and provide representation on all issues that impact clients. Together this has resulted in increasing demands on SHE services, for counselling services as well as for participation in planning meetings, consultations and awareness raising activities. It is expected that this will continue as we witness the growing interest and investment both locally and nationally in the issues arising from family and domestic violence and/or abuse.

SHE is well positioned to represent concerns relating to family violence and gender issues and contributes to social policy and legislative inquiries in order to raise the profile of the issues that affect the community we work for.

SHE also has a proactive presence in the media and is well equipped to represent the social-political environment that surrounds and responds to domestic violence. SHE maintains a strong

presence on social media. SHE has very strong networks within the immediate domestic violence sector as well as other supportive community service organisations.

SHE is committed to being an inclusive organisation that addresses isolation, marginalisation and other barriers to accessing services.

SHE sees that more needs to be done for women who are subject to violence and abuse but do not necessarily recognise that the patterns of behaviour are causing harm or that they qualify for services. There is also a considerable number of women who feel unable to access services due to;

- stigma attached to domestic violence,
- reduced self-worth and the belief that they are not entitled to support,
- implied or implicit criminality that prevents people from wanting to engage with the law,
- threat of involvement by the Child Protection Service for people seeking intervention, or
- perceived mistrust or irrelevance of services.

ANROWs use ABS statistics to say that 24% of women who have experienced violence from an ex-partner have **never sought advice or support**. Other sources suggest up to 60% of women who experience family violence do not seek help.

Building sustained investments

Community service organisations play a key role in prevention, intervention, education, support and safety. Community based domestic violence and women's services are also uniquely positioned to be collaborating with women (and children) who have lived experience of violence. They can engage easily with individuals and communities to ensure greater community accountability, more relevant service provision, mobilisation of communities, social inclusion and added value for all stakeholders.

There is a clear need for a greater and more efficient service response to the issue of violence against women; increased awareness and response training within services and the broader community, counselling and education groups for women and families, up to date and locally relevant resources about family violence, skills development for women leaving violent relationship, and community development – however, resource limitations limit the extent that we are able to engage with these needs. SHE is confident that with increased investment our service will be able to deliver successful outcomes with far reaching impact on the communities in Tasmania.

SHE offers experience as a long-term stakeholder in the domestic violence sector in Tasmania. With an in-depth theoretical understanding of women's experience of violence and abuse, strong community networks and active inter-sector relationships, SHE will ensure that this project has community accountability and relevance to the services that make up the sector. SHE has a reputation as a professional service with a high degree of consumer satisfaction.

SHE's capacity

SHE services follow these practice principles:

- Use ecological model
- Draw on previous research and approaches
- Address structures, norms and practices
- Take an intersectional approach - inclusive
- Tailor program for specific group/context
- Use research, theory and lessons from practice to inform program
- Be informed with a clear conceptual framework and theory of change
- Evaluation (strategic and continuous)
- Cross sector partnerships
- Take a social not individual approach

Our expertise enables us to be able to develop and deliver the following programs:

1. Primary prevention: (respectful relationships, parenting support) can be tailored to specific environments and provided by SHE. SHE already does this to the extent that resources permit. Training and awareness raising programs need to be relevant and accessible. They need to be delivered with a combination of skills across a range of platforms. Education needs to be challenging in order to create meaningful change but not confrontational to the degree that people are alienated, blamed or feel disengaged.
2. Workplace training: SHE is strategically placed to be rolling out training to front line services around recognising and responding to domestic violence. Again, this is a service that SHE already provides but it is not approached comprehensively due to under resourcing. Changing the attitudes and behaviors that lead to family violence has emerged as a significant process that must be engaged with if we are to eliminate violence against women in Australia. Attitudes like 'she deserves it' or a tolerance to sexism are indicators of a culture which allow domestic violence to exist unchallenged or unaddressed within the workplaces and the local community. Workplaces can create structural change by developing and implementing family violence policies that make provisions for anyone experiencing family violence and include measures that address use of workplace resources to perpetuate family violence. Consultation (targeting large business with traditionally male workforces, or where women make-up the greatest percentage of clientele, eg. hairdressers) will enable workplaces to develop policy and involve key stakeholders, promote policy and train staff to respond to family violence scenarios. SHE can support workplaces at a structural level making changes to practices and leading attitudinal change.
3. Counselling interventions:
 - i.) SHE already has leading expertise in the provision of long term counselling and other psychotherapy tools that address the impact of family violence on women in Tasmania. However, these services are under great strain with 3-4 week waiting lists and growing demands on staff to deliver other services (community education). Counselling is the only evidence based practice proven to be helpful in mitigating the long term impacts of post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression that results from the trauma of family violence. In order to be able to

meet the demand on the specialised counselling service we need to build our workforce and expand the number of counselling sessions we are able to offer.

- ii.) A significant gap in services exists for children affected by domestic violence. SHE has the expertise and commitment to be offering specialised services to children.
 - iii.) Clients often need case management and advocacy services. Complex needs that compound people's experience of trauma demand specialised ongoing, long term support. SHE counsellors are able meet these needs to a limited extent but the process can be very time consuming. Increasing the resources to SHE to enable the provision of case management and advocacy rather than relying on referral would increase the likelihood of successful intervention from both client and public health points of view. Women also need support navigating their way through the legal system. This is additionally stressful for socially isolated women including (for example) women with disabilities, women from CALD communities or recently arrived in Tasmania, women living with mental health issues and women who have previously been incarcerated.
 - iv.) Partnerships with perpetrator programs - this integrated response to perpetrator programs allows for the greatest accountability in measuring behaviour change by working with the partner of the perpetrator to support intervention frameworks and ensure that the victim is experiencing or observing changes in attitudes and behaviour. Perpetrator programs are known for the difficulty in measuring their effectiveness, however it is recognised that the success can be measured by conferring with the existing partners to monitor and support change. SHE is strongly positioned to participate in this model of integrated and supported perpetrator programs.
4. Community Capacity development: In order for at-risk communities to respond to and assimilate anti-family violence messages they need to be resourced with greater capacity to engage, respond and support individuals. As a trusted community based organisation SHE is well placed to offer additional services in supporting community initiated projects with people affected by family violence.

Unlike many pioneering community responses to issues (HIV/AIDS, People with Disabilities -"Nothing about us without us"), the voice, perceptions, wants and ideas of women who have been subjected to violence and abuse is often missing from the decision making, policy design and service provisions that attempt to eliminate violence against women. It is overdue that the community of women with lived experience of violence have their expertise acknowledged and valued with real mechanisms for meaningful consultation and engagements.

Furthermore, the voice of this community is frequently missing from media, lobbying and advocacy despite the fact that real stories make personal impacts. In terms of changing community attitudes it is widely recognised that "lived experience speaking" changes more attitudes than hearing about policies and statistics. Bringing together women with personal stories into a culture change program creates meaning, relevance, empowerment and genuine motivation to transform attitudes and practices that hide and tolerate and thus permit domestic violence to endure at the epidemic levels that it exists at. The lived

experience of people who have been affected by family violence is an invaluable resource that needs to be harnessed but it is a strategy that also needs resourcing.

5. Inclusion: SHE has identified the need for tailored responses and programs that work with women with disabilities, LGBTI communities, people adversely affected by alcohol and other drugs and women and men from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds. SHE has already done substantial work with women with disabilities as well as LGBTI groups and need to be able to strengthen responses to marginalised and socially isolated groups. SHE sees opportunities to create tailored responses and programs for socially isolated women.

Concluding Comments

Domestic Violence has reached unprecedented levels of unacceptability in the community. This is an opportune time to take the wealth of knowledge within the research arena and translate it into practices.

Access to ongoing specialised counselling for women who have experienced abuse and violence in relationships is essential to addressing the impact and damaging consequences of the abuse. However, discussions about eliminating violence against women must include the need to engage all sectors of the community to challenge societal beliefs, cultural norms, language and codes of behaviour that lead to the reduced status of women including discrimination, stereotypes and gender inequalities. Prevention that promotes respectful relationships, attitudes, language and norms to address gender inequalities need to target the whole population to deliver enduring and persistent messages.

This organisation showcases leading approaches to successful community engagement. The long standing role that SHE has played in the direct, hands-on response to domestic violence inform this submission with a deep understanding of the impact, conditions and experiences of the prevalence and nature of domestic violence in Tasmania.

SHE makes a significant contribution to the history of domestic violence service interventions in Tasmania and proudly carries a reputation of trust and quality in the community for service delivery over 3-4 decades and to generations of women.

SHE has established networks in the community and are known by individuals as an essential service for women subject to violence and abuse. SHE is well connected within the domestic violence sector across Tasmania and is known for its compassionate, evidence informed representation of domestic violence amongst the community sector and government agencies. SHE is committed to producing sustainable outcomes that contribute to a more fair and equitable society.