



Women, Disability and Violence

A Knowledge Translation and Exchange Workshop for the Specialist Disability and Domestic and Family Violence Services Sector

Facilitator Workbook

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Supporting everyday safety of women with disability.

Recognise the importance of listening to women with disability and believing them.

- Ensuring women are informed about what violence is and about their pathway to safety and justice.
- Ensuring information is fully accessible (Auslan, Easy English, Images, Audio-visual).
- Women's everyday health needs to be considered: there may be unaddressed needs linked to or preceding the violence being reported. These may include psychological supports that could address issues such as trauma, and self-blame.
- Housing security is a critical part of effective violence and prevention responses.
- Information about peer supports may be really valuable to address immediate outcomes but also to build broader social networks.
- Emphasise the need to ensure relevant legal options and any legal processes are clearly and accessibly explained: AVOs, charges, family law support.
- Emphasise the need to ensure perpetrators are 'kept in view'.
- Recognise silo effects on inter-agency co-operation: women's needs are likely to be complex and will need diverse responses.
- Recognise that, where possible, consistency of support and case management may assist in mitigating silo effects on inter-agency co-operation and ensuring supports are in place i.e. housing, NDIS.
- Consider opportunities for community education and support (e.g. if schools are nearby, a disability information intervention may offer neighbourhood/community support).

1. About this workshop resource.

These workshop resources emerged from our project with People with Disability Australia (PWDA) on behalf of Disabled People's Organisations Australia, funded by ANROWS, focused on the experiences of women with disability as they sought to access justice (see ANROWS Horizons Research report at: <https://www.anrows.org.au/publications/horizons/women-disability-and-violence-barriers-accessing-justice-final-report>). The report is also available in Easy English and Auslan versions at: <https://arts.monash.edu/gender-and-family-violence/projects/women-disability-violence/>). A key finding was that, for women with disability, the different service aims and objectives often meant they were not able to get the support or even the pathways they needed in one place (see also ANROWS Compass report for a summary of key findings and implications for policy and practice at: <https://www.anrows.org.au/publications/compass/women-disability-and-violence-barriers-accessing-justice-key-findings-and>).

The workshop resources are designed to be used as a self-directed learning tool within organisations or to support workshops to be run between organisations. Participant and facilitator material is freely available here and can be used and adapted to support organisations in enhancing their responses to women with disability. Our thanks to those in NSW and Victoria who provided such informative feedback on the pilot workshop.

The workshop resource focuses on the stories of four women with disability, and invites service providers to consider what each of these women says that she needs, what supports these needs will require and how she might be assisted to achieve her objectives. It aims to develop knowledge about different support systems across specialist family violence and specialist disability services, to provide an opportunity for organisations to consider holistic approaches to women's needs, and to build skills in listening and responding effectively to the voices of women with disability.

Following input from stakeholders and collaborators, we present these stories as closely as possible to how they were told to us. We have altered details to prevent identification but have used the words of the women who contributed to our study. In these stories, women describe what has happened to them and talk about what they need. In line with our commitment that women are identified as decision-makers and experts in their own lives, we don't categorise in terms of disability, previous service provision, or existing assessments. The objective for the workshop is that services think broadly and inclusively about how to respond to the women who present.

Our heartfelt thanks to the women who shared their experiences and expertise with us.

These stories are difficult to read: it will be important to make sure supports and care are in place for the participants.

2. About this workbook.

This Facilitator Workbook is designed for use in conjunction with the Participant Workbook when conducting the Knowledge Translation and Exchange (KTE) workshop. Sections 6 and 7 are specific to the Facilitator Workbook. The workbooks may also be used alongside the KTE web resource - <https://arts.monash.edu/gender-and-family-violence/projects/women-disability-violence/online-workshop/>. The web resource contains video summaries of the women's stories as well as video footage of the introduction to the New South Wales KTE workshop held in Redfern in February 2018.

3. About this workbook.

Time - 3.5 hours total (including break)	Activity
15 minutes	Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitator(s) introduce event and discuss workshop objectives (see section 4 below) ● Attendees introduce themselves
15 minutes	Facilitator outlines structure of workshop and reads out workshop questions for working with the women's stories (see section 5 below). Structure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attendees to split into small groups (3-5 people per group ideal). Groups then simultaneously: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Read women's stories ○ Discuss stories guided by questions ● Small group discussion followed by large group discussion and collaboration on best practice responses to each story ● Facilitator takes notes of key responses/concerns in a format visible to all attendees i.e. whiteboard ● Repeat this process through all four stories
15 minutes	Small group work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read story 1 ● Discuss in small group
15 minutes	Large group discussion and summary of story 1
1.5 hours	Repeat the above for stories 2, 3 & 4
30 minutes	Breaks – to be determined

15 minutes	Large group discussion of key findings and outcomes
15 minutes	Conclusion/final thoughts/objectives/follow up

4. Workshop Objectives.

- To support organisations to conduct in-house training that enhances knowledge of cross-sectoral responses when women with disability present at services.
- To build new knowledges of pathways and areas of response to enhance women's outcomes.
- In our service responses, embed women's rights to live violence-free lives, enhance their access to basic human rights, including justice, and remember well-being as a critical part of everyday security.
- To ensure we are engaging with women with disability as experts in their needs, pathways, and objectives.

5. Workshop Questions

- If Vanessa/Linda/Stephanie/Melanie presented to your service, what questions would you ask?
- How would you seek out key needs and objectives to address existing safety needs/living options/enhanced life outcomes?
- How do you see the role of your service here?
- Describe a set of good and supportive service responses that could assist these women to achieve their objectives and enhanced life outcomes.

6. Women's stories.

Notes on the Women's Stories - Key points for facilitators

The notes presented underneath the women's stories below are not prescriptive; they are intended as a guide for facilitators. The bullet points indicate key areas of concern for the women and opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration. The women with disability and the specialist disability and domestic and family violence service providers who attended the workshops upon which this workbook is based identified these areas and opportunities.

6.1. Vanessa's Story

Vanessa was in an abusive relationship with her now ex-partner. She has four children who were removed from her care because of this violence. Vanessa went to court and won back custody of her children. Following this, she moved to Adelaide to be near her former partner's ex-wife and daughter for support. Following some misdirected allegations Vanessa's children

were removed from her care again. At that time Vanessa was receiving support from a disability advocacy service and one of their workers tried to help Vanessa to sort out this issue, but Vanessa's children are still in care. Since this time Vanessa has completed numerous courses and attended counselling in an attempt to win back custody of her children. Vanessa's advocate told us that her chances of her regaining custody are not good.

Vanessa has lost the support of her family and is very isolated. Vanessa's current living arrangements are volatile. She says there are a lot of break-ins, drugs, yelling, screaming and fighting. Vanessa does not feel safe in her home. She had spoken with the police on the morning of the day we interviewed her.

About feeling safe Vanessa said:

Where do you think you could feel safe and secure?

Vanessa: *Close to my kids.*

About losing the support of her family Vanessa said:

...so what I should have done is went from [small town] to up here instead of going to another violent family, which I did the opposite to my family. I should have listened to my family and came this way, but I went that way.

...instead of going straight to Adelaide and got my kids taken off me and then I won the court case down there, I should have just come straight up here, went to Housing Commission and say, "Hey, I got four kids and myself. Can you find somewhere for us to stay?" But you never know. And then we went to my auntie's that lived in [small town] because she was caring for them and then she couldn't care for them anymore so she put them in foster care. Now I'm trying to fight for them back.

Well most of my family weren't much supportive, but they were happy that I left him, because they didn't like him. But then as soon as they found out the paperwork about the allegations and the DV, they just stopped supporting me.

Oh yeah, my sister. When I moved up here, my sister up from me, she is only three years older than me. She turned on me. The first thing she helped me put my forms in for Housing Commission and stuff like that and then she found the paper about the allegations and then she turned on stuff and me like that. So I told her to get fucked and then - I see her now and then with the kids, but that is about it. Now she doesn't talk to me.

About what is important Vanessa said:

Most important is just get the kids back.

6.1.1 Key Points for Facilitators

- Legal support and advice regarding her rights with her children. Is she able to have visitation? Has she been informed of the likelihood of regaining custody of her children?
- Have appropriate legal avenues and supports been identified and explained for Vanessa?
- Continuity of support an issue. Vanessa may benefit from a case conference and ongoing case management. She may wish to take a support person with her.
- Isolation seems to be a critical issue: peer and community supports could be vital here.
- Finding safe housing is critical for both immediate safety and security and for longer-term goals such as custody.
- Support from Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal may be a possibility.
- Witness the undermining of Vanessa's personal agency.
- Challenge perpetuation of stereotypes about women with disability and their parenting skills

6.2 Linda's Story

Linda arrived early for her afternoon interview, and jumped straight into her story. She told us that she would start by talking about the violence she experienced as a child, and then talk about violence she experienced as an adult.

Linda talked about severe physical and psychological violence from her father that started at a young age. She remembers a lot from her childhood, and spoke about all the violence her father used against her when she was a toddler, young child and adolescent.

Linda told us about subsequent experiences of violence, largely sexual assault, perpetrated by male relatives (at least two male cousins when she was between the ages of 4 and 9, and one of her uncles when she was a young teen), a male partner (which resulted in a forced pregnancy), a boarding house proprietor and various other men.

While at the boarding house, Linda witnessed numerous crimes. She told us that many of these crimes – domestic violence, robbery, assault, sexual assault – went without any police response. Linda left the boarding house. She told us that finally, the boarding house was closed down and stripped of its license for mismanagement.

What Linda said:

So it's been a long history of what's been going on in my life. Like I said, I don't know why I can't find the will to defend myself, like hey back off from the sexual assault, even though afterwards I feel angry and I go why didn't I deck that guy, but you can't do that.

About the violence she experienced as a child Linda said:

I do remember that my father - I was a breastfed baby and I remember my father flicking me in the head and trying to remove my head from my mother's breast when I was feeding, as though he was really jealous. My mother said he was jealous of me.

I copped all the abuse; the physical abuse, the psychological abuse, but he never sexually abused me. Not my father. But I had various other parties that were involved.

He used to pick me up by the ears or he'd get the scruff of my hair and pull my hair and drag my hair to the bathroom or wherever he was going. It was really bad.

I was only five years old. That was one incident that happened and I was all black and blue. All my legs were covered in black and blue bruises.

[About sexual abuse perpetrated by her cousins] he did those things to me until I was nine years old. From four to nine... When I was nine, I told my mother what happened. I told her everything. She was angry and frustrated and she wanted to talk to [my aunt] about - do you know she talked to [my aunt] about all this disturbing information about [my cousin] and [my aunt] protected him and said that she doesn't want him to go to prison, because he'll go to prison, you know, like that, and she protected him, so my mother agreed not to say no word about it.

And, when I used to get hit from my mother, I one time dug my fingernails into my cheeks because I was so angry because she hurt me and there was that and there were times that I'd try and put a plastic bag over my head and strangle myself. I'd try to strangle myself, but it was very painful to suffocate myself. It was painful. It's painful. When it starts to get too much you can't breathe. It starts to hurt.

[My mum] wanted all my money, my pension money, and it was hard to stick up for myself. It's like I was in a relationship with my mother that it wasn't - I couldn't be honest with her, I couldn't stick up for myself...

About the impact of the violence Linda said:

I always had gastric - because I was always anxious and shaking and I had pains in the gut all the time and I used to wet myself because of all the stress and all that and I'd cop hidings all the time for wetting myself.

I had problems with my schooling because of the - probably from the abuse.

I went to a boarding school because I stopped talking when I was eight. The stuttering got really bad to the point - because my father was hitting me too much. My father was really belting into me too much and I stopped talking because I couldn't say anything properly and they put me into boarding school called [school name], and that's for mentally disturbed as well as unwanted children and children with disabilities.

Child abuse has left my life so lonely. That's what I've come to realise. And now I'm more vulnerable because I don't have my parents or anything.

About the violence she experienced as an adult Linda said:

When I was 23 years old, I went into a boarding house and I was first in hospital for about six months because I was homeless as well as I had psychiatric problems, and I ended up in this boarding house.

[the boarding house proprietor's] father tried to get me drunk and was ejaculating on my back, like that, and he was trying to strip me like that, because he gave me ouzo and I told Brian about it... No-one called the police.

[the boarding house proprietor] he wanted to do a topless - he wanted to do me a tattoo picture on my front and he wanted me to take off my bra and I was really scared. ... He did the tattoo and all that and I was really scared and then he started to hurt my nipples and all of that, and I was really, really scared, and then he got me on the bed and was trying to rough me up a bit on the bed and do certain things, thrusting on the bed with clothes on, and I was really scared.

Yeah, I fell pregnant. I was in a de facto relationship but I never wanted kids because of my child abuse. I never wanted kids... And I had domestic violence on myself of Paul because it's like you don't want to ever have kids and all that and he wouldn't let me take the contraceptive pill and it's like, "If you take the contraceptive pill, I'll kick you out," and all of that, out of this Department of Housing, because he owned the lease... I had nowhere to go. He said he would kick me out if I took the pill and he got me pregnant, sexual assault... I had the child but I was all messed up. I was really all messed up. It's like you feel as though the child is like a demon. It's taken over your body. I ended up putting the child up for adoption. He's in a good home and he's safe and he's good and he's happy.

[About a local man who sexually assaulted her] He seemed quite okay at first and he took me to his place and he had all these kitchen knives all over the place...because he was doing a chef training course, but apparently he's got a background of sexual assault, rape and physical abuse. ... But I got to know him...so I gave him my number, but then he started making prank phone calls and things started to sour because I said no to him...and the next day he got me and there were all these kitchen knives scattered on the floor and on the tables and the lounge and I don't know whether that's called rape. I don't know... I said no. ... I got an AV - all I could do was get an AVO out on him. An AVO, and he breached that a few times... At the time, he had eight AVOs against him. Now he's got more than 16. More than 16.

About reporting violence Linda said:

Well, the problem is I've got a problem that I don't stand up - now I realise I don't stand up for myself.

[about telling the police] That was good. It was nerve wracking. It was really nerve wracking because then you've got to go through the private details and it's a bit yukky. It's a bit horrible.

Department of Housing said to ring the police to get a statement about what happened and all that. It's explaining the details can be a bit tough. It's like you've got to say it over again what happened and all of that and you feel just so angry and why is this happening and all this and you feel not right. Dirty.

6.2.1 Key Points for Facilitators

- Lifelong experiences of violence, experiences of vulnerability, self blame, feeling unable to protect herself.
- Violence across the lifespan - how do you intervene in a meaningful way? Access to counselling services, particularly trauma counselling may be required
- Possible need for strong social supports that will assist in building Linda's confidence, recognising violence and mitigating her isolation. Links to a social network may increase well-being. Recognition that Linda is not defined by these experiences.
- Capacity and confidence building around sexual violence and her rights
- Ensure contraceptive options - health services, family planning – are available if needed
- Considering the violence she experienced at the boarding house, importance of interrogating definitions of family violence is clear: 'family' is not a static concept.
- Ensuring that violence against women with disability is classified as violence and not a 'service incident'. How violence is classified will impact the services and responses made available.
- Linda needs to be supported to consider what her goals are and be fully informed of what service providers can and will do for her.
- Important to note that while Linda may not be currently experiencing violence, everyday security means working toward safety now and in the future. Certain services may only be available for women currently experiencing violence. Alternative avenues will need to be pursued to make Linda safe.

6.3 Stephanie's Story

Stephanie's advocate, Anthony, spoke to her about participating in our research, and she wanted to share her story. We spoke to her in her mother's living room, with Anthony there for support, as Stephanie asked. They have been working together for seven years.

Stephanie explained that she got married to Glen, her now ex-husband, when she was 18, after falling pregnant to him at 17. She was pressured by Glen and his father to get an abortion, but Stephanie wanted to keep the baby. During their marriage, Glen was violent and controlling. He prevented her from having any contact with her friends and family, and only allowed her to eat when he ate. On one occasion, before Stephanie knew she was pregnant with their second daughter, Glen pushed her against a wall, kicked her in the stomach and choked her. She almost died.

She had two daughters with Glen, and above all else, wanted to keep them safe.

Child Protection was involved with both of Stephanie's daughters, after they lost weight as babies due to health conditions. Stephanie fought to have her concerns about their health taken seriously, despite having issues with her own health at the time. When Stephanie left Glen, their children were in the care of his parents.

Stephanie has endured a four-year court process with her ex-husband, and his parents, to obtain custody of the children.

Stephanie is now 30, and has a young son with her new partner. Her new partner is supportive and caring, and has a close relationship with her daughters and the rest of her family.

What Stephanie said:

I'm a kind person. I love my kids, they mean the world to me – like anyone hurts them, you're dealing with a mother bear! And that's the way it is with me, my kids always come first, and that's what I always thought. The girls came first before [my son] came in. The girls always came first, so I always put their needs first. And then so – same – you've got to put yourself and I was a little selfish but you've got to put yourself first too, and I said – really? I've always had that mindset – kids come first. Always. If I didn't get out, I was afraid that I would die... I was afraid that he would kill me. I was afraid that if I didn't get out that the girls wouldn't have their mother, and I couldn't take that chance. And that's why I left when I did.

About the violence Stephanie said:

He threw me out with one of the girls, called the police on me. Called the police on me yeah - and said you come to this house and I would have one of the girls with me and said you come in this house and I'll call the police – and I said oh I need to get something, I can't remember which one it was, Anna or Carly, and I was outside and he would call the police on me. And then they took me to my mum's and he tried to stop them from taking me to my mum's and the police said – no she's coming with us because you're not letting her in. She's got a baby and you're silly – you called us and you're the one that's acting this way. The police were more on my side – than his side. 'Cause they knew that I didn't do anything wrong. They said "What happened?" and I said that he threw me out by my hair.

I had to stay here [at my mum's] 'cause we had a joint bank account and he closed it. And he opened an account but because everything I owned was in that house and he wouldn't let me get it.

I called the police and they said I would have to go through court and that. But he threw all my clothes out ... But I just wanted my clothes. 'Cause I had nothing except for the stuff I was wearing on that... Mum got me some clothes so I could get clothes, so I could go to Centrelink, get a new ID and all that sort of stuff, and open my own account and set up Centrelink so I could get some money and that. So, that I can get my own clothes and things like this, which I did. I had to redo everything 'cause he wouldn't let me get anything.

I had no choice but to leave 'cause I was scared and I knew the girls were safe 'cause they were with his parents. So I knew that they could look after them. But I was more scared 'cause he's hit me so many times that I had no choice but to leave. Or else he would do it again. And then he said that I abandoned the girls. And it's like – no I wasn't abandoning them; it was me making sure that I don't get hit. Protecting myself.

About the perpetrator Stephanie said:

I always stood and talked for myself. And even though I was scared to, but everyone said that I was the one calming him down and controlling him. It's like – NO. And then – it was just – sit here and go on this rollercoaster. And you have a toad with you instead of a Prince. And I kind of felt like – it feels wrong but I kind of felt like I married – how my father was abusive, it's like marrying a similar person to your father.

About Child Protection Stephanie said:

'Cause my stepdad taught me to have a backbone and speak for myself, and that's what I always did was speak for myself. Especially when they tried to take my girls away.

But when I was pregnant with Carly – and then I had Carly – the doctor said we had a meeting and the worse thing of a mother hearing saying – we'll take Carly away and you just deal with Anna. I was like – no. No – why? And they're like – 'cause you can't handle the two of them. I said how do you know I can't handle the two of them? I can. Give me a chance to. They were only young – I'm just starting to figure it out!

"I felt restricted on what I could do. Like with a new baby, you've gotta [baby]proof everything. And I couldn't do it because I would get in trouble for it. And it's just like - whoa. Yeah, I get in trouble for doing it and then I get in trouble if my baby gets sick."

"Cause we went to court with them and they tried to take the girls off us and then the court said no give them a chance, give them help – parenting courses.

I was agreeing to everything that they put in place and he wasn't. He wanted to get rid of it. He didn't like it. And it's like – work with them. And then they'll go. They'll let us be parents. And – no. He kept on arguing and arguing and there was more arguing and that.

About the court process Stephanie said:

I was worried when we first went to court how he said – I abandoned them. And I said – I didn't abandon them. And the court said I didn't abandon them. I was leaving them in the hands of their grandparents, pretty much, and even though the court said that – that I left them in the hands of their grandparents. Always I was afraid that he would hurt me. And that's what I was afraid of. I didn't want to leave them. I didn't want to leave them – but it was like – get out now before he hurts you, in front of the girls. That's one thing I didn't want them to see.

[After the court process] Finally, I was so happy. And it was over! I said – I can't do it, I couldn't do another year of it, like as I said, going in and out, 'cause I had things to do with the kids. With [my son] being so little. It was taking my time away from him and it's like – it was bad enough taking my time away from the girls as well. This was the main thing – to spend time with the girls.

It's just lasted so long and I was just happy that the girls live with me and you know, they spend, they're going to school which they love going.

About how people should respond Stephanie said:

Some people are shocked when I tell them what happened, like with the choking and the kicking and the pulling hair, it's like... Just listen and be supporting and just take it on board yourself. Think – this could happen to me. I didn't think in a million years that it could happen to me but – look – it happened. As Anthony said before I wasn't even 20! And I went through so much. And so it's like – you just got to think to yourself, will it happen, will it not happen? And that's what I think people should feel. Take it on board, what I say. Or if not, at least I've said my piece. And what I went through. People can't believe what I've gone through. And they say – did it really happen? And I say – trust me! It happened!

6.3.1 Key Points for Facilitators

- Access for support in relation to Child Protection is critical.
- Were adequate health responses provided for her children?
- Is there a way specialised disability services can interact with specialist FV and child protection (knowledge transfer across three sectors needed here)?
- Acknowledge the important role and knowledge held by disability advocates.
- Absence of effective court/justice responses.
- Access to counselling for earlier as well as recent experiences.
- Ongoing support and advice around ex-partner and custody. At the time of Stephanie's story the ex-partner was still exhibiting controlling behaviour. Stephanie indicates that she agrees to everything, this makes it even more important that Stephanie is aware of her rights within a shared custody arrangement and she knows what she can do if she is concerned the children may be exposed to domestic and family violence.
- Ex-partner should remain accountable and in view.

6.4 Melanie's Story

Melanie arrived to tell her difficult and traumatic story and began talking straightaway. She was assaulted and held by her abuser for hours one early morning in her home several years ago; she was seriously injured and feared for her life. After the assault, Melanie was targeted her attacker's friends. Even though he admitted his assault and was later jailed, there were many events around her home that were frightening.

She has moved houses and area since that time; she feels safer in her new neighbourhood and, importantly, she has security doors, something she had asked for before the attack in her previous house. The Department of Housing refused to put screen doors on Melanie's house and this is where the attacker broke in. They installed one after the attack.

Melanie's mother left money in a trust for her to use. Melanie has ongoing issues with the Trustee who controls this money. Melanie would like some money to fumigate her new house, she would like to put curtains up for privacy and she would also like a dog for security and

company. When we spoke with Melanie, the Trustee was refusing to provide money for these things.

What Melanie said:

I'm under the Government Trustees which I've been under for about 20 years because I was hit by a car 20 years ago. I was run over. So I've got disabilities in my arm and leg, and I've had a brain haemorrhage, stroke too. So going through that, I finally get myself together and independent. I can live by myself, feed myself, do the housework, mow, drive a car. And then he comes along and rapes me, and I'm still doing things by myself. And the Trustees won't even let me take two, three thousand dollars out of my account when I'm allowed to. There's no rules telling me what I can spend the money on, which my mum left me, to even put curtains up in my home. So where I am now, any man can walk by and watch me in the house. Kids do. They come up to my window and squash their faces up there at nine, ten o'clock. The whole house, it's open up to everybody.

I'd like a dog, not so much as a guard dog or anything, just like a therapy dog that'd keep me company and will kind of protect me and will let me know that there's someone at the door. Or someone's out in the back yard or something. Because my hearing is getting worse and so that I think would help me enormously. And for company too.

But the Trustees won't give me the money to do that, even though I have the money. See, I notice with them – and they don't care about the rape or anything. They couldn't care less. And if they see that you are happy and you are comfortable, they hate that. And I do want the dog, very, very much so. And I've been saying that for years.

[Simon, my support worker] gave me the letter and he said I feel this would be very good for you. In fact, he was right. Because what I like about telling you what had happened, you're not judging me. You're not saying you're blamed for this, you're blamed for that. You're saying we understand.

About the police after the home invasion Melanie said:

[The police] were good. They weren't aggressive. They said if you don't want to say much now you don't have to. They didn't rush me. And what they did say, when we finished the statement, they said if you think of anything else that you have forgotten now, let us know so we can put it in the statement, add it on.

About support after the home invasion Melanie said:

They didn't do anything after the statement. The only person I really stayed in contact with was the detective. And then he put me onto another detective who's doing the court part, because the first one wasn't speaking in the court. It was someone else that was doing it. But there was no support, there was no back up. They just wanted information, my side of the story and just be around in case they do need to call me up.

What Melanie says she would have liked:

A support person I guess to come around afterwards and sit with me for a while, let me let it all hang out. I don't know who that'd be. Maybe they'd call a nurse or someone in. But after the police dropped me off I sat up all night watching and waiting for him to walk back in, even though they told me they got him. It was like watching a movie. And I kept thinking it's going to happen again, and I couldn't sleep. So that knocked me around, being 24 hours without sleep and not eating. And then I'm there on my own. And my house is a wreck, and I disinfected everything. I disinfected the walls. I disinfected my bed, the furniture, the lounge, everything. I threw that lounge out. I ended up buying all new furniture, the lounge and everything, to get rid of him.

About the neighbourhood abuse Melanie said:

...the police...said to the Department of Housing move her because they're trying to kill her. And they took a good year mucking around moving me, and because they put me under police protection. I don't know how long for, but in the beginning I was. And they said whatever you do, don't talk about the case to anybody and when you move don't tell anyone where you are.

About the perpetrators Melanie said:

It's always the same group of people...They live around the street before my street...they've pulled many, many stunts on me...they're all friends but they've also all drug addicts too, with little kids and that. I'd just be walking up the road and they'd come out and belt the hell out of me. There was another time I walked out to my mailbox and I didn't see or hear anyone come. Next thing I know bang. I was knocked unconscious. There was another time I left my house, this was just before I got my car, and I always walked up the road to buy the newspaper. And there was a car outside my place and I thought they were visiting someone so I didn't think much of it. And I walked down the road and walked half way up and I thought something's not quite right. And I walked back down to my house. The door was unlocked, I walked in, there's two young guys there trying to take my TV. Knocked me out, there's blood all over the wall.

... Another time I was walking across, up the very top at the end of the road there's a school, a primary school, and I was walking across the crossing. The girl jumped out of the van, who only comes from the house, the street in front of me, in a white van, jumped out and went whack, whack, whack, whack. I'm unconscious on the ground. There were witnesses. They called the police and the ambulance and what woke me up was the siren. And all my left side of my arm and my leg were black as black as black as you can be. The other time is when I got my car, all the kids, I always drove home the same way. I'd drive past the school where I was bashed and then I'd turn to go right to go down their road and these kids would come on their bikes if they saw me. They'd all get in front of my car in a row to block me. This is five, ten year olds, and they wouldn't move so you're stuck. And at one time I beeped my horn and they scattered and then I slowly moved down, because it's a steep hill. And as I went down I heard this woman go aarggh, she's hit him, she's hit him.

Ten minutes later the police are down the end of the house down there, on that house in front of me, and there's another house at the end of the road, they're friends with all these drug

addicts. The police are down there and the ambulance. They've made it out that I ran over a kid. No such thing occurred. There was nothing wrong with the kid, there was nothing wrong with his bike, there was no marks on my car. They were trying to create trouble. There's another time they called me a child molester. I've never touched a child or hurt a child in my life, and it's the same group of people and the police knew that wasn't true.

About feeling safe Melanie said:

Not at the moment, because if any of his so-called drug addict friends find out where I live I'm gone, I'm sure. And I did say to the police when I did move, I said what if they follow me in the truck? You know, get in their cars and follow me? He said, I don't think they will. I said but it's possible. And he said I don't think they will. And I don't think they did because nothing has happened, but then who's to say someone out where I live now knows some people that live out there. And I can't talk about the case to anyone. I've had to lie to my neighbours, because they said where did you live before? And I said oh [suburb]. And that's where I did grow up, was raised in [suburb]. And I can't keep that charade going. And I don't like lying to them.

I can't have a relationship with a man. I'd like to have a partner and things like that but I can't now because of him, because of the sexual assault. And I feel that if I met another man, if we had sex it would remind me of him, so I can't. So I find it difficult to want to go out and meet someone. I can't. I can be a friend but not a lover or anything to them. And wherever I go and whatever I do, he is there. And I can get all the compensation in the world, it's still not going to get rid of him.

6.4.1 Key Points for Facilitators

- Were all critical post sexual assault information lines provided when police attended/during initial stages of support?
- Support after the attack to clean up and secure herself: lack of privacy and dignity is a denial of human rights.
- Connection with ongoing support, in particular group support to mitigate isolation.
- Did Melanie receive a health follow up?
- Classification of Melanie's experience at the 'threshold' of family violence/general violence meaning Melanie may not be eligible for wrap-around services. Is there a work-around? Case Management? Access to safety planning?
- Department of Housing refusal to secure her home - advocacy for this.
- Adequate support and follow up regarding the ongoing abuse from associates of her attacker.
- Melanie was concerned these neighbourhood abusers might follow her and she wasn't reassured by police about her privacy and protection.
- Advocacy with the Trustees of her money; denial of reasonable requests reveals troubling assumptions about legal capacity.
- Distrust about what women say they need to be safe.



Women, Disability and Violence

A Knowledge Translation and Exchange Workshop for the Specialist Disability and Domestic and Family Violence Services Sector

Participant Workbook

May 2018

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1. About this workshop resource.

These workshop resources emerged from our project with People with Disability Australia (PWDA) on behalf of Disabled People's Organisations Australia, funded by ANROWS, focused on the experiences of women with disability as they sought to access justice (see ANROWS Horizons Research report at: <https://www.anrows.org.au/publications/horizons/women-disability-and-violence-barriers-accessing-justice-final-report>). The report is also available in Easy English and Auslan versions at: <https://arts.monash.edu/gender-and-family-violence/projects/women-disability-violence/>). A key finding was that, for women with disability, the different service aims and objectives often meant they were not able to get the support or even the pathways they needed in one place (see ANROWS Compass report for a summary of key findings and implications for policy and practice at: <https://www.anrows.org.au/publications/compass/women-disability-and-violence-barriers-accessing-justice-key-findings-and>).

The workshop resources are designed to be used as a self-directed learning tool within organisations or to support workshops to be run between organisations. Participant and facilitator material is freely available here and can be used and adapted to support organisations in enhancing their responses to women with disability. Our thanks to those in NSW and Victoria who provided such informative feedback on the pilot workshop.

The workshop resource focuses on the stories of four women with disability, and invites service providers to consider what each of these women says that she needs, what supports these needs will require and how she might be assisted to achieve her objectives. It aims to develop knowledge about different support systems across specialist family violence and specialist disability services, to provide an opportunity for organisations to consider holistic approaches to women's needs, and to build skills in listening and responding effectively to the voices of women with disability.

Following input from stakeholders and collaborators, we present these stories as closely as possible to how they were told to us. We have altered details to prevent identification but have used the words of the women who contributed to our study. In these stories, women describe what has happened to them and talk about what they need. In line with our commitment that women are identified as decision-makers and experts in their own lives, we don't categorise in terms of disability, previous service provision, or existing assessments. The objective for the workshop is that services think broadly and inclusively about how to respond to the women who present.

Our heartfelt thanks to the women who shared their experiences and expertise with us.

These stories are difficult to read: it will be important to make sure supports and care are in place for the participants.

2. About this workbook.

This Participant Workbook is designed for use by participants in the Knowledge Translation and Exchange (KTE) workshop. The workbook may also be used alongside the KTE web resource -<https://arts.monash.edu/gender-and-family-violence/projects/women-disability-violence/online-workshop/>. The web resource contains video summaries of the women's stories as well as video footage of the introduction to the New South Wales KTE workshop held in Redfern in February 2018.

3. Workshop structure and schedule.

Time - 3.5 hours total (including break)	Activity
15 minutes	Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitator(s) introduce event and discuss workshop objectives (see section 4 below) ● Attendees introduce themselves
15 minutes	Facilitator outlines structure of workshop and reads out workshop questions for working with the women's stories (see section 5 below). Structure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attendees to split into small groups (3-5 people per group ideal). Groups then simultaneously: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Read women's stories ○ Discuss stories guided by questions ● Small group discussion followed by large group discussion and collaboration on best practice responses to each story ● Facilitator takes notes of key responses/concerns in a format visible to all attendees i.e. whiteboard ● Repeat this process through all four stories
15 minutes	Small group work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read story 1 ● Discuss in small group
15 minutes	Large group discussion and summary of story 1
1.5 hours	Repeat the above for stories 2, 3 & 4
30 minutes	Breaks – to be determined
15 minutes	Large group discussion of key findings and outcomes
15 minutes	Conclusion/final thoughts/objectives/follow up

4. Workshop objectives.

- To support organisations to conduct in-house training that enhances knowledge of cross-sectoral responses when women with disability present at services.
- To build new knowledges of pathways and areas of response to enhance women's outcomes.
- In our service responses, embed women's rights to live violence-free lives, enhance their access to basic human rights, including justice, and remember well-being as a critical part of everyday security.
- To ensure we are engaging with women with disability as experts in their needs, pathways, and objectives.

5. Workshop Questions.

- If Vanessa/Linda/Stephanie/Melanie presented to your service, what questions would you ask?
- How would you seek out key needs and objectives to address existing safety needs/living options/enhanced life outcomes?
- How do you see the role of your service here?
- Describe a set of good and supportive service responses that could assist these women to achieve their objectives and enhanced life outcomes.

6. Women's Stories.

6.1 Vanessa's Story

Vanessa was in an abusive relationship with her now ex-partner. She has four children who were removed from her care because of this violence. Vanessa went to court and won back custody of her children. Following this, she moved to Adelaide to be near her former partner's ex-wife and daughter for support. Following some misdirected allegations Vanessa's children were removed from her care again. At that time Vanessa was receiving support from a disability advocacy service and one of their workers tried to help Vanessa to sort out this issue, but Vanessa's children are still in care. Since this time Vanessa has completed numerous courses and attended counselling in an attempt to win back custody of her children. Vanessa's advocate told us that her chances of her regaining custody are not good.

Vanessa has lost the support of her family and is very isolated. Vanessa's current living arrangements are volatile. She says there are a lot of break-ins, drugs, yelling, screaming and fighting. Vanessa does not feel safe in her home. She had spoken with the police on the morning of the day we interviewed her.

About feeling safe Vanessa said:

Where do you think you could feel safe and secure?

Vanessa: *Close to my kids.*

About losing the support of her family Vanessa said:

...so what I should have done is went from [small town] to up here instead of going to another violent family, which I did the opposite to my family. I should have listened to my family and came this way, but I went that way.

...instead of going straight to Adelaide and got my kids taken off me and then I won the court case down there, I should have just come straight up here, went to Housing Commission and say, "Hey, I got four kids and myself. Can you find somewhere for us to stay?" But you never know. And then we went to my auntie's that lived in [small town] because she was caring for them and then she couldn't care for them anymore so she put them in foster care. Now I'm trying to fight for them back.

Well most of my family weren't much supportive, but they were happy that I left him, because they didn't like him. But then as soon as they found out the paperwork about the allegations and the DV, they just stopped supporting me.

Oh yeah, my sister. When I moved up here, my sister up from me, she is only three years older than me. She turned on me. The first thing she helped me put my forms in for Housing Commission and stuff like that and then she found the paper about the allegations and then

she turned on stuff and me like that. So I told her to get fucked and then - I see her now and then with the kids, but that is about it. Now she doesn't talk to me.

About what is important Vanessa said:

Most important is just get the kids back.

Notes:

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6.2 Linda's Story

Linda arrived early for her afternoon interview, and jumped straight into her story. She told us that she would start by talking about the violence she experienced as a child, and then talk about violence she experienced as an adult.

Linda talked about severe physical and psychological violence from her father that started at a young age. She remembers a lot from her childhood, and spoke about all the violence her father used against her when she was a toddler, young child and adolescent.

Linda told us about subsequent experiences of violence, largely sexual assault, perpetrated by male relatives (at least two male cousins when she was between the ages of 4 and 9, and one of her uncles when she was a young teen), a male partner (which resulted in a forced pregnancy), a boarding house proprietor and various other men.

While at the boarding house, Linda witnessed numerous crimes. She told us that many of these crimes – domestic violence, robbery, assault, sexual assault – went without any police response. Linda left the boarding house. She told us that finally, the boarding house was closed down and stripped of its license for mismanagement.

What Linda said:

So it's been a long history of what's been going on in my life. Like I said, I don't know why I can't find the will to defend myself, like hey back off from the sexual assault, even though afterwards I feel angry and I go why didn't I deck that guy, but you can't do that.

About the violence she experienced as a child Linda said:

I do remember that my father - I was a breastfed baby and I remember my father flicking me in the head and trying to remove my head from my mother's breast when I was feeding, as though he was really jealous. My mother said he was jealous of me.

I copped all the abuse; the physical abuse, the psychological abuse, but he never sexually abused me. Not my father. But I had various other parties that were involved.

He used to pick me up by the ears or he'd get the scruff of my hair and pull my hair and drag my hair to the bathroom or wherever he was going. It was really bad.

I was only five years old. That was one incident that happened and I was all black and blue. All my legs were covered in black and blue bruises.

[About sexual abuse perpetrated by her cousins] he did those things to me until I was nine years old. From four to nine... When I was nine, I told my mother what happened. I told her everything. She was angry and frustrated and she wanted to talk to [my aunt] about - do you know she talked to [my aunt] about all this disturbing information about [my cousin] and [my aunt] protected him and said that she doesn't want him to go to prison, because he'll go to

prison, you know, like that, and she protected him, so my mother agreed not to say no word about it.

And, when I used to get hit from my mother, I one time dug my fingernails into my cheeks because I was so angry because she hurt me and there was that and there were times that I'd try and put a plastic bag over my head and strangle myself. I'd try to strangle myself, but it was very painful to suffocate myself. It was painful. It's painful. When it starts to get too much you can't breathe. It starts to hurt.

[My mum] wanted all my money, my pension money, and it was hard to stick up for myself. It's like I was in a relationship with my mother that it wasn't - I couldn't be honest with her, I couldn't stick up for myself...

About the impact of the violence Linda said:

I always had gastric - because I was always anxious and shaking and I had pains in the gut all the time and I used to wet myself because of all the stress and all that and I'd cop hidings all the time for wetting myself.

I had problems with my schooling because of the - probably from the abuse.

I went to a boarding school because I stopped talking when I was eight. The stuttering got really bad to the point - because my father was hitting me too much. My father was really belting into me too much and I stopped talking because I couldn't say anything properly and they put me into boarding school called [school name], and that's for mentally disturbed as well as unwanted children and children with disabilities.

Child abuse has left my life so lonely. That's what I've come to realise. And now I'm more vulnerable because I don't have my parents or anything.

About the violence she experienced as an adult Linda said:

When I was 23 years old, I went into a boarding house and I was first in hospital for about six months because I was homeless as well as I had psychiatric problems, and I ended up in this boarding house.

[the boarding house proprietor's] father tried to get me drunk and was ejaculating on my back, like that, and he was trying to strip me like that, because he gave me ouzo and I told Brian about it... No-one called the police.

[the boarding house proprietor] he wanted to do a topless - he wanted to do me a tattoo picture on my front and he wanted me to take off my bra and I was really scared. ... He did the tattoo and all that and I was really scared and then he started to hurt my nipples and all of that, and I was really, really scared, and then he got me on the bed and was trying to rough me up a bit on the bed and do certain things, thrusting on the bed with clothes on, and I was really scared.

Yeah, I fell pregnant. I was in a de facto relationship but I never wanted kids because of my child abuse. I never wanted kids... And I had domestic violence on myself of Paul because it's like you don't want to ever have kids and all that and he wouldn't let me take the

contraceptive pill and it's like, "If you take the contraceptive pill, I'll kick you out," and all of that, out of this Department of Housing, because he owned the lease... I had nowhere to go. He said he would kick me out if I took the pill and he got me pregnant, sexual assault... I had the child but I was all messed up. I was really all messed up. It's like you feel as though the child is like a demon. It's taken over your body. I ended up putting the child up for adoption. He's in a good home and he's safe and he's good and he's happy.

[About a local man who sexually assaulted her] He seemed quite okay at first and he took me to his place and he had all these kitchen knives all over the place...because he was doing a chef training course, but apparently he's got a background of sexual assault, rape and physical abuse. ... But I got to know him...so I gave him my number, but then he started making prank phone calls and things started to sour because I said no to him...and the next day he got me and there were all these kitchen knives scattered on the floor and on the tables and the lounge and I don't know whether that's called rape. I don't know... I said no. ... I got an AV - all I could do was get an AVO out on him. An AVO, and he breached that a few times... At the time, he had eight AVOs against him. Now he's got more than 16. More than 16.

About reporting violence Linda said:

Well, the problem is I've got a problem that I don't stand up - now I realise I don't stand up for myself.

[about telling the police] That was good. It was nerve wracking. It was really nerve wracking because then you've got to go through the private details and it's a bit yukky. It's a bit horrible.

Department of Housing said to ring the police to get a statement about what happened and all that. It's explaining the details can be a bit tough. It's like you've got to say it over again what happened and all of that and you feel just so angry and why is this happening and all this and you feel not right. Dirty.

6.3 Stephanie's Story

Stephanie's advocate, Anthony, spoke to her about participating in our research, and she wanted to share her story. We spoke to her in her mother's living room, with Anthony there for support, as Stephanie asked. They have been working together for seven years.

Stephanie explained that she got married to Glen, her now ex-husband, when she was 18, after falling pregnant to him at 17. She was pressured by Glen and his father to get an abortion, but Stephanie wanted to keep the baby. During their marriage, Glen was violent and controlling. He prevented her from having any contact with her friends and family, and only allowed her to eat when he ate. On one occasion, before Stephanie knew she was pregnant with their second daughter, Glen pushed her against a wall, kicked her in the stomach and choked her. She almost died.

She had two daughters with Glen, and above all else, wanted to keep them safe.

Child Protection was involved with both of Stephanie's daughters, after they lost weight as babies due to health conditions. Stephanie fought to have her concerns about their health taken seriously, despite having issues with her own health at the time. When Stephanie left Glen, their children were in the care of his parents.

Stephanie has endured a four-year court process with her ex-husband, and his parents, to obtain custody of the children.

Stephanie is now 30, and has a young son with her new partner. Her new partner is supportive and caring, and has a close relationship with her daughters and the rest of her family.

What Stephanie said:

I'm a kind person. I love my kids, they mean the world to me – like anyone hurts them, you're dealing with a mother bear! And that's the way it is with me, my kids always come first, and that's what I always thought. The girls came first before [my son] came in. The girls always came first, so I always put their needs first. And then so – same – you've got to put yourself and I was a little selfish but you've got to put yourself first too, and I said – really? I've always had that mindset – kids come first. Always. If I didn't get out, I was afraid that I would die... I was afraid that he would kill me. I was afraid that if I didn't get out that the girls wouldn't have their mother, and I couldn't take that chance. And that's why I left when I did.

About the violence Stephanie said:

He threw me out with one of the girls, called the police on me. Called the police on me yeah - and said you come to this house and I would have one of the girls with me and said you come in this house and I'll call the police – and I said oh I need to get something, I can't remember which one it was, Anna or Carly, and I was outside and he would call the police on me. And then they took me to my mum's and he tried to stop them from taking me to my mum's and the police said – no she's coming with us because you're not letting her in. She's got a baby and you're silly – you called us and you're the one that's acting this way. The police

were more on my side – than his side. ‘Cause they knew that I didn’t do anything wrong. They said “What happened?” and I said that he threw me out by my hair.

I had to stay here [at my mum’s] ‘cause we had a joint bank account and he closed it. And he opened an account but because everything I owned was in that house and he wouldn’t let me get it.

I called the police and they said I would have to go through court and that. But he threw all my clothes out ... But I just wanted my clothes. ‘Cause I had nothing except for the stuff I was wearing on that... Mum got me some clothes so I could get clothes, so I could go to Centrelink, get a new ID and all that sort of stuff, and open my own account and set up Centrelink so I could get some money and that. So, that I can get my own clothes and things like this, which I did. I had to redo everything ‘cause he wouldn’t let me get anything.

I had no choice but to leave ‘cause I was scared and I knew the girls were safe ‘cause they were with his parents. So I knew that they could look after them. But I was more scared ‘cause he’s hit me so many times that I had no choice but to leave. Or else he would do it again. And then he said that I abandoned the girls. And it’s like – no I wasn’t abandoning them; it was me making sure that I don’t get hit. Protecting myself.

About the perpetrator Stephanie said:

I always stood and talked for myself. And even though I was scared to, but everyone said that I was the one calming him down and controlling him. It’s like – NO. And then – it was just – sit here and go on this rollercoaster. And you have a toad with you instead of a Prince. And I kind of felt like – it feels wrong but I kind of felt like I married – how my father was abusive, it’s like marrying a similar person to your father.

About Child Protection Stephanie said:

‘Cause my stepdad taught me to have a backbone and speak for myself, and that’s what I always did was speak for myself. Especially when they tried to take my girls away.

But when I was pregnant with Carly – and then I had Carly – the doctor said we had a meeting and the worse thing of a mother hearing saying – we’ll take Carly away and you just deal with Anna. I was like – no. No – why? And they’re like – ‘cause you can’t handle the two of them. I said how do you know I can’t handle the two of them? I can. Give me a chance to. They were only young – I’m just starting to figure it out!

“I felt restricted on what I could do. Like with a new baby, you’ve gotta [baby]proof everything. And I couldn’t do it because I would get in trouble for it. And it’s just like - whoa. Yeah, I get in trouble for doing it and then I get in trouble if my baby gets sick.”

“Cause we went to court with them and they tried to take the girls off us and then the court said no give them a chance, give them help – parenting courses.

I was agreeing to everything that they put in place and he wasn't. He wanted to get rid of it. He didn't like it. And it's like – work with them. And then they'll go. They'll let us be parents. And – no. He kept on arguing and arguing and there was more arguing and that.

About the court process Stephanie said:

I was worried when we first went to court how he said – I abandoned them. And I said – I didn't abandon them. And the court said I didn't abandon them. I was leaving them in the hands of their grandparents, pretty much, and even though the court said that – that I left them in the hands of their grandparents. Always I was afraid that he would hurt me. And that's what I was afraid of. I didn't want to leave them. I didn't want to leave them – but it was like – get out now before he hurts you, in front of the girls. That's one thing I didn't want them to see.

[After the court process] Finally, I was so happy. And it was over! I said – I can't do it, I couldn't do another year of it, like as I said, going in and out, 'cause I had things to do with the kids. With [my son] being so little. It was taking my time away from him and it's like – it was bad enough taking my time away from the girls as well. This was the main thing – to spend time with the girls.

It's just lasted so long and I was just happy that the girls live with me and you know, they spend, they're going to school which they love going.

About how people should respond Stephanie said:

Some people are shocked when I tell them what happened, like with the choking and the kicking and the pulling hair, it's like... Just listen and be supporting and just take it on board yourself. Think – this could happen to me. I didn't think in a million years that it could happen to me but – look – it happened. As Anthony said before I wasn't even 20! And I went through so much. And so it's like – you just got to think to yourself, will it happen, will it not happen? And that's what I think people should feel. Take it on board, what I say. Or if not, at least I've said my piece. And what I went through. People can't believe what I've gone through. And they say – did it really happen? And I say – trust me! It happened!

6.4 Melanie's Story

Melanie arrived to tell her difficult and traumatic story and began talking straightaway. She was assaulted and held by her abuser for hours one early morning in her home several years ago; she was seriously injured and feared for her life. After the assault, Melanie was targeted her attacker's friends. Even though he admitted his assault and was later jailed, there were many events around her home that were frightening.

She has moved houses and area since that time; she feels safer in her new neighbourhood and, importantly, she has security doors, something she had asked for before the attack in her previous house. The Department of Housing refused to put screen doors on Melanie's house and this is where the attacker broke in. They installed one after the attack.

Melanie's mother left money in a trust for her to use. Melanie has ongoing issues with the Trustee who controls this money. Melanie would like some money to fumigate her new house, she would like to put curtains up for privacy and she would also like a dog for security and company. When we spoke with Melanie, the Trustee was refusing to provide money for these things.

What Melanie said:

I'm under the Government Trustees which I've been under for about 20 years because I was hit by a car 20 years ago. I was run over. So I've got disabilities in my arm and leg, and I've had a brain haemorrhage, stroke too. So going through that, I finally get myself together and independent. I can live by myself, feed myself, do the housework, mow, drive a car. And then he comes along and rapes me, and I'm still doing things by myself. And the Trustees won't even let me take two, three thousand dollars out of my account when I'm allowed to. There's no rules telling me what I can spend the money on, which my mum left me, to even put curtains up in my home. So where I am now, any man can walk by and watch me in the house. Kids do. They come up to my window and squash their faces up there at nine, ten o'clock. The whole house, it's open up to everybody.

I'd like a dog, not so much as a guard dog or anything, just like a therapy dog that'd keep me company and will kind of protect me and will let me know that there's someone at the door. Or someone's out in the back yard or something. Because my hearing is getting worse and so that I think would help me enormously. And for company too.

But the Trustees won't give me the money to do that, even though I have the money. See, I notice with them – and they don't care about the rape or anything. They couldn't care less. And if they see that you are happy and you are comfortable, they hate that. And I do want the dog, very, very much so. And I've been saying that for years.

[Simon, my support worker] gave me the letter and he said I feel this would be very good for you. In fact, he was right. Because what I like about telling you what had happened, you're not judging me. You're not saying you're blamed for this, you're blamed for that. You're saying we understand.

About the police after the home invasion Melanie said:

[The police] were good. They weren't aggressive. They said if you don't want to say much now you don't have to. They didn't rush me. And what they did say, when we finished the statement, they said if you think of anything else that you have forgotten now, let us know so we can put it in the statement, add it on.

About support after the home invasion Melanie said:

They didn't do anything after the statement. The only person I really stayed in contact with was the detective. And then he put me onto another detective who's doing the court part, because the first one wasn't speaking in the court. It was someone else that was doing it. But there was no support, there was no back up. They just wanted information, my side of the story and just be around in case they do need to call me up.

What Melanie says she would have liked:

A support person I guess to come around afterwards and sit with me for a while, let me let it all hang out. I don't know who that'd be. Maybe they'd call a nurse or someone in. But after the police dropped me off I sat up all night watching and waiting for him to walk back in, even though they told me they got him. It was like watching a movie. And I kept thinking it's going to happen again, and I couldn't sleep. So that knocked me around, being 24 hours without sleep and not eating. And then I'm there on my own. And my house is a wreck, and I disinfected everything. I disinfected the walls. I disinfected my bed, the furniture, the lounge, everything. I threw that lounge out. I ended up buying all new furniture, the lounge and everything, to get rid of him.

About the neighbourhood abuse Melanie said:

...the police...said to the Department of Housing move her because they're trying to kill her. And they took a good year mucking around moving me, and because they put me under police protection. I don't know how long for, but in the beginning I was. And they said whatever you do, don't talk about the case to anybody and when you move don't tell anyone where you are.

About the perpetrators Melanie said:

It's always the same group of people...They live around the street before my street...they've pulled many, many stunts on me...they're all friends but they've also all drug addicts too, with little kids and that. I'd just be walking up the road and they'd come out and belt the hell out of me. There was another time I walked out to my mailbox and I didn't see or hear anyone come. Next thing I know bang. I was knocked unconscious. There was another time I left my house, this was just before I got my car, and I always walked up the road to buy the newspaper. And there was a car outside my place and I thought they were visiting someone so I didn't think much of it. And I walked down the road and walked half way up and I thought something's not quite right. And I walked back down to my house. The door was unlocked, I walked in, there's two young guys there trying to take my TV. Knocked me out, there's blood all over the wall.

... Another time I was walking across, up the very top at the end of the road there's a school, a primary school, and I was walking across the crossing. The girl jumped out of the van, who only comes from the house, the street in front of me, in a white van, jumped out and went whack, whack, whack, whack. I'm unconscious on the ground. There were witnesses. They called the police and the ambulance and what woke me up was the siren. And all my left side of my arm and my leg were black as black as black as you can be. The other time is when I got my car, all the kids, I always drove home the same way. I'd drive past the school where I

was bashed and then I'd turn to go right to go down their road and these kids would come on their bikes if they saw me. They'd all get in front of my car in a row to block me. This is five, ten year olds, and they wouldn't move so you're stuck. And at one time I beeped my horn and they scattered and then I slowly moved down, because it's a steep hill. And as I went down I heard this woman go aargh, she's hit him, she's hit him.

Ten minutes later the police are down the end of the house down there, on that house in front of me, and there's another house at the end of the road, they're friends with all these drug addicts. The police are down there and the ambulance. They've made it out that I ran over a kid. No such thing occurred. There was nothing wrong with the kid, there was nothing wrong with his bike, there was no marks on my car. They were trying to create trouble. There's another time they called me a child molester. I've never touched a child or hurt a child in my life, and it's the same group of people and the police knew that wasn't true.

About feeling safe Melanie said:

Not at the moment, because if any of his so-called drug addict friends find out where I live I'm gone, I'm sure. And I did say to the police when I did move, I said what if they follow me in the truck? You know, get in their cars and follow me? He said, I don't think they will. I said but it's possible. And he said I don't think they will. And I don't think they did because nothing has happened, but then who's to say someone out where I live now knows some people that live out there. And I can't talk about the case to anyone. I've had to lie to my neighbours, because they said where did you live before? And I said oh [suburb]. And that's where I did grow up, was raised in [suburb]. And I can't keep that charade going. And I don't like lying to them.

I can't have a relationship with a man. I'd like to have a partner and things like that but I can't now because of him, because of the sexual assault. And I feel that if I met another man, if we had sex it would remind me of him, so I can't. So I find it difficult to want to go out and meet someone. I can't. I can be a friend but not a lover or anything to them. And wherever I go and whatever I do, he is there. And I can get all the compensation in the world, it's still not going to get rid of him.

