

**NSW Rape Crisis Centre
Annual General Meeting 2006
Manager's Report**

In 2005/06 NSW Rape Crisis Centre experienced a 20% increase in calls. This trend has continued.

There is no indication that this equals a higher incidence of sexual violence against women. In fact the Australian Bureau of Statistics research shows a slight decrease. The increase appears to be because more and more women, who have been sexually assaulted, are seeking help to recover.

Women are no longer willing to keep silent. Many are saying 'He had no right to treat me like that, I didn't ask for it and I didn't deserve it, I am going to get help and I will recover'. Increasingly women are also choosing to report the assault to Police, most often with the aim of 'Stopping him from doing what he did to others.'

As with any social and attitudinal shift there are many factors but it is inescapable that the media and community discourse around sexual assault has changed. It is no longer acceptable to say publicly that victims asked for it or that their dress or behaviour is an excuse for the perpetrator to do what he did. Women who are sexually assault are no longer held up for judgment to the extent that they were in the past and more and more people, including lots of men in a range of ways, are standing up to violence against women and saying 'its got to stop'. This is very heartening and a great testament to the many thousands of women who have worked for the past 30 to 40 years to bring about the changes we are now seeing.

Unfortunately these attitudinal changes are not being reflected in our criminal justice system. In fact many of the victim blaming myths are alive and well. In a recent trial of four gang rapist one of their victims was asked over 2,000 questions by three lawyers over two days of cross examination. The third question on the first day was 'You are a liar aren't you'.

NSW Rape Crisis Centre has and will continue to advocate for change in the way sexual assault complaints are managed in the NSW Criminal Justice System. We acknowledge that making a complaint of sexual assault is never going to be easy but it is very possible to have a system were the complainant is treated with dignity and respect and were the evidence, not the person, is examined so the truth of what occurred can be established.

In the near future the NSW Attorney General will be releasing a discussion paper on consent and objective fault. Defense Lawyers are opposed to these changes and will use a lot of legal words to try and confuse the situation and use extreme examples as a way of arguing for the status quo.

In NSW sexual assault law there is no definition of consent – a bit of a problem when most sexual assaults are decided on whether or not consent was given. We need a definition and the definition must include three key words, freely, voluntarily and capacity. That is 'she gave her consent freely and voluntarily and she had the capacity to do so'. This definition is in common with other states in Australia and in comparable countries such as England. This definition will establish a public guideline, principle or measure on what is and isn't criminal.

In NSW a sexual assault defendant has only to satisfy subjective fault in claiming not guilty. This means that the defendant can pretty much say "I thought she was up for it." And need say no more. Objective fault would require the defendant to show what steps he took to ensure consent was given. By moving to objective fault the law will become more reflective of community attitudes to sexual intimacy. It is generally accepted that both parties to an intimate act must be consenting and are also responsible to ensure the other person has consented. Objective fault reflects this very reasonable community position.

NSW Rape Crisis Centre is in a three year partnership with Professor Moira Carmody from the University of Western Sydney. The partnership aims to reduce sexual violence by developing a researched and evaluated intervention program for women and men aged 16 to 25 years. This Sexual Ethics project is funded by the Australian Research Council and the report from the first stage will be launched on 8.12.06. The first stage involved Moira and I interviewing young people from around NSW on their experiences of sex education, their decision making, attitudes and experiences in relation to sexual intimacy and their ideas for sexual violence prevention programs. The information these young people so generously shared with us provided great food for thought, and debate, and we are looking forward to putting their ideas into practice over the next two years.

The past year has seen a great increase in demand for information about sexual assault and the services of NSW Rape Crisis Centre. Dana has sent out over 25,000 Centre pamphlets and a further 30,000 stickers promoting Rape Crisis Online. The Centre's website scored its 1 millionth hit for the year sometime in October. A phenomenal response to a website for a centre our size and a definite accolade to Donna who is the website's architect and manager. Hundreds of students per annum contact us for a range of information and the Centre is responding to an average of a request per week for a speaker at forums and functions. The media in all its forms regularly contacts the Centre for information, comment and background for stories. We are even getting calls from overseas including in the last year England, Scotland, New Zealand and Canada. We have also had the pleasure of welcoming delegations from a number of countries to the Centre. While we are sure of the success of most there was one we still wonder about. The interpreter did not know how to translation the words 'sexual assault' and went and stayed bright red for the entire visit.

The core work of NSW Rape Crisis Centre is the 24/7 telephone and online crisis intervention, support counselling and referral service for anyone in NSW who has experienced sexual assault. In 05/06 the centre answered 3,609 calls. 25% of those callers had been sexually assault in the past 7 days. 15% were from supporters of people who had been sexually assaulted, family friends etc and the remaining 60% had experienced sexual assault anywhere between 8 days and 70 years ago.

For callers who were recently assaulted part of the counsellor's work is to encourage them to make contact with their local sexual assault service where medical attention, forensic and access to face to face counselling is available. For callers who were assaulted in the past dealing with the impacts of trauma, such as nightmares, flash-backs, eating, sleeping and concentration disturbances, depression, suicidality and other mental health impacts has become overwhelming and they seek our assistance. For supporters, they are dealing with their own emotional response to someone they care about being sexually assaulted while also being that person's supporter.

Under the professional and expert guidance of our Counselling Co-ordinator, Jackie Burke, NSW Rape Crisis Centre Counsellors have developed great skill in responding to these challenging calls. Therapeutic interventions within the trauma model and crisis response framework are used with immense skill, compassion and caring. Many callers contact the centre feeling helpless and hopeless and finishing their contact with increased understanding, enhanced feelings of self worth and a plan.

In December 2005 we launched Rape Crisis Online. This was the first time anywhere in the world a person could make online real time contact with a sexual assault counsellor. Over 220 people have made online contact with many taking the next step of ringing the Centre. Counsellors have used their experience of this medium to develop therapeutic practices which are helpful in an online environment. Rape Crisis Online aims to offer an alternative way for a person who wants assistance after sexual assault but is not at the stage where they can speak the terrible words. Rape Crisis Online has been very successful in reaching this target group

It is undeniable that the Counselling team at NSW Rape Crisis Centre does a phenomenal job and that many women are in a much better place because of their work.

In the course of the Counselling work a number of areas where training can be offered has been identified. Neighbourhood, youth and community workers are often the first person someone who has been sexually assaulted to talk with. To ensure an informed response from these compassionate and tireless workers NSW Rape Crisis Centre has offered training on how to assist a person who has been sexually assaulted. Over 100 workers have attended and the success guarantees the training will be ongoing.

At the beginning of my report I noted the increase in calls to the Centre. I now state that we will continue to do everything we can to encourage that growth.

Having said that I must also say that this trend, along with funding enhancements not meeting actual increases in costs, has impacted greatly on our Centre. The cost of keeping the core service operational in this financial year will be just over \$100,000 more than the funding we will receive from NSW Health. This disparity has been growing over the past few years and has been covered to date by donations, and charging for some services such as consultancy work and training. The disparity is getting to large to rely solely on generation of income from these sources. To give you an idea of the growth in costs versus grant income, over the past two years the Centre has been allocated a core grant increase of 4.7%. At the same time core costs have risen by 28%. An example of this increase is the Centre's telephone bill. Calls to the Centre are 1800 calls. This ensures equity of access for all callers across NSW. In 2005 the phone bill was \$34,000, in 2006 \$42,000 and this year a projected \$70,000. We are working with Government to increase the annual allocation to the centre. We are also working with people who have skills in the area to attract regular large donations. We have been developing our training program to include training for private practitioners and human resource managers. Training for which we can charge.

While this presents a challenge I have no doubt that we will rise to the demand.

I have the great honor of working with a group of the most amazing women.

The members of the management committee who show up month after month and work through a considerable array of governance matters with commitment, dedication and intelligence. Thank you for the debates, the support and for sharing unreservedly your knowledge and expertise.

Jackie has been our counselling co-ordinator for the past 12 months. Her understanding of the impacts and how to respond to the trauma of sexual assault is at least equal to any and I'd say better than most. Her experience, professionalism, knowledge, people skills and abilities has enabled her to organise, support and lead the counselling team to provide a service which is unquestionably best practice. Jackie's has the capacity to identify the key elements of any situation, the analytical ability to identify the reasons or underpinnings and considerable practical aptitude in developing plans for a response. She also has excellent politics and a sense of humor which often sustains a workplace which can at times be demanding.

Donna and Dana, the engine room of NSW Rape Crisis Centre. These women have an enormous capacity to manage huge workloads with attention to detail and time frames which would overwhelm most. They bring skills far in advance of the pay they receive and they do it with a continuous eye for how can we do this better or get a bit more out of that. Their commitment to the Centre and its work is inspirational and while I do a bit around the place I could not do most of it without these two great women doing what they do and consistently doing it so well.

And the Counsellors. These women who day in and day out 24 hours a day everyday of the year continue to pick up that phone and answer online contacts. And they do it with immense care, compassion and skill. Using their years of training and further years of experience they give all they can to each and every call with the aim of being part of that person's road to recovery. And then usually before they get the chance to complete the file work each call generates the phone is ringing again.

All of these women have created a centre of excellence in the provision of services to anyone who has experienced sexual violence.

And together we will continue to work until we have achieved a society free of violence.

Thank you