
by

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part to qualify for an other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signed: [Signature]

Name: Jacqualine Lee Theobald

Date: 27/06/2011
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>Australian Assistance Plan</td>
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<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<td>BHA</td>
<td>Brenda House Archives</td>
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<td>Centres Against Sexual Assault</td>
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<td>Community Services Victoria</td>
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<td>Department of Community Welfare Services</td>
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<td>DHS</td>
<td>Department of Human Services</td>
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<td>DVC</td>
<td>Domestic Violence Committee</td>
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<td>DVIRC</td>
<td>Domestic Violence Incest Resource Centre</td>
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<td>DV Vic</td>
<td>Domestic Violence Victoria</td>
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<td>EHH</td>
<td>Elizabeth Hoffman House</td>
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<td>FACS</td>
<td>Family and Community Services</td>
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<td>FDVCPF</td>
<td>Family and Domestic Violence Crisis Protection Framework</td>
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<td>HACS</td>
<td>Health and Community Services</td>
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<td>HPAP</td>
<td>Homeless Persons Assistance Program</td>
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<td>Immigrant Women’s Domestic Violence Service</td>
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<td>Office of the Status of Women</td>
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<td>Office of Women’s Policy</td>
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<td>Partnerships Against Domestic Violence</td>
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<td>Refuge Ethnic Workers Program</td>
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<td>SACS</td>
<td>Social and Community Services</td>
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<td>SSSCRFV</td>
<td>State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence</td>
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<td>THM</td>
<td>Transitional Housing Management Program</td>
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<td>University of Melbourne Archives</td>
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<td>Victorian Community Council Against Violence</td>
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<td>Victorian Law Reform Commission</td>
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<td>Victorian Women’s Refuges Group</td>
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<td>Women’s Coalition Against Family Violence</td>
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<td>Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service</td>
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<td>Women’s Electoral Lobby</td>
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<td>Women’s Emergency Services Program</td>
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<td>WESNET</td>
<td>Women’s Emergency Services Network</td>
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<td>WLC</td>
<td>Women’s Liberation Centre</td>
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<td>Women’s Liberation Halfway House</td>
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<td>WPCU</td>
<td>Women’s Policy Co-ordination Unit</td>
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<td>Women’s Refuge Referral Service</td>
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<td>WSS</td>
<td>Women’s Safety Strategy</td>
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<td>WSS</td>
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Abstract

This thesis analyses the history of the Victorian women’s domestic violence services movement from 1974 through to a period of significant change in 2005. Whilst services provided accommodation to women and children in crisis, the refuge movement of the 1970s made explicit the link between what became known as domestic violence and the need for refuge. In a climate of international and national activism, and as a result of resolute advocacy and creative political campaigning, members of the movement made public what had otherwise been considered a private issue, and identified the ‘intolerable circumstances’ facing women in their intimate relationships as a reason for large numbers of women and children seeking emergency accommodation. Despite the tremendous gains made by the domestic violence services movement in both service development and social policy concerning domestic violence, there has been no comprehensive study of any state-based refuge movements in Australia. The primary aim of the thesis is, therefore, to document and historicise the refuge movement in Victoria in its social and political context. In doing so, it will contribute to the task of recording the movement's unequivocally political nature.

One of the principal objectives of this dissertation is to investigate the ideologies and actions of the women involved and make evident the influence of feminism and the contributions of community sector women’s organisations to service delivery, social policy and legislation concerning domestic violence. In doing so, the thesis also considers the ways that diverse organisations have worked together to achieve social change. As a result of the domestic violence services movement’s political activism and advocacy, domestic violence is now widely and publicly denounced, and this project is significant because it documents the strategies that were adopted in order to achieve this goal.

The thesis also investigates the relationship between the movement and external institutions. In particular, it considers the movement’s shifting, and at times productive as well as problematic, relationship with state institutions. By extension, it undertakes to critically analyse the historical development of public policy as well as the current policy and organisational context relating to the domestic and family violence service sector.

This dissertation then, illuminates how the refuge movement in Victoria emerged, how members organised and worked towards achieving their goals, made sense of their experiences and dealt with the obstacles they encountered whilst undertaking action to create change for women. It also acknowledges that the history of the refuge movement is not a
seamless one of ‘feminist’ success and ideas but rather a story of complex relationships, ideologies, identities and power struggles. However, the project will seek to acknowledge the diversity, ingenuity and resourcefulness of the activists and community-sector women’s organisations that made it happen.
Introduction

When you think about all of the women, and some men, that have been tilling the ground in this area for decades … it’s so shocking to think that the issue of bashed and raped women isn’t enough to make people realise that something has to be done.¹

When the Victorian women’s refuge movement² emerged in 1974, activists were profoundly shocked at the extent of violence they uncovered. Employing resolute advocacy and creative political campaigning, movement members soon made public what had previously been considered a private issue and identified the ‘intolerable circumstances’ facing large numbers of women and children seeking emergency accommodation.³ The movement was central to problematising and politicising what became known as domestic violence by the late 1970s.⁴ The first refuges established in the 1970s operated as communal households, and those identified with radical feminist politics operated under collective structures where violence against women was conceptualised within the feminist understanding of all forms of women’s oppression—gender inequality. Whilst services that provided accommodation to women and children in crisis had certainly existed for a long time, the refuge movement of the 1970s made explicit the link between domestic violence and the need for refuge. However, as former refuge worker and Victorian Labor Party Minister, Kay Setches, contends above, members of

¹ Kay Setches, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 2 April 2009.
² Typically, in Australia, the ‘women’s refuge movement’ is now talked about in terms of domestic and family violence services (rather than ‘refuges’ or ‘shelters’ as they are known in some Australian states) reflecting the much greater diversity in service models and programs now available. I will employ the phrase ‘Victorian women’s refuge movement’ when referring to earlier periods, and, at other times, ‘domestic violence services movement’, to better reflect the current sector.
³ What became known as domestic violence was also of concern to earlier feminist activists, but their responses were different, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 2.
⁴ Whilst domestic violence has been referred to in the past as ‘cruelty’ or ‘wife bashing’, the Australian women’s refuge movement adopted the phrase ‘domestic violence’ to describe intimate partner violence from the late 1970s. Through this thesis, I primarily use ‘domestic violence’, and accord it the same definition, because it remains the preferred terminology of Victorian domestic violence services. More recently in Victoria, the term ‘family violence’ has become the preferred terminology of the state government to acknowledge that violence may also be perpetrated by other family and community members, in particular, in relation to Indigenous women. At times, I use ‘family violence’ interchangeably with ‘domestic violence’, where it is appropriate to do so. The thesis also acknowledges the socially constructed nature of domestic violence, and recognises the problem as located on a continuum of mistreatment stemming from inequality between women and men. The uncritical adoption of family violence in preference to domestic violence in comparison to the broader term ‘violence against women’ has been critiqued by some because it de-genders the nature of the violence. See, for example, Helen MacDonald, What's in a Name: Definitions and Domestic Violence, Discussion Paper No. 1, Domestic Violence Incest Resource Centre, Melbourne 1998; Wendy Weeks and Kate Gilmore, ‘How Violence Against Women Became an Issue on the National Policy Agenda’, in Tony Dalton, Mary Draper, Wendy Weeks, and John Wiseman (eds), Making Social Policy in Australia: An Introduction, Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1996, pp. 141–153; Carol Lee Bacchi, Women, Policy and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems, Sage, London 1999; Adrian Howe, Sex, Violence and Crime: Foucault and the ‘Man’ Question, Routledge-Cavendish, London 2008; Suellen Murray and Anastasia Powell, ‘“What’s the Problem?”: Australian Public Policy Constructions of Domestic and Family Violence’, Violence Against Women, vol. 15, no. 5, 2009, pp. 532–552.
the movement soon realised that exposing the problem was not, in and of itself, enough. Consequently, they have continued to demand that the government and wider community take responsibility for tackling the problem. As a result, outreach and other specialist women’s domestic violence services have gradually developed, and organisations have become increasingly responsive to the diverse requirements and subjectivities of women. Moreover, since the 1980s, Australian federal, state and territory governments have continually pursued policy in this area, and, over the years, they have formed taskforce investigations, created domestic violence units within police forces, and established other government inquiries. In particular, Victoria in recent years has attempted a concerted whole-of-government response to domestic violence, involving collaboration that includes the courts and the police.

Despite the tremendous gains made by the domestic violence services movement in both service development and social policy, there has been no comprehensive study of any state-based refuge movements in Australia. This dissertation thus partially fills this gap by documenting and contextualising the history of the refuge movement in Victoria. In doing so, it emphasises the unequivocally political nature of women’s activism and achievements in this area. The research that informed this thesis was conducted with the assistance of Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic), the peak advocacy body on women’s domestic violence services for the state of Victoria.  

Recognition, documentation and analysis of the domestic violence services movement is important because the legitimacy of feminists organisations has been challenged by conservative governments. At times federal and state government policy has worked to undermine the equality of women. As political scientist Marian Sawer notes, from 2004 until 2010, national Labor Party leaders campaigned without so much as a reference to women, and, despite policy initiatives designed to tackle violence against women, they lacked ‘a coherent plan for addressing gender inequality’. However, the release of the Labor government’s National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children in 2011, combined with the newly elected Gillard-led Labor government’s Equality for Women policy

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5 This PhD project forms part of an Australian Research Council linkage grant, and was funded as an industry-based scholarship. The industry partner is DV Vic. A project reference group, comprising representatives from DV Vic, other member organisations, and RMIT University, has overseen the research.
framework in 2010,\(^9\) has signalled improvements. Nevertheless, it remains critical that the work undertaken by women’s services, alongside the challenges they face in an uncertain and shifting political and institutional context, are made known.

This thesis is significant because violence against women continues at disturbingly high levels and is the leading cause of death, disability and disease among women aged between fifteen and 44.\(^10\) The extent and severity of domestic violence have been revealed in reports such as *Women’s Safety Australia (1996)*, which documented that one in five women report experiencing violence at some time during their adult lives.\(^11\) A decade later, 40 per cent of Australian women reported at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of fifteen, with most perpetrated by a current or former partner or family member.\(^12\)

In this dissertation, I analyse the shifting trajectory of the Victorian domestic violence services movement and document the unremitting efforts of activists over a thirty-year period to have the problem redressed. I make evident the influence of feminism and the contributions of women’s organisations to service delivery, social policy and legislation concerning domestic violence in Victoria. I also make apparent the influence of external forces, including state institutions, on the shifting aims and activities of the movement. In doing so, this thesis also considers the ways that women’s organisations have worked together to achieve social change.

This dissertation traces the movement primarily from the viewpoint of those who have worked in its services from its beginning in 1974 until 2005. It is not intended to provide a history of individual domestic and family violence service providers across Victoria but, rather, to examine the development of the broader movement that emerged within the context of women’s liberation. Three interdependent themes correspond to the central arguments developed. Theme one analyses the ways feminism has shaped the movement’s ideas and aims in response to the issues facing women working in or accessing domestic violence services. The second theme considers the shifting internal and external strategies the movement employed to exercise influence. And the third theme examines the relationship between the movement and external institutions such as ‘the state’.

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The first theme gives particular attention to the impact of feminist theorisations of gender and power. It also considers the role activists have played in the discursive construction of ‘domestic violence’ as a feminist issue. To date little attention has been paid to the diversity of organisations, women and feminisms that comprised the Victorian movement, particularly in its early years. Unique to Victoria was a high level of inter-refuge organisation and secrecy of refuge locations and both of these features will be examined in this thesis. I seek to acknowledge the diversity, ingenuity and resourcefulness of the activists and community-sector women’s organisations that made it happen.

The second theme interlocks with the first, and argues that the movement’s internal and external strategies and actions derived from feminist ideas and aims. The shift in emphasis over time from radical to liberal feminist tactics and methods is documented and analysed. Documentation of the debates and processes this entailed is an important aim of this thesis in order to ‘give voice to the movement’s everyday life in its women’s organisations and services’.13

The third and final theme considers the relationship between the domestic violence services movement and external institutions. In particular, the thesis examines the movement’s shifting, and at times productive as well as problematic, relationship with state institutions. The achievements resulting from this association are documented and the challenges explored. The strategies the movement adopted to ensure that feminist ideas and ways of organising were not compromised by engagement with the state are analysed in detail. I also examine the growing influence of liberal feminism on the relationship with state institutions from the 1990s onwards. This paralleled the impact of a changing political and institutional context as the function of government shifted from funder, service provider and macro-economic stabiliser in the 1970s and 1980s to contractor, regulator and promoter of economic efficiency in the 1990s and 2000s. The thesis thus also briefly analyses the historical development of public policy relating to the Victorian domestic and family violence service sector. Feminist conceptualisations of domestic violence rest on critical interrogation of gendered power structures, and this understanding has shaped both current practice and public policy in general. However, this has not gone uncontested, and ongoing challenges confront the domestic and family violence sector in Victoria as it navigates an uncertain political and economic environment dominated by neo-liberal ideology and managerialism.

Structure of the Thesis

The first chapter provides a conceptual framework and outlines the key theoretical and epistemological issues involved in a historical analysis of the domestic violence services movement. I discuss the influence of feminist historians on my approach to historical inquiry and the task of theorising women’s pasts. I then contextualise my study within Australian feminist history. A review of writings most connected to the key themes of the thesis follows, including the historiography of the domestic violence services movement, literature pertaining to the role of the state in Australia and the construction of social policy as it has related to domestic violence services, and the growing body of literature examining feminist and community service organisations. Finally, I outline the methodology adopted to undertake the research, including discussion of how evidence was gathered, my conduct of interviews and use of archives, and reflection on my position within the research, as both creator and interpreter of evidence.

In Chapter 2, I draw on the published writings about feminist activism in Australia and the analysis of my interviews with refuge movement activists and former bureaucrats, as well as various archival and documentary sources, to outline the social, political and institutional context within which refuges emerged in Victoria. Particular attention is paid to the significance of the women’s liberation movement. I contend that the women’s refuge movement should be understood as a new feminist response to previously silenced problems of women’s homelessness and intimate partner violence. Whilst feminists had campaigned on these issues in the past, the refuge movement of the 1970s represented an approach to supporting women that was radically different from that of existing charitable institutions and those approaches that had come before. I explore the range of feminist ideas—socialist, radical, liberal and protectionist—informing the movement, in terms of their influence on understanding both the problems facing women in refuge, and their broader ideals about working with women, and structuring their organisations.

In Chapter 3, I utilise my interview transcripts and archival sources, including meeting minutes, to analyse the refuge movement’s activities throughout the second half of the 1970s. Focusing on the movement’s peak body, the Victorian Women’s Refuges Group (VWRG), I explore members’ aims and activities as they worked together to politicise the numerous issues facing women in refuge and constructed domestic violence as a feminist issue. The interdependence between activists’ political strategies and actions and their feminist ideals is demonstrated through the modus operandi of the VWRG and other feminist refuges. I also
consider the extent to which co-operation on the one hand, and conflict on the other, characterised the group. I then examine the relationship that developed between the refuge movement and ‘the state’, and in particular, the relationship that evolved between key bureaucrats within the Department of Community Welfare Services (DCWS) and members of the VWRG. Finally, I document the outcomes of this engagement, including the origins of government funding for refuges and the strategies adopted by the movement to maintain autonomy and avoid ‘state control’.

Using a wide array of source material, including interview transcripts, documentary sources, and published accounts, Chapter 4 continues the examination of the refuge movement’s engagement with state institutions and policy-makers and bureaucrats into the 1980s. I analyse the influence of refuge movement activism on the policy processes that led to increased funding for domestic violence services and to Victoria’s first broad-sweeping policy initiatives, the contents of which make evident the influence of feminism on the development of social programs dealing with domestic violence. I document the funding and programmatic arrangements in order to highlight the changing political and institutional context under which domestic violence services were operating, as well as their impact on shifting the movement’s aims and objectives. This includes collaboration between movement activists and feminists in government to achieve co-ordinated policy and funding responses, particularly in relation to the judiciary and the police. In light of the changing political context, the chapter then explores the emerging influence of liberal feminism on the movement’s aims and activities, as less radical groups tentatively asserted their influence on internal operations, as well as external relationships.14

In Chapter 5, I draw upon government policy documents, domestic violence sector publications, archival sources, interviews and academic writings to analyse the rapidly changing political, institutional and policy context within which domestic violence organisations were operating throughout the 1990s. I note that, whilst the issue of domestic violence assumed a central place on both Commonwealth and state government agendas, other discursive and institutional shifts, including the onset of economic rationalism and changing conceptualisations of citizenship and welfare, dramatically changed the nature of the movement’s relationship with government. I document how this confluence of factors

14 Throughout the thesis, I adopt the language of movement activists and categorise ideological differences between groups as ‘conservative’ and ‘radical’ recognising these terms’ limitations, and acknowledging variations of perspectives within each. Some of these are outline in Chapter 1. Similarly, whilst I refer to the growing influence of liberal over radical feminism in the movement my analysis also demonstrates how these feminist standpoints changed over time.
generated a particularly inhospitable environment for domestic violence services, and analyse how, over the course of the decade, they adapted to these changing circumstances. Moreover, I argue that from the early 1990s onwards, domestic violence services were increasingly challenged from within to provide for women’s differing requirements and subjectivities. I document the sustained efforts and advocacy of marginalised groups of women, who responded to these needs and demanded that mainstream services do the same.

During the early 2000s in Victoria, a number of dramatic changes in policy responses to domestic violence occurred, culminating in the state government contributing approximately $30m in its 2005 budget to tackle the problem. Chapter 6 documents these changes, as well as the achievements and challenges for the domestic violence services movement in the lead-up to this major announcement. It explores the contradictions embedded within the policy and funding environment affecting domestic violence organisations, which, on the one hand, reflected the government’s prioritisation of the problem, and, on the other, failed to rectify the acute under-funding while at the same time demanding improvements in efficiency and quality of service provision. Furthermore, the chapter examines the movement’s purposeful collaboration with a range of government and non-government institutions and makes evident its influence in achieving a number of cross-government policy and funding commitments. These achievements were enhanced by a culture of partnership promoted by a new state Labor government.

In the final chapter, I draw together the themes of the thesis and discuss the achievements of, and future challenges for, domestic violence services. Of significance is that their relationship with the state bears little resemblance to that of the 1970s and early 1980s; indeed, the locus of power has indelibly shifted. This presents ongoing challenges for the movement, with governments continuing to exert rigid control over the planning and operation of all community services organisations. For a movement so uniquely founded on a critique of patriarchal power and the promotion of women as experts on their own lives, this adjustment has proved difficult and left many questioning how the voices of women and children experiencing violence are to be heard, and the goals of dislodging institutionalised power achieved.
Chapter 1: Concepts and Questions

The dissertation falls under the umbrella of Australian feminist history and uses a theoretically eclectic approach. As gender historian Laura Lee Downs has noted, we now live in a ‘theoretically heterodox era’. This chapter outlines the key theoretical and epistemological issues surrounding the process of history writing as they relate to this thesis. It then discusses the bodies of literature relevant to the thesis topic and its key themes. I contextualise the research project within Australian feminist history and then review writings related to the domestic violence services movement. Subsequently, I examine literature and theory pertaining to the role of the state in Australia and the construction of social policy in connection with domestic violence services and feminist and community service organisations more broadly. Of particular interest are theories relating to organisational conflict and the impact of neo-liberal ideology on domestic violence services. Finally, I discuss the methodology adopted for the dissertation, which has included extensive oral history interviews and archival research.

Investigating the origins and evolution of the women’s domestic violence services movement reminds us of the historical continuum of violence stemming from women’s unequal position in society. To understand the present, we need knowledge of the past. In particular, it is important to know what mattered to women in the past and how women achieved change because dominant versions of Australian history are androcentric. Only when this skewed understanding has been redressed can we develop new ways of thinking and acting.

Theorising History

The thesis is particularly informed by feminist theory, including elements of radical, liberal, socialist and post-structuralist feminism. Amongst other things, these feminisms theorise the nature of gender, power, knowledge, and discourse, and the way they contribute to women’s unequal position in Western society. Feminist perspectives on gender and power inform my understanding of why and how domestic violence exists, as well as why and how political activity in response to domestic violence grew. Specifically, feminist conceptualisations of

1 Laura Lee Downs, Writing Gender History, Hodder Arnold, London 2004, p. 100.
domestic violence rest on a critical interrogation of gendered power differences relating to the respective positions of men and women in society.

There is no doubt that an epistemological divide exists amongst historians when it comes to the state of theory, and it has been argued that the discipline ‘is yet to take a quantum leap forward to embrace a new epistemological paradigm’. This divide centres on the nature of historical knowledge and whether it is possible to claim, as the historian or the knower, techniques and methods that permit direct, objective access to reality. Post-structuralist theorisations regarding the centrality of language to the creation of historical meaning have certainly challenged history ‘as traditionally conceived’, and ‘raised doubts about the discovery of truth and the foundation of knowledge’.  

Amongst others, feminist historians have been at the forefront of reconstituting historical discourse, arguing for a reflexive approach and challenging foundationalist epistemologies. As feminist historian Jill Matthews noted some twenty years ago, ‘there is no Truth, there is no Real, and, most importantly for historians, there is no What Really Happened. Rather there are many truths, many realities, and many versions of what happened.’ It is this perspective that informs my understanding of the nature of history writing and the task of how to theorise women’s pasts. In particular, my own epistemological position is that historical knowledge consists of narratives that represent the past. As historians, we make history by telling stories, which are thus a product of the present and shaped by who we are. History is therefore subjective and consists of things in the past that are also in the present. As products of the present, we cannot sit outside of this process; thus, the narrative I am constructing in this dissertation is informed by my own subject position, a point to which I will return later in this chapter when discussing my role in the making of this history.

Through historicising women’s ‘experiences’ by placing them in their social and political context, my aim is, in part, to reveal the way that change came about in a material sense. A ‘materialist’ explanation of history draws upon historical ‘evidence’ produced by—and in the case of this study—in collaboration with ‘real’ women. But these women are also sentient

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beings who represent their own subjectivity through discourse. In other words, this thesis is informed by the perception that material and discursive realms cannot be entirely separated, but are instead ‘mutually constitutive’. Because human ‘experiences’ are mediated, there is no single historical ‘truth’ and all knowledge is interpretative. Post-structuralist feminists, in particular, have challenged the tendency of historians to adopt historical categories such as ‘experience’ without qualification. Feminist historian Joan Scott, for example, famously rejected the notion that historians can appeal to ‘experience as uncontestable evidence’ or a ‘foundation on which analysis is based’—insisting instead it constitutes a ‘linguistic event’ that ‘doesn’t happen outside of existing meanings’. The proposition that women’s experiences constitute mere ‘linguistic event[s]’ subsequently raised considerable objections from feminist historians who considered the implications of post-structuralism ‘politically paralysing’ for women’s historical agency. Whilst the polarisation between language and social experience that emerged from this debate has lessened to some extent in recent years, there is no turning back from the proposition that historians cannot capture experience in the form of unmediated truth, or, as feminist historian Sue Morgan argues, uncritically ‘read off’ women’s ‘historical identity’ as some ‘self-evident social experience’. However, this thesis is premised on the notion that experience, despite its partiality, is not, as Scott conceded, ‘something we can do without’, because it ‘serves as a way of talking about what happened, of establishing difference and similarity, of claiming knowledge that is unassailable’. The category of experience is particularly important for the writing of feminist history because it allows for challenges to be made to the ‘truth’ of the androcentric historical record and dominant narratives.

Attention must also be given to discourses that organise experience. This thesis is thereby informed by the proposal that ‘multiple discourses of gender, class … and race’ give ‘meaning to women’s experiential reality’. It does not hold, though, that there is no ‘reality’ for women outside language but, rather, that ‘the meanings of the material world are produced

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12 Morgan, p. 385.
14 Morgan, p. 386.
within discourse’. Moreover, discourses are not always stable or coherent, and ‘competing meanings are part of broader relations of power’. This dissertation is thus further premised on the notion that, despite the importance of discourse in ‘effecting truth’ regarding women’s lived historical experiences, subjects also possess a degree of agency. Subjectivity is, therefore, a lived process, as philosopher Sonia Kruks contends, which is ‘taken up by the subject, be it in modes of complicity, of resistance, or both’. Without a concept of agency, historians are hard pressed to theorise historical causation. As Laura Downs asks: ‘if history only happens on a discursive plane … how does change actually occur?’ Some years earlier, feminist historian Kathleen Canning similarly questioned how ‘discourses [can] figure as anything but fixed hegemonic systems without the interventions of agents who render them contingent and permeable?’ Both historians reject the notion that historical subjects are devoid of agency, which, as Downs contends, enables transformation:

whatever the dogma of patriarchal discourse may prescribe, things are always more complicated in real life. Indeed the subordinate might go so far as to seize hold of those same identities that position some (men) as possessors of power and use them to constitute their own identities and thereby challenge the dominant discourses.

This thesis is therefore concerned to document, in Canning’s terms, ‘the material consequences and ideological effects not only of discourses that become hegemonic but also of those that were contested and transformed’. Indeed, it was women as subjects, but also as agents, who were active in setting up women’s refuges and opening doors to the streams of women and children who entered them. This lived socio-political reality was the space where activists began to challenge dominant discourses relating to violence against women, revealing that ‘real men and women do not always or literally fulfil the terms of either their society’s prescriptions or of our analytic categories’. The domestic violence services movement has indisputably been characterised by resistance in terms of its relations to external hegemonic institutions and discourses, but also within its own ranks. Externally, this movement produced one of the most sustained challenges to the gender order thus far,

16 Weedon, p. 102.
18 Downs, p. 83.
20 Downs, p. 94.
namely, that domestic violence should be seen as the result of unequal power relations experienced discursively and institutionally between men and women.

Whilst materially grounded interpretations of history can provide insights into how change occurs, it is also necessary, as I have suggested, to consider the role of language and discourse in constructing social experience, as it is language that inscribes reality. In this sense, I am arguing that the domestic violence services movement needs to be understood as constituted not simply by ‘a set of unmediated or self-evident experiences but by particular discourses of gender, class or race’. Post-structuralist theory is useful for such an analysis as it reveals the subjective and socially constructed nature of social categories, and can allow for a critique of the politics embedded in such categories as feminism and domestic violence. Feminist history, then, can be used as a process of critical inquiry that seeks to challenge ‘ways of thinking that legitimate themselves as natural’.

This leads to an acknowledgement that my research has a political impetus, motivated by the call of feminist historians to write history in a way that seeks to politicise contemporary issues. Evidence of the power of the domestic violence services movement as a force for change in Australian history is a reminder to future and present historians that, as Joan Scott implores, history can and should be used not only as a tool for the ‘production of knowledge’ but as means to ‘disrupt the certainties of the present and so open a way to imagine a new future’.

**Literature Review**

**Feminist History**

This thesis is informed by a commitment to feminist historical enquiry. It is therefore necessary to contextualise the dissertation within the project of feminist history. Here I outline its trajectory in Australia, and make evident how the thesis is located within its shifting objectives and evolving theoretical orientations. These theoretical shifts are reflected in the first and second thesis themes concerning the influence of feminism on the movement’s changing ideas, aims, and activities.

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Women experience inequality in society and are underrepresented in our histories, particularly in their contribution to political and social change. Prior to the early 1970s, the academic study of history was mainly undertaken by men in universities, who wrote about public life and politics. The historical experience of women was largely omitted from these histories with the result that women’s voices were silenced. As a result, ‘generations of Australian women had studied history without learning anything about women in the past’. 26 However, we are reminded by historian Marilyn Lake that women were in fact writing history in multiple genres, but the failure to acknowledge that this constituted ‘real’ history meant they were not publicly heard and accepted. 27 Not until the 1970s were women increasingly appointed in significant numbers to academic positions in university history departments—primarily as a result of the women’s movement. 28

Thirty years of feminist historical research has resulted in many challenges to Australian historiography, not the least of which has been the writing of women back into history. 29 Feminist historians have been successful in bringing women’s history in from the margins, and this project seeks to contribute to this process. Early feminist historians interrogated the invisibility of women in history as well as the authority of white male historians, who represented their histories as universal and others as specialist, sectional and narrow. These pioneer women scholars sought, as historian Ann Curthoys has argued, to ‘shake history by the shoulders till it gave them answers to the questions of why women were still second class citizens, with lower pay, subject to violence and an all too apparent cultural devaluation’. 30 Feminist historians thus undertook to redress the historical silencing of women’s experiences, arguing that women not only needed to be restored to history but that history needed to be restored to women; and they were intent on the process of ‘creating … knowledge of ourselves’. 31

The women’s liberation movement provided ‘an important platform for the expansion of feminist historical scholarship’, 32 and activists pursued ‘a radical feminist history … that attempt[ed] to understand any given situation from the point of view of the most oppressed

28 Patricia Grimshaw, ‘Falling into Women’s History’, in Damousi and Attwood (eds), p. 11.
group concerned’. Early women’s liberationist texts concentrated on documenting women’s contribution to the national story and focused their critique on the emphasis of Australia’s national history on men’s achievements. Moreover, as Lake points out, their critique was aimed at bringing about a ‘women friendly state that subsidised childcare, women’s health centres, and refuges; provided support for victims of rape and incest; and legislated against sex and race discrimination and sexual harassment’. Central to their politics was their ‘unity of theory and practice’, and their writings were significant because many emphasised the oppression and victimisation that women experienced. Feminist historian Jill Matthews has argued that one effect of this emphasis was that women were acknowledged not so much for what they had done as for their status as ‘passive victims, acted upon, rarely acting themselves’. These texts were also later critiqued for their ‘fleeting attention to race, and to questions of Indigenous dispossession’.

Feminist history soon emerged as a distinct field among women’s liberation writings. It moved beyond writing about women as objects of history and underwent significant theoretical shifts. What had been previously labelled ‘women’s history’ became ‘feminist’ or ‘gender history’. The category of gender, for example, assumed a central place as a category of analysis and informed a newly emerging feminist discourse relating to the identity and position of women, and increasingly men, in society. This shift reflected a critique of women’s history as unreflexive in its use of historical categories, and argued for an approach that considered the shifting nature of the relations between men and women and reflected the endemic inequality these relations embodied. Feminist history, then, problematised and recognised ‘gender relations as a major power dynamic within history’.

Coinciding with these theoretical shifts regarding the nature of history, feminist historians sought to interpret the historical experience of women and to cast them not only as victims of sexism and patriarchy, but also as active historical agents intent on shaping their own history. Historiography began to focus on issues of importance to women such as women

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40 Matthews, ‘Feminist History’, p. 150.
and work, the family, welfare and philanthropic activities.\textsuperscript{42} As part of this shift, scholarship also began to emphasise women’s political mobilisation within a national frame.\textsuperscript{43}

At the same time, there was a move away from celebrating universality, in order to work through the implications of differences among women’s experiences. This shift was also reflected within the domestic violence services movement throughout the 1990s. As Matthews recounts:

[W]orkers against middle-class women, lesbians against straights, women of non-English speaking background against Anglos, Koorie against whites, disabled against sound, Muslim women against Christian, postcolonial women against settler imperialists. There was an urgent demand for recognition on the part of each of the groups identified … had been historically oppressed, excluded, ignored.\textsuperscript{44}

For many feminist historians, the ‘notion of difference began to overtake that of opposition’.\textsuperscript{45} And feminism more broadly, it has been argued, embraced ‘a politics of difference and diversity’.\textsuperscript{46} This coincided with the onset of the ‘linguistic turn’, as discussed above, which emphasised the role of language and discourse in constructing social experience. At the same time, feminism itself became a subject of critical inquiry in two central ways. First, a major theoretical and political concern of feminist scholarship at this time was ‘to recognise the existence of many different feminisms’, alongside the way that categories like ‘ethnicity, socioeconomic position, religion and sexuality differentiate and divide women’.\textsuperscript{47} Writers of colour challenged white scholars to accept that:

[F]eminism can never be an encompassing political home for all women, not just because different groups of women have different and sometimes conflicting interests, but, more radically, because for many groups of “other” women other interests, other

\textsuperscript{42} For a review of this historiography, see Kay Saunders ‘Recent Women's Studies Scholarship, History: Women’s History in Australia; The Decade Reviewed’, \textit{Hecate}, vol. 16, no. 1–2, 1990, pp. 171–181.
\textsuperscript{44} Jill Matthews, ‘Doing Theory or Using Theory: Australian Feminist/Women’s History in the 1990s’, \textit{Australian Historical Studies}, vol. 27, no. 103, 1996, pp. 49–58.
\textsuperscript{45} Matthews, ‘Doing Theory’, p. 53.
identifications are sometimes more important and politically pressing than, or even incompatible with, those related to their being women.\textsuperscript{48}

Second, feminist historians became increasingly concerned to document the history of feminist activism. Whilst a number of studies by historians and social scientists relating to the history of Australian feminism had been written from the 1980s onwards,\textsuperscript{49} it was not until the 1990s that the first book-length studies emerged.\textsuperscript{50} In particular, Lake, who had previously highlighted the dearth of historical scholarship relating to the political activity of Australian women, contended that ‘women’s history, has, for the most part, been social history’, where, in some instances, ‘political activity is subsumed under and reconceptualised as social struggle’.\textsuperscript{51} Concerned as she was to document the history of feminism as a political movement, Lake called on scholars to undertake ‘historical work on the detail of [feminist] campaigns’, much of which, she argued, ‘remain[ed] to be done’.\textsuperscript{52} It is the political work of feminists within the domestic violence services movement that this thesis emphasises, an area that has thus far been under-researched. In undertaking this task, the thesis makes evident the multiplicity of feminisms, experiences, and identities that characterised the movement.

By the 2000s, feminist historians were taking time to celebrate their achievements,\textsuperscript{53} and question the future direction of their endeavours.\textsuperscript{54} Historian Katie Holmes, for example, argued that an ongoing challenge for feminist history was to prevent women from ‘disappearing as historical subjects’.\textsuperscript{55} It was, therefore, incumbent on the discipline, she contended, to insist ‘that feminist history matters—for its potential to be inclusive, subversive, critical, alternative’.\textsuperscript{56} Another feminist historian, Susan Magarey, saw the decade as a period when feminist historians continued to flourish, producing a range of social and

\textsuperscript{48} Ang, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{51} Lake, ‘Feminist History’, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{52} Lake, ‘Feminist History’, p. 166. The publication of Lake’s history of Australian feminism in part filled this substantial void, see Lake, \textit{Equal}.
\textsuperscript{55} Holmes, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{56} Holmes, p. 11.
cultural histories that gave attention to politics and gender relations, some of which were marked by theoretical innovations relating to white race privilege.\textsuperscript{57} Lake, too, posited an optimistic outlook on the state of Australian feminist history, suggesting it had been ‘revitalised’ in recent years ‘through its recognition of and engagement with a transnational past’.\textsuperscript{58} She contended, however, that ‘activists and historians’ needed to bear in mind that it is ‘primarily within the domain of the nation-state that policies can be influenced and political change effected’.\textsuperscript{59} This is true in a negative as well as a positive sense, in that it is within our nation-state and its many jurisdictions that hostile neo-liberal and conservative policies have profoundly impacted on the work of the domestic violence services movement over the past fifteen years dismantling many of the achievements of the women’s movement more broadly.\textsuperscript{60} Moreover, as Curthoys contends, during this time, ‘feminism as a political movement seemed to have lost its force’, and other issues such as ‘human rights’ came to be considered more ‘urgent’.\textsuperscript{61} Indeed, the recognition of women’s rights as human rights, assumed a central focus in Beijing at the world conference for women in 1995. Yet, there remains an urgent need for feminist scholarship that seeks to examine the impact of, and resistance to, these discursive and material shifts as they affect women’s services. Indeed, as Curthoys suggests, it is timely ‘to bring feminist concerns back into central focus’.\textsuperscript{62}

**Historiography and the Domestic Violence Services Movement**

While the history of feminism in Australia has been broadly documented, detailed accounts of feminist responses to particular issues, including domestic violence, remain to be written.\textsuperscript{63} In writing this history, therefore, my aim in part is to fill a gap in the historiography of feminist political activism in Australia. Although there is now a substantial literature relating to


\textsuperscript{58} Lake, ‘Historiography’, p. 183.

\textsuperscript{59} Lake, ‘Historiography’, p. 184.


\textsuperscript{62} Curthoys, ‘Feminist Scholarship’, p. 131.

domestic violence in Australia, there has been no major state-based historical analysis of the women’s refuge movement, despite its key contribution to the development of social policy and services. In examining the historical and other literature that does exist in relation to the domestic violence services movement in Australia, I explore the shifting interpretations that have generally paralleled the development of feminist history writing. These range from those seeking to ‘write women back into history’ to more sophisticated analyses that have sought to highlight the role of language in shaping and changing the way problems are conceptualised. Finally, I note the areas where this dissertation contributes to this body of literature.

It is over 35 years since the first domestic violence refuges were established, and a recent upsurge of writing aims to document the movement’s origins, including those of its constituent organisations.64 These writings have generally been locally resourced and written by non-academic feminist activists—many of whom continue to be involved with domestic violence services and/or the women’s movement. These activist accounts emphasise the struggles and triumphs the authors experienced and reflect the tradition of community-based advocacy and research that has characterised the movement. The accounts of the writers—like those of feminist historians—reflects a desire to ensure that younger generations of women have access to the stories and knowledge of their predecessors.

Documentation of the history of refuges occurred from its earliest days and was mostly begun by women affiliated with feminist refuges.65 Consistent with early women’s liberationist texts, they emphasised women’s oppression and sought to challenge androcentric accounts of history. They aimed to give voice to the ‘experiences’ of women, and to provide testament to the political agendas, goals, motivations, challenges and aspirations of feminist activism. They were emblematic of a movement that stressed women’s agency in making history as well as recording historical knowledge.


The Women’s Liberation Halfway House Collective (WLHWH) was the first feminist refuge in Melbourne, and published their *Herstory* in 1976.\(^66\) Consistent with other feminist literature of the time, it attributed the need for refuges to the ‘exploitative, sexist, racist, class base of this society’.\(^67\) It was WLHWH’s intention to ‘make the problems we encounter public knowledge; to make the government and uninformed public feel responsible for the sufferings of women’.\(^68\) Similarly, out of Sydney’s Marrickville refuge, a collection of documents argued ‘women were experiencing their common oppression in a patriarchal society’.\(^69\) Both texts encapsulated the aims of early feminist historians to redress the absence of women as subjects in a largely androcentric tradition of history writing. The agenda of *Herstory* is clear in its opening paragraph: ‘recording history to date has been the story of great men and great events … it has accurately reflected the patriarchal and class nature of our society’.\(^70\) In seeking to provide a ‘feminist perspective on the past’, they also reiterated a stated aim of Vivien Johnson’s *The Last Resort*: to ‘let women speak for themselves’ and allow for the ‘immediacy of the spoken word’.\(^71\)

By the 1980s, reports and other studies sought to evaluate the work of women’s refuges.\(^72\) Whilst debate ensued about the extent of their achievements,\(^73\) refuges were still generally represented as places where women could assert independence and control over their lives,\(^74\) and feminists in state governments began arguing the case for their expansion.\(^75\) In Victoria, refuges were held to be ‘safe homes’ and ‘secure’ places where women could expect to receive a ‘service of high standard’ in an environment of ‘relative peace’.\(^76\) It was also argued that the ‘great diversity within the Victorian women’s refuge movement’ had contributed to...

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\(^{66}\) WLHWH, *Herstory*, p. 5.

\(^{67}\) WLHWH, *Herstory*, p. 5.

\(^{68}\) WLHWH, *Herstory*, p. 5.

\(^{69}\) Johnson, *Last Resort*, p. 10.

\(^{70}\) WLHWH, *Herstory*, p. 5.

\(^{71}\) WLHWH, *Herstory*, p. 11.


\(^{73}\) Reiner; Smith.

\(^{74}\) Noesijirwan, p. 267.


its ‘richness, creativity and energy’.\textsuperscript{77} These narratives constructed women’s refuges, and the movement, as inclusive and empowering for residents and activists alike, though, as we shall see, ‘other’ women began to challenge this dominant narrative from the 1990s.

Early accounts of the refuge movement simplistically interpreted its beginnings as a response to the pre-existing problem of ‘domestic violence’.\textsuperscript{78} But as historian Linda Gordon has argued, ‘the modern history of family violence is not the story of changing responses to a constant problem but, in large part, of redefinition of the problem itself’.\textsuperscript{79} This thesis argues that, from its beginnings in the mid-1970s to the end of the decade, the advocacy work of the Victorian refuge movement was directed to a broad range of issues affecting the lives of women in refuge. The problem of what became known as ‘domestic violence’ was but one of their many concerns. It is one of the purposes of this project to analyse the way that the refuge movement came to prioritise ‘domestic violence’ and construct it as a feminist issue.

In line with feminist historiography, women’s refuge movement studies of the 1990s began to reinterpret the historical experience of women in terms of agency.\textsuperscript{80} These writings also emphasised the movement’s achievements in making domestic violence a political and public issue, the centrality of radical feminism to refuge activists’ work and the ability of women to work together. In their study of refuges as a social movement, sociologists Heather McGregor and Andrew Hopkins have argued that the grassroots character of the refuge movement was the driving factor in its ability to achieve social change.\textsuperscript{81} They further contend that the refuge movement’s twin goals were providing housing and publicly promoting the elimination of violence, and ‘much of the history and experience of the refuge movement is best understood in terms of the interplay between these purposes’.\textsuperscript{82} The emphasis of my research is less on how movement activists achieved social change than it is on how they responded to and made

\textsuperscript{77} Susan Feldman, Second Thoughts: A Review of the Past, Present and Future of Victorian Women's Refuges, Community Services Victoria, Melbourne 1986, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{78} Smith, p. 23; Feldman, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{82} McGregor and Hopkins, p. 15.
sense of the problems facing women in their services and the outcomes of their responses. This opens up the possibility for a multitude of narratives and encourages a consideration of the diversity of the women and ideologies that constituted the movement.

In the Victorian context, Liz Orr has highlighted the leading role of radical women in the refuge movement. She judges the movement an unmitigated success and ‘the driving force in making family violence a public concern’. Similarly, sociologist Gisela Kaplan, who briefly discusses the women’s refuge movement in her history of the women’s movement, considered it the ‘most effective grass-roots feminist organisation in Australia’.

Whilst these studies have emphasised women’s agency and documented the movement’s achievements, they have failed to interrogate difference and discourse as they relate to the construction of categories such as ‘domestic violence’ and the experiences of the women that made up the movement. We are reminded by Laura Downs, however, that whilst such critiques appear ‘incredibly obvious from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century’, it is important to remember that in the 1970s and 1980s ‘the desire for an uncomplicated sisterhood was so strong, that it made it quite difficult for mainstream (i.e. white middle-class) feminists to really hear the voices of feminists of colour’.

From the late 1990s onwards, accounts of the refuge movement have, like feminist scholarship generally, given greater attention to these factors. Counter-narratives by migrant, refugee and Aboriginal women have highlighted the centrality of whiteness to the refuge movement. In particular, they have argued that, in part because of racism, many women did not experience refuges as ‘safe homes’, or, in the case of activists, that the movement was less than inclusive. The concept of ‘home’ in relation to domestic violence has been deconstructed by feminist scholar Anannya Bhattacharjee, who highlighted the multiple significations it elicited from poor immigrant women who participated in her study, including those relating to their extended communities and nations of origin. Criminologist Adrian Howe has argued that a narrow definition of home reveals the ‘limitations of a Western

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84 Kaplan, p. 72.
85 Downs, p. 23.
87 Bhattacharjee, pp. 313–314.
feminist analysis that assumes public space is one of recourse from injuries endured in “private”.\textsuperscript{88}

Historian Adele Murdolo critiques dominant histories of the refuge movement, arguing that the ‘complex issues raised by race, class, and ethnic divisions are consequently written out’.\textsuperscript{89} Endeavouring to correct such omissions, she constructs a compelling counter-narrative, which places the activism of migrant and refugee women at its centre and highlights the ‘complexities and difficulties of feminist activism’.\textsuperscript{90} Marilyn Lake, who briefly considered the development of refuges within the context of the women’s liberation movement, also highlighted the role of migrant women in the refuge movement and their misgivings about particular cultural assumptions.\textsuperscript{91}

Stressing some of the complexities of feminist ideas, historian Suellen Murray, in a brief history of the ‘Nardine’ refuge in Perth during the 1970s, highlighted the universalising assumptions underpinning ‘radical feminism’, including deterministic notions of masculinity and a belief that commonalities between women overrode differences.\textsuperscript{92} Radical feminism has thus been extensively critiqued for its propensity to universalise white western women’s experiences. As Historian Laura Downs has argued, ‘for poor women and women of colour, the forms of masculine domination that they encountered at home were not always the most problematic forms of discrimination and inequality that marked their lives’.\textsuperscript{93}

In \textit{More than Refuge}—Murray places the refuge movement in its social and political context and highlights the social change agenda of feminist refuges, alongside their role in politicising and making public the issue of domestic violence in the context of radical feminism. Furthermore, Murray charts the changing responses to domestic violence over time and how dominant discourses relating to gender, the family and feminist theory shaped the way domestic violence was constructed as a social problem.\textsuperscript{94}

Others scholars have also drawn attention to the role of discourse in the constitution of domestic violence as a social problem. Janet Ramsay has shown how refuge feminists in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{88} Howe, p. 206.
  \item \textsuperscript{89} Murdolo, p. 262.
  \item \textsuperscript{90} Murdolo, p. 270.
  \item \textsuperscript{91} Marilyn Lake, \textit{Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism}, Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1999, pp. 269–270.
  \item \textsuperscript{93} Downs, p. 23.
  \item \textsuperscript{94} Murray, \textit{Refuge}, pp. 84–115.
\end{itemize}
NSW initiated a ‘social constructionist framing’ of domestic violence,\(^{95}\) while historian Ann Genovese examined the genealogy of domestic violence, highlighting feminism’s role in ‘the construction of a discourse’ on the subject.\(^{96}\) For her part, criminologist Adrian Howe has highlighted the challenges facing feminists once this was achieved and, in particular, the acceptance of ‘domestic violence’ as a discourse at policy level. Howe contends, for example, that the gender-neutrality of the term has worked to conceal ‘the profoundly sexed asymmetry of interpersonal violence’.\(^{97}\)

This dissertation builds on this existing historiography by documenting continuity and change in the efforts of domestic violence activists over a 30-year period. In doing so, it explores how the movement in Victoria emerged and how members organised, worked towards achieving their goals, made sense of their experiences and dealt with the obstacles they encountered while undertaking action to create change for women. I demonstrate the centrality of discourse to the movement’s ideas and actions and, in particular, its influence on the way the movement made sense of, and responded to, issues facing women in their services. The result is not a seamless story of ‘feminist’ success, but rather one of complex relationships, ideologies, identities and power struggles. History can rarely tell simple stories. However, it can reveal courage, ingenuity and fortitude, whilst also acknowledging diverse experiences including failures and successes.

**Domestic Violence Services, ‘the State’ and Social Policy**

Historian Ann Curthoys has noted how much of the literature on the Australian women’s movement ‘concentrates on one outstanding feature of Australian feminism: its close relationship with the government as a means of achieving its ends’.\(^{98}\) A close relationship with ‘the state’ has certainly characterised the domestic violence services movement and constitutes a central theme of this thesis. In this section, I outline how the state is conceptualised in this dissertation, and survey literature relating to the often fraught engagement of feminist organisations, including women’s refuges, with government. I also canvas literature examining the role of social policy in relation to domestic violence, before explaining the specific contribution of this dissertation to these bodies of scholarship.

\(^{95}\) Ramsay, p. 106.
\(^{97}\) Howe, p. 184.
Sociologists Rosemary Pringle and Sophie Watson have noted that feminists have ‘shared a view of the state as, to a greater or lesser extent, a coherent unity’, and have suggested that instead it should be conceptualised as ‘a set of arenas’ whereby ‘women’s interests are constructed rather than pre-given’. More recently, Carol Bacchi has argued against seeing ‘the state as a body operating either for or against claimant groups’. Instead, she contends that governmentality literature, inspired by the work of Michel Foucault, provides an alternative conceptualisation of the state as ‘always intervening’ to produce citizens as self-regulating subjects. Bacchi argues that the ‘dominant framing of the state’, as identifying and responding to social problems needs to be re-evaluated; rather ‘the state together with non-state actors, in particular professions, produces understandings of problems that have particular effects’.

Central to this analysis are relations of power, which Foucault contends ‘necessarily extend beyond the limits of the state’ despite the ‘omnipotence of its apparatuses’, because it operates as ‘superstructural in relationship to whole series of power networks’. Conceptualising power, according to Howe, has been revolutionised by Foucault, who transformed it from being ‘understood as held by one group over another’ to that which produces ‘effects of truth through discourses’. Foucault also contends that ‘there are no relations of power, without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised’.

This dissertation works within a conceptualisation of the state that recognises it as comprising an always intervening ‘complex set of interrelated but distinct institutions, relations, hierarchies, discourses and practices, interests and players’. I pay particular attention to the role of those formal arms of the state, such as bureaucracies, police and the judiciary, that have obviously fashioned the work of domestic violence organisations. However, my analysis also recognises subtler processes that seek to regulate the individuals with whom they work. I also consider the roles of individuals who have both constituted and contested state

100 Pringle and Watson, p. 229–230.
105 Howe, p. 11.
106 Foucault, p. 142.
institutions and practices. Finally, I acknowledge that the state engages with others in ‘discursive battles over meaning’, and should be recognised, in Claire Reinelt’s words, as ‘a site of active contestation over the construction of gender inequalities and power’.

Analysis of this relationship with the state revolves around two questions. How were gains achieved over time, and what factors have been critical in effecting such outcomes? In relation to the refuge movement, a number of studies have highlighted its successes in gaining funding for domestic violence services. Social work academics Kate Gilmore and Wendy Weeks, for example, have emphasised that ‘activity inside government was kept moving by a refuge movement, which saw itself as involved in political action’. Others have highlighted the role of feminists within government bureaucracies as crucial in securing funding and facilitating communication between community organisations such as women’s refuges and the government. Existing literature also highlights the role feminists have played in securing the place of violence against women on the policy agenda, as well as ensuring that a feminist perspective underpins the development of government policies.

Conversely, other writers tend to contrast the work of community activists with that of femocrats, suggesting that once the former had achieved the job of exposing the issue, the baton was then passed to feminists within the bureaucracy, who undertook to ‘convince the governments to develop policies to address the problem’. Whilst there is no doubt that this occurred to some degree, it paints an overly simplistic picture. Working within a theorisation of the state that recognises bureaucrats’ engagement with non-state actors produce particular understandings of problems, this dissertation instead emphasises the activists’ dynamic, long-lasting and reciprocal relationships with state actors, a nexus that produced new ways of defining and responding to the policy problem of domestic violence. I thus examine in some detail the nature of the relationships between the domestic violence services movement and

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111 Weeks and Gilmore, p. 144.
113 McGregor and Hopkins; Weeks and Gilmore; Murray, Refuge.
state bureaucrats, building on Murray’s conclusion in relation to women’s refuges in Western Australia that, ‘the patriarchal state was neither monolithic nor undifferentiated. The relationship between refuges and bureaucrats was variable: at times and in certain places, difficult; at others, productive’.115

Debate has also centred on circumstances that have allowed government-funded feminist organisations to survive. Weeks and Gilmore have argued, for example, that in the case of women’s refuges, this was enabled by the ‘coming to power in the 1980s of state and federal Labor governments with explicit commitments to equality and social justice’.116 However, sociologist Roselyn Melville contends that liberal social democratic governments cannot guarantee the survival of feminist organisations, and identifies other crucial factors such as ‘the level of political activism within feminist services, the degree of state autonomy and its capacity to deliver social goals and the peculiar nature of Australian federalism and constitutional politics’.117 Political scientist Louise Chappell has also emphasised the significance of Australian federalism for Australian feminists’ progress in relation to domestic violence policy.118

Researcher and former refuge worker Ludo McFerran has highlighted the importance of electoral pressure in influencing the decision of governments to fund feminist services such as refuges. In particular, she has documented how the federal Labor government’s decision to fund a national women’s refuge program in 1975 as a direct consequence of overwhelming support from women voters.119 Adopting a similar argument, more recently, political scientist Marian Sawer has contended that this can also work in reverse, and that because of changes in the broader women’s movement, ‘governments have found they can abolish agencies without widespread community protest and the fear of electoral backlash’.120

In a comparison of Australian and Canadian women’s movements, Chappell suggests Australian feminists’ reliance on the Australian Labor Party (ALP) to provide ‘positive opportunity structures’ to advance their claims has made them ‘vulnerable to the state in a way that their Canadian counterparts are not’—the latter having focused on the legal and constitutional arms of the state.121 However, in this thesis, I demonstrate Victoria’s domestic

115 Murray, Refuge, p. 152.
117 Melville, ‘Funding’, p. 16.
118 Chappell, ‘Federalism’, p. 61.
121 Chappell, Gendering, p. 49.
violence services movement has also looked to the state’s legal apparatus to advance its aims, and has made important progress through engagement with the judiciary and the police, thus placing broader pressure on the state bureaucracy to increase funding for services.

A further theme in the literature concerns the implications for feminist organisations of entering into funding and contractual arrangements with governments.¹²² Services have been required to adopt governance structures and administrative reporting requirements held by some to be in conflict with their feminist philosophies and collective structures.¹²³ In particular, the issue of whether alternative institutions can maintain their autonomy if they receive money from structures they are seeking to change was and still is, to some extent, an issue of contention amongst feminist service providers.¹²⁴ McFerran, for example, believes that the attainment of funding security in the early 1980s turned refuges into ‘part of the welfare furniture’.¹²⁵ This thesis adopts a different perspective, challenging the view that domestic violence services gave up on being feminist or resisting government directives. Accepting that there are no relations of power without resistances, this thesis demonstrates that whilst services were indeed forced to vary their methods and tactics in response to government coercion, they simultaneously found opportunities to resist and, over time, began to work more cooperatively with each other and with external organisations to survive. Indeed, as Reinelt suggests, while involvement with state institutions has political risks, it can also ‘create political opportunities for transforming institutional practices and furthering a feminist agenda’.¹²⁶ Certainly, feminist services organisations continue to play an important role for Victorian women, though their work has to some extent been compromised by managerialism and economic rationalism.¹²⁷

A growing body of literature seeks to unpack the way domestic violence is presented in public policy,¹²⁸ and how it ‘has been named and renamed as a social problem’.¹²⁹ When refuges began, they were responding to what Murray calls an ‘almost invisible issue’.¹³⁰ Domestic

¹²⁶ Reinelt, p. 100.
¹²⁷ See, Women’s Services Coalition, Women’s Services into the 1990s and Beyond, Women’s Services Coalition, Melbourne 1994.
¹²⁹ Howe, p. 185. See also Gordon.
violence did not exist as a named social issue, let-alone as part of public policy. It was the refuge movement that initiated a process of constructing ‘domestic violence’ as a feminist issue, identifying it ‘and other forms of violence against women as manifestations of women’s oppression in a male-dominated society’. As a result of the ensuing campaigns and the work of feminist bureaucrats, Australia had by 1994 adopted more policy initiatives in relation to domestic violence than any other democratic government except Canada.

Murray and Powell have canvassed the varying ways that domestic violence has been named and framed, highlighting how the ‘ongoing contestation over gendered or ungendered problematisations continues to influence policy approaches’. Generally, public policy in Victoria has considered domestic violence as a gendered issue, although ‘at times, under certain governments, public policy has been more or less gendered’. For example, Chappell argues that domestic violence related policies: developed in states with Liberal Coalition governments reflect the pervasive influence of a conservative discourse that is reflected in the emphasis on family and perpetrator projects. By contrast in states with ALP governments … the focus has been quite different … a degree of commitment to feminist approaches to domestic violence continues.

Weeks and Gilmore have highlighted the particular risks for domestic violence policy development of ‘being co-opted by the law and order lobby’—an approach that ‘feeds into an individualising of both victim and perpetrator, thus deflecting emphasis away from gendered power relations as the central issue’. Adrian Howe also warns against feminist social justice campaigns being subsumed under a law and order focus.

Concerns were raised about the national Howard Coalition government and its policy initiatives towards, and analyses of, domestic violence. Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) was introduced in 1997 and ran for three terms until 2005. The policy has been widely critiqued for its embedded discursive elements, which were intended to ‘negate

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131 Murray and Powell, p. 537.
133 Murray and Powell, p. 548.
135 Chappell, ‘Federalism’, p. 66.
136 Weeks and Gilmore, p. 152.
137 Howe, p.195; see also Bacchi, ‘Rolling’.
the feminist roots of domestic violence policy as a women’s issue’.\textsuperscript{138} Furthermore, it has been criticised for promoting a ‘pro-family’ agenda, which ‘marginalises women and children experiencing domestic violence’.\textsuperscript{139} As Murray has pointed out, PADV formed ‘a major part of the Government’s strategy for strengthening families’.\textsuperscript{140} A harmful consequence of this ‘family harmony’ discourse is that it places the ‘responsibility for “managing” violence upon women’.\textsuperscript{141} Social work academic Ruth Phillips has argued that this runs the risk of ‘undoing the potential to challenge gendered forms of violence [and] the practical knowledge that has developed as a result of women’s activism in policy governance’.\textsuperscript{142} Chappell argues, however, that PADV was ‘unable to unilaterally impose its views on the states … [and] … no single discourse on domestic violence has prevailed’.\textsuperscript{143}

This dissertation contributes to this literature by focussing on Victorian and Commonwealth government policy and programs and analyses of domestic violence since the late 1970s, tracking the impact of feminism on social policy definitions and framings that identified gender as the principal causative agent. It explores the highly contested and political nature of the policy development process in relation to domestic violence, highlights the incongruities that have often emerged between agreed-upon problem definitions and objectives and the failure to match them with appropriate funding and policy design. As Murray has noted:

The naming of domestic violence as gendered violence has not yet ensured that the wider dimensions of violence against women are addressed. There continues to be a gap between rhetoric and reality, and addressing gender inequality is an integral part of the process if we really want to prevent domestic violence.\textsuperscript{144}

**Feminist Organisations**

This section focusses on literature relevant to my second thesis theme—the movement’s internal and external strategies and actions. The diversity of ideology and organisations in the


\textsuperscript{140} Murray, ‘“Impossibly Ambitious”’, p. 30.


\textsuperscript{142} Phillips, p. 213. See also, Webster, pp. 14–18.

\textsuperscript{143} Chappell, ‘Federalism’, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{144} Murray, ‘“Impossibly Ambitious”’, p. 32.
early years of the second wave women’s movement has begun to be documented. More recently, the effects of this diversity on feminist women’s services, including domestic violence organisations has been recognised. So too has the fact that they have worked together despite considerable external pressure from the impact of managerialist and economic rationalist–inspired government policies. A significant body of literature considers the impact of these discursive and institutional shifts in relation to the Australian women’s movement.

Political scientist Verity Burgmann has noted that, in the early years, ‘the distinction between the women’s liberation movement and the Women’s Electoral Lobby was between those who believed revolution was needed for women to achieve equality and those who insisted substantial reform would be sufficient’. Katy Reade observes that the relationship between these women’s organisations in the 1970s was highly fractious to the point where any ‘useful similarities were often overlooked or downplayed’. However, most women’s organisations also perceived the necessity for a united front, public differences being defined as ‘threatening to the supposed solidarity of “sisters”’.

The refuge movement reflected these divisions incorporating organisations of differing ideological persuasions. Unlike other coalitions in the women’s movement, not all organisations that made up the refuge movement were feminist. Radical feminist refuges, for example, were often in conflict both with ideologically different organisations providing refuges such as religious groups, as well as with their government funding bodies, which they saw as a threat to their autonomy. My research has examined the degree to which the Victorian refuge movement can be characterised by conflict and/or unity, and the strategies the movement adopted over time to deal with these challenges. Divisions in the domestic violence services movement have continued and one of the aims of this project has been

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148 Sawer, ‘Femocrat’; Andrew and Maddison.
149 Burgmann, p. 113.
150 Reade, p. 199.
151 Reade, p. 205.
examine how diverse organisations, including feminist refuges, worked together to achieve change. This also contributes to our understanding of the way activists who were marginalised within the mainstream movement initiated programs to meet their different needs. As Reade has argued in relation to the broader women’s movement, organisational conflict need not necessarily result in negative outcomes:

Criticism is ultimately a constructive rather than a destructive political act, involving a metamorphosis of the overall politics of the women’s movement from one which assumes homogeneity of all women’s experience of oppression at the hands of a common enemy to one which acknowledges, in a positive way, the existences of difference.152

The refuge movement is illustrative of how some social movements have metamorphised and contributed to complex community service delivery.153 Whilst the ideas of women’s liberation continue to inform a wide range of autonomous women’s organisations, women’s liberation no longer exists as a social movement.154 By the 1980s, it had fractured, and radical and socialist feminists could no longer cooperate politically to the extent that was necessary to sustain the movement. The impact of this split is evident within the Victorian refuge movement and this thesis explores how members dealt with a new degree of disunity.

In more recent years and, in particular, from the late 1980s onwards, major changes have taken place in the nature of state welfare provision. Governments have increasingly transferred welfare provision to the non-government sector and pursued policies of privatising an increasing number of essential community services. Various forms of competitive tendering and other market-style funding mechanisms have replaced previous funding agreements for domestic violence services. This shift has taken place in an institutional environment dominated by managerialist and economic rationalist ideologies that privilege efficiency and effectiveness, resulting in increased competition amongst services and the dismantling of some of the wider social welfare infrastructure.

Some studies have considered the negative effects of these changes on the provision of domestic violence services, revealing that those who ‘used feminist working practices were

152 Reade, p. 199.
154 Burgmann, p. 113
those most likely to suffer feelings of being constantly under threat'. In an examination of four NSW women’s refuges, Melville argues that the effect of economic rationalist policies on refuges has been to increase their vulnerability since they are premised on values of self-help and community development, seen as ineffectual in the current policy environment. More recently, social work academic John McDonald has argued that managerialist ideology has tended to ‘depoliticise and clinicalised domestic violence’.

This thesis contributes to this body of work by examining the nature and consequences of these changes for domestic violence services, which struggled to survive the 1990s in a hostile climate characterised by the imposition of countless administrative and programmatic changes aimed in part to regulate the work of their organisations. However, feminist organisations have not become complacent in this climate of change. They have attempted to organise and resist, as well as to forge creative ways of operating in the ‘competition age’.

Methodology

The study of the origins and development of Victorian domestic violence services draws substantially on the perspectives of those who have worked in the services. The analysis is presented both chronologically and thematically, and the ‘evidence’ has been drawn from a combination of oral and archival sources, analysed with, ‘a keen materialist and feminist eye to context, and also … post-structuralist insights into language’.

We make history out of the traces or the remnant materials of the past and arrange them to produce historical narratives. Evidence is thus fundamental to history but must be considered critically, and as partial, subjective and mediated. In this section, I identify some of the distinguishing features of oral narratives compared with documentary sources, emphasising that transcripts from interviews are to be understood as constructed texts rather than unmediated accounts of women’s ‘true experiences’. I will then discuss how evidence was gathered for this study, including my conduct of interviews and use of archives. Finally, I will

156 Melville, ‘External’.
157 McDonald, p. 283.
158 On changes to the Australian homelessness service system, see Jane Bullen, ‘Governing Homelessness: The Discursive and Institutional Construction of Homelessness in Australia’, PhD Thesis, UTS, 2009. Bullen’s work has assisted my thinking around these issues as they relate to domestic violence services.
reflect on my position within the research, both in terms of my role in making evidence, which I have done by shaping and structuring the interviews and producing transcripts, and in writing history based on this and other evidence.

**Oral History**

Giving voice to women who have participated in the domestic violence services movement, as well as documenting their history as a political movement, is central to the aims of this thesis. Indeed, collaboration and engagement with others in the research process, particularly those such as women who have been marginalised and omitted from the written record, enhances the potential for communities to become more democratic and pluralising. The adoption of oral history as a methodological approach is therefore congruent with the research objectives, and the interview process has been utilised to gain the perspective and understanding of activists about the social and political environment within which they operated, often amidst adversity, to create change for women and children experiencing domestic violence. It is for this reason that this dissertation engages with oral history. Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to position memory itself as the object of study, it is necessary to discuss some of the particular theoretical and methodological problems relating to oral history—including the present-centred nature of memory.

Oral sources are inescapably presentist, and there has been significant debate amongst historians regarding their suitability as a method of constructing the past and creating history.\(^{161}\) It has been argued, for example, that oral informants provide unreliable sources of historical information because, as public perception and social consciousness alter—what Alistair Thomson refers to as ‘public memory’\(^{162}\)—so too does the past they remember.\(^{163}\) In addition, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and political ideology create significant differences in how people remember and tell their lives.\(^{164}\) The role of myth has also been identified as a central constituent in the memory of human experience.\(^{165}\)

Oral accounts are unavoidably about the relationship between past and present, resulting in what John Murphy has referred to as a ‘revised edition of one’s life … [where it] … is impossible to recall events without the recollection being informed with such pattern and

\(^{161}\) On these debates, see Alistair Thomson, ‘Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History’, *Oral History Review*, vol. 34, 2006, pp. 49–70.

\(^{162}\) On the way that public myth relating to Anzac influenced memories of war veterans, see Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living With the Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1994.


\(^{164}\) Sangster, p. 7.

logic as one’s life now seems to have’. Narrative gives a shape to our memories that they did not have at the time and ‘we organise our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative’. Narrative is, therefore, ‘a process of retrospective meaning making—the shaping or ordering of past experience’. Where appropriate throughout this thesis, consideration is given to the way that participants’ narratives have been fashioned by these processes.

Feminist post-structuralist theories are congruent with the methods of oral history, highlighting the subjective nature of the relationship between experience and representation as well as the role of discourse in shaping testimony. This should not, however, be taken as a denial of the importance of experience. Indeed, we should keep in mind Sangster’s plea not to lose sight of the reality of the lived oppression of women, for post-structuralist theory may ‘pose the danger of overstating the …“fictionality” of oral histories, and the impossibility of using them to locate a woman’s past which is real and knowable’. I am particularly aware of this dilemma, and, while attending to the role of subjectivity in relation to women’s oral narratives, I am concerned to ensure that this in no way ‘moves all events to the level of discourse, stories and social categories, turning away completely from questions of truth and justice’. Though oral sources may not provide us with the ‘factual’ events of the past, they can tell us about the meaning attached to events by those who experienced them. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli, for example, argues that oral sources tell us not just ‘what people did but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did’. In relation to feminist oral history, Sangster contends that, ‘asking why and how women explain, rationalise and make sense of their past, offers insight into the social and material framework within which they operated … [and] … the perceived choices and cultural patterns they faced’. Feminist historians utilising oral sources as a way to learn about the

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169 Sangster, p. 13.


172 Sangster, p. 6.
past, therefore, can and should do so to understand ‘how women understood, negotiated, and sometimes challenged … dominant ideals’ and practices.\footnote{173}{Sangster, p. 10.}

**Conducting Interviews**

The oral history component of this project involved conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with 55 women, and three men, as well as three focus groups with a total of thirteen women. The interviews were conducted in an open-ended manner to facilitate the telling of participants’ stories, and with the additional prospect that those interviewed might help ‘shape the research agenda by articulating what is of importance to them’.\footnote{174}{Sangster, p. 5.} The majority of women interviewed were either current workers and/or former activists/volunteers. A large proportion of the women interviewed had worked across several domestic violence services and other related organisations in senior roles for more than ten years. A small number had done so for more than 30 years. Some had also worked as bureaucrats overseeing the administration of domestic violence services. Interviews were also conducted with three women and three men whose sole connection with the movement was as bureaucrats or members of parliament. These accounts offered a significant counter-narrative to ones from those directly involved in the movement, and related to the productive and differentiated role of the state—a theme explored in various parts of the thesis.

Focus groups were conducted with the aim of examining particular decades in greater detail, and the first two were organised around women’s experiences of the 1970s and 1980s respectively. Three women participated in the first focus group, each representing different services. Two of these women were also interviewed individually. The 1980s focus group was considerably larger, with nine women attending, several of whom had worked in rural and outer suburban organisations. This group was particularly constructive, as people interacted with each other, sparking memories and providing competing versions of the past. Finally, a focus group was conducted with two women who had worked in services targeting young women to ensure that this component of the movement’s work was captured.

Among the interviewees who participated in both the one-on-one interviews or the focus groups, approximately 75 per cent of the organisations that made up the movement in Victoria were represented, including those located in rural areas. In an attempt to gain the perspectives of women with varying identities and backgrounds, participants were also purposely recruited on the basis of their varying political persuasions, ethnicities, ages, sexualities, and physical
abilities. However, there is significant Anglo bias and no Aboriginal women were interviewed. The reasons for this will be explained below.

I conducted these interviews and focus groups between November 2007 and May 2009. Access to participants was facilitated via a project reference group that included representatives from the domestic violence services sector and its peak body, Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic). The project reference group provided a mechanism for identifying and recruiting initial participants, and snowballing was employed to recruit further participants. Other forms of organisational communication were also used to contact participants, including member meetings and advertisements on DV Vic’s website.

Following the receipt of ethics approval from the RMIT University Human Resources Ethics Committee, I approached participants initially by telephone. If they agreed to be interviewed, I followed up the conversation with a letter detailing the nature of the project, as well as a copy of the interview schedule and consent form. The conditions outlined included that the interview would be recorded (if they agreed for this to occur), transcribed and sent back to the participants for checking and amendments. Following the interview, the transcript was sent, accompanied by a second letter reiterating these conditions, including an assurance that I would not use anything said without approval. Subsequently, after I had completed a final draft of the thesis, all interviewees’ quotations were sent to them for final approval. At this point, even where they had already edited their quotations, the majority of participants chose to edit or re-edit their quotes, and all but one agreed to be identified. The fact that most people wished to make changes to their printed words is congruent with the theoretical position of this thesis: that oral narratives are not ‘windows into the past’, but are instead constructed texts.

In undertaking ethical research with a political agenda, I have been guided by the work of feminist researchers and historians for whom oral history is a commitment to ‘an activist enterprise’, which might ‘empower people’ and ‘contribute to social change’.175 These writers recognise that traditional sources have often neglected the lives of women. Oral history, they have argued, provides an opportunity to put women’s voices at the centre of history,176 in this instance giving voice to the women who made up the Victorian domestic violence services movement.

Feminist research has also been characterised by opposition to masculinist hierarchical research methods. In keeping with this understanding, I have endeavoured to carry out interviews from a position that minimised my role as ‘expert’ or ‘knower’, and to conduct myself with ‘sensitivity’ and ‘self-awareness’.\(^\text{177}\) However, adopting these approaches to interviewing does not eliminate the inherent capacity for exploitation by the researcher of her subject.\(^\text{178}\) Indeed, the researcher has considerable power over the final narrative, and is therefore party to an ‘asymmetrical exchange’.\(^\text{179}\) I have sought to lessen any possible negative effects from this dynamic by engaging in dialogue about my analysis and conclusions with participants throughout the course of researching and writing the dissertation. Thus, whilst I have unquestionably imposed my interpretation of the meaning of participants’ experiences, I have sought to ensure the validity of this account through a range of means. First, I have adopted a consultative approach to choosing participants’ words for use in the final thesis, and have provided them with numerous opportunities to edit their final narratives and thus maintain a degree of interpretative authority. I have also engaged in an ongoing process of discussion and debate via the project reference group regarding my analysis and interpretation of evidence. The group has met quarterly over the past four years for this purpose and to provide verbal and written feedback on drafts of the dissertation. Finally, I have presented parts of the dissertation at wider sector-level forums annually, such as the DV Vic Annual General Meeting, in an endeavour to make the research process as egalitarian, consultative and accountable as possible.

**Documentary and Archival Sources**

The oral history component of this project has been complemented by the utilisation of documentary sources. Whilst all historical sources are interpretative and therefore partial and limited, the nature of archival written sources—unlike oral sources, which are entirely constructed in the present—is such that they are of ‘another time’. It has been argued that this offers conventional historical research, more so than oral history, the potential to explain anew historical causation.\(^\text{180}\) In other words, this provides the potential for more ‘objective’ interpretation of how the past constructs the present because archival sources provide a disjunction between the past and the present. Accessing a particularly rich body of documentary material has, from this perspective, strengthened the ability of this thesis to

\(^{177}\) Armitage and Gluck, p. 6.
\(^{178}\) See Judith Stacey, ‘Can There Be Feminist Ethnography?’ in Gluck and Patai, pp. 111–119.
\(^{180}\) Attwood, pp. 217–18.
locate women’s experiences in a materialist context of social, political, cultural and economic relations and imperatives.

First, two Victorian refuges, Brenda House and Kara women’s refuges, provided me with access to their archives on their premises. Wendy Austin played a crucial role both in amassing, and enabling access to, the collection at Brenda. These combined archives amounted to ten boxes of material, providing me with access to a rich body of meeting minutes, including those relating to Victorian Women’s Refuges and Associated Domestic Violence Services (VWRADVS now DV Vic) the movement’s peak body, during the period from 1995 to 2005. They also included other meeting minutes, annual reports, unpublished internal documents, evaluations, policy and practice documents, consultant reviews, government reports and internal and external correspondence. These materials allowed for a detailed reconstruction of the movement’s activities and advocacy from the early 1990s. Two folders of primary source material were also provided to me by DV Vic, which included correspondence and meeting minutes relating to the organisation’s evolution from VWRADVS to DV Vic during the first half of the 2000s.

Archives were also accessed from collections housed at the University of Melbourne’s Women’s Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archive (MWLA). This rich source of data includes records specifically related to women’s refuges and, in particular, the archives of the first Victorian refuge, the Women’s Liberation Halfway House, which consists of 100 boxes of material (from which 30 were examined in detail). This material was relevant not only to the refuge’s own history, but also to the wider refuge movement because WLHWH was particularly active and engaged with the women’s movement, and other campaigns relating to housing, until the late 1980s. Other collections examined within this archive include the Australian Union of Students (AUS) Women’s Department papers, Women’s Liberation Centre papers, Lesbian Open House papers, Women’s Liberation Movement papers, Vig Geddes’ papers, Sue Jackson papers, Jenny Tatchel’s papers, Frances Ryan’s papers, and Jan Chapman’s papers. In addition, the Maggie Burrows collection was accessed from the University of Melbourne archives separately from the above collection. These collections offered voluminous amounts of material that included meeting minutes, campaign letters, handwritten notes, letters, posters and fliers, pamphlets, newspaper articles, conference proceedings and magazines. A number of participants offered me access to their personal documents over and above those held by the University of Melbourne archives; this was gratefully accepted. These included Wendy Austin, Vig Geddes, Jean Taylor, Con Smith, Chris Sitka, Ulla Svensson, Rose Stone, Judy Johnson, Gwyn Roberts, Judy Line, Natalie...
Thomas, Janine Berryman, Keran Howe, Lyn Walker, and Sandra Morris. By far the most substantial collection was that belonging to Ulla Svensson, whose personal papers included copies of ‘Drum’ Newsletter—the official collective meeting minutes of the WLHWH—from 1974 to 1988, Victorian Women’s Refuge Group meeting minutes, newspaper articles, newsletters, campaign meeting minutes, books, conference papers, speeches, unpublished papers, policy and funding submissions, letters, copies of parliamentary debates and government documents, statistical data, and annual reports. These documents combined afforded detailed data to reconstruct the social and political context of the early years of the refuge movement in Victoria.

Other primary data examined included women’s movement journals and newsletters from Victoria, New South Wales and the UK, which I scanned for articles, letters and editorials on the subject of women’s refuges and domestic violence. In particular, I examined the Women’s Liberation Newsletter (1974-1985), Scarlet Woman (1975-1985), Vashti’s Voice (1973-1980), Rouge (19791980), Refractory Girl (1975- 1980), Spare Rib (1976-1983), and Woman Speak (1978-2005). At the library of the Domestic Violence Resource Centre in Melbourne (formerly Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre), I also accessed Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre Quarterly from 1989 to 2008, along with other reports associated with women’s refuges including ministerial taskforce reports and annual reports. This material enabled me to examine the way that activists and organisations responded to, and conceptualised, various legislative and policy changes over time. Finally, I also reviewed Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD) for the Legislative Assembly and Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD) for the House of Representatives and the Senate for the purpose of investigating how, and by whom, issues relating to women’s domestic violence services were raised, tackled and responded to in parliament.

The Historian and History

In the context of an explicitly political and feminist research project, it is important that I locate and reflect critically on my position as the researcher/author of this history, and also as the maker of evidence in the process of conducting and transcribing interviews with the participants concerned. My own subject position as a relatively young, able-bodied, English-speaking, tertiary-level educated, feminist, heterosexual, white, middle-class woman cannot be divorced from either of these processes.

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181 This collection will be submitted to the MWLA after the completion of my thesis.
In my view, oral sources are always the result of a relationship, a common project in which the informant and the researcher collaborate. The class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and education of both interviewers and participants all contribute to the outcome of the interview. In this sense, as Armitage and Gluck contend, ‘each interviewer will get different partial truths, given her or his positionality’.182

My approach to the interviews was self-consciously non-objective. Often, before the interview began, I had spoken at length on the phone with participants about the purpose of the project and the ‘conversational’ style that I intended to adopt. From the outset, participants were encouraged to feel at ease and confident that there was no right or wrong answer to the questions I was asking. Whilst I did not identify as a member of the researched group, there was often the presumption of common values, or, at times, when participants asked directly about my own identity and history, I openly talked about them, including the fact that I identified as a feminist, was committed to social justice and women’s rights, and had been a social worker with the homeless community in Victoria and South Australia. This also meant that there was a shared language, or a ‘sharedness of meaning’, which enabled an understanding of ‘the contextual nature of specific references’.183 These factors have by and large generated positive feelings between the interviewees and myself, as well as dialogues that were relatively free-flowing. The effects on the interviews were therefore generally constructive and people spoke frankly and honestly. There were also several participants with whom I had previously developed professional relationships, which further enhanced this dynamic.

On reflection, however, I became aware that I had at times been cautious, as Valerie Yow puts it, about ‘ask[ing] some things of narrators for whom I felt affection lest my questions cause them discomfort’.184 On the other hand, I was sometimes intimidated by the experience, expertise and knowledge of many interviewees. This was related to the fact that the vast majority of participants were at least one generation older than me, and several participants had post-graduate qualifications, including at least eight with PhDs, and others had spent the bulk of their lives working towards eliminating violence against women. My cautious approach was also brought to my attention by Ulla Svensson, who, after editing her transcript,  

182 Armitage and Gluck, p. 5.
informed me that I should have been more direct in asking about things she was ‘ashamed’ of during her time as a political activist in a Melbourne refuge in the 1970s. She later wrote to me about the ‘worst experience’ she had undergone, which occurred while supporting a resident through an arduous court case. In particular, she had not believed the woman’s claims that her husband had been sexually abusing their daughter, and instead assumed the woman to be ‘crazy’. It was revealed, however, at the end of the case that the husband had previously been jailed for that very offence. This clearly fractured her relationship with the woman and her daughter, and had left her with memories that were ‘hard to even mention’. 185

This ‘private memory’ provides an example of what was ‘omitted’ from our interview, in part as a consequence of my own ‘positionality’ as interviewer. However, such omissions may also reflect the way that some interviewees’ private memories can be repressed if they do not fit in with public norms or acceptable versions of the past, or with the image the interviewee wants not only to project but to inhabit. Moreover, private memory, in this instance, contradicts public memories of the refuge movement, which for the most part stressed its achievements in challenging the silence surrounding women’s experiences of violence and incest. These public memories have informed dominant accounts/narratives of the refuge movement—indeed it was the achievements of the movement that dominated the majority of participants’ narratives and, by extension, the history I have constructed. This suggests a circular relationship between public memory and oral history, whereby memory reconstruction generates oral history, and the latter ‘reflects and shapes collective or public memory’. 186

Furthermore, looking back on the transcripts, it became apparent to me that I was seeking particular answers to my questions, and many times I did not receive the answers I expected. Below is an edited excerpt from an interview with long-term worker in domestic violence services, Vig Geddes, which was the second interview I conducted. 187 It is clear to me on reflection that I had predetermined and romanticised notions about the beginnings of the refuge movement that imagined women working together, putting aside their differences, forging a sense of unity as a movement, and embracing feminism. However, Vig’s account reveals something quite different.

Jacqui: How did they manage to work together amongst so much diversity?

185 Personal correspondence, Ulla Svensson, 9 August and 15 October 2010.
**Vig:** Well I think everyone was just really committed to the women, you know, to keeping women safe. I think that was really strong.

**Jacqui:** So a commitment to making women safe united people of different political persuasions?

**Vig:** I don’t think we would’ve even talked about what we had in common; we focused a lot on the differences. I think that’s what kept everybody in there … [and] … we were not namby-pambying around … I mean there was some heated debates and differences and people raising their voices and … the feminist analysis was pretty hammered home.

Geddes’ account reveals how a focus on what divided (not united) women was prevalent from her experience, and a feminist analysis of domestic violence was, at times, forcibly imposed. Oral testimony can serve to challenge the assumptions of researchers, and thereby dominant narratives. And, in part as a result, the history I have constructed does not (re)present an idealised view of this feminist past. However, feminism, and its relationship to the domestic violence services movement, constitutes a central theme of this thesis, which brings me to another example of the way that my own positioning has influenced the construction of oral narratives. Specifically, I had assumed that feminist ideology would be fundamental to workers engaged in this movement. However, I had not assumed that it would mean the same thing to everyone. What became apparent was that, for many women, feminism or feminist ideas were not only reflected upon in the interviews in innumerable ways, but played an increasingly ambiguous role in the contemporary context. This in turn led me to reflect on what might have occurred had I not assumed this structure for their memories.

It is also important to note that, when editing their transcripts, many participants took the opportunity to rephrase what they had said. Some women stated that they were self-conscious about sounding inarticulate, and others felt the need to qualify comments they had made during the interview whilst feeling particularly ‘disarmed’ and ‘at ease’. Furthermore, when editing transcripts, many participants sought to clarify my interpretation of their words, which had taken on a different meaning when transferred to paper from what they had intended to convey.
The process of writing history is also shaped by the historian, according to ‘his or her own ideas, interests, and preoccupations’. In particular, it is important to note that there is much missing from the narrative as I have constructed it, particularly the perceptions and experiences of women from backgrounds other than those interviewed. In particular, no Aboriginal women were interviewed for the project. This can in part be explained by the fact that the project was initiated academically by women from Anglo backgrounds and then steered by several key Anglo women who had worked/volunteered in domestic violence services over many years. Whilst a variety of organisations were invited to join the reference group so that it could represent the diversity of women comprising the sector/movement, immigrant and Aboriginal women chose not to participate at that level. The project reference group, including myself as researcher/author, therefore symbolised what sociologist Anna Yeatman terms ‘custodians of the established order’. In this sense, the project was predisposed from the outset towards an Anglo account of this history, in part because these women made themselves and their archives immediately available as resources for the project. And, whilst attempts have been made to draw upon documentary sources and oral accounts to incorporate the divergent experiences and subjectivities of ‘other’ women, the dissertation inevitably replicates to some extent invisibilities that have been characteristic of mainstream Australian feminist history. This can be considered reflective of a domestic violence services movement that, like society more broadly, has been dominated by the standpoint of Anglo women who have historically possessed a greater proportion of society’s resources, power, and cultural capital than their non-white, non-Anglo counterparts.

The other women who have remained silenced in the writing of this history are the residents and/or clients of domestic violence services. For a range of ethical and time-related reasons, including my own identity as a social worker with no experience of having been a client/resident/consumer of domestic violence services, these women were not invited to participate in the project, although, by happenstance, several women interviewed had experience as both residents and workers in domestic violence services. These accounts posed

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188 Attwood, p. 216.
189 Representatives from Victoria’s Aboriginal women’s refuge were invited onto the project reference group and some discussions were held with both Board and staff of this organisation, it did not result in membership of the reference group nor the recruitment of research participants.
190 At times throughout the thesis, I adopt the term ‘Anglo’ to emphasis that the refuge movement has been dominated by women from Anglo-Celtic Australian backgrounds. Whilst the category is overly generalist, I have used it to highlight the way that non-white and non-western women have been historically excluded from the refuge movement. Additionally, it has been commonly adopted by critics of this exclusion.
a counter-narrative to the dominant one constructed by workers—most significantly in questioning that refuges were always a ‘safe’ place for women.

This thesis is, therefore, not exempt from the omissions and silences that occur when some women construct history. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that, whilst this thesis in part aims to render women visible to history, in doing so it automatically makes other women and their experiences invisible. However, even if all women were somehow equally represented and empowered, the participants’ narratives in this dissertation could still not be considered as collectively ‘true’, for all sources can conceal, as well as reveal, the past. Despite these reservations, it is hoped that the extent and depth of research forming the basis of this thesis will enrich and complicate understandings of both the refuge movement and the women whose work made its achievements possible.
Chapter 2: The Varied Beginnings of the Victorian Refuge Movement, 1974–1979

The women’s refuge movement is a political movement standing against patriarchal attitudes and ideals that provide the foundation and cover for men who bash the women they marry … Its purpose is to alter power structures so that women are, and are recognized as being, politically, socially and economically equal with men.¹

This chapter explores the emergence of the Victorian women’s refuge movement, beginning in 1974. It outlines the social, political and institutional context within which refuges emerged in Victoria, and particular attention is paid to the significance of the women’s liberation movement. In Victoria, and nationally, radical feminist refuges were central to the foundation and development of the refuge movement. For this reason, the ambitions and activities of feminist activists from Melbourne’s women’s liberation movement who established the first women’s refuge, are examined in some detail. Feminist discourses emanating from the women’s liberation movement informed their ideas and actions in seeking to create societal change and institute special rights for women. However, the refuge movement as a whole was made up of women from diverse backgrounds, not all of whom identified with feminism, and, for this reason, this chapter includes the development of migrant and Aboriginal women’s refuges.

The relationship between feminism and the refuge movement constitutes a key theme of this thesis and is explored here in a way that reveals the variety of feminisms in refuges during the movement’s early years. For this reason, the beginnings of several individual refuges are examined, though no attempt is made to cover the origins of all refuges.

Refuge activists were informed by a range of feminist ideas—including socialist, radical, liberal and protectionist—which are discussed below, both in terms of how they influenced understandings of the problems facing women in refuge, and in terms of values that moulded the ways they structured their organisations and worked with women. For example, refuges affiliated with the women’s liberation movement, organised collectively and in accordance with their radical feminist goals of breaking down power relations. However, as this chapter makes evident, achieving ‘sisterhood’ in this context proved problematic, in part because of the diverse identities of the women involved.

The Context: ‘A Unique Time in Herstory’

The women’s refuge movement in Australia emerged within the context of a radically changing political, institutional, social and economic environment, both internationally and domestically. On the domestic front a climate of opposition to the Vietnam War provided a ‘focus for people’s radical political engagement’. Women’s liberation arose out of the ‘new left’ and anti-Vietnam war movements, and consciousness-raising groups developed in each capital city in the early 1970s, following similar developments overseas.

A new Labor government led by Gough Whitlam came to power nationally in 1972, influenced by European notions of social democracy, including women’s equality. The Whitlam government committed itself to ‘large-scale spending in the areas of health, housing, urban development and education’. One of the major innovations of the government was the establishment of a Women’s Affairs section in the Department of Home Affairs in 1973. In his speech at the inaugural meeting of the National Advisory Committee for International Women’s Day on 11 September 1974, Gough Whitlam outlined his position in relation to women’s unequal situation in Australian society: ‘We have to attack the social inequalities, the hidden and usually unarticulated assumptions which affect women not only in employment but in the whole range of their opportunities in life’.

Changing social and economic circumstances for women under the Whitlam government included reproductive control and expanded means of economic independence. Of particular importance in 1973 was legislation that provided income for sole supporting parents and, in 1975, ‘no fault’ divorce. All these factors were significant for the development of refuges because it meant that women were able to envision their lives in a new context of greater ‘political, social and economic rights than [their predecessors] of a century before’.

At the same time, a context of international activism in relation to violence against women, such as the development of a women’s refuge in London in 1971 and the subsequent publication of a book detailing its development in 1974, provided a significant catalyst for the beginning of the movement in Australia and, in particular, the development of Elsie.

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2 Jean Taylor, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 5 March 2008.
3 Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath, and Quartly, p. 300.
4 Curthoys, ‘Doing it’, p. 432.
5 Mendes, p. 25.
6 Dowse, p. 205.
7 Gough Whitlam, ‘International Women’s Day Priorities and Consideration’, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 4 December 1974, Frances Ryan papers, 100/211, no. 13, box 1, MWLA.
8 Murray, Refuge, p. 10.
Australia’s first feminist refuge, in Sydney the same year.\(^{10}\) The women’s liberation movement was of central significance to the development of women’s refuges and its emergence in Victoria will be explored in detail below. The emergence of refuges also related to the development of a new framework for thinking about women’s homelessness, which was also of central concern to feminists at this time. Before examining the way this happened in Victoria, it is necessary to situate the new feminist responses within the context of existing social policy and programs.

**Domestic Violence, Homelessness and History**

In the mid-1970s, the homelessness of women and what came to be known as domestic violence, were not issues that were acknowledged or tackled in any coherent way at a Commonwealth or state government policy level. Moreover, prior to the 1970s, what became known as domestic violence was commonly referred to as cruelty within the context of the law, and was one of the grounds by which women could seek divorce.\(^{11}\) Whilst legal remedies were available, in reality ‘many women would never have taken advantage of these laws because of the cost of litigation, fear of retribution, and shame at the failure of their marriage’.\(^{12}\) However, throughout the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, cruelty became increasingly unacceptable within marriage and legislation came to reflect changing attitudes to violence.\(^{13}\) Domestic violence had long been silenced throughout the preceding years for a number of reasons relating to the traditional rights of men to discipline their wives, the confinement of women to the home and the limitations of legal redress.\(^{14}\)

It was, however, still not discussed widely and publicly. The ‘new wave’ of young feminist activists, thus knew very little about these issues until the opening of women’s refuges because, as historian Janet Ramsay argues, ‘no political or policy discourse, including that of their own political tradition, spoke to them about this widespread violence’. As a result, many felt that they had ‘discovered’ the issue.\(^{15}\)

Problems facing women, including what came to be known as domestic violence, had been of concern to feminist activists from the late nineteenth century onwards, and historian Marilyn

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\(^{11}\) Murray, *Refuge*, p. 86.


\(^{13}\) Murray, *Refuge*, p. 89.

\(^{14}\) Murray, *Refuge*, p. 89.

\(^{15}\) Ramsay, p. 77.
Lake has documented five overlapping periods of Australian feminism, arguing that they ‘constitute an organised political movement’. However, until the women’s liberation movement, feminist activism, including that relating to domestic violence, had maintained as its cornerstone the moral and caring role of women whose rightful place was seen to be within the sphere of the family home. Domestic violence as a specific problem had remained mostly hidden in ‘the codes and limited strategies of the temperance movement’ and philanthropic societies, and, as a result, there were ‘few markers to assist the next generation of feminists in their identification of domestic violence’. Whilst earlier feminists framed the problem and measures to deal with it in ways that were different from their late twentieth century successors, they were nonetheless aware of and active in response to such violence.

Women’s refuges developed within the context of charity-based emergency accommodation for women. Religious organisations such as the Salvation Army and the Catholic Church had long provided some small-scale accommodation services for homeless women. Women who experienced domestic violence most certainly accessed such services. However, this was not publicly acknowledged and discussed. Mary Anderson Lodge (MAL) was one such place operated by the Salvation Army. It loosely aligned itself with the refuge movement after 1975 by accepting government funding, although it continued to operate relatively independently until more recent years. Catholic organisations such as the Good Shepherd sisters’ convent in Abbotsford and the Missionaries of Charity Women’s Shelter in Fitzroy also provided crisis accommodation to women, and the latter continues to operate today. But neither was aligned with the refuge movement and they generally saw their work as an extension of Christian duty, focusing on restoring families and defending women’s morality. Other non-denominational organisations such as Hanover Welfare Services identified the problems facing women as ‘human distress’ and argued that it was common to all those experiencing homelessness. None of these groups were in the business of critiquing the social structures within which women became homeless. Only after the beginnings of the refuge movement did some sections of the community begin publicly to acknowledge, that ‘the battered wife is a tremendous and very common problem’. And it was not until the development of feminist refuges that women’s homelessness was publicly and explicitly linked to the issue of domestic violence. Feminist refuges argued against the welfare-focused charity model, and responded with new ways of interpreting and dealing with the problem of domestic violence.

17 Ramsay, p. 81.
18 Hanover Welfare Services to Halfway House Committee, 7 June 1974, in WLHWH, Herstory, p. 11.
19 Age, 18 May 1974, in WLHWH, Herstory, p. 10.
The issue of homeless men dominated public discourse at this time and the main welfare services in Melbourne responded with large accommodation facilities. These included ‘The Gill’ run by the Salvation Army, and ‘Ozanam House’ auspiced by St Vincent De Paul. The Commonwealth government played no formal role in the provision of these services until ‘pressure by people from Victorian homelessness services on both political parties’ saw the establishment of a working party to investigate ‘the needs of homeless men and women’ following the election of the Whitlam Labor government. The working party’s recommendations formed the basis of the first Commonwealth legislation providing for homeless people passed in December 1974, the Homeless Persons Assistance Act (1974), and most of the recommendations were implemented under the national Homeless Persons Assistance Program (HPAP) in 1975. Notably, the working party had concluded that ‘women were not a significant part of the homeless population’, and argued that the government’s response to the problem should ‘give consideration to not segregating the sexes’. Thus the extent of women’s homelessness and its relationship to domestic violence remained unacknowledged.

**Victoria under Hamer**

The state of Victoria was also beginning to experience what would be a considerable transformation over the course of the decade. The Liberal state government underwent massive change in its political focus as a result of the election of Rupert Hamer as premier in 1972. Hamer was known as a socially progressive small ‘l’ Liberal, and was elected following the resignation of the conservative premier, Henry Bolte, after eighteen years in office. The Hamer government placed a high priority on the state’s provision of social welfare services. He also created an environment favourable to the promotion of women’s issues, and Penny Ryan was appointed adviser to the premier in 1975. However, this was short-lived, as conservative forces galvanised to ensure her removal. At the same time, in the context of International Women’s year, the Whitlam government appointed Elizabeth Reid as its first Women’s Adviser.

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20 Bullen, p. 47.
22 Report, p. 7.
23 Report, p. 29. My emphasis.
25 Sawyer and Simms, p. 173.
Hamer’s actions were supplemented by the flow-on effects of the Whitlam government’s progressive social policy initiatives under its Australian Assistance Plan (AAP), which radically increased Commonwealth government intervention in health, education, welfare and urban planning, as well as promoting the role of local government in social welfare provision. The South Australian Labor Party government had implemented similar policies under the pioneering premiership of its socially progressive leader, Don Dunstan.26 Throughout the latter half of the decade, Victoria followed South Australia’s lead, enacting a range of progressive legislative changes including the Equal Opportunity Act in 1978.

Victoria continued to implement Whitlam’s AAP following his dismissal in 1975 and the subsequent election of Malcolm Fraser, who headed a new conservative Liberal–National Party Coalition government. The AAP was embodied in the Family and Community Services (FACS) program, which came about as a result of a request to the Victorian Consultative Committee on Social Development by the then Minister for Social Welfare, Brian Dixon, in 1976.27 David Green was the director of regional services at this time in Victoria’s Department of Community Welfare Services (DCWS) and wrote the basis of the submission for continuing the AAP.28 According to Green, programs like FACS distinguished Victorian social welfare policy because they promoted ‘a continuation of a local planning perspective based around the regionalisation of social welfare’, which was combined with a new emphasis on ‘keeping the non-government organisations [and] the local councils in some kind of connection around community issues’.29 However, as Green concedes, even though FACS was a pale shadow of the AAP, it was a central reason why ‘Victoria was different’.30

The Victorian women’s refuge program, as it came to be called by the department, was administered under Green’s directorship within the new FACS program from the beginning of 1978. Green, and the soon-to-be appointed co-ordinator of the women’s refuge program, Rosi Lever, were in charge of its administration when the role and provision of social welfare were being conceived in new ways, moving from an individually focused response to an increasing awareness of structural issues. As Lever recalled, ‘David and I were committed to new service priorities that were focusing on more practical approaches rather than what were sometimes referred to at the time as “the triumph of the therapeutic”. He was ground-breaking in his

28 David Green, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 28 March, 2008.
29 Green interview.
30 Green interview.
work’. Finally, the impetus behind the government’s new approach to social welfare cannot be divorced from the movements for social change occurring within the wider community, including the women’s liberation movement, which strove to make public institutions more accountable to women. Former refuge activist Kaye Hargreaves recalls: ‘Public services were very much sort of like brick walls at the time … you can’t underestimate how remote and unaccountable the public institutions were’.

Women’s Liberation Movement

Women’s liberation consciousness-raising groups developed in each capital city in Australia during the early 1970s following similar developments overseas. They were a response to ‘unshakeable sexist assumptions and behaviour of the new left men’, as well as a reflection of international developments on theory and practice that inspired young women in Australia.

The women’s liberation movement demanded more than equality for women, and its focus shifted from demands relating to citizenship to women-centred rights. By the early 1970s, the central tenets of women’s liberation were the rights of women to abortion, free contraception and childcare and, by the middle of that decade, it had developed into a movement for social change and revolution. In a speech given on International Women’s Day in 1975, ‘Adriana’ outlined the newly developing ‘radical’ agenda in Melbourne:

It is more than just the basic reforms such as repeal of the abortion laws, free child minding centres, equal pay with minimum wages for women and no discrimination in education and employment opportunities that women’s liberationists seek; we seek an entire dissolution of those structures and those people that place women into a particular role in life: that predetermines what the definition of a woman is and what her place and function in society will be. To expose the sexist attitudes towards women is to engage in the process of demolishing the old attitudes and creating the new—this is our struggle of liberation.

By the early 1970s, no longer satisfied with the goals of citizenship and equality, and ‘armed with a university education and the pill’, Australian women began to demand sexual,

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31 Rosi Lever, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 30 June 2008.
33 Curthoys, ‘Doing it’, p. 432.
34 Curthoys, ‘Doing it’, p. 432.
35 Reade, p. 205.
36 Vashti’s Voice, no. 7, June-July 1974, p. 4, Ryan papers, box 3, MWLA.
37 Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath, and Quartly, p. 300.
economic and political freedom as well as equality. Simultaneously, they began to develop radically new and different woman-centred identities and lifestyles. Notably, domestic violence was not at first a part of the women’s liberation movement’s concerns.

For feminist historians and activists alike, women’s liberation provided a ‘flourishing intellectual environment’ and a new framework for interpreting women’s lived experiences. As Lake notes, it was an ‘intensively literary movement’ and new modes of feminist thinking sought to explain the what, why and how of women’s inequality. It gave rise to a feminist theory and scholarship that emphasised the patriarchal nature of society and, in particular, women’s sexuality. It emphasised notions of ‘woman’ and ‘sisterhood’ and highlighted women’s shared oppression under the ‘chains’ of patriarchy. This style of feminism became known as ‘radical’, and feminist refuge activists used it to theorise the nature of violence against women. Much feminist thought at this time was also heavily influenced by Marxist critiques of capitalism. Socialist feminism, as it came to be known, privileged the capitalist system and class over gender in explaining women’s oppression and focused its critique on the unpaid labour of women. Over time, socialist feminism fell out of step with radical feminist agendas partly because it was unable to account for the common oppression of women that cut across class lines.

While ‘decades of feminist activism have won women equal rights to participate in social, economic and political life in Australia’, as Murray reminds us, ‘equality has meant participating on men’s terms’. But the women’s liberation movement has been characterised as ‘a historical disjuncture in a centuries old activist tradition’, because at this moment in Australian history feminists rejected men’s terms, along with their forbears’ commitment to maternalist citizenship, and mounted a campaign overtly aimed at bringing about radical change. This was partly a consequence of the changing economic circumstances of a new generation of women, as Lake has noted. She has also argued that the transformation in women’s attitude to their sexuality was the most significant dividing line between feminists of the late twentieth century and all who went before. Janet Ramsay, however, stressed the centrality of women’s new-found employment opportunities, which meant that women could

39 Lake, Equal, p. 222.
42 Curthoys and Docker.
43 Murray, Refuge, p. 4.
44 Ramsay, p. 77.
45 Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath, and Quartly, p. 301
46 Lake, Equal, pp. 6–9.
now ‘expect to establish autonomous household(s)’, and could thus ‘reject the institutional dominance of marriage in women’s lives’. The rejection of marriage held particular significance for the refuge movement, one of its primary aims being to establish women in autonomous households.

The women’s liberation movement, for all these reasons, was able to destabilise seemingly fixed, uncontested and naturally occurring gender roles for women, particularly those relating to their sexuality and prescribed roles as wives and mothers. Essentialist ideas about gender were undermined in the process. The women’s liberation movement, then, had begun the process of politicising women’s identities. This had important implications for the development of the refuge movement because it enabled refuge activists to reconstruct the problems facing women in refuge in new and important ways.

**Women’s Liberation Centre**

Following the emergence of the women’s liberation movement in Melbourne, the first Women’s Liberation Centre (WLC) opened in Little Latrobe Street in March 1972. The centre came about in part because ‘it was obvious that the lack of a central place hindered the growth of the movement’. Melbourne’s WLC was more closely connected to working-class activism and trade unionism than its Sydney counterpart, and its members were often affiliated with the Communist Party. The Women’s Action Committee, for example, led by prominent Communist Party member and equal wage campaigner Zelda D’Aprano, played a central role in its establishment. The space provided a central meeting place for the various action groups that emerged, and it was also used as a forum for weekly discussion groups and for meetings to explore the meaning of women’s liberation. It established a phone contact, information and referral services point, as well as a drop-in and support centre for women. It allowed for enhanced communication between the various groups and facilitated the movement’s ability to organise and structure more effectively.

As well as providing a space for members of the women’s liberation movement to develop and coordinate their agendas and activities, the phone contact at the centre improved

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47 Ramsay, p. 77.
50 D’Aprano, ‘Herstory’.
51 *Women’s Liberation Newsheet*, no. 9, Melbourne 1975, Jan Chapman-Davis papers, 100/210, no. 12, box 1, MWLA.
52 *Women’s Liberation Newsheet*. 
communication between them and other women more broadly. Very quickly, according to an early account of the refuge movement, the precarious nature of many women’s circumstances was revealed through the constant phone calls from ‘women in crisis situations, requesting accommodation’. These desperate appeals propelled members of the movement into action to alleviate the range of ‘intolerable circumstances’ such women faced. As former WLHWH refuge activist Marie Rowan recalls:

[W]omen just came to the women’s centre seeking shelter and different women would take them home and that didn’t work. Partly it was simply a problem that needed solving and a problem that had been raised by feminism and/or feminists. The women’s liberation movement was talking about liberating women and women started liberating themselves and asking for help.

The need for a halfway house had been recognised by the women’s liberation movement since the foundation of the WLC, and some members had already begun accommodating women in their own homes. It was not only accommodation, however, that women were seeking; as Jean Taylor recalls, the ‘centre started getting a lot of calls for abortions and about rapes and domestic violence’.

Lesbians were a central driving force within the women’s liberation movement and, in particular, they provided an important impetus to the feminist refuge movement in Melbourne as well as nationally. As early as 1973, the Melbourne Radical Lesbians organised a consciousness-raising weekend in Sorrento. They identified various strategies to overcome being ‘invisible in this male oriented world’, and published a paper that canvassed the ‘establishment of women’s halfway houses and the opening of our own homes to women leaving parents and husbands who have nowhere to go’. Sharon Laura played a central role in initiating the Halfway House Group (HHG), and she recalls that it was at the Sorrento conference that she raised the ‘issue of the vulnerability of women’ and the need for ‘a safe place’. The role of lesbians in the movement was not without controversy, however, and prejudice was commonplace, leaving many feeling ‘alienated, discriminated against, and

54 Marie Rowan, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 6 June 2008.
55 Taylor interview.
56 Chris Sitka, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 1 May 2008.
58 ‘Radical-Lesbian’.
59 Sharon Laura, interviewed Jacqui Theobald, 15 October 2008.
generally ignored or made to feel invisible by our sisters’. However, the movement indisputably owed much to these women who were ‘on the vanguard of many women’s liberation movement actions’.

The action group that emerged within the WLC with the aim of providing a half-way house for women who needed it was just one in an explosion of women’s groups. By 1975, the WLC was home not only the HHG but also to the Women’s Abortion Action Coalition, the Women’s Health Collective, Women Against Rape, and the Lesbian Feminists, among many others.

The Halfway House Group

Activists from within the women’s liberation movement were central in establishing a committee to find a way forward for the proposed Halfway House. In April 1974, an initial meeting was held at the WLC and, soon after, a co-ordinating committee of eight women was elected. Later that month, the ‘halfway house committee’ was operating out of the WLC to ‘provide help and accommodation for women if and when they required it’. The close-knit group functioned as a collective and met every Monday night to build the financial, practical, and physical capacity needed to start a refuge. The HHG’s central mission was to provide women with accommodation and safety from men’s violence and, as Anne Summers recalls, this was also the case in the establishment of Elsie in Sydney: ‘we had to do something practical immediately to help women who were homeless or suffering from abuse at the hands of men’.

The discourse of radical feminism, with its emphasis on challenging patriarchy and women’s oppression, was central in shaping the ideas and actions of the HHG. However, there were variations between members in terms of how they became involved. Chris Sitka, for example, recalls that she had become radicalised after ‘reading women’s liberation literature and had decided to not follow the stereotype role’. Women’s liberation theory thus shaped the way that radical feminists like Sitka challenged dominant roles and norms for women, and the concept of a half-way house was part of this challenge, as were personal decisions like not

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60 ‘Statement from the Lesbian Feminists’, 1975, Women’s Liberation Centre papers, 100/174, no. 47, box 1, MWLA.
61 Personal correspondence, Jean Taylor, November 2007.
62 Women’s Liberation Newsheet.
64 Summers, Ducks, p. 316.
65 Sitka interview.
following prescribed roles for women and dress codes.66 From Sitka’s perspective, women’s liberation from men, and in particular from the institution of the family, constituted the group’s ‘core’ aim:

We saw the halfway house as a place for women to come once they decided they wanted to leave oppressive men and become independent, politically active women … And part of that of course was that men raped and bashed women … but … for us the central core concept was that we provided a political hot house where women could come as they left their families … whether they were married or young … [W]e wanted the liberation of women, and it wasn’t just economic, it was about a spiritual liberation.67

By contrast, for socialist feminists such as Hargreaves, involvement in the HHG was stimulated by concern about the structural inequalities facing women and, in particular, women’s homelessness. In a policy context dominated by men’s homelessness, she recalled feeling compelled to ask: ‘Where are the homeless women? … no-one could really answer that question … it was really a gap in the knowledge of our understanding of what was going on in society at that time’.68 It was with this in mind that she attended the first meeting of what would become the HHG. However, as Hargreaves discovered, those in attendance were primarily concerned to liberate women from oppressive relationships with men: ‘certainly accommodation was seen as an important issue but the nature of the relationships that women were in was really the driving force’.69

With a slightly different perspective, founding HHG member Sharon Laura recalled that her involvement stemmed from being ‘radicalised’ by involvement in the ‘anti-war movement’,70 and experiences that heightened her awareness of the vulnerability of women:

I’d met young women who were in gaol … under exposure to “moral danger”. I had a very strong sense of the vulnerability of young women [and] because of my family background, I had a very strong sense of the abuse that women could suffer, that there was no place for women or young girls to go to. Because of all of that, there was a sense that there needed to be… [somewhere] … that women could be safe … So I suppose there were a lot of personal things that were driving my position.71

66 Sitka interview.
67 Sitka interview.
68 Hargreaves interview.
69 Hargreaves interview.
70 Laura interview.
71 Laura interview.
By contrast, Sitka did not recall whether ‘many of the women in my particular little radical group had talked about being bashed by their fathers or their mothers being bashed so it probably wasn’t in our personal experience’.  

Whether their aims derived from women’s liberation, homelessness or safety, the women who made up the HHG were predominantly young, Anglo and able-bodied. For these women, and many others of the women involved in the women’s liberation movement, gender was a more oppressive structure than class or race. They rarely considered how their actions and ideas might impact on women from different backgrounds. Indeed, they focused their attention on minimising difference and promoting the unity of all women as sharing a common oppression under patriarchy.

The issue of women’s homelessness and subjection to violence was new to them, and like much of the rest of society, they were staggered by its extent. As Sitka recounts: ‘I’m sure I didn’t know how widespread it was. I knew it in theory but not in practice and so probably we were a bit overwhelmed about … the extent of the violence’.  

However, as the collective grew, and other women came to work at the refuge, first-hand experiences of ‘unhappy marriages or home life situations’ became more frequent.  

These women had been through ‘intolerable domestic crises, and knew that there were many other women who were in contact with the movement who were going through the same ordeal, and were trapped in their situation’. It is clear that the lived experience of violence and abuse by men was a part of the experience of many women who became involved in the refuge movement at its beginnings.

The HHG was influenced by the development of refuges interstate and overseas. Indeed, Sitka had been directly involved in the squatting that preceded the establishment of ‘Elsie’ in Sydney. In the same year, women had spoken out in Sydney at the Women against a Violent Society Conference on International Women’s Day, again revealing their many stories of violence, as well as the grossly inadequate responses of the legal system.  

By September in Melbourne, a rape crisis centre had opened in Collingwood as a result of the work undertaken

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72 Sitka interview.
73 Sitka interview.
76 Sitka interview.
by the radical feminist collective, Women Against Rape (WAR).\textsuperscript{78} The centre was operated by volunteers and run by the Women’s Health Collective until December 1975.\textsuperscript{79}

The emergence of refuges overseas was well known at this time, and their activities were receiving publicity in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{80} As Taylor acknowledges, ‘We didn’t just start it up out of nothing. Already, there were refuges in England’.\textsuperscript{81} Movements were also developing in other parts of the UK, and in the US and Canada.\textsuperscript{82} In the US, for example, ‘shelters’ were formed across the country during the 1970s and early 1980s, and, whilst they had diverse organisational beginnings, ‘radical feminist ideology … profoundly influenced their policies and practices’.\textsuperscript{83} For Canada, Gillian Walker has documented how women in Vancouver, ‘worked to make women’s experiences of beating, brutality, and neglect … a matter of public and political concern’.\textsuperscript{84} Similarly, S. Laurel Weldon has shown that ‘women’s groups were identified as the catalyst for government action’ in the eight nations most responsive to the problem of domestic violence’.\textsuperscript{85}

There were eleven refuges operating across the country by mid-1975,\textsuperscript{86} and members of the HHG knew they ‘were being flooded with women and children seeking shelter’.\textsuperscript{87} This meant that they were reluctant to squat in order to obtain a house, even though the idea was discussed and explored at some length, lest they be ‘swamped with desperate women needing help’.\textsuperscript{88} Instead, they were determined to be ‘very well organised before we start’, to avoid ‘add[ing] to the misery these women have suffered already by our mismanagement’.\textsuperscript{89} They thus set about the task of recruiting people to fill the house rosters and creating an extensive list of women who would be prepared to open their homes to women and children. They publicised a central number and began receiving calls well before the refuge was operating.

\textsuperscript{79} The development of the rape crisis centre was stalled when the State Health Department refused to provide Commonwealth funds earmarked for the service. This arose from WAR collective’s concerns about compromising their objectives. This early battle with the state meant that the development of services for victims of rape and sexual assault in Victoria was slowed, and this was still evident in 1990 when Victoria had less than half the funded services of NSW; See Orr, ‘Sexual Assault’, pp. 56–58.
\textsuperscript{81} Taylor interview.
\textsuperscript{82} Walker; Reinelt.
\textsuperscript{83} Reinelt, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{84} Walker, pp. 21–35.
\textsuperscript{85} Weldon, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{86} McGregor and Hopkins, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{87} WLHWH, \textit{Herstory}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{88} ‘Halfway House’, \textit{Vashti’s Voice}, no. 7, June–July 1974, Ryan papers, box 3, MWLA.
\textsuperscript{89} ‘Halfway House’.

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Initially, HHG planned to establish a number of houses but it quickly became apparent that the attainment of even one would be more difficult than they foresaw. They petitioned various bodies, and hundreds of letters were sent out asking for funds. However, this proved unsuccessful and they very quickly began looking to the state for assistance, submitting various proposals to government. The group’s first submission in August 1974 included $100,000 for buying a suitable house, and was sent to a number of government departments. Simultaneously, the group publicised their activities through women journalists at the Age and the Herald and began to receive community support. It was only after members handed out leaflets at a WEL forum, however, that a member offered the use of her house in Kew for twelve months, rent free. The committee immediately launched into action and again took a meticulous approach to organising before the refuge opened. People were recruited for transport and baby-sitting rosters, and a long list of rules was devised for roster women. The group developed a manifesto, later renamed the Halfway House principles, in order to ensure that the house operated as part of the women’s liberation movement and was consistent with their ‘specific political strategies’. On 23 September 1974, the HHG opened the first women’s refuge in Victoria, the WLHWH, operating entirely on donations and volunteer efforts for its first thirteen months. The house was overwhelmed with demand and in nine months they had received ‘over 350 requests and accommodated over 100 in the house’. They had also resorted to accommodating ‘about two dozen in our own homes’, and approximately one third of the women seeking help were unable to be housed.

**Feminisms and the Refuge Movement: Difference, Equality and Protectionism**

[O]ne by one from ’74 … refuges popped up, not connected at all, grew like topsy from a whole variety of different perspectives … you can imagine the diversity and the disparity of the people that were actually working there.

Refuges would soon become central to the women’s movement’s response to the problem of domestic violence. In Victoria, and nationally, radical feminist refuges were highly influential in both the initiation and the further development of the refuge movement. However, refuges in all states were characterised by varied philosophies, and not all shared radical feminist

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90 WLHWH, Herstory, p. 13.
91 WLHWH, Herstory, p. 14.
92 WLHWH, Herstory, p. 15
95 Wendy Austin, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 15 October 2007.
beliefs, particularly in the early years. Some were motivated by religious compassion. Others drew on a variety of feminist philosophies, goals and strategies, including those others championed by an earlier generation of feminists. The continuity of these past feminist ideas, along side the new, characterised the work of the 70s refuge movement in Victoria.

**Women’s Liberation Halfway House**

I think the Halfway House collective was one of the fulcrum’s from which feminism was moving the world.\(^{96}\)

WLHWH opened in September 1974. Its objectives were heavily shaped by radical feminist philosophy with its emphasis on patriarchy and women’s oppression, from which all issues facing women, including violence, were seen to be derived. Above and beyond its focus on liberating women economically and personally, WLHWH activists sought to create societal change and were firmly committed to the notion of difference and special rights for women, identifying the ‘intolerable situations’ women faced as ‘an overall social problem’.\(^{97}\) The assessment, and the initial aims and objectives of the HHG were inseparable from the subject positions of the women who created them.

In November 1974, the WLHWH sent its first submission for funding to the federal Hospital and Health Services Commission and, by February 1975, after much lobbying, they were given an interim grant of $14,600. These were federal funds administered through the Victorian State Health Department and were designed to cover costs until alternative funding was made available through the federal government’s HPAP. However, administrative hold-ups prevented them from receiving any of the funds until 28 May 1975. The refuge committee quickly learnt that ‘the state government had no precedent for dealing with groups like ours and … [we] felt that they viewed us with suspicion, if not downright hostility. The feeling was mutual’.\(^ {98}\) This distrust among WLHWH refuge workers was accentuated by the department’s inability to quickly process and distribute interim funds. Ongoing bureaucratic bungling seemed to induct lack of care and commitment to the refuge program and resulted in the refuges’ applications for funding being lost on more than one occasion.\(^ {99}\) This initial engagement with the state government set the scene for a somewhat turbulent future relationship.

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\(^{96}\) Rowan interview.


The WLHWH, set a precedent for future feminist refuges in undertaking an approach to supporting women and structuring their organisation that was radically different from the existing charitable institutions and all of those that had come before. Early on, WLHWH refuge was seen to offer ‘a point of contact between the women’s movement and women in acute, desperate and dangerous situations’. Its principal aims were not only to ‘offer emergency accommodation and food’ but to empower the women coming into refuges and ‘enable them to regain their confidence, re-establish their identities as worthwhile individual human beings, and establish new lives in which, in the long term, they can be free and independent’.

Support was thus based on enabling women to achieve independence in relation to their practical needs as well as the potential for developing of new identities as women. The emphasis was on empowerment, and their intention was to provide a model of support based on self-help principles: ‘We do not think at this stage that we are capable of providing permanent homes for women. We can only assist women as they attempt to help themselves’. On another level, they also tried to support women to ‘find themselves’, to resist and ‘break out’ of their traditional roles. As Sitka wrote at the time:

Originally we envisaged the Halfway House as being a place where women who had decided to leave their previous situation could find the space and the time to find themselves, where they could get the space and time and support with which to more confidently shape their new lives.

It is difficult to point to a unified set of aims, with a collective of up to 100 women, and different feminisms in operation from the beginning, but it is clear that ‘it wasn’t enough just to run the refuge’. The WLHWH was concerned with changing the structure and nature of society so that women could ‘choose to live with or without a man, with or without children, with dignity, economic security and independence’. This approach was directly shaped by the radical and socialist feminist philosophies of the women’s liberation movement. As

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102 Hargreaves, ‘Halfway House’, p. 36.
103 Members of the WLHWH produced two short films titled Women Break Out in 1981 and Not Take it Any More in 1976. Their purpose was to both document the work of the refuge but also to promote the work that the refuge was contributing to the wider women’s movement in relation to enabling women to establish new and independent lives.
104 Chris Sitka ‘Where is the Halfway House Heading?’ 4 April 1975, Chris Sitka private papers, in possession of Jacqui Theobald.
105 Geddes interview.
former WLHWH activist Di Otto recalls, ‘[W]e did see ourselves as changing ourselves and the world. And we were very hopeful about being able to do that in a relatively short amount of time’. Such change was a central concern of the WLHWH, which aimed to provide much more than support and independence for women; they would also promote the right of women to live and be different from men. This emphasis was what clearly differentiated the work of the WLHWH from that of other women’s refuges.

As an extension of their radical feminist philosophy, refuge activists rejected traditional forms of charitable welfare provision, working in opposition to the professional institutions providing charity to women and children such as religious and welfare groups. Otto recalls:

[W]e saw ourselves as opposed to the “welfare” state, that we were going to create a different kind of assistance, where women were treated as sisters—as equals—and not as objects of social work.

They critiqued the role of traditional welfare organisations, as serving to reinforce ‘the role of women as “female” i.e. mother, wife, housekeeper, passive, selfless, dependent’, and inevitably leading to their ‘continued dependence on intolerable situations’. They would instead support women to ‘determine their own lives and recognise their self identity’. This rejection of traditional forms of welfare intervention was also embraced by other women’s refuges that emerged soon after the WLHWH and shared their view that the institutional context of support services for women was inadequate and a new approach was needed. As Hargreaves recollects:

So a woman … says she was in an intolerable domestic situation … who could she turn to? Doctors, lawyers, priests, psychiatrists, social workers, police … we explored all these sort of institutions and avenues and found that they were all just dead ends as far as giving the woman some help to get out of the situation.

Violence against women by their husbands, combined with economic insecurity, was the most prominent issue facing women residents. But in addition to responding to their very real and immediate physical, psychological and emotional needs, the refuge would also aim to ‘show that these intolerable situations are widespread, the result of the sort of society we live in’.

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107 Otto interview.
108 Otto interview.
111 Hargreaves, ‘Halfway House’, p. 35.
112 Hargreaves interview.
113 Hargreaves, ‘Halfway House’, p. 35.
Another important part of their work was to politicise, critique and make public the conditions that created the need for refuges. As Di Otto recalls:

So we saw ourselves as involved in a movement for the liberation of women and we saw the violence that women were experiencing in their family situations as something that needed to be exposed and become known about.\(^{114}\)

WLHWH was structured according to a collective model of functioning that encouraged the full participation of residents in decision making. This approach was intended to ‘close the gap between provider and recipient’.\(^{115}\) Collectivity was seen as the only ideologically consistent form of organising for women’s liberationists because it was believed to remove oppressive hierarchical structures and to foster democratic decision making:

We work as a collective because hierarchical organisation induces apathy and depersonalisation, and robs people of the right to become involved and responsible in whatever capacity they choose. We don’t want to perpetuate the system whereby the fate of the many is decided by a few. We want to develop an organisational structure which is democratic and non-authoritarian, so that all members of the collective can share equal responsibility for its functioning.\(^{116}\)

The idea of collectivity, as with many other women’s liberation auspiced organisations, was firmly established by the group in 1975 in order to ‘establish ourselves as feminists, as a political, not a charitable group’.\(^{117}\) Western Region Women’s Refuge followed suit when it opened in 1976 by employing only feminist workers.\(^{118}\) The refuge was initially funded by the Essendon local council under the HPAP. The council had tried to push for a committee of management and, as a result, the refuge attempted to cut all ties in defence of its commitment to a women-only collective structure.\(^{119}\) An extension of this philosophy was the development of employment policies that limited workers periods of tenure to twelve months. As former WLHWH activist Vig Geddes recalls: ‘[Y]ou normally only had the job for a year, because it was seen that this opportunity to be paid for your political work should be shared around’.\(^{120}\)

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\(^{114}\) Otto interview.

\(^{115}\) Smith, p. 29.


\(^{117}\) WLHWH, Herstory, p. 34.

\(^{118}\) Women’s Liberation Newsletter, March 1976, p. 6, Frances Ryan papers, box 3, MWLA; Booklet, ‘Western Region Women’s Refuge Group: Aims, Structures and Policies’, Melbourne, August 1976, Burrows papers, UMA.

\(^{119}\) Women’s Liberation Newsletter, p. 6.

\(^{120}\) Geddes interview.
Differences amongst women at the WLHWH (and other women’s refuges) meant that collective processes did not create the seamless sisterhood they had intended. In particular, differences in class, race and sexuality between women meant that there were varied experiences for those involved. Acknowledging these differences at the time, however, was resisted. The propensity of second-wave feminism to adopt a ‘universalisation of white middle-class women’s lives as representatives of the female experience’, 121 has been well documented. Radical feminism, in particular, employed its own essentialist notion of ‘women’, which meant that different experiences and identities were minimised. As Otto reflects:

> It was about combining our energies and combining our resources for the collective good really and resisting hierarchies and divisive differences between us. The downside of that is that we were then reluctant to acknowledge that there was also value in our differences and capabilities and resources and so on.122

Problems relating to engagement with residents also emerged for political activists, some of whom found it confronting ‘listening to those terrible stories’ and ‘tried to keep ourselves distant’. 123 This also resulted from the fact that many of the women in refuge were ‘working class’. 124 On this topic, former WLHWH activist Ulla Svensson remembers:

> There always was that gap …. that we (who attended Monday night collective meetings, the political activists) were successful and we had jobs, we earned money, we had our own house … we had never been beaten … At that time I don’t think we understood that we were not sisters in the same situation … [but] … I think we sincerely tried to relate to the residents as “sisters”.125

Moreover, she added, many residents were ‘scared’ by radical lesbian activities, and this generated a further ‘barrier to sisterhood’. 126 Pat Russell was a resident, and later worker, at the WLHWH at this time and recalled that collective processes could be intimidating for residents, and the divisions between themselves and ‘office workers’ could operate in such a way so as to mirror the relationships they were trying to escape:

> It was very frightening to speak in front of twenty other people that you don’t really know … [W]hen you come into a place, to you, they’re the bosses. They’ve taking over your husband’s role virtually … What they say goes more or less … women

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121 Ang, p. 58. Original emphasis.
122 Otto interview.
124 Taylor interview.
125 Svensson interview.
126 Svensson interview.
[that] come in [to refuge] think they're in charge, they're going to make these rules and regulations and that's it.\(^{127}\)

Furthermore, as Otto remarks, the support needs of residents were not considered with the same level of rigour as the collectives desire to enable women to ‘become one of us’.\(^{128}\)

Similarly, Geddes reflected on the consequences for residents when political work took priority: ‘it probably wasn’t very good for those women in a lot of ways, and we didn’t really reflect on our practice much in terms of what it was like for them’.\(^{129}\)

On this subject, former WLHWH activist Irena Davis remarked: ‘I don’t think they took much time to think about the wonders of feminism … I think some came around to it once their life got sorted a bit’.\(^{130}\)

Barriers to ‘sisterhood’ also stemmed from the policies and practices of WLHWH, and some later refuges. Sitka reflected, for example, on the heterosexual focus that refuges developed, which made her ‘angry’ because she perceived them to have evolved from ‘a place where all sisters were welcome to be helped by all other sisters’ to one where access became ‘narrowly focused … [on] … heterosexual women abused physically by men … even though lesbians were… [a] …large proportion of the group who set it up’.\(^{131}\)

She also expressed her dismay at the involvement over time of women in the collective who ‘weren’t radical feminists’, who she considers to have hijacked their revolutionary agenda by focussing their work on ‘individuals’ instead of ‘politics’.\(^{132}\)

However, as Sitka concedes, this exclusion was less intentional than a result of a lack of resources and awareness: ‘at that time, we didn’t really have a concept of lesbian domestic violence because we were … so focused on male dominance of women’.\(^{133}\)

Women of migrant backgrounds were also discriminated against, and this was formally written into policy as is evident in the ‘Doing Roster’ manual for WLHWH: ‘If the woman does not know enough English to communicate, we cannot take her in’.\(^{134}\)

It is also evident that ‘racism … was openly acknowledged among migrant women and Aboriginal women’.\(^{135}\)

Indeed, Rowan recalls that migrant women ‘wouldn’t feel comfortable coming [to refuge]
because they were surrounded by Anglos’. By contrast, Rowan recalled her own experience as ‘a fabulous time to be alive and a fabulous time to be a woman’. Murdolo has contended that, within the white women’s movement, migrant women often faced ‘judgements ... about their feminism, and the assumption was made that they did not measure up to the image of the feminist activist and refuge worker’. This image, Murdolo contends ‘was based on an unacknowledged series of white Anglo-feminist core values’. Such values are implicit in the narrative of activists like Rowan, which reveal that migrant women were expected to conform to an ‘Australian’ way of life upon entry into refuge:

The women who left ethnic communities ... were the women who were able and willing to say, ‘I don’t want to belong to that community ... I’m an Australian, and I want to live as an Australian. And I want to bring my children up as Australian’. And we could resettle them in an Anglo community, and help them set up a support system. If they were those women who couldn’t bear to not be in touch with mum and sister and Aunty Mary or whoever, that was extremely hard.

Implicit in Rowan’s narrative is the assumption that migrant women only became real ‘Australians’, after they rejected their cultural heritage and adopted an ‘Anglo’ way of life. Similarly, Sitka’s memories, as outlined above, are shaped by her identity as a white, middle-class, radical, lesbian feminist. Indeed, her recollection of a utopian sisterhood that was subsequently ‘taken over’ by conservative forces does not reflect the experiences of other women for whom class and/or ethnicity shaped their experiences in less positive ways.

Yet how to overcome divides between women was the subject of much debate in the WLHWH collective. And there were successful endeavours to bridge social class differences. Svensson recounts, for example, how on her rostered nights at the refuge she would arrive ‘with two kits ... one was a handyman kit to repair fallen-off door handles and kitchen cupboard handles ... the other was a contraception kit to show residents how not to get pregnant’. This provided Svensson with a successful way of interacting with residents, some of whom became more ‘accepting of her than some other politicos’. This acceptance also related to the fact that Svensson adopted a non-judgmental approach, and chose not to

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136 Rowan interview.
137 Rowan interview.
138 Murdolo, p. 300.
139 Murdolo, p. 300.
140 Rowan interview.
142 Svensson interview.
143 Svensson interview.
‘preach’ at residents when they failed to take up the aspirations of some radical feminist collective members.\textsuperscript{144} Other activists sought to minimise differences between themselves and residents in other ways. Taylor recounts how, whilst she was working in an inner-city feminist refuge: ‘residents came to my house for dinner often’.\textsuperscript{145}

Breaking down divisions between women, and empowering residents, was achieved in a range of other ways. As Otto recounts:

Some residents were extraordinary and did join the collective and participated like anyone else. Some became paid workers at the refuge—which was our hope really, to have former residents as workers, because that was one way to dismantle the welfare model of the expert and the needy person—to mix those people up and not accept those two categories.\textsuperscript{146}

Russell believes that her experience at refuge was just as empowering as it was intimidating, and, in particular, the communal focus facilitated a shared consciousness-raising between residents:

[P]eople talked … and you realised that you weren’t the only one in that situation. Because you thought when you went in there [that] “I must be a bad person I don’t know anybody else who’s living like that”.\textsuperscript{147}

Similarly, Rowan believes the communal model created a space where women could share their experiences, often for the first time, as an ‘experiment’, learning from each other:

I quite liked being on nights because … people would talk … about their lives and their feelings and their hopes and their dreams and their fantasies… [W]e weren’t just there providing a service we were providing consciousness raising … the idea that the 50s model of the woman by herself in a home taking care of herself and her husband was challenged very directly … [W]e just created a household where you can talk about anything, there is no privatisation of oppression anymore.\textsuperscript{148}

As a direct result of their aims to promote the rights of women to live and be different from men, WLHWH opened its doors with the stated aim of supporting any woman in need for whatever reason. Though violence was certainly a part of their understanding of the circumstances facing women, they were also motivated by the fact that ‘women were not

\textsuperscript{144} Svensson interview.
\textsuperscript{145} Taylor interview.
\textsuperscript{146} Otto interview.
\textsuperscript{147} Russell interview.
\textsuperscript{148} Rowan interview.
always looking for an escape from abusive domestic situations’ but were often ‘needing somewhere to stay for a while, often in desperate circumstances … A significant proportion of them were young girls with no-where to go’.\textsuperscript{149} Most significantly, WLHWH was committed to offering support to all women, regardless of their circumstances, and the criteria for women to access the refuge were very broad. They included: ‘intolerable circumstances, including financial difficulties and insecurities, fear of an unknown situation, lack of support and acceptance from the community … We hope to accommodate any woman who requires emergency shelter, whatever the reason’.\textsuperscript{150} In its beginnings, then, WLHWH was a response to the needs of all ‘desperate women’.

As well as seeking to expose the issues they were dealing with at the refuge, and in line with the objective of social change, the collective mounted a series of political campaigns. They initiated action groups in response to the issues women in refuge were dealing with. Some of these issues related to income support, the law, children and housing, and they assumed a central focus in the refuge movement’s political activity for well over a decade.\textsuperscript{151} The lack of housing options for women in refuge was publicly exposed by the WLHWH housing action group. A campaign was initiated just two months after the refuge was opened and involved squatting in a block of nine vacant flats in an inner-city suburb of Melbourne. The squat lasted for several years, and during that time, the flats were used as emergency accommodation for women exiting the refuge. Their main aim was to publicise the lack of well-located and affordable accommodation for women.\textsuperscript{152} Hargreaves, who played a leading role in the campaign, recalled their motivation to politicise the vacant housing:

It was at the time when we realised that women needed housing, they couldn’t just stay at the refuge forever … and we were starting to put demands on the housing commission to accommodate women, and we found out there were a lot of vacant flats … while women desperately needed homes. It was just such an obvious contradiction. One which we thought we could use politically. So we decided to move in.\textsuperscript{153}

Residents’ lived experiences drove the work of the refuge activists at WLHWH, just as the ideology of the women’s liberation movement continued to shape their feminist approach. The beginnings of the refuge movement, and the development of WLHWH, inaugurated a significant period of feminist resistance and struggle in Victoria with the clear aim of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{149} WLHWH, \textit{Herstory}, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{150} ‘Halfway House Principles’.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Victorian Women’s Refuges Group, \textit{Women and Housing}, Housing Action Group, Melbourne 1979.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Australian Union of Students, ‘Public Housing Policy’, \textit{National Weekly}, 18 October 1977, Jan Chapman-Davis papers, box 1, MWLA.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Hargreaves interview.
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undermining the gendered social order and empowering women facing homelessness and violence.

**CO-AS-IT: Migrant Women and Feminism**

In 1975, the first migrant women’s refuge was established under the auspices of Comitato Assistenza Italiana (Co-As-It)—translated as the Italian Association of Assistance. By 1978, Co-As-It was receiving national refuge program funding. The following account of the refuge’s beginnings is largely based on the narrative of Vernon Hillman, the first worker at Co-As-It to run the women’s refuge. Acknowledging this part of the refuge movement’s history is imperative because, as Murdolo points out, neither the establishment of the migrant women’s refuge in 1975, nor its three-year struggle to obtain government funding, has been noted in any other accounts of the women’s refuge movement before her own.

Murdolo contends that Co-As-It refuge was established ‘in response to the perceived gaps in the provision of welfare service to women, on the initiative of immigrant feminists who were working as social workers’. The account provided here broadens this analysis, and considers the influence of Hillman—a non-immigrant and non-feminist social worker—alongside that of WLHWH as other catalysts for the beginning of Co-As-It’s refuge. It documents how the refuge provided an important support service to Italian women in the community that was aligned in its philosophy and practice with existing traditional welfare organisations.

Hillman was employed as a senior social worker with Co-As-It in the early 1970s. She recalls that the organisation had advertised for ‘a social worker’ to provide generalist support ‘for Italian family welfare’. Not being Italian, she quickly learned to speak the language by taking ‘Italian lessons and try[ing] to become fluent’. Hillman subsequently worked for the organisation for over twenty years. As soon as it was operational, Co-As-It dealt with ‘every possible problem’ facing Italian families, including the particular problems facing women, such as domestic violence, an issue they were ‘dealing with all the time’. However, the

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155 Murdolo, p. 261.
156 Murdolo, p. 279.
158 Hillman interview.
159 Hillman interview.
extent of the problem had not previously been identified because their work had focused on individuals and the concept of a refuge was something that they ‘hadn’t thought of before’.\textsuperscript{160}

As a result of her work at Co-As-It, Hillman was inspired to attend the ‘Women and Madness’ conference held at the University of Melbourne in August 1974 because it was concerned with the themes of ‘women having trouble with their husbands … or having no housing’.\textsuperscript{161} She recalled being ‘enchanted’ by the ‘fierce’ nature of proceedings, and summoned the courage to approach the women speakers from WLHWH:

I was absolutely enthralled by it … they stood up one after the other and they really went for it. I was speechless and I didn’t dare interrupt and it was such a shock to me, and I had never heard such … swearing and carrying on … So I got my courage and went to the woman who was running it and I said, “I am from Co-As-It”, and they said, “Co-As-It, what’s the good of that place? … We can’t cope with all these Italians and their kids and we don’t know anything about them, and we can’t feed them … and we haven’t got enough money to get special food and we haven’t got enough staff”. And then they said, “If you call yourself a social worker, why don’t you bloody well do something about the Italian community?” And so I said “I will” … They just said, “We can’t cope with the Australians, let alone all these,” and I had to stop them saying W-O-G-S. But that was flashed about a bit.\textsuperscript{162}

Hillman was immediately ‘made to swing into action’. She knew from her own work that Italian women were experiencing ‘domestic violence’ and, following the conference, that their needs were not being met by the limited existing services. She was also now aware of the existing racist attitudes towards them.\textsuperscript{163}

At this point, and with the support of the Co-As-It board of management committee, Hillman began the process of establishing a refuge. The refuge was founded in 1975 and funded in the first instance by Co-As-It. The property was provided by an estate agent who sat on their committee. It took two years before the refuge received government funding in the refuge program.\textsuperscript{164} At its outset, Hillman was the sole worker, and recalls the anxiety it caused her when she accommodated the first three women in the Carlton refuge: ‘I was sick with worry

\textsuperscript{160} Hillman interview.
\textsuperscript{161} Hillman interview.
\textsuperscript{162} Hillman interview.
\textsuperscript{163} Hillman interview.
about them and thinking, “Oh Lord, I hope the husband hasn’t found them”. It was a terrific responsibility and a terrific worry, but I had the committee very firmly behind me’.165

The work of Co-As-It women’s refuge was based on the traditional welfare approach that shaped the broader organisation. It offered women professional welfare services that were informed by dominant notions of women’s roles in society relating to motherhood and the family. It also operated on a hierarchical model with men on the committee, whose inclusion, they fought to maintain in opposition to feminist refuges that operated as women-only collectives.166 Their focus at the refuge was on reunification of women with their families and partners where possible. As Hillman recalls:

Basically we thought why we were there was to help women to independence if they wanted it or help them to go back to their families, which was the thing that we hoped that we could do the most, because the children were involved and we offered guidance and things like that. So our philosophy you would have to say was, if we thought there was any faint chance, get them together. And we had private places where they could be together, and talk to each other.167

The Co-As-It refuge developed a close and supportive working relationship with the staff at Mary Anderson Lodge because the two refuges were based on reasonably similar philosophical positions and provided each other with support and camaraderie. Hillman recounts a meeting of the three initial refuges, illustrating the diversity of women in a visual context:

I always sat next to the old girl that was the head of the Salvation Army … She was a very wonderful woman and she was rather staid … and one meeting she dug me in the ribs … and she said, looking down at all the women’s lib who had no shoes and not very much at all underneath, and she said, “Mrs Hillman, you and I are the only ones around this table wearing brassieres”.168

The lack of history telling in relation to migrant activism and the refuge movement is evidenced by the fact that very few interviewees from this period were able to recall that Co-As-It was actually operating a refuge during the mid-1970s. Furthermore, it is evident from Hillman’s account that migrant women were often excluded from access to refuges on the basis of their ethnicity. These policies of exclusion are often mis-remembered or not

165 Hillman interview.
166 Lever interview.
167 Hillman interview.
168 Hillman interview.
remembered at all, particularly by non-migrant interviewees, many of whom insisted that refuges did not deliberately discriminate. This reflects the effects on interviewee’s memories of their subjectivities, and is mirrored in dominant accounts of the movement, which have silenced these events.

**Maroondah Halfway House and Doncare Women’s Refuge, Feminism and Equality**

In contrast to WLHWH, other refuges established during the 1970s were characterised by more moderate feminist philosophies. One such refuge was Maroondah Halfway House (MHWH), which opened in September 1975, and Doncare Women’s Refuge (later named Brenda), which opened in 1978. These refuges focused on the individual needs of women. They sought to promote equality by working with women on an individual level rather than stressing the structural issues relating to women’s experiences of violence. This included supporting them to achieve economic independence and autonomous households; however, they were less concerned with changing the structures of society and prescribed roles for women. This facilitated learning on the run, as former MHWH worker Kate Coleman recalls, ‘we all flew by the seat of our pants, there was no guidebook, there was no job description, and we were all learning’.169

MHWH was initiated by members of the Nunawading Legal Service, opened earlier that year as part of a Whitlam government initiative. A key role was played by Erskine Roden, a local solicitor who organised a public meeting to establish a women’s refuge in the area.170 Roden generated awareness of the issues facing women who came to him for help in relation to their violent husbands.171 The legal centre then teamed with a range of women from the local community in the east, including members of the Women’s Electoral Lobby, to form MHWH group.172 WEL’s politics were focused on the achievement of equality for women and what is now often referred to as liberal feminism.173 Notably, Kate Coleman recounts, the group was also supported by men, one of whom ‘bought a house and said “use it to run a refuge”’. The refuge subsequently ‘got some funding and opened early September 1975’.174 The MHWH

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169 Kate Coleman, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 22 July 2008.
170 Judy Johnson, focus group by Jacqui Theobald, 27 November 2007.
172 Coleman interview.
174 Coleman interview.
group was motivated by the fact that WLHWH house ‘was up and running’, combined with a climate of growing ‘concern about women in the community’.175

The refuge was also supported by a broad range of women in the community, including local councillors like Gracia Baylor176 and many other committed women volunteers.177 Through the Local Government Women’s Association, over which Baylor presided for a number of years in the early 1970s, women councillors across Victoria ‘were drawn together’ to respond to ‘discrimination issues against women’.178 As a result of their public position, they were well aware of problems like domestic violence ‘that were not being addressed or being dealt with in any proper way’.179 Baylor, however, acknowledged that she could not recall where the refuge movement originated: ‘to be honest, I can’t remember who first thought of it, the idea of a refuge, and the concept of a house’.180 Baylor’s lack of recollection provides evidence of women’s activism in history being rendered invisible. It also emphasises the importance of documenting events as significant as the formation of the refuge movement. The centrality to it of the women’s liberation movement, which provided the impetus for other community groups such as the MHWH, might otherwise be forgotten.

Liberal feminism shaped the work of MHWH. Domestic violence and women’s homelessness were considered to be the result of women’s inequality. Unlike the WLHWH, which aimed to work outside established structures, MHWH set about working within them. As Kate Coleman recounts, ‘the philosophy of Maroondah wasn’t anywhere near as women’s liberationist as the women’s lib house was’.181 It was on the fundamental issue relating to the desired place of women in Australian society, and the means of achieving that goal, that the work of the two refuges differed. The feminism of WEL, and by extension MHWH, was viewed by one WLHWH member as, ‘not ambitious enough, we actually didn’t want what men had’.182

MHWH thus focused on working with individual women as opposed to political campaigns like squatting. Using feminist ideals, they sought to empower women and increase their autonomy so they might be equal with men. In doing, so the refuge workers were informed by

175 Johnson focus group.
176 Gracia Baylor served as a local councilor for the Healesville Shire from 1971–1977. In 1979 she was the first woman elected to the Victorian Legislative Council.
177 MHWH, ‘Twenty Years’.
179 Baylor interview.
180 Baylor interview.
181 Coleman interview.
182 Rowan interview.
the belief that women were entitled to the same citizenship rights as men, and this included economic independence. In this area of their work, MHWH like WLHWH, was working in clear opposition to the charitable approach of the traditional welfare services. Indeed, the original aims of MHWH were for ‘a place where women can be free to help themselves, not a charitable institution which will keep women dependent and passive’. In this sense, even though they made no claim to being politically radical, they participated in a process of politicising the nature of mainstream welfare services for women. It was this approach that the two refuges shared, and MHWH embraced this philosophy because it also fitted within their commitment to equality for women.

For a number of years the refuge operated through a board of management that included men although women held key positions as co-administrators in relation to the day-to-day operations of the refuge. They did not embrace the model of collectivity employed by the WLHWH. Again, this choice derived from liberal feminism. MHWH was seeking equality, not revolution, and, despite the fact that they were not overtly political, the refuge maintained connections with the women’s liberation movement and WLHWH. The influence of this relationship would manifest itself in later years when MHWH changed its constitution to become a women-only collective.

Doncare women’s refuge was funded through a variety of local services, including Doncare Community Agency, the local council and churches. The service operated largely on a volunteer basis, with only a few women employed part time. Long-term refuge worker Wendy Austin recalled in relation to her experience working at Doncare in the late 1970s that the focus of their feminism was on ‘women helping women’, and unlike, WLHWH, they were not ‘involved in the political side of it at all in that point of time’. As Austin elaborates:

[T]here was a lot of emphasis put on … conversation time, just being with the women. It was women helping women on a basis of equality, that was what the whole business was about … back in the 70s … it deliberately contradicted the social work client-type scenario … where women were basically being told what to do in a fairly strict social work framework as opposed to being given the options, being listened to at length for the first time and being encouraged to make decisions of their own that would actually

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183 WLHWH, ‘Halfway Houses’.
184 MHWH, ‘Twenty Years’.
186 Johnson focus group.
188 Austin interview.
meet their need. It was very deliberately non-professional … It was quite openly said, “this is not a professional service, these are not professional women, we are women helping women, this is equal”.

Austin surmised that the central difference between refuges like Doncare and other radical groups derived from their concern with ‘political change … [whereas] … for us it was more just taking women through a process and allowing them to control their lives rather than having their lives directed’. This goal was consistent with their liberal stress on equality and creating the conditions for women to make independent decisions with the support of other women.

**Caroline Lodge and a Feminism of Protection**

In a somewhat different beginning, another refuge (later named Caroline Lodge) opened in the south of Melbourne in 1975. This refuge was auspiced by the Mentone City Council and accessed funding to support its establishment through the HPAP in 1975. The refuge was extremely conservative in its early years and operated for a decade via a committee of management that included members of the local council, and was chaired in its early years by a notoriously tyrannical mayor. Caroline Lodge received considerable support from ‘hordes of women and men’, and, by the time the refuge opened, volunteers were ‘lined up to be roster women’. Trades people and other local businesses donated various goods, including food and clothing, reflecting the extent of community support.

The refuge was underpinned by a philosophy akin to that of mainstream traditional forms of ‘charity’ or ‘welfare’, which were characterised by a feminism of protectionism. The role adopted by this refuge was to provide women with protection from their husbands as opposed to facilitating a new and different life and changing the structures of society. Dominant constructions of femininity, such as the view that ‘a good wife kept her family together’ and was responsible for family harmony, informed their work, and volunteers actively encouraged the restoration of the family. A representative of the refuge stated they were ‘proud of our success in helping these women return to their husbands and restore their marriages’. Whilst they did not object to women’s economic independence—indeed, one of their stated goals was ‘assisting women to become self-determining, self-reliant and able to utilise

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189 Austin interview.
190 Austin interview.
191 Con Smith, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 22 April 2007.
192 Smith interview.
facilities available in the community.\textsuperscript{194}—Caroline Lodge largely aimed to reinforce existing constructions of women as wives and mothers. Con Smith worked at the refuge from its inception for over thirty years, and recalled the mainly conservative women volunteers it attracted:

They were really fine women … when they were on roster duty they always turned up looking spic and span … [they] were very lovely women, but … they were very conservative, and could be quite judgmental, and I was probably a bit the same. And I just felt awful when this lovely dressed up roster woman would arrive with her casserole in her hand and say, “Well what will we do today?” … It wasn’t a good idea to come all dressed-up like you were going out to a Sunday lunch.\textsuperscript{195}

At first glance, Smith’s memory of the ‘roster women’ appears contradictory; they were at once ‘fine’ and ‘lovely’, and also ‘judgemental’ and ‘conservative’. This contradiction can be explained by examining the way that Smith’s ‘past and current political ideology shape[s] the construction of [her] memory’.\textsuperscript{196} First, because the ‘roster women’ were Smith’s colleagues and contemporaries in the past, it is probable that she shared ideas in common with them, and is therefore likely to recall their virtues. However, Smith was also critical of the pervasive class-based judgments adopted by the roster women, and whilst, acknowledging that she too had this tendency, Smith maintained she was not ‘as bad’ as some whose behaviour and dress unnerved her. However, it is also likely that this awareness, and by extension her memories, have been constructed over time in light of her developing feminist political ideology. Giving further weight to this argument, Smith acknowledges that ‘the years that I was a worker in a women’s refuge … was a really wonderful education for me’.\textsuperscript{197} In particular, she recalls how her appreciation for feminism, and the methods of radical feminists, was a gradual process:

I was a bit on the conservative side and originally I wouldn’t even think of becoming involved in a sit-in and I found myself in the tent over at St Paul’s Cathedral, and going on the night walk … I surprised myself with the fact that I could do it. I didn’t think that I had it in me to go. I think it was because of the influence of those women who I thought had brilliant ideas and were very brave and very radical.\textsuperscript{198}

\textsuperscript{194} Hargreaves, ‘Halfway House’.
\textsuperscript{195} Smith interview.
\textsuperscript{196} Sangster, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{197} Smith interview.
\textsuperscript{198} Smith interview.
Regardless of their class position, women like Smith’s response in support of refuges is evidence that the issue of violence in the home was already well known amongst those who began volunteering their support. Smith noted her own motivations:

I learned that from a very early age that it was an accepted thing for men to rule the family with violence. My own grandmother was a victim of domestic violence in the late 1800s in England … so when I heard about the feminist movement in the late 1960s, and the fine work they were doing to fight for the rights of women and children escaping domestic violence … I decided to join them. 199

Though Smith recalled it was the work of the ‘feminist movement’ that inspired her to join the refuge movement, she also admitted to being somewhat conservative, recalling that her appreciation for feminism grew gradually. On this subject, Smith’s long-time colleague and friend, refuge movement activist Billi Clarke recounts: ‘I know Con in the old days would have said, “I’m not a bloody feminist”’. 200 These contradictions highlight the continuing construction of memory, and reveal how changing political consciousness has shaped Smith’s memories over time. Regardless, the refuge movement provided a space for Smith to act in support of women like her grandmother.

Caroline Lodge was intent on providing professional services and actively employed welfare experts such as marriage guidance counsellors and social workers from the local council and citizen’s advice bureau. 201 This is what primarily differentiated their work from other equality-focused refuges such as Doncare, which actively worked against the dominance of professional welfare services.

These differences resulted in heated media exchanges between WLHWH and Caroline Lodge over the issue of funding. 202 Prior to the introduction of national refuge funding by the Whitlam government in June 1975, MHWH and Caroline Lodge were granted financial support through their local councils via the federal government’s HPAP. This appears to be inconsistent with the government’s general reluctance to fund women’s refuges at this time. 203 Indeed, during the development of the HPAP guidelines, Social Security Minister Bill Hayden had been reported as saying that he did ‘not want activity to be dominated by … extremist

199 Personal correspondence, Con Smith, 12 May 2007.
200 Billi Clarke, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 1 April 2009.
202 WLHWH, Herstory, p. 30.
203 Ludo McFerran argues that the Social Security Department at this time was exhibiting antifeminist tendencies. See McFerran, ‘Interpretation’, p. 192.
women’s groups’. This explains in part why the WLHWH operated for a number of months without government funding from the HPAP, despite numerous submissions. The WLHWH voiced outrage at the nature of the funding process, as well as the conservative ideological position of Caroline Lodge. In a letter addressed to Hayden, they lamented:

We cannot help but wonder whether the grant to the council was made as a result of favouritism towards organisations which were more aligned than we are with the conservative and male-dominated power structure … organisations which until our collective, and the Elsie women’s refuge collective began taking action, had attenuated and tried to ignore the problems of women in this society, and which are now emerging to jump on the bandwagon of the increasingly “trendy” women’s refuge movement.

It is clear that the HPAP had been reluctant to fund radical feminist organisations. However, it is also likely that the ability of MHWH and Caroline Lodge to access HPAP funding rested on a number of other factors, not the least of which was the fact that they were registered as charitable organisations. This meant that, unlike the WLHWH, they met the eligibility criteria of the HPAP to receive capital grants. Furthermore, it appears that the guidelines of the program itself were open to wide interpretation, and difficulties within its administration meant that there was a degree of inconsistency and ambiguity in relation to all its funding decisions. Those with knowledge and contacts could exploit this confusion. MHWH, for example, was able to take advantage of key public servants like Sid Spindler, who facilitated access to the federal purse. It is undeniable, however, that the speed with which Caroline Lodge gained funding under the HPAP indicates that some members of the Commonwealth government were uncomfortable with funding feminist organisations. The development of refuge funding will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

By early 1976, the media had begun to understand refuges as a response to violence against women by men and their role was described by a supportive journalist as ‘the only glimmer of hope for these prisoners in their own homes’.

As a result of the work of the refuges, and in particular the publicity generated by WLHWH, public attitudes were shifting and dominant

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205 WLHWH to Minister for Social Security, 6 June 1975, in WLHWH, Jordon, p. 115.
206 Jordon, p. 115.
207 Jordon, p. 115.
208 Johnson focus group. Sid Spindler (later a Victorian Democrats Senator in the 1990s), worked as the administrator of the Outer Eastern Regional Council of Social Development in 1974, a program under the administration of the Federal Department of Social Security and part of the Whitlam Government’s AAP. Under the AAP, regional councils received capitation grants to support community welfare projects.
209 ‘Two Refuges’.
discourses relating to the sacredness of the home were being challenged. The conservative ideology of refuges such as Caroline Lodge would later shift in response to this growing awareness. Like MHWH, Caroline Lodge would later become a collective and exclude men from involvement in their operation.

Mary Anderson Lodge, the Salvation Army and the Sacredness of the Family

In Melbourne the Salvation Army’s refuge for women, Mary Anderson Lodge (MAL), had played an important role historically in the provision of services to homeless women. During the 1970s, MAL was amongst the first refuges, following WLHWH, to receive Commonwealth funding under the Hospital and Health Services Commission and worked in collaboration with the handful of other women’s refuges operating in Victoria.

The Salvation Army, and MAL by extension, were shaped by patriarchal and Christian values. The philosophical underpinnings of the refuge were therefore very different from those of feminist refuges such as WLHWH. The Salvation Army’s work with women, as Elli McGavin has noted, was conceived historically as ‘rescue work’ with ‘women leaving prison, escaping prostitution or in crisis situations’. 210 This century-long tradition fundamentally shaped the work of MAL at this time. Unlike WLHWH, which had begun to frame problems facing women in refuge in the context of women’s inequality, the Salvation Army, as McGavin points out, failed to understand the cause of domestic violence in this context. 211 Furthermore, the patriarchal nature of the organisation meant that MAL was ‘a highly structured hierarchical management model and traditionally appointed staff outside the client group to professional roles’. 212 Unlike feminist refuges, they did not seek to promote the empowerment of women by facilitating their involvement in the refuge or to promote collectivism in the running of the house by breaking down oppressive hierarchical structures.

Central to the ideology of the Salvation Army was the sacredness of the family, and this certainly shaped the nature of the practical work with women at MAL. Women were invariably encouraged to return to their husbands, as long-term Salvation Army officer and MAL worker Major Elsie Roberts commented at the time: ‘our first aim is to restore the relationship if possible … we encourage the woman’s husband or de facto to come here and

211 McGavin, p. 45.
212 McGavin, p. 50.
talk, but of course this is not always advisable’. MAL worker Laurel Pearce confirmed Roberts’ comments and noted that, ‘some people in the Army at this time would see that these women should be with their husbands. You don’t break up a marriage’. However, she qualified this statement by commenting that they were ‘very careful about that’, which suggests that, whilst the belief that a woman’s natural place was in the family home influenced work at the refuge, at some time in its development, the women working there began to subvert that ideology. Moreover, alongside a history of supporting the ‘sacredness of the family’, a history of social justice traditions within the Salvation Army included supporting the individual rights of women. Whilst the sacredness of marriage and family remains central to the Salvation Army’s work, historically ‘tensions have existed in the promotion and acceptance of the sacred nature of marriage and family and the rights of individual women’. In the 1970s, domestic violence was not on the Salvation Army’s social justice agenda, and feminism was not central to MAL’s conceptualisation of the problem or to their practical work with women in the refuge. There is evidence to suggest, however, that though they did not operate in a feminist framework, over the course of the 1970s, ‘they had begun to develop an understanding that domestic violence required specialised responses’.

The refuge movement at this time distinguished ‘refuges’ from ‘accommodation services’, on the basis that traditional welfare services were antithetical to their feminist philosophy. The receptiveness of some of the other refuges to MAL in the refuge program was thus far from welcoming, and Rosi Lever, co-ordinator of the refuge program at this time with Department of Community Welfare Services (DCWS) recalled, ‘Mary Anderson Lodge remained funded although … [some other refuges] … would have liked not to … They were considered by some to look more like an emergency accommodation service’. MAL’s relationship with other refuges was turbulent and for periods it was not considered to be a part of the movement.

Aborigines Advancement League and Elizabeth Hoffman House (EHH)

Not until 1979 was a refuge for Aboriginal women established in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. As was the case for other women’s refuges, gaining funding proved difficult and it was not until an amount of $38,000 was bequeathed to the Aborigines Advancement

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214 Laurel Pearce, quoted in McGavin, p. 58.
215 Pearce, quoted in McGavin, p. 58.
216 McGavin, p. 3.
217 Pearce, quoted in McGavin, p. 45.
218 Lever interview.
219 VWRG, minutes, 3 March 1981, Svensson papers.
League that they were able to purchase a twelve-roomed house. A refuge committee soon formed that included Aboriginal activist Elizabeth Hoffman, after whom the refuge was to be named. According to then CEO, Joyce Johnson, attempts were made to establish a refuge for Aboriginal women from as early as 1971, but had been unsuccessful. Prior to the refuge’s opening in 1979, however, a smaller refuge had been operating for a number of months sustained by the volunteer efforts of the Aboriginal community and the Aborigines Advancement League, but it was limited in its capacity and could house only four women at a time.

Attempts by the group to access funding were denied on the basis that existing refuges should be able adequately to meet the needs of Aboriginal women. In this sense, the particular needs of Aboriginal women, like those of migrant women, were not commonly acknowledged or understood. Indeed, until very recently, policies of assimilation towards Aboriginal people were unquestioned and self-determination was a new concept. However, Aboriginal people had begun to make claims to indigenous rights (including those to land) and the US-derived ideals of ‘black power’ came to dominate the political trajectory of pro-Aboriginal organisations and activists. Within this context, Aboriginal activist Molly Dyer argued the need for ‘special facilities for Aboriginal women’. Funding was finally granted by the DCWS in 1979.

The desire of Aboriginal women to establish their own refuge was supported by some members of Melbourne’s women’s liberation movement, who acknowledged that existing refuges were ‘alien to their cultural background, their life experiences’ and that Aboriginal women often experienced ‘racism from the other white women residents’. The experience of racism by Aboriginal and migrant women in Anglo refuges challenges the assumption that refuges were necessarily ‘safe homes’ for all women. Although racism was undoubtedly a major issue facing Aboriginal women in refuges, Joyce Johnson emphasised it was not their sole motivation for establishing the refuge. Indeed, she noted that, while some Aboriginal women had been made to ‘feel very welcome’ at women’s refuges, they were determined to

222 ‘Aboriginal Women Fight for a Refuge’, Vashti’s Voice, no. 25, 1979, p. 25, Jenny Tatchel papers, box 2, MWLA.
224 ‘Aboriginal Women Fight.’
'care for their own people'. In addition, other issues facing Aboriginal women necessitated a specialist response because they often endured longer waiting periods for housing and required longer stays.

The development of Elizabeth Hoffman House (EHH) was supported by the refuge movement, and the initial co-ordinators visited WLHWH on at least two occasions during its initiation. It was a requirement of funding at this time to engage with other refuges, so this probably had as much to do with these initial visits as any sense of affiliation with other refuges because it is clear that EHH operated quite separately. This reflected the fact that its objectives were not in accordance with the Anglo-dominated Victorian refuge movement. Lever recalls that the Aboriginal women who established EHH ‘stood their ground’ and argued against embracing white feminism, claiming that ‘this is not part of our cultural heritage and ideology’. Indeed, as Tikka Jan Wilson notes, ‘the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and the second-wave women’s movement—the latter understood by both black and white to be a white women’s movement—has been marked by intense conflict’. Moreover, like the Co-As-It refuge, EHH was not prepared to operate separately from men in their community, or keep the address of the refuge a secret.

The separatist nature of EHH must be understood, as Wilson argues, in relation to the ‘specific historical context of the Australian welfare state’. Aboriginal people were systemically excluded from the entitlements granted to non-Indigenous people, and the impacts of dispossession, government-sponsored racist policies of segregation, forced sterilisation and child removal meant that the demands of the Anglo-feminist movement were often alien to Aboriginal women’s experiences. It has consistently been argued that race is as central as gender to the identity of Aboriginal women. Aboriginal activist Ruby Hammond, for example, argued in this vein during International Women’s Year in 1975, stating that it was, ‘too early for Aboriginal women to be concerned solely with the feminist cause’. Hammond emphasised that ‘Men, women and children suffered from discrimination’ and had

226 ‘Women Seek Refuge’.
229 Lever interview.
230 Wilson, p. 1.
231 ‘Women Seek Refuge’.
232 Wilson, p. 2.
been ‘fighting oppression all our lives’.\textsuperscript{235} Similarly, Molly Dyer stressed the importance of unity for the Aboriginal community arguing that ‘before anything else, our communities must unite. We are too fragmented … The last twenty years has produced many shattered human beings’.\textsuperscript{236} According to Hammond and Dyer, then, it was not only Aboriginal women, but their entire community that was oppressed and this meant that calls to ‘sisterhood’ by an Anglo-dominated refuge movement—based as it was on the presumption of an ‘overriding commonality among women as women’—\textsuperscript{237}—were often rejected by Aboriginal women as a consequence of their historical experience of racism and dispossession, which has also involved the ‘racial violence of white women towards Aboriginal women’.\textsuperscript{238}

EHH intended to provide accommodation for all Aboriginal women who needed it. In particular, it sought to provide accommodation for Aboriginal women exiting prisons such as Melbourne’s Fairlea correctional institution.\textsuperscript{239} While this goal had been adopted by the WLHWH in its origins, it was later abandoned as will be discussed in Chapter 2. This meant that central to the aims of EHH was the provision of safe accommodation for Aboriginal women, regardless of the circumstances. This related to Aboriginal women’s experiences of racism and dispossession, the impact of which enhanced their exposure to violence in the public sphere. Aboriginal women’s experiences of ‘violence’ were not perceived as predominantly perpetrated within the private sphere of the marital home. Instead they were government sanctioned and entrenched within mainstream public institutions. In addition, houses for Aboriginal women were far less readily available than for non-Aboriginal women, which meant that the committee were reluctant to exclude women on the basis of homelessness. The aims of EHH were inextricably linked to Indigenous women’s experiences and identity as Aboriginal Australians, as well as gender.

**Conclusion**

Broad changes in women’s lives, combined with the courageous activism of women experiencing violence and the determinism of the women’s liberation movement and Halfway House Group (HHG), underpinned the early development of the refuge movement in Victoria. The movement revealed that even where there is considerable power imbalance, capacity to challenge and resist dominant ideologies and structures is possible. The women’s liberation movement played a central role in resisting and recasting dominant constructions of gender at

\textsuperscript{235} ‘Black Women’.
\textsuperscript{236} ‘Dyer’.
\textsuperscript{237} Wilson, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{238} Wilson, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{239} ‘Aboriginal Women Fight’.

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this time. They sought to help women find new ways of being, and in doing so they had to deal with the issue of violence. This was central to the aims of the HHG with its focus on the liberation of women at a personal and societal level. The pioneering role of HHG, with its emphasis on challenging patriarchy and women’s oppression, emerged from the radical feminist agenda for social change and resulted in WLHWH, Victoria’s first women’s refuge. Their ideas gained significant publicity, which spurred on the development of new refuges so that, by the end of 1979, there were sixteen in existence across the state.

Refuges emerged in a haphazard manner and were characterised by varied philosophies, organisational structures and funding arrangements. The philosophies ranged from those focused on difference, and women-centred rights, to a more conservative protectionist focus. These were often shaped by geography as well as the politics of specific refuge auspicing bodies, and no two were exactly alike. Inner-city refuges, like WLHWH and Western, which opened in 1976, were more likely to be radical and connected with the WLM. Outer suburban refuges were often closely aligned to their local councils and churches and informed by liberal or protectionist feminisms. However, despite these differences, the majority of refuges shared a commitment to challenging the judgmental and professional social work approach that characterised traditional charities and welfare services whose interventions into women’s lives could often be disempowering and autocratic and predicated upon prescribed roles for women.

In their beginnings, refuges received considerable support from their local communities, particularly amongst women but also amongst men. Volunteer support was offered in abundance by various groups of women, and they often had financial, physical and moral support from local councils, churches and businesses. In particular, a significant financial and administrative role was played by local councils in support of refuges. It is also worth noting that women who joined the movement had personal experience, either directly or indirectly, that spoke to them about the extent of women’s vulnerability in society at large.

Radical feminist ideas gave priority to minimising difference and promoting the unity of all women, which meant that the real differences between women in refuges, and their needs, were often disregarded. Women felt excluded on the basis of their difference, and this led to the development of new refuges to cater to the particular needs of Aboriginal and migrant women. For these women, race and ethnicity was as central as gender in shaping their experiences, activities and philosophy.
What began as a diverse group of refuges operating relatively independently from one another would soon develop into a powerful force that united, when they needed to, in opposition to perceived threats to the autonomy of women’s refuges by the state in 1978. The refuge movement also now began to develop and clarify its understanding of ‘domestic violence’ as a problem and its relationship to gender inequality.

If you were being beaten by your husband what would you do and where would you go? You would go to segregated high-rise housing in Fitzroy, even if you lived in Mornington or Kensington … You would only get a single mother’s pension … you would not be assured of getting half-share of property and access to the kids, the police would write it off as a domestic, it would be very difficult to get a restraining order through the courts. We used to tell women if you wanted a food voucher, hide your cigarettes, take out your earrings, don’t smoke while you’re down there, you’d have to be “deserving”, it was all on men’s terms … Divorce was available, but it was looked down on and expensive … Women’s wages were not anywhere near parity, and women had very little role politically and economically … and domestic violence was seen by society as OK.¹

In Chapter 2, I detailed the emergence of the refuge movement in Victoria in the mid-1970s, and the beginnings of several refuges were examined to make evident their contrasting nature and the range of feminisms that informed their work. Here I extend my analysis of the 1970s to the end of the decade, and document the activities of the refuge movement as members began to work in collaboration with each other as well as with ‘the state’. In accordance with the first two thesis themes, I explore the ideas and strategies of the Victorian Women’s Refuges Group (VWRG), highlighting the influence of radical feminism on their work. After tracing the formation of the group in 1976 and the way that refuges began to work together under its umbrella, I then explore the political campaigns VWRG undertook to counter the fact that life for women seeking refuge was largely, as former Peninsula women’s refuge worker Maureen Donnelly recounts above, structured ‘on men’s terms’. The group campaigned for resources for women in refuge to promote their autonomy, economic independence and ability to live free from violence. In doing so, the VWRG applied a feminist lens to each problem it encountered, and politicised numerous issues facing women in refuge. They also worked to challenge dominant discourses regarding society’s sanctioned roles for women, which worked to perpetuate their marginalised position and the need for refuge. Whilst the methods they used were varied, direct action was central to the spirit of activism at this time. The first half of this chapter, then, documents the political action VWRG undertook to change the lives of women and their engagement in a debate over the

politics of gendered representations of women. The process by which the VWRG helped to construct ‘domestic violence' as a feminist issue will also be considered, alongside the way that access to refuge was narrowed accordingly.

The refuges also worked strategically together with the aim of presenting a publicly united front to the state government. I document the outcomes of this strategy in the second half of this chapter, as well as the attainment of government funding, together with the debates and controversy that surrounded it. I also examine the relationship that evolved between key bureaucrats within the Department of Community Welfare Services and members of the VWRG. The strategies adopted by the VWRG to ensure that their feminist ideas and ways of organising were not compromised by their engagement with the state are also analysed. In particular, a discussion of the successful campaign launched by the movement to maintain the secrecy of their addresses concludes this chapter.

The Victorian Women’s Refuge Group

They were very skilled women, who put their skills together … and coloured with their passion around feminism … they were trying to create something.2

Working Together

From the end of 1976, representatives from refuges had begun meeting together under the umbrella of the VWRG, which was initiated by WLHWH. As we have seen, refuges had been operating relatively independently of each other until this time. But established ones such as WLHWH and MHWH had been active in supporting the development of new refuges by providing them with information and policies, which made the process of formalising a co-ordinating group smoother.3 However, as long-term refuge worker Wendy Austin reflects:

It was amazing that we actually eventually came together under some sort of an umbrella … back then I was quite scared of some of the more political women who were very radical and out there.4

The VWRG was a political strategy by radical feminists designed to influence the direction of the refuge movement. An early account of the movement noted that WLHWH formed the VWRG in order to ‘prevent the growth of refuges facilitating a trend towards welfare

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3 Rowan interview.
4 Austin interview.
provision’, and to raise the ‘political awareness of other refuges’. This suggests the VWRG arose partly in response to a perceived ‘counter movement’ of non-feminist refuges occurring largely outside of the women’s movement. Indeed, they were successful in subverting an attempt by the conservative Women’s Action Alliance to assume control over the development of a proposed refuge in the La Trobe Valley in 1977. Radical feminist refuges were alarmed by these kinds of developments and were concerned that they would destabilise the political focus of their work. As former WLHWH refuge activist Marie Rowan recalls: ‘[The] VWRG was a political strategy … to influence the policy development of all of those groups, to ensure they weren’t going to undermine us knowingly’. Feminist refuges thus undertook to influence the operation of all refuges through the forum of the VWRG to ensure they did not lose their ‘political goals and just end up running a service’. They saw themselves as the only service providers with an ideology informing their practice, viewing other organisations providing refuge as problematic because they had:

[F]ailed to recognise these women as victims of an oppressive system … The growth of refuges will only act to hide the real inequalities of women if there is no understanding of the social implications behind women’s oppression.

The feminist-led VWRG developed a set of aims and objectives, cemented by the principles of sharing, collectivity, social change and social action. The VWRG had incorporated all the hallmarks of feminist organisations within their constitution, which was endorsed by the fourteen members including WLHWH, Western, Footscray, Matilda, Mountain, Co-As-It, MHWH, Caroline Lodge, Southern, Peninsula, La Trobe Valley, Warrnambool, Blackburn and Doncare. As will be discussed below, their concerns about engaging with the state were another key catalyst for this development. Notably, MAL had decided to formally leave the refuge group by this time. While it can be assumed that differences of philosophy created this fall-out, it is also likely that conflict between refuge workers, as discussed below, played a part in MAL’s decision to leave. Furthermore, the Aboriginal women’s refuge, EHH, did not become involved in the wider movement until much later.

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6 VWRG minutes, June 1978.
7 La Trobe Valley Women’s Refuge Group, ‘History of the Establishment of the La Trobe Valley Women’s Refuge’, 1977, Con Smith private papers, in possession of Jacqui Theobald; Rowan interview.
8 Rowan interview.
9 Hargreaves interview.
10 Alley, Chapman, Geddes, and Wilson, p. 4.
Conservative refuges often joined the VWRG for pragmatic reasons, such as their dire need for funding. Whilst they were more often concerned with providing a good quality service to women and children than campaigning for political change, they also recognised that uniting with other refuges would give them a louder voice at the bargaining table with government. Despite the different perspectives in the group, lobbying for funding was an issue that they could agree on. Austin recalls:

We needed money in order to be able to provide a decent service to women and kids. We couldn't continue to fight without money, we really needed to find a way to go to government together and be able to say this is what we need. [T]here was a lot of give and take, and over the years there was a lot of different groups and a lot of fighting against each other about what was actually important, but in the early days we very deliberately put aside some of that and came together to be able to go to government to try and get some funding.14

The capacity of the refuges to ‘work well’ together on behalf of women and achieve change is a matter of contention, and representations of refuges as constituting a ‘magical sisterhood’ were challenged early on. ‘Kathy’ from WLHWH, for example, argued in a letter to her collective that they need not fall into ‘a trap of idealising’ their work.15 What is apparent, however, is that they did work together, even if it was at times amid conflict and with different objectives. Then director of regional services in the DCWS, David Green, observed that, despite the existence of ‘a lot of other perspectives’ within the refuge movement, they ‘held together’.16 Moreover, at a national refugee conference in Melbourne in 1978, Victorian refuge workers informed other states and federal bureaucrats that, ‘despite widely divergent views, the refuges have worked well together’.17 In accordance with this view, former WLHWH activist Jenny Macmillan recounts her memories of working in collaboration with ‘conservative’ refuges:

Mostly we just got on with doing what we could with them in common … that’s how I remember it ... They were pretty good those women that were working in those refuges it’s just that they were very different from us … We could still get together to advocate for the women; it was just within an understanding of those differences. And we had some good times with them actually.18

14 Austin interview.
16 Green interview.
17 ‘Summary of Delegation to the Bureaucrats’, National Women’s Refuge Conference, 5 March 1978, Jan Chapman-Davis papers, 100/210, no. 12, box 1, MWLA.
However, in contrast to Macmillan’s memories of ‘good times’, conflict was recalled by others as more characteristic of the VWRG. Indeed, representatives from radical feminist refuges were forthright and hard-line in their approach, particularly when they did not see eye-to-eye with the positions of workers from more conservative refuges. Feminist activists had an agenda to push and were more than assertive in getting it accepted. Long-term refuge worker Con Smith recalls being on the receiving end of some tough-minded women: ‘We were hauled over the coals by one of the women’s libbers you know the radical ones, about how we were not toeing the line … it was like preaching to the converted. We were there’.\(^\text{19}\) The fact that these less radical groups ‘were there’ warranted a degree of respect that was not always given. This was particularly the case with the more conservative refuges such as MAL, as Green recalled:

[T]he tough aggression of the feminist collectives was not their cup of tea, but they were there and they were party to it. I can remember thinking time after time, it’s a great pity that woman from the Salvation Army would have left that meeting, with the sense that she had just been humiliated, or her view point … just brushed aside sometimes.\(^\text{20}\)

This made the experience of attending meetings a potentially intimidating one for some, and it is not too surprising that they were often ‘scared’ to attend. The visual diversity and uncomfortable experience of attending the meetings is captured by Austin:

[Y]ou can imagine the diversity and the disparity of the people that were actually working there, so you'd get these massive meetings, you'd go in twos because it was all a bit scary, and we had twin sets and pearls knitting up one end, and dogs and kids and torn overalls and goodness knows what else down the other end.\(^\text{21}\)

Smith argued that a ‘tough’ approach was ‘not always right’, and suggested that radical feminists needed the influence of conservative women who ‘didn’t need to bash on doors, and disrupt people to get what you wanted done’.\(^\text{22}\) Instead, she insisted, you could ‘do it in a much easier way and a more even way’.\(^\text{23}\) However, despite her misgivings about their methods, Smith came to believe that, ‘they were a group of highly intelligent women, who had courage of their convictions’.\(^\text{24}\) With hindsight, women from feminist refuges have also

\(^{19}\) Smith interview.  
\(^{20}\) Green interview.  
\(^{21}\) Austin interview.  
\(^{22}\) Smith interview.  
\(^{23}\) Smith interview.  
\(^{24}\) Smith interview.
reflected on what they might have learned from refuges more concerned with the personal than the political. In this vein, Macmillan remarked: ‘I think we could have done more to have built up some people’s skills … we should have taken a bit of a message from what the Salvos were doing’.  

At the time there was a growing concern among radical feminist refuges that joining together with conservative groups had undermined their political agenda: ‘the emphasis of the VWRG is becoming more towards reforms of institutions within the system, rather than radical social change’. While acknowledging that, ‘the VWRG is a strong group and we work well together’, radical feminists were concerned to ask the question ‘are we compromising too much?’  

This view was shared by members of the WLHWH, who argued that:  

[A]ttempts to keep the group united in its struggles with its funding bodies and the increase in conservative refuges has as much of a depoliticising effect as a politicising one. The feminist refuges compromised on direct political action and modified their public statements.

Radical refuges viewed compromise negatively, and, in this sense, they were in an ongoing bind. They needed to work with the other refuges to ensure that the refuge movement’s aims and objectives were not compromised; but they were also concerned that collaboration had caused their goals to be diluted. Despite this difficulty, however, they also saw themselves as part of a national movement and remained committed to working with others and developing a group that was functional, if not seamlessly unified:  

It is important to realise that there is a women’s refuge movement, however informal. We are more than just individual houses providing local services. We are the beginning of a social and political movement organised around the need for women to share their skills and resources in order to fight for change ... most refuges, and certainly the actively feminist ones, see that it is essential to work on this broader, political level. To do this, we have to unite with other groups.

Despite tensions and conflicts, a commitment to a united front was maintained by the majority of refuges in the VWRG. For some, however, a commitment to working together did not outweigh the challenges posed by the group. As mentioned, the Salvation Army withdrew

25 Macmillan interview.
26 VWRG minutes, July 1979.
27 VWRG minutes, July 1979.
28 Alley, Chapman, Geddes, and Wilson, p. 4.
from the group, in part, as a result of conflict. Furthermore, EHH were never a part of the VWRG, being unwilling to have Aboriginality appropriated under the guise of sisterhood.

The capacity of VWRG to unite and gain resources was evident in its success in gaining funding for a Women’s Refuge Referral Service (WRRS) by the end of the decade. The development of a central agency to make referrals to refuges was seen as necessary because of the un-coordinated nature of existing arrangements.\textsuperscript{30} It also enabled refuges to maintain anonymity of addresses and the safety of women in refuge.\textsuperscript{31} Whilst many refuges received direct referrals, radical feminist refuges received them through the Women’s Liberation Centre, which had continued to operate as a central referral point in Victoria until late 1978 when the centre closed. In response to the closure, five refuges pledged $5 a week to continue operating a service, the Women’s Liberation Switchboard (WLS), and they set about collating all the information from each refuge into one central file.\textsuperscript{32}

The WLS grew out of a meeting in December 1978 between women who had been part of the roster group at the Women’s Liberation Centre and members of the VWRG.\textsuperscript{33} The service began operating and accepting refuge referrals in early 1979, renting a room in the Women’s Cultural Palace in Fitzroy—a new centre for the women’s liberation movement—and advertising for volunteers to staff the roster.\textsuperscript{34} They intended to provide support to all women, but in particular women needing referral to refuge, by relating their ‘specific problems or queries to the wider context of women’s oppression’.\textsuperscript{35} By mid-1979, the WLS received approximately 50 per cent of the referrals for Victoria’s refuges, and was staffed primarily by volunteers.\textsuperscript{36} The service began operating from 9.30am to 9.30pm weekdays, and, outside of these hours, refuge referrals were automatically transferred to the Young Women’s Christian Association.\textsuperscript{37}

The VWRG sought government funding to shore up the operation of the WLS as early as September 1978, and members worked together to prepare a submission.\textsuperscript{38} This was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} ‘Drum’, 2 May, 1978.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Taylor interview.
\item \textsuperscript{32} ‘Drum’, 17 January 1979.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Taylor interview.
\item \textsuperscript{34} ‘Women’s Liberation Switchboard’, \textit{Women’s Liberation Newsletter}, February 1979, Jenny Tatchel papers, 100/214, box 2, MWLA.
\item \textsuperscript{35} ‘Switchboard’.
\item \textsuperscript{36} VWRG minutes, 11 April 1979.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Women’s Liberation Switchboard Collective, ‘Women’s Liberation Switchboard and Refuge Referral Service’, \textit{Women’s Liberation Newsletter}, February 1981, p. 7, Frances Ryan papers, 100/211, no. 13, box 1, MWLA.
\item \textsuperscript{38} ‘Drum’, 12 September 1978.
\end{itemize}
ultimately rejected because the word ‘liberation’ in the name was considered too political.\textsuperscript{39} Other members of the VWRG also opposed the title, which resulted in an agreement to adopt the title WRRS. By this stage, the government had agreed in principle to fund the service for the cost of one salary,\textsuperscript{40} and, in early 1980, the then Minister for DCWS, Walter Jona, announced a grant from the minister’s fund of $20,000 towards its operating costs.\textsuperscript{41}

During the early 1980s, funding for the WRRS was not adequate or recurrent, and the service was threatened with closure, particularly when pressure was applied by government for it to operate 24 hours a day on an allocation of $30,000. Roster women worked for nothing to keep the service operational as the state government refused to provide recurrent funds, despite considerable lobbying.\textsuperscript{42} In response, refuges workers marched into the foyer of DCWS bearing a giant red papier-maché telephone with its cord cut, symbolising the unanswered refuge referrals. Continued lobbying eventually resulted in the minister making a recommendation to cabinet that the WRRS be included in the refuge program. This was eventually accepted, albeit following a number of closures and protests. The service continued to operate out of the women’s building for some years, providing a central referral point for women and children seeking refuge as well as a central contact point for the refuges themselves.\textsuperscript{43} The capacity for members of the VWRG to work together and successfully gain funding for the establishment of the WRRS provides evidence of the refuge movement’s increasing capacity to put aside issues of ideology for mutual benefit.

**Political Action and Advocacy**

[I]t was just astonishing what you could do by a bit of lobbying and stuff. We were passionate, about everything that we were doing and we were determined ... we were running our refuges.\textsuperscript{44}

Central to the activities of the VWRG at this time was political campaigning, and radical feminist refuges drove this work with the clear agenda of politicising the problems facing women in refuge because they were committed to the idea that ‘society needs to be changed so that refuges are unnecessary’.\textsuperscript{45} Like WLHWH, the VWRG clearly linked the problems

\textsuperscript{39}Jean Taylor, focus group conducted by Jacqui Theobald, 27 November 2007.  
\textsuperscript{40}VWRG minutes, 8 August 1979.  
\textsuperscript{41}‘Drum’, 11 February 1980.  
\textsuperscript{43}Taylor interview.  
\textsuperscript{44}Taylor interview.  
\textsuperscript{45}‘Summary of Workshop: What is a Feminist Refuge?’ National Women’s Refuge Conference, Melbourne, March 1978, Jan Chapman-Davis papers, box 1, MWLA.
facing women in refuge with women’s inequality and was concerned that if it got to ‘the stage that we think refuges are necessary to solve a problem, we will have become institutionalised’.46 To avoid ‘propping up a rotten system’ feminist refuges involved themselves in broad campaigns, not just those focussing on a ‘narrowly defined problem of domestic violence’.47 Macmillan explains:

If you were looking at women in the context of women’s refuges, you had to also be looking at women in terms of independent finance … security of housing … childcare. Then there were the issues around the personal is the political … And the refuge kind of personified that in a way… this is the situation that women can get into when they don’t have all that.48

In the early years of the movement, the issue of domestic violence, commonly referred to as ‘intolerable circumstances’, was one of a number identified by the movement. The advocacy work of the feminist-led VWRG extended equally to many other areas affecting the lives of women and children in refuge. Relevant historiography has understated the broader goals of radical feminist refuges, which sought to overcome not only violence against women but also the inequality of all women in society and, in particular, their lack of access to autonomous households. These goals were also characteristic of feminist refuges in other states including WA and NSW.49 Political activity often took the form of direct action, including street marching, squatting and street theatre. The VWRG became increasingly organised, adopting tactical approaches that drew on the ideas of Saul Alinsky’s book ‘Rules for Radicals’ to enhance their power.50 They organised conferences to discuss and debate the relationship between feminism and refuges,51 and systematically targeted the media to publicise the issues. As former WLHWH activist Vig Geddes recounts:

We set up a media group for the Victorian Women’s Refuge Group, but it was actually made up of all the feminist refuges… we’d write these media releases … [and] … at night after work … we’d jump in the car … and deliver them all by hand. [T]here was no email then and we raced around the city, we had this little route and dropped them all off at the various radio stations.52

46 ‘Workshop’.
47 ‘Workshop’.
48 Macmillan interview.
51 ‘Workshop’.
52 Geddes interview.
The VWRG also networked locally and shared information with other non-government organisations, including the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS), Council for the Single Mother and her Child, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Shelter Victoria. Direct action tactics were also embraced by some less radical members of the VWRG. Ex-Maroondah Halfway House (MHWH) refuge worker Judy Johnson recalled lobbying Minister Jona, en masse:

All of us went into the department … I mean you wouldn’t have a hope in the world of doing that these days, and there must have been about 60 or 70 women and we just sat cross legged on the floor outside his office.\(^{53}\)

The VWRG systematically sought to make contact with state and federal bureaucrats and politicians in order to educate them about refuges.\(^{54}\) Refuge workers attended demonstrations, and travelled to Canberra, where they performed street theatre on the steps of Parliament House and lobbied politicians in relation to violence, housing, childcare, income, the law and the lack of recurrent funding for refuges.\(^{55}\) The remainder of this section will consider the movement’s involvement in each of these areas.

The issue of housing for women and children assumed a central focus of political activity for the Victorian refuge movement and a feminist analysis of the problem drove their agenda. As former WLHWH activist Ulla Svensson, told a state refuge conference in 1979:

> We need social change, which gives women access to society’s resources without first processing them through the welfare system. We need housing – not more social workers and family support services.\(^{56}\)

It was the refuge movement’s feminism that ‘radicalised the Melbourne housing action scene’.\(^{57}\) WLHWH undertook political action with the aim of highlighting the dearth of affordable and accessible housing for women and children.\(^{58}\) The group continued to lobby the state Housing Commission to increase accommodation for women and children escaping violence and faced with poverty. As former WLHWH activist Kaye Hargreaves wrote:

> [D]iscrimination and inequalities in the rental market and the inadequacy of the Housing Commission of Victoria have been amongst the most obvious and immediate manifestations of the oppression of women. The prospect of living in poverty in a

\(^{53}\) Johnson focus group.
\(^{54}\) VWRG minutes, June/July 1978.
\(^{55}\) WLHWH, p. 7; *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* (CPD), Senate, 29 May 1979, p. 2227.
\(^{56}\) Ulla Svensson, ‘Presentation at State Refuge Conference’, 27 October 1979, Svensson papers.
\(^{57}\) Kaye Hargreaves, Untitled paper, October 1976, Svensson papers.
substandard house, having borrowed the bond, lied about being on a pension and having children, and not being sure whether you can pay the next week’s rent does not help a woman who already is struggling to establish some degree of independence from a destructive domestic.  

Not only was the grossly inadequate provision of housing for single women highlighted in the VWRG’s work, so were the processes that worked to perpetuate these circumstances, including dominant discourses about women’s relationships with men. Activists repeatedly stressed the way that gender constructs social relationships and is central to the constitution of power relations. As former WLHWH activist Chris Sitka wrote at the time, women who did not fulfil society’s prescribed roles for women as wives and mothers were labelled as deviant and housed alongside marginalised others according to the established gender-based social hierarchy:

Single mothers and deserted wives are sent by the housing commission to the outer suburbs, to the country or into ghetto flats in the inner city along with other social misfits … because the norm is for women to be attached to a man, a woman who is not, is seen to be inadequate and often meets contempt, and disapproval from the people and the institutions, to whom she turns for help.  

Outer area refuges such as Maroondah Halfway House were also active in lobbying for the housing needs of women. The MHWH pioneered the first bond and relocation scheme in Australia. Its function was to support women to access the private rental market by providing loans for the bond and rent in advance.  

MHWH also auspiced the Outer Eastern Regional Housing Council, the first of its kind in Australia. The council performed a research and advocacy role, and worked in collaboration with the VWRG. Together they achieved success in lobbying local councils to provide emergency housing for homeless women. And, by 1978, the Outer Eastern Regional Housing Council had successfully negotiated with then state Minister for Housing Brian Dixon to fund a pilot program to spot purchase public housing.  

Former MHWH worker Kate Coleman contends that ‘housing awareness grew in the outer east specifically from the refuge movement’.  

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59 Hargreaves, ‘Untitled’.  
61 Coleman interview.  
62 Coleman interview.  
63 Coleman interview.  
64 Coleman interview.
The advocacy work of the refuge movement, together with groups like Shelter Victoria (many of whose founding members were refuge workers) and the Housing Commission Tenants Union, eventually led to the growth of various other non-government bodies advocating for the needs of the marginally housed and homeless. As Coleman recounts:

> From Shelter Victoria, all of those other peak bodies grew. Youth Accommodation Coalition, Public Tenants Union, Squatters Union, Rental Co-ops, Common Equity Co-op; Shelter Vic auspiced all of those groups. And then that pushed it into the state and national level of Shelter.66

As a result of this groundswell movement, the VWRG gained representation on a Community Tenancy Law Reform Committee convened by the state government, which reviewed the Landlord–Tenant Agreement and made state-wide recommendations about the bond insurance scheme. Thereafter, the VWRG published a book detailing ‘the problems faced by residents at women’s refuges (with) recommendations on how the housing market could become more responsive to their needs’. This was widely distributed to relevant politicians and government ministers.

At the same time, refuge movement activists quickly recruited the support of feminist lawyers whose experiences of supporting women in court, and the overt discrimination and sexism they encountered, propelled them into action. Rowan recalled an experience of attending court with a resident whose police-officer husband was awarded full custody of their three children. Rowan then ‘spent a lot of time getting [together] a collection of feminist lawyers’, the result of which was that they ‘got a hell of a lot of their business from us’. Rowan’s shock at what she witnessed ensured that she ‘never lost another case’, and instead, ‘briefed every lawyer’, so that whenever they ‘represented one of our women … [she] met her lawyer [who] listened to her story’. In this way, activists acted to empower refuge women in the courts and, at the same time, began the process of educating and politicising women lawyers.

Other areas of advocacy for the VWRG included family law. The guiding principles of the family law court at this time were based on ‘the need to give the widest possible protection

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66 Coleman interview.
68 VWRG, Women and Housing, p. 1.
69 Rowan interview.
70 Rowan interview.
71 Rowan interview.
and assistance to the family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society’. A detailed submission was made by the VWRG in 1979 to the Joint Select Committee on the Family Law Act. The group challenged a number of the court’s requirements for women relating to divorce, which were based on what they regarded as patriarchal assumptions about women, family and marriage. In particular, the VWRG argued against the requirement that a woman’s partner should assume financial responsibility for her children, thus ensuring their continued financial dependence on men. In doing so, they politicised gendered representations of men as the natural heads of the family unit, and women as natural dependants.

Members of the VWRG also campaigned on the issue of income support for single mothers. They collaborated with the Council for the Single Mother and her Child and a Pension Action Group (PAG), was formed in 1978 that worked with a range of other community-based organisations and individuals. The group pushed for women to receive access to the pension, based on their economic situation, not their marital status or sexual relationships: ‘when a mother does not live with the father of her children, the government should guarantee her income security’. They also lobbied the Department of Social Security at a ministerial level and undertook direct action by occupying ‘social security offices because women couldn’t get their pensions’. The PAG thus politicised the assumptions about women’s roles embedded in public policy discourse relating to income support, and sought to transform the policies of the Department of Social Security practices.

Although the devastating impacts of domestic violence on children are now widely recognised, at this time, this was not well understood or acknowledged in the 1970s. As former WLHWH activist Di Otto explains, the issue of children in refuges had generally taken second place:

[A] real blind spot that we had was about the children, because we very much identified the children’s interests as being the same as the mother’s interests and didn’t face those hard questions about children’s rights really … we also were kind of blind to abuse of children by some of the women who were residents. We had a playgroup,

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75 VWRG, ‘Submission’, p. 4.
and we provided childcare. But really our political and philosophical commitment was to the women and to the children because they were connected to the women.\textsuperscript{78}

Work in relation to supporting children focused primarily on ensuring adequate childcare in refuges. Childcare was the subject of campaigns by the VWRG and the Childcare Group formed by representatives from feminist refuges WLHWH, Southern and Footscray refuges. All refuges agreed on the need for action and it drew them together in support of funding.\textsuperscript{79}

The issue of childcare was considered political because it related to women’s oppression in the family. This analysis was based on a socialist–feminist critique of capitalism, which identified children as commodities and levers to manoeuvre women in or out of the workforce.\textsuperscript{80} The Childcare Group engaged in political action in order to gain resources for women, whilst politicising the issue of women’s designated roles as mothers and housewives. Their purpose was to ensure that women in refuges were not ‘daunted by the motherhood myth, which says such relationships are sacred and unquestionable and to intervene is tampering with nature’.\textsuperscript{81}

They initiated campaigns that included a state-wide conference on the issue of children in refuges in 1978. This prompted them to lobby the then federal Minister for Social Security, Senator Margaret Guilfoyle, which resulted in funding to improve childcare facilities in refuges. An advocate for refuges, Guilfoyle provided each with $10,000 through the Office of Childcare in 1979 for the purchase of play equipment.\textsuperscript{82} Though a few refuges had already been funded for a childcare worker, the new funding meant that access to care became more widely available.\textsuperscript{83}

The response of the police at this time to domestic violence and women’s refuges was inadequate and difficult, to say the least. Domestic violence was considered to be private, ‘never taken seriously,’\textsuperscript{84} and not within the context of criminality, unless, as Hargreaves recalls, the woman was killed:

We’d get women ringing up saying “look, I’m in danger of domestic violence, my husband is threatening me” and the response would be “well, there’s nothing that we

\textsuperscript{78} Di Otto, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 23 April 2008.
\textsuperscript{79} Macmillan interview.
\textsuperscript{81} Child Care Group, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{82} CPD, Senate, 29 May 1979, p. 2227.
\textsuperscript{83} ‘Drum’, 7 July 1980.
\textsuperscript{84} WLHWH, Refuges, p. 29.
can do about it‖. It was only … when he had taken a gun and shot her that it became a homicide and therefore it was a police matter.\textsuperscript{85}

In response to an ineffective police force, the VWRG took action by attending training sessions and participating in conferences with police instructors, all with the aim of influencing their policies and practice.\textsuperscript{86} Members of the VWRG systemically organised and utilised residents’ experiences to inform their advocacy campaigns and gathered stories of women’s experiences to submit to police corruption inquiries.\textsuperscript{87} Over time, the VWRG was invited to provide input into police training manuals, and in the early 1980s, members of the group gained influence within the Women’s Advisory Council (WAC) to the premier. In this capacity, they argued in a submission to a major committee of inquiry that the Victorian police force needed to take into account the ‘needs of women, most particularly in situations of domestic violence’.\textsuperscript{88} The amount and quality of training provided to police officers needed to be increased so that they would ‘provide assistance to women clients without being patronising’.\textsuperscript{89} The refuge movement’s condemnation of ‘patronising’ attitudes of the police towards women, and their attempts to challenge this via formal processes, is further evidence of activists’ concern to change both the cultural and the material contexts of women’s lives.

**Historicising Domestic Violence**

The language of domestic violence didn’t exist, because the phenomenon itself was totally hidden.\textsuperscript{90}

In this section, I turn to how the refuge movement was centrally involved in transforming dominant discourses regarding the problem of interpersonal violence in heterosexual relationships. Specifically, I trace the VWRG’s engagement in a process of defining the problem of domestic violence as a feminist issue, and make evident the impact of the discourse of radical feminism in fashioning members’ ideas. These discursive processes have received scant attention, most accounts having located the movement’s beginnings in activists’ response to the pre-existing problem of domestic violence.\textsuperscript{91} This section then, examines the use made of the new definition to determine the criteria for access to women’s

\textsuperscript{85} Hargreaves interview.
\textsuperscript{86} ‘Drum’, 29 September 1980; VWRG minutes, 8 November 1980.
\textsuperscript{87} WLHWH, *Herstory*, p. 138-39; WRWR, Referral Card for Women and Children Entering Refuge, circa 1979, Burrows papers.
\textsuperscript{88} WAC, ‘Submission to the Committee of Inquiry into the Victoria Police Force’, November 1983, p. 1, Svensson papers.
\textsuperscript{89} WAC, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{90} Hargreaves interview.
\textsuperscript{91} Saltman, pp. 232–238; Smith; Feldman.
refuges. In the process, Victorian refuges narrowed qualification for entry from ‘any women who needs it’, to women experiencing ‘domestic violence’.

When refuges began in the 1970s, they were responding to an ‘almost invisible issue’. Domestic violence did not exist as a named social problem, let-alone as part of government public policy agenda. The invisibility of the issue also meant that its extent and severity were unknown. In her study of policy activism and domestic violence in NSW, Janet Ramsay has revealed that the first formal use of the term ‘domestic violence’ in a national context was in a submission to the 1975 International Women’s Year United Nations world conference, and it incorporated a socially based analysis. According to Howe, the formal adoption of the term domestic violence above other terms such as ‘criminal assault in the home’ or ‘wife bashing’ represented a concession by policy advisers to ensure that the ‘relatively benign term … succeeded as a discourse’. It is certainly the case that in Victoria by the late 1970s domestic violence was the common term within the refuge movement as well as in public policy discourse more broadly.

Ramsay contends that this early framing by Australian feminists of domestic violence as a social issue meant they had ‘stolen a march’ on the established professions and their ‘pathological representation’ of the problem. By contrast, feminists in Canada, the USA and the UK were forced to negotiate their understandings of domestic violence with established professions whose ‘controlling role in the policy processes … limited feminist influence on the eventual policy framing of domestic violence’. However, the relatively uncontested adoption of the radical feminist analysis of domestic violence in Australia meant that:

[W]hen broader ranging analytical discussions about domestic violence and appropriate policy responses … began, feminist refuges had already been funded and feminist identification and ownership of the issue of domestic violence had an established presence in the policy arena.

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93 Ramsay, p. 103.
94 Howe, p. 181.
96 Ramsay, p. 107.
97 Ramsay, p. 105.
98 Ramsay, p. 107.
In Victoria, as we have seen, the level of ‘ownership’ of the issue was evident in the refuge movement’s activism within and across a range of institutions and organisations. Radical feminist refuges were thus ready and determined to defend their analysis in opposition to other professions as well as those within their own movement. As Green recalls:

I have a very strong memory of that absolute determination to broaden the analysis out, and part of the antagonism within the groups was around the weakening of that by the women who really wanted to rescue other women … who did not see this in a political and gender context, who saw it as being about bad men.  

However, as we have seen, during the mid-1970s, the key issue was still homelessness. Refuges had played a critical role redefining and gendering it, maintaining that women’s homelessness resulting from ‘intolerable circumstances’ was distinct and a result of women’s inequality in society. As Hargreaves recalls:

One of the things that Halfway House and other refuges have done is expand the view of homelessness. That it isn’t just literally the derro on the park bench that is homeless but there is a whole spectrum of homelessness … women were very hidden in all of that.

It is also evident that the refuge movement’s emphasis on women’s homelessness as a policy problem related to their desire to achieve government funding. Hargreaves recounts:

And it just so happened that a homeless persons program popped up and we then said “well these women are homeless, therefore we should get funding”. I think it was a funding-driven sort of thing that made us put that label on the problem.

Over the next several years, the refuge movement began to concentrate on domestic violence above and beyond other issues facing women in refuges such as their homelessness. At the same time, access to refuge was narrowed so that, by 1978, the group was arguing that refuges should not be a response to ‘homeless women without children’. Furthermore, ‘the needs of women in particular crises, such as drug dependence and discharge from psychiatric

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99 Refuge activists wrote journal articles in response to other professionals including medical practitioners and the police. They also attended conferences on domestic violence convened by police, criminologists and Legal Studies Departments at universities, where they challenged non-feminist framings of the problem. ‘Drum’, 15 October 1979, 4 and 12 August 1980.
100 Green interview.
101 Hargreaves interview.
102 Hargreaves interview.
103 VWRG, ‘The Concept of Women’s Refuges’, June 1978, Burrows papers, UMA.
institutions or prisons, should be provided for under a different program than the women’s refuges program’.

This marked a turning point for the refuge movement, whose original aims and objectives were shaped by a commitment to offer support to all women. Sitka was one who was disappointed with this redirected focus:

[P]eople … couldn’t really understand what we were on about because it was so radical … they didn’t believe in women’s liberation, they didn’t believe that society needed to change … but they could grab onto this concept “yes it’s bad to see these women and children physically abused, and it is good to do something about that”. So we would push that in order to get sympathy, support to build our movement. But I think that what was lost was the broader thing about the need for social change...

According to former WLHWH volunteer Merriene Shortridge, the new focus on domestic violence occurred because of ‘the absolute immediate and real physical harm’ that residents faced. By contrast, Taylor believes that changes in eligibility derived from a lack of resources:

Once we started doing the definition, that became much more of a hard line, because there were psychiatric problems, there were women who were homeless for a lot of reasons, and we decided in the refuges that we could only afford to take women who had to leave home because of domestic violence. [S]o we had to take a bit of a hard line about that ... [A]t one stage, even women without children were being looked at twice because they had more options.

Hargreaves also sees the decision to focus on women experiencing domestic violence as arising from their limited skills and resources. It was a decision that members of the NSW refuge movement opposed:

We made a hard nosed decision on the basis that we didn’t think we could handle it; we had enough on our plate. We got into real trouble with the Elsie women, who took a different line because they thought that psychiatric problems just came with the territory, and that we were being discriminating for no reason, or for arbitrary reasons.

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104 VWRG, ‘Concept’.
105 Sitka interview.
106 Shortridge interview.
107 Taylor interview.
108 Hargreaves interview.
Undoubtedly, it was a combination of all these issues that influenced the VWRG’s decision to narrow the eligibility criteria for refuges. These refuges now begun to differentiate between women who were homeless and women experiencing what was now commonly referred to as domestic violence, despite the fact that they had earlier reformulated, the problem of women living in ‘intolerable circumstances’ as one of homelessness. Over time it became their official policy to exclude women experiencing homelessness, language difficulties, disabilities, psychiatric, drug and alcohol issues. However, refuges did in reality support such women to some extent. Elizabeth Hoffman House (EHH) and Co-As-It, were also exceptions in that they prioritised Aboriginal, migrant and refugee women.

Alongside Elsie, Marrickville refuge in Sydney continued accepting single homeless women, and this informed their understanding of the oppression that many women who became homeless shared. Refuge activist Vivien Johnson surmised all of them faced society’s failure to respond adequately.

We began to realise that for the woman who leaves home, our reformulation of the domestic violence issue as a question of homelessness was no expedient piece of bureaucratic jargon, but an appalling and stubborn reality—indeed, that ultimately there might be no difference between women displaced by society’s failure to make adequate provision for the dependents of broken marriages and the original chronically homeless, except the length of time since their lives had been overtaken by such events. ¹⁰⁹

Narrowing the criteria for refuge occurred in tandem with a process of conceptualising domestic violence within a framework of understanding that normalised experiences of Anglo, married, middle-class women above and beyond other issues relating to women’s inequality. This meant that experiences of inequality and injustice, including violence and homelessness, that diverged from this model were not paid the same attention.¹¹⁰ The centrality of class and subjective experience in shaping the movement’s focus on domestic violence above homelessness is revealed by Rowan, who recounts how at a personal level she did not recall:

[S]eeing women’s homelessness as a political issue. I mean obviously it is … but enough of us had been in oppressive marriages to know what that was like. Maybe that’s a reflection of who I was really, that I wasn’t able to connect to the underclass

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, Last Resort, p. 13.
¹¹⁰ Hargreaves interview.
of women, whereas I could connect to women experiencing violence and bad marriages'.

By the late 1970s the VWRG was active at a national level in constructing feminist understandings of domestic violence, which thus came to be defined by the refuge movement within the parameters of gender inequality and the patriarchal home. Radical feminism provided the theoretical basis for such accounts, and while they did include challenging the assumption that it only occurred in a particular class or group, they nevertheless still framed it within a critique of women’s inequality within marriage:

Wife bashing is not confined to any particular groups of men in society. It occurs irrespective of class or income, and is built into the structure of society, where women have less status and less power than men. In the past women were regarded as the possessions of their husbands and were at their mercy, and this is still the case with many women today.

Domestic violence was in this view inextricably linked to the ‘role of women’ or, in other words, their gender, and that it was both perpetuated and condoned by a range of institutions and structures. In a context of national activism, the Victorian refuge movement ‘[M]ade public the issue of domestic violence… [and] …. were influential in putting it in a context … about power’. Given the focus of the women’s liberation movement on challenging the institution of marriage, it is not surprising then that domestic violence came to be defined within this specific power context. Even more specifically, it was located within the sphere of marriage inside the private home:

Domestic violence is violence which occurs in the home. By no co-incidence it is also understood to mean violence against women by the men they are living with and married to. It occurs behind the protective veil of privacy accorded to the family in our society.

And it was quintessentially about the power differential within marriage. As former WLHWH activist Irena Davis recalls:

[P]art of seeing it in a feminist framework was to say it is not the woman’s fault, it was about the relationships between men and women, it was a fundamental power

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111 Rowan interview.
113 Macmillan interview.
114 WLHWH, Magazine, p. 16.
thing. Not that she’d burnt the chops or didn’t put his plate on the table the right way
or whatever pathetic excuses they’d give for belting the shit out of their partners.\textsuperscript{115}

This framing of domestic violence reflected the subjectivities of the refuge activists involved.
In particular, as Otto reflected, the focus on domestic violence above other inequalities faced
by women was ‘in retrospect, I think … a reflection of the priorities of radical feminism’,\textsuperscript{116}
which gave primacy to challenging the institution of marriage. As Svensson wrote at the time:

We intended to use our experiences in operating a refuge to publicise the inequities
women suffer in our society, and to take direct political action to gain rights for
women … above all, the right to leave a marital relationship.\textsuperscript{117}

This definition was shared by other state refuge movements, including NSW, where activists
argued that domestic violence must be recognised ‘as a social responsibility’\textsuperscript{118} that
was ‘inherent in the institution of marriage’.\textsuperscript{119} This understanding of domestic violence
was constructed as a counter-discourse to challenge the dominant view of the problem as
caused by ‘vicious bullying husbands’,\textsuperscript{120} or the ‘aberrant conduct of individual men’.\textsuperscript{121} As former
state member of parliament Gracia Baylor recalls, women experiencing domestic violence
were considered to be, ‘Somehow failing, it was a women’s role to create a happy home and
all that … [T]here was a lack of sympathy, among certain people, for the women caught in
these situations’.\textsuperscript{122} Hargreaves recalls that a significant consequence of attributing
the problem of domestic violence to individual men was that women’s experiences were often
pathologised by medical professionals, including psychiatrists:

[T]here was a very strong sense of blaming the woman for not being the good wife, or
a sense from the psychiatrists that the woman was neurotic and should be given
valium, and sent back to the situation, rather than empowered to leave it.\textsuperscript{123}

The feminist-led VWRG was unrelenting in its attempts to educate and politicise state
bureaucrats about the severity and causes of domestic violence. Rosi Lever worked as the co-
ordinator of the refuge program in its infancy. She recalled the intensity and forthrightness of
the ‘radical feminists’ she encountered:

\textsuperscript{115} Davis interview.
\textsuperscript{116} Otto interview.
\textsuperscript{117} Ulla Svensson, International Women’s Day Speech, 8 March 1980, Svensson papers.
\textsuperscript{118} Vivien Johnson, ‘A Note on Masochism and the Women’s Refuge Movement’, Working Papers, no. 3, 1977,
pp. 27–30, p. 28, Australian Union of Students Women’s Department papers, 100/155, box 2, MWLA.
\textsuperscript{120} Johnson, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{121} Murray, Refuge, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{122} Baylor interview.
\textsuperscript{123} Hargreaves interview.
my clearest memory is of them saying that men would or could kill women and …
they were so persuasive and compelling … they certainly radicalised my way of
thinking and they turned me into, I think, a more courageous bureaucrat.\textsuperscript{124}

On reflection, Green considered that a ‘feminist’ interpretation of the problem was crucial in
order to transform dominant constructions of domestic violence:

\begin{quote}
I think a change of consciousness is generally going to be led by some sharp new
interpretation. And I think the feminist women had it right. They had to be sharp, they
had to change the paradigm and the way of thinking about it. They had to break it
open. I probably don’t represent the typical view.\textsuperscript{125}
\end{quote}

No doubt Lever and Green did not represent the ‘typical view’ of government bureaucrats.
However, their progressive views and location in key jobs was enough to ensure that the
refuge movement in Victoria developed within a context of openness to change and new ways
of thinking about welfare provision.

Convincing representatives from the DCWS was certainly a serious challenge for members of
the VWRG. Lever herself acknowledged that she initially considered ‘ridiculous’ the claim
that women were being murdered.\textsuperscript{126} However, the bureaucracy became increasingly
receptive bureaucracy as Green’s statement below reveals:

\begin{quote}
I thought the whole process of the politicisation of the women’s refuge was a really
important process. And that, in a sense, the differences of view were secondary, that
what was happening here was that in fact a long standing social problem; one of the
most significant kind of residual problems in Australian gender relationships, violence
to women … was being unlocked, and if it was being unlocked in conflict, it was
better than having it locked.\textsuperscript{127}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{124} Lever interview.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Green interview.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Lever interview.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Green interview.
\end{footnotes}
‘Drawing a Line’: The Refuge Movement and the State

If you're looking for change that actually gets into a variety of areas of power … then I think you've got to engage with the state.129

Funding

Federal funding for a national women’s refuge program was introduced by the Whitlam–led Labor government in June 1975, $59,000 was allocated across nineteen refuges.130 Feminists within the Whitlam government had influenced the development of public policy so that ‘refuge funding could be forced onto the political agenda’.131 However, access was haphazard and inadequate and the majority of refuges continued to operate primarily on the volunteer efforts of women, particularly in relation to staffing and day-to-day running of the refuges. Funding for food and other costs was sought from a range of sources, including local councils, churches, private charities and philanthropists, non-government community organisations and various women’s groups such WEL. In its first year of operation, for example, WEL set up a trust fund to pay the rates, electricity and phone for WLHWH, which also received philanthropic support from the Myer Foundation.132 Refuges sought general donations and undertook a range of fundraising activities.133 Available funds were divided according to need, as Austin explains: ‘in those days we just said “we've got X number of workers, X number of hours … we want to cover the service from nine to nine, this is what we can afford to pay”’.134

Generally speaking, in Australia, the refuge movement has, alongside the broader women’s movement, believed that the state has a responsibility to provide for women and children and they have continually lobbied state and Commonwealth governments to provide financial support for refuges and related services. But there was also resistance to government involvement, despite a widespread conviction about the need to ‘force the government into recognition of its responsibility to meet the specific needs of homeless women’.135 Considerable debate took place when WLHWH first received funding; there was ‘probably … more disagreement within our collective over our approach to government funding … than

128 VWRG minutes, 29 March 1978.
129 Green interview.
130 WLHWH, Herstory, p. 30.
131 Melville, ‘Funding’, p. 17.
134 Austin interview.
almost anything else’. One of the central concerns for feminist refuges within the Victorian refuge movement was the fear that it would depoliticise their work:

We thought it was quite a dangerous option, even though we also thought we deserved funding, or the women who were coming to the refuge deserved resources. But we didn’t want to go down that track of becoming a depoliticised charity.\(^{137}\)

At the federal level, Malcolm Fraser headed a new conservative Liberal–National Party Coalition government following the dismissal of the Whitlam government in November 1975. This change of government signalled a shift to a residual approach to welfare. Whitlam’s social welfare initiatives were wound back, resulting in ‘substantial changes being made to refuge funding as a consequence of the federal devolution of the Community Health Program’ from which refuges had been funded.\(^{138}\) This included administration of refuges being handed over to the states and funding earmarked in federal block grants.\(^{139}\) Sociologist Roselyn Melville has argued that federalism was ‘used as a guise to institute large funding cutbacks by devolving federal government functions and responsibilities to state governments’.\(^{140}\) Alongside this, the 1976 federal budget expenditure for refuges was reduced to 90 per cent of operating costs and 75 per cent of capital costs.\(^{141}\) This trend continued, and the following year it declined further to 75 per cent operating and 50 per cent capital.\(^{142}\)

State governments were expected to make up funding shortfalls and the Hamer government continued to do so in Victoria. Indeed, Victoria was unusual in that refuges continued to expand during this period despite a conservative state government— unlike Queensland and Western Australia’s governments, which refused to meet the funding gaps. Somewhat surprisingly, however, and despite the welfare cuts of the Fraser government, the 1977–78 federal budget saw a considerable increase in funds for refuges from the Community Health Program to $1.4 million. This was the outcome of work by femocrats within the Commonwealth Office of Women’s Affairs, public pressure and media exposure.\(^{143}\)

The responsibility for administering refuge funding in Victoria was held by the State Health Department until December 1977, when it was transferred to the DCWS. It is unclear why this


\(^{137}\) Hargreaves interview.

\(^{138}\) Melville, ‘Funding’, p. 19.

\(^{139}\) Melville, ‘Funding’, p. 19.

\(^{140}\) Melville, ‘Funding’, p. 19.

\(^{141}\) Chairman of Hospital and Health Services Commission to Halfway House Collective, 21 May 1976, WLHWH papers.

\(^{142}\) Melville, ‘Funding’, p. 20

\(^{143}\) Melville, ‘Funding’, p. 20. See also McFerran, ‘Interpretation’.

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administrative shift occurred at this time. However, it is likely that the department’s tumultuous history of relations with refuges was a motivating factor. It can also be assumed that the government considered the refuge program would fit better within a welfare portfolio than with health, particularly as refuges focused attention on domestic violence as a cause of women’s homelessness, and some had already received funding under the Commonwealth Homeless Persons Assistance Program.

In mid-1978 in response to the Commonwealth’s provision of additional funds for refuges, the DCWS placed a submission to the Federal Health Department to continue funding the nine existing refuges, and a further five from which they had received submissions. These included young women’s refuge collective and Co-As-It. The receipt of funding for Co-As-It followed two years of sustained efforts to prove the need for a migrant women’s refuge. Soon after, a number of refuges were established across Melbourne as well as in regional areas, including Frankston, Warrnambool, Geelong and the La Trobe Valley.

Whilst funding levels for refuges increased from to $1.4 million in 1977–1978 to $3 million in the 1978–1979 Commonwealth budget, individual refuges were forced to operate on less money because of the increase in their overall numbers. Furthermore, there were considerable inconsistencies in funding between refuges. Co-As-It, for example, was funded at a lower rate than other refuges for a number of years. Murdolo has argued this arose from the assumption that ‘migrant women’s needs were thought to be easily and readily met, despite quite some evidence to the contrary’. Moreover, the oldest refuges were often in a better position to access funds simply because they were more experienced and knew what to apply for.

Following a national refuge conference convened in Melbourne during March 1978, refuges were informed by the Commonwealth that funding guidelines established in 1975 under the Whitlam government were no longer applicable. The guidelines had been prepared by women bureaucrats in the Commonwealth Health Department who had ‘stayed loyal to the original feminist image’ and drew on the ‘models developed by Elsie and the WLHWH’. The change meant that funding guidelines became ambiguous and state governments assumed

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145 Young Women’s Refuge Collective, ‘Submission for Funding’, Melbourne 1978, Kara House Archives (KHA); ‘Young Women’s Refuge Collective’, Women’s Liberation Newspaper, Melbourne August 1979, Tatchell papers, box 1, MWLA.
146 Co.As.It, p. 6, Judy Johnson private papers, in possession of Jacqui Theobald.
148 Murdolo, p. 283.
149 ‘Delegation’.
150 VWRG minutes, June 1978.
a greater position of power over the governance of refuges. Victorian refuges also feared the Commonwealth’s perceived indifference to their insistence that refuges must be more than an accommodation service, and moved to ensure that any new state government funding guidelines reflected their aims with regard to the role of refuges. They did so because they felt that it was not:

enough to be a hostel for women in order to qualify for women’s refuges money. The government seems very unclear as to where they should draw the line so it is probably a good idea if we worked out where we would like it drawn.

**Definition of a Refuge**

The formation of the VWRG enabled refuges to work strategically together when engaging with the state. As former refuge activist Jean Taylor recalls: ‘Before going into the meetings, we would sit around in the Classic Café, and say “when they say that, we will say this”, we had it all planned out’. By mid-1978, the VWRG felt impelled to express its concern to the state government about the increase in the number of refuges that were charitable in nature and run by non-political organisations. As well as fearing their aims and objectives were under threat, feminist refuges were also alarmed about the possibility of a ‘split within the refuges group’. Their solution was to ensure greater clarity surrounding the functions of refuges, and, with this aim, a working party commenced the task of establishing a definition. Initiated by a group of inner city refuges, it met each Friday for five weeks from August 1978. The group aimed to secure representation from all refuges, and maintain unity: ‘It is politically important for all refuges to be involved with social welfare—if we are not united then social welfare will split us’.

The definition developed was based primarily upon a paper written by WLHWH collective member and sociology academic, Ulla Svensson. It sought to establish, ‘what sort of organisation constitutes a refuge?’ They were concerned that they would receive funding in accordance with organisations ‘providing emergency accommodation, and other more conservative women’s refuges’. So the definition was ‘constructed in such a way as to

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152 VWRG minutes, 4 June 1978.
153 VWRG minutes, 29 March 1978.
154 Taylor interview.
157 VWRG minutes, 1 August 1978.
158 VWRG minutes, 4 October 1978.
159 VWRG minutes, 18 August, 1978.
160 VWRG minutes, 4 June 1978.
provide a basis for establishing appropriate funding guidelines,' and shaped by the following feminist principles:

A women’s refuge is run by women for women and their children; a women’s refuge is committed to social change; a women’s refuge seeks to directly affect the conditions of our lives in this society; a women’s refuge provides temporary accommodation in a supportive environment; a women’s refuge is based on the premise of reciprocal support; a women’s refuge is a non-professional social setting; a women’s refuge is accessible to ex-residents.

The VWRG’s role in the development of a definition exemplifies the ability of refuge activists to work together to ensure their objectives relating to social change were taken into account when it came to funding so that they could operate as an ‘alternative to institutionalised welfare’. They thus insisted upon ‘political activities being part of the funding’. They were aware that, in Queensland, the refuge program now limited ‘refuges to emergency accommodation’, and were concerned to ‘prevent that from happening in Victoria’. Their definition insisted that the feminist principles of the VWRG be incorporated into state funding guidelines so that any organisation running a refuge was required to incorporate these into their work. In particular, the criterion that refuges operate as women-only collective organisations was enshrined in the guidelines.

Members of the VWRG were also invited, at their request, to participate in a DCWS working party reviewing applications from refuges for new funding. Their definition was utilised as a tool to assist assessment, and representatives ranked submissions in accordance with the new understanding, which included ensuring that refuges were ‘involved in changing social structures and institutions which disadvantage or affect the status of women and children in society’. The VWRG also tried to ensure that funding went only to organisations they considered ideologically ‘appropriate to run a women’s refuge’. Conservative organisations, such as the ‘Women’s Action Alliance, St Vincent de Paul … were not considered ideologically suitable’. Moreover, in order to qualify for funding, refuges were expected to align themselves with the VWRG. Whilst it is not clear whether this was a

161 VWRG minutes, 18 August, 1978.
162 ‘Definition of a Refuge’, June 1978, KHA.
164 Hargreaves interview.
165 Ulla Svensson to VWRG, 25 May 1978, Svensson papers.
166 ‘Dru’, 1 August 1978.
specific requirement, the authority experienced by the VWRG suggests that, without their support, access to funding was unlikely. This position was remembered with great delight, as Taylor recalls: ‘It was very much the decision of the refuges who were on the interview panel, which refuges got funded’.\textsuperscript{170} Caroline Lodge, for example, sought funding at this time—as they had previously been funded under the HPAP—and, in response, the VWRG argued:

[W]e feel that the stated aims and structures of the organisation differ from the concept of a refuge which we have developed. The Mordialloc refuge departs from this concept on two grounds: males are eligible to join the working group; the management structure is hierarchical.\textsuperscript{171}

As we have seen, conservative organisations did nevertheless receive funding from the DCWS and Mary Anderson Lodge is one example. However, the strategic capacity of the feminist-led VWRG to develop a definition of a refuge, combined with its influence on funding guidelines as well as the allocation of funds, enabled feminist principles to become enshrined in the state government’s refuge program and policy development. Moreover, these processes worked to ensure that newly funded refuges were brought ‘under the wing’ of the VWRG so as to ensure they adopted feminist philosophy and practice. In effect, this meant that all organisations involved in providing refuge to women were bound by these principles and guidelines.

The Bureaucracy

In a way they needed us as much as they needed each other. They needed open, flexible bureaucrats.\textsuperscript{172}

The refugee movement drove a process of responding to domestic violence in a new way and it was their feminist framing of the problem that came to be accepted by state bureaucrats. Whilst fraught with conflict, this relationship was also characterised by reciprocity and negotiation. Claire Reinelt contends in relation to the US in the 1970s, that the ‘challenge for state-level feminist activists was to negotiate a path that provides support services to battered women and at the same time promotes a feminist program for change’.\textsuperscript{173} Feminists who led the Victorian women’s refuge movement’s engagement with the state walked this line with considerable care, determination and fortitude, the outcome being the support of the Victorian government for their leadership of the direction of the refuge program. The role of women,

\textsuperscript{170} Taylor interview.
\textsuperscript{171} Mordialloc refuge to VWRG, July 1978, Svensson papers.
\textsuperscript{172} Lever interview.
\textsuperscript{173} Reinelt, p. 85.
and men, within government was also important in enabling the refuge program to develop unhindered, as well as ensuring that conservative forces did not undermine the feminist agenda for political action and social change. Indeed, in this context, the state actually assisted in bringing about one of the most sustained challenges to the gender order, namely, that domestic violence should be seen as the result of unequal power relations between men and women.

At first, the VWRG was highly suspicious of the state government, and members were concerned that their engagement with bureaucrats would depoliticise the work of refuges. As the state sought to increase its intervention in the running of refuges, so too did refuges seek to maintain their autonomy. Similarly, activists in the US and Canada sought to ensure that shelters maintained autonomy whilst receiving money from the state. To this end, feminist refuges in Victoria initiated meetings with bureaucrats with the objective of ‘taking control by setting the demands to protect Halfway House’s aims through educating and influencing the department’. But they also feared this would result in ‘giving the department more knowledge and material with which to manipulate and undermine refuges’. To circumvent this, at every step of the refuge program’s development, the VWRG made sure that members were involved in all decision making. The appointment of a co-ordinator, for example, was not made without the refuge group’s control over the job description. They also insisted on autonomy in relation to other funding requirements, including self-evaluation, research and input into policy. The issue of government control over feminist organisations more broadly was a publicly debated and contentious one at this time:

The question of whether government funding of community projects necessarily involves government control of these projects has been a matter of grave concern to many community-based groups. However the VWRG as a consolidated united group will maintain its right to autonomy.

The VWRG’s response to the implications for autonomy of accepting government funding was particularly shaped by radical feminist philosophy, which favoured autonomous institutions outside of the mainstream. But the desperate need for money meant that negotiations with the state were inevitable and, by the late 1970s, the divide between those who argued for and against state involvement in feminist projects was less apparent.

174 Reinelt, p. 86; Walker, p. 36.
175 Alley, Chapman, Geddes, and Wilson, p. 4.
176 Alley, Chapman, Geddes, and Wilson, p. 4.
178 VWRG minutes, 24 January 1978.
179 VWRG, ‘A Paper’.
The challenges the VWRG faced in maintaining a unified group, combined with the struggle to retain autonomy, as well as put feminist philosophy into practice, were well recognised by the bureaucracy. The state acted in support of the group, however, and never, according to Green, deliberately undermined its integrity despite members’ fears. As Green reflects:

[A]s a conscious position, [we] never, ever, in any way, attempted to use those differences or exploit them. We could have, and occasionally people would say to us “I don't want to be party to this”. And when the meetings were at their most insulting, either directed towards me or towards the state … no-one ever took it as totally personal … none of the dissenting groups felt strong enough … to break away, so there was sufficient coherence in it and I felt that was really important. If there was this process divided, that would have actually not served anybody's purpose very well. I thought it was really important that we tried to find solutions, which were respectful, not only of the state's interest, but alongside the refuges, the collectives’ interests.180

The respect for the VWRG’s work by staff within DCWS meant that they considered themselves to have:

[P]layed a small role in holding that together, so that it didn't fracture into groups … a lot of people thought it was important to hold this together and saw the diversity of the groups and the diversity of motivations and compassion and commitment that were there.181

At the same time, the political work of Victorian refuges came under scrutiny from others, , including conservative Senator Brian Harradine, who directed criticism at a Melbourne refuge that had advertised for a worker to undertake political work. Harradine applied pressure to the Federal Health Department, which in turn pressured the DCWS to ensure that political activity would not be undertaken in refuges during work hours.182 In response, the DCWS supported the advocacy and social action role of refuges.183 Because this was a period when the nature of welfare provision was being challenged in a broader context, supporting the refuge program to operate in new and different ways, was part and parcel of the department’s work. As Lever comments, ‘it was about acknowledging that there is a whole group of people in the population who are not well served by counselling and often mainstream middle-class

180 Green interview.
181 Green interview.
service options of the time’.184 The refuge program acted as a forerunner to this process and provided, as Green recalls, ‘a testing ground for all of us … it was actually leading a different way of relating to a sector if you like, which worried some people though, especially the Commonwealth’.185

The refuge movement’s engagement with the state and its capacity to advocate for the autonomy of refuges gained the support and ‘enormous respect’ of government bureaucrats, resulting in the preparedness of the DCWS to respond to refuge administration with flexibility. In a national context, DCWS bureaucrats argued this position, contending that refuges and other ‘new programs’ should not be run according to blanket rules of operation:

   Licensing, contracting out or registration may be appropriate for, say, children’s homes or family group homes where the state has a traditional regulatory role … but will not be appropriate for new programs such as youth refuges, emergency accommodation for families, financial counselling, women’s refuges etc … too little is known about the most effective ways of providing services in these areas to prescribe rigid standards, uncertainty should be seen as a constructive part of program development.186

The personal impact on bureaucrats involved with the refuge movement was significant because the consistent pressure applied by the VWRG meant, as Green recalls, that, ‘there wouldn’t be a meeting without fail that we weren’t actually challenged on four or five different issues’.187 While these were not ‘easy for me personally’,188 they were nevertheless ‘extremely invigorating … and largely quite enjoyable. It was exciting and they were doing some really innovative things’.189

Lever found group meetings difficult in facing the wrath of a group of ‘radical’ and ‘intellectual’ women,190 and then condemnation of all things related to the patriarchal state. As Hargreaves recalls, ‘I think we’ve had a very kind of unfair attitude that we labelled everyone as bureaucrats and put them in the camp of the enemy’.191 At the time, there was very little appreciation of the work done by feminists in government. However, Lever juggled the competing demands of the refuge program’s radical agenda and the constraints of

182 Lever interview.
183 Green interview.
184 DCWS, ‘Discussion Paper’.
185 Green interview.
186 Green interview.
187 Green interview.
188 Lever interview.
189 Hargreaves interview.
bureaucracy. As she recounts: ‘I still remember Walter [Jona] looking at me and saying … “Don’t you put me in an invidious position”’.

A further example of state institutions supporting the work of the refuge movement is the role of women’s departments and advisers. Whilst the role of adviser under the Hamer government was short-lived, it led to the establishment of a Women’s Advisory Bureau—later re-named Office of Women’s Affairs (OWA)—whose members sought contact with women’s refuges and offered support in the form of administrative resources and strategic advice in relation to ‘contacts in the state government that are sympathetic’. The relationship was not particularly close, however, because bureaucrats (women included) continued to be viewed with suspicion by members of the VWRG.

Yolanda Klempfner was appointed to the OWA during the late 1970s, and sought to promote the issue of domestic violence onto the policy platform of the Hamer government. Refuge workers were considered experts on the issue of domestic violence, and Klempfner sought information and co-operation from them. The OWA also produced a pamphlet in partnership with the VWRG outlining the role and function of a women’s refuge. Liz Orr has noted that Klempfner was particularly skilful at ‘utilising the support and knowledge of sympathetic men, in particular the Premier’. This was evident in her capacity to lobby Treasury directly for funds to initiate research into domestic violence, and to ensure the government maintained its commitment to match the federal funding short-fall for refuges. The role of women like Klempfner in Liberal governments confirms Melville’s argument that funding support for refuges was dependent on factors other than the election of Labor governments.

The state’s support for the refuge movement’s feminism, autonomy and unity was hard won but it meant that the VWRG exercised considerable power. Members were able to influence the further development of the refuge program to ensure that feminist principles were embedded within government policy and adopted by newly funded refuges. A major

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192 Lever interview.
195 VWRG minutes, 9 May 1979.
196 VWRG and OWA, ‘Do You Need a Women’s Refuge?’, Department of Premier, Victoria 1981, Ryan papers, box 1, MWLA.
197 Orr, ‘Sexual Assault’, p. 55.
199 ‘Drum’, 29 August 1978
demonstration of this power was the campaign mounted to maintain secrecy of refuge addresses.

**The Secrecy of Address Campaign**

The bureaucrats wanted to just walk into the refuges, they wanted to come and visit, they wanted to pop in as they did with any other institution … We absolutely flatly refused to have that happen.\(^\text{201}\)

In October 1979, Minister for Community Welfare Services Walter Jona formally requested the addresses of and visitation rights to the sixteen women’s refuges.\(^\text{202}\) Refuges were informed that, unless their addresses were provided to the DCWS, they would have their funding cut.\(^\text{203}\) They refused this request and launched a campaign to secure public support for their right to maintain secrecy. The success of the campaign became highly symbolic for the Victorian refuge movement because those involved were united, organised and ultimately successful in their battle against the state. For these reasons, it has become a highpoint in movement activists’ in accounts of their history.\(^\text{204}\) Reflecting the subjective nature of memory, the address campaign has been represented as primarily concerned with the security of women’s refuges, such commitment being claimed as characteristic of Victorian refuges from their beginnings.\(^\text{205}\) Only over time has the campaign come to symbolise ‘the ability of refuges to maintain some autonomy from the government’.\(^\text{206}\) Here I reconsider these assumptions, and argue that the feminist-inspired campaign was equally determined from its the start to maintain the autonomy of refuges from the state government in order to avoid being forced to operate along the lines of traditional charitable welfare organisations. Whilst a commitment to confidentiality of address was characteristic of the Victorian refuge movement from the outset, the actual resolve to maintain secrecy developed over time. Initially, confidentiality was a practical response to immediate security concerns, but the resolve to defend it on principle strengthened as the Commonwealth and state governments increased the intensity of their demands. Finally, the campaign is often remembered as achieving success solely as a result of the determination of the refuge movement.\(^\text{207}\) Whilst undoubtedly a useful strategy to muster group identity and solidarity, this narrative pays inadequate

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\(^{201}\) Taylor interview.

\(^{202}\) WLHWH, ‘Halfway House: Collective Work is a Political Act’, *Scarlet Woman*, no. 11, 1980, pp.11–12;

\(^{203}\) VPD, Legislative Assembly, 19 October 1979, p. 3854.


\(^{207}\) Austin, pp. 14–15.
attention to the significance of the political and institutional context—much of which has already been canvassed here—in addition to the influence of other actors operating in the state bureaucracy who enabled its success. This particular confluence of factors and people, I argue, allowed Victorian women’s refuges to operate as government-funded community organisations with extraordinarily irregular accountability requirements that included being funded at unknown locations until the late 1980s.

The addresses of Victorian refuges were unknown to the state government when the DCWS assumed administration of the program in late 1977.208 Prior to this, when the program was administered by the State Health Department, the address of at least one refuge was known to department representatives.209 It appears that there had thus been no formal decision by Victorian refuges to keep their addresses a secret when they were initially established.210 Indeed, the issue was debated internally, and some members of the WLHWH questioned the necessity for secrecy.211 Extreme caution was taken with this information, however, which was in stark contrast to refuges in other states like Elsie in Sydney, which began in a very public fashion.212 By 1977, and in response to growing concerns about security, refuges became more focused on ensuring their addresses remained secret.213 At the same time, they adopted policies of moving the location of refuges in response to alleged security breeches.

The cautious approach adopted by Victorian refuges was in part shaped by the experiences of the women who started the movement. WLHWH co-founder Sharon Laura recounts earlier experiences that shaped her behaviour:

[W]e were being careful how we did things in order to protect the actual organisation. I know that my experience in the anti-war movement, my experience in the trade union movement, my experience with the cops, had very much informed how I operated within the group and the collective. 214

Pressure on the state government to find a solution that both preserved the secrecy of refuges’ addresses and delivered assurance that they were in fact operating grew following a request from Prime Minister’s wife, Tammy Fraser, to visit a Victorian refuge. As then director of regional services David Green recalls:

208 Green interview.
212 Summers, Ducks, pp. 316–319.
214 Laura interview.
I was called one day by the Commonwealth to say that the Prime Minister’s wife wanted to visit a refuge. I said “yeah that would be good but we’ll have to contact the refuge, we don’t know where they are”. And there was this huge furore about the Prime Minister’s wife being held up in her wishes to just drop in on a refuge … because the state didn’t know where they were located.215

Under pressure from the Commonwealth, the Victorian state government increasingly sought access to the addresses of refuges.216 In response, refuges became more organised in their resistance and debated the question of how far they should co-operate to provide this information.217 Notably, radical feminist activists from WLHWH, including Kaye Hargreaves, were influential in arguing against ‘allowing entry to the refuge’, as well as ‘persuad[ing] other refuges’ to follow suit.218 Not all refuges, however, were prepared to toe the line. Aboriginal activists, for example, challenged secret addresses as potentially divisive in the Aboriginal community. Lever recalls that Aboriginal women ‘stood their ground’ in relation to the issue, and argued against embracing white feminism, claiming that ‘this is not part of our cultural heritage and ideology’.219 Rural refuges also approached the issue of security differently because they ‘had to assume that everybody in town knew where the refuge was’.220 They often worked in close collaboration with their local communities, and some did not adopt secrecy-of-address policies.221

Whilst safety for women was a motivator in their campaign, radical feminist refuges were also, as former state government bureaucrat Susan Feldman argued, ‘ideologically driven, I believe, because it’s a very strong feminist stance. And we’re talking about some very radical women’.222 The Victorian refuge movement continued to oppose the intrusion of the state into their affairs, which, they argued, represented a threat to their autonomy. This was a central focus of the address campaign. Feminist leaders continued to argue that, unlike other forms of welfare provision, refuges were not ‘an accommodation service … [and] … the concept that how residents live is susceptible to monitoring and evaluation … is directly in conflict with … this way of operating’.223 At their state conference in 1979, refuges argued that providing addresses would result in ‘undermining their integrity and autonomy’, and they ‘regarded the

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215 Green interview.
216 Acting Director-General of Health to Director-General of Social Welfare, 17 May 1979, Svensson papers.
219 Lever interview.
221 Emma House Collective, Aims and Objectives, circa 1985, KHA.
222 Susan Feldman, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 1 April 2009.
demand for addresses and visits as a directive for refuges to operate purely as a welfare service’. Avowedly feminist refuges were particularly concerned about what it would mean for refuges as sites of political action:

The government’s demands must be seen as a move towards increased government surveillance and control over refuges. Possession of refuge’s addresses and the right to visit gives the government … the formal procedures for restricting the political function of refuges.  

Refuge activists were certainly also concerned about the threat to their security. As Macmillan recounts, it was not unusual ‘if [men] found out the address of the refuge’ for them to ‘arrive occasionally armed, demanding that we give them their wives back’. The VWRG reached consensus on this issue and agreed that ‘no bureaucracy can guarantee to safeguard the addresses’. It was further argued that ‘women come to the refuge to escape physical and mental violence. For this reason tight security is essential for the safety and protection of the residents of the refuge. Addresses of refuges are only known to those people living and working in each particular house’. They agreed that the address issue would be publicly explained in terms of the threat to the security of refuges, and the conviction that wider access to addresses would compromise their ‘ability to truly offer women sanctuary from male violence’. This explains in part why the address issue is often remembered primarily in terms of safety. As refuge worker Janine Mahoney recounts:

The whole concept of safety has [had] a massive influence on the development of the services … The whole security of address issue developed because we were looking to maintain safety for the clients that we provided services for.

However, as I have indicated, the address issue represented something considerably more compelling and complex to refuge activists than the physical security of women; they did not consider that they should be held accountable to government. Hargreaves now reflects:

I think the security issue was not just in relation to the security of women residents, the danger of their husbands or their boyfriends coming around. I mean, we had reasons to be worried about that … we had incidents … but I think it was also the idea

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225 Alley, Chapman, Geddes, and Wilson, p. 3.
226 Macmillan interview.
227 VWRG, ‘The Security of Women’s Refuges in Victoria Is Threatened by a Demand for their Address from the Department of Community Welfare Services’, Melbourne, 1979, Burrows papers, UMA.
228 VWRG, ‘Security’.
229 ‘Women’s Refuges Under Attack’, Women’s Liberation Newsletter, November 1979, Tatchel papers, box 2, MWLA.
230 Janine Mahoney, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 8 October 2008.
that we didn’t want to be under scrutiny from the government. There was an issue of autonomy versus accountability. We didn’t actually think that we … should be accountable, because we were the women who had the problem, and we were acting on our own behalf. Yes, so what right did they have to ask us to be accountable? We were the ones with the entitlement.\textsuperscript{231}

Similarly, as Wendy Austin reveals, although the protection of women was a fundamental motivator in their campaign, it was also important that the community was not holding men to account, and so refuges likewise resisted being held accountable:

Women need to be protected, the workers need to be protected, these are violent nasty men who the community's not paying any attention to, and is not holding to account in anyway, so … we're basically not going to tell you where we are.\textsuperscript{232}

This stance puzzled bureaucrats who did not consider themselves ‘to be careless or dishonourable, or people who … when a furious husband or de-facto rings up and demands the address of his wife … just fall over and provide it’.\textsuperscript{233} They were stunned by the insinuation that they were not ‘responsible enough, or respectful enough, of the security issues involved to treat these matters with a reasonable degree of control and security and privacy’.\textsuperscript{234} By contrast, refuge activists argued that ‘having never been through this kind of experience, government employees do not understand the necessity of secrecy’.\textsuperscript{235} This necessity had been experienced first hand by former Victorian Labor Party Minister for Community Services Kay Setches, when, as a volunteer at a refuge in the late 1970s, she was phoned by a leading Victorian Australian Labor Party politician demanding the refuge’s address because his colleague’s wife was known to be residing there. Despite Setches’ staunch refusal to provide the information, the woman’s husband managed to locate the refuge within the week. This event gave Setches a renewed appreciation of the need for protection and security:

Now, if that hadn’t happened to me, being the person who was in charge, who understood the way that political patronage and information can be found among men … [a]nd they had no care that she was bashed. No care. And so, whenever I used to hear people saying, “they’re paranoid” … they might be a bit, but I’ve seen it work.\textsuperscript{236}

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\textsuperscript{231} Hargreaves interview.
\textsuperscript{232} Austin interview.
\textsuperscript{233} Green interview.
\textsuperscript{234} Green interview.
\textsuperscript{235} Irena Davis, ‘Should Refuges’ Addresses Be Freely Available to the Department of CWS?’ 10 October 1979, Svensson papers.
\textsuperscript{236} Setches interview.
\end{flushleft}
The security of addresses campaign was largely successful, revealing the powerful position that refuges had attained. As former refuge and outreach worker Judy Johnson argued: ‘[Y]ou couldn’t possibly have splashed right across the local paper that government had closed all the refuges. They would have gone to the wall on that … so we did have a huge amount of political power’. 237

Alongside the relentless advocacy of a united refuge movement, the state itself played a critical role in support of the refuge movement’s position both by listening and by continuing to support what they considered to be a ‘crucial service’. State bureaucrats in the DCWS advocated for them in the face of the Commonwealth government’s alarm at the autonomy of the Victorian refuge movement in relation to addresses. The Commonwealth Health Department attempted to force provision of addresses by incorporating it in the funding agreement with the state. 238 Until this point, refuges had met accountability requirements by providing DCWS with a statutory declaration nominating the suburb where the refuge was located. However, issues of accountability combined with the ambiguous legal status of refuges as unincorporated associations had already begun to plague the DCWS to the point that it no longer considered it ‘satisfactory to direct substantial funds to postal addresses of a group of unknown people’. 239 But, whilst the state government was determined to improve the accountability mechanisms for refuges, the DCWS was also determined to continue ‘attempting to administer an innovative program flexibly … in spite of the complexity of these issues’. 240

Supporting refuges to maintain secrecy of addresses is evidence that state bureaucrats were working from an awareness of the serious effects of domestic violence and the consequent need to defend the autonomy of refuges. Lever recalls the public servants’ motivations for supporting the refuges:

    This group were so strong and articulate, and had a strongly held … philosophy and ideology, and we listened. And beyond listening we actually translated their view into the development of a ground-breaking program. Who else would ever, as a bureaucrat, fund people where you actually didn’t know where they were operating from? 241

237 Johnson focus group.
239 Acting Director General of Social Welfare to Crown Solicitor, 6 August 1979, Janine Berryman private papers in possession of Jacqui Theobald.
240 Director General to Crown.
241 Lever interview.
Green believes that this continued largely because no formal attempts were made to interfere with his autonomy as a bureaucrat, and the methods he adopted to navigate the process:

[A]t no point did my director, the director general of social welfare, Albert Booth, ever tell me not to go down the track of trying to negotiate the way through. I was never subject to any coercive interference with respect to that process, either from the minister or from the director general … [The] prospect of that ever happening today, a similar situation in terms of the risks for the state involved in that, the risk everybody was running, in that process, is just inconceivable. There'd be eight levels of authority breathing down the neck of my equivalent. So the institutional context is significant.  

As Green’s comments suggest, the autonomy he was allowed would be impossible in the present climate where governments are primarily focused on increasing their ‘steering and regulatory functions to manage and direct policy responses to societal risks’.  

The address issue gained significant publicity and became a topic of debate in state parliament, where ALP members, including feminist Joan Coxsedge, questioned the minister over his intentions. Support was also present amongst Victorian Liberal Party women such as Gracia Baylor, who recalled the impact they made on the government’s eventual decision to support the refuge movement’s campaign. It was because ‘conservative women were openly being associated with it’, she argued, that ‘it publicly hit home a bit with the state government’. Their position of influence was enhanced because of their ‘networks and people would watch what we do and say’. As a consequence, they were able to ‘influence the thinking of a number of … key people in government circles’. Within DCWS itself, there was also considerable support for the position of women’s refuges. Green recalls:

[A]mongst my staff in regional services there was sympathy towards the position … many of the staff in the division…. were very supportive of the women's refuge movement and it was exciting, it was a real inroad on … a very weak response to … male violence. And the women's refuge collectives were very articulate about it. The power struggle as we saw it, was more the struggle between us and the

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242 Green Interview.
245 *VPD*, Legislative Assembly, October 1979, pp. 3854–71.
246 Baylor interview.
247 Baylor interview.
248 Baylor interview.
Commonwealth, rather than us and the refuges. That’s not the way the refuges would see it.\(^{249}\)

In response to refuges’ protests, and the ensuing publicity and community support, DCWS convened a meeting in mid-December 1979 with the aim of resolving the deadlock. Refuges were informed that the minister would make a number of concessions, in particular, the notion of an address holder.\(^{250}\) In practice, this meant that a nominee would be asked to hold the address of a refuge in confidence and make an annual visit to authenticate its operation. Address holders would be well-reputed women within the community and not necessarily employees of DCWS. The compromise position was accepted by the majority of refuges but rejected by feminist ones, including WLHWH and Western, which argued that members found it ‘no longer possible to operate a refuge consistent with our principles and to accept government funding’.\(^{251}\) This decision was over-turned within a few months, and they reluctantly agreed to accept funding according to the new agreement.\(^{252}\) They were unhappy about being forced into this position, and protested in theatrical fashion by occupying David Green’s office dressed as mourners and carrying a coffin to symbolise the ‘death of autonomous refuges’.\(^{253}\)

A tussle continued between the state government and the Commonwealth into the early 1980s, with the Commonwealth persisting in its demands for access to refuge addresses.\(^{254}\) The VWRG also met with the then Commonwealth Minister for Health, Michael Mackellar, who insinuated that they would lose their funding if they were not prepared to negotiate.\(^{255}\) Refuges held to their position, which was strengthened by the ongoing support of the national refuge movement and the stand assumed by the Minister Jona in favour of the address-holder position.\(^{256}\) It has been argued by McFerran that the Commonwealth’s agenda ‘bore little connection to the issues of accountability’, but was instead ‘a thinly veiled campaign against the best organised refuge movement’\(^{257}\) in Australia. It seems likely, however, that the Commonwealth’s agenda did concern accountability, in part because of growing backlash against the welfare state by the Murdoch press and the backbenchers in Fraser’s Coalition

\(^{249}\) Green interview.
\(^{250}\) VWRG and DCWS meeting minutes, 17 December 1979, WLHWH papers, box 16.
\(^{251}\) WLHWH to Minister for Community Services, 19 December 1979, Svensson papers.
\(^{253}\) ‘Drum’, 31 March 1980; Green interview.
\(^{255}\) Commonwealth Health Minister and VWRG minutes, March 1981, Svensson papers.
government. However, in the end, ‘the State told the Commonwealth that that was the way it was going to be, and the Commonwealth had to accept it’.259

The initial address-holder arrangement was maintained until 1987, when all refuges’ addresses were required to be lodged with female staff in Community Services Victoria (CSV) (formally DCWS). At this time, CSV had come under direct criticism from the Victorian state auditor general, who had ‘publicly criticised CSV’s handling of … the Women’s Emergency Services Program (WESP) in particular’.260 The new requirements imposed on refuges reflected, (as will be discussed in the following chapter), the Commonwealth government’s growing commitment to accountable management, which was inflamed by alleged abuses of power committed by particular refuges, including closing without notifying the department and misuse of public funds. Despite some renewed protest, refuges’ addresses were lodged with a number of female bureaucrats who undertook annual inspections and made statutory declarations to the state confirming that the refuge existed and was operating.261 Susan Feldman recalled, ‘I was an address holder, so my refuge was in Mildura. I used to keep the addresses under a mat on my desk, unbeknownst to my colleagues’.262 Today the confidentiality of addresses of Victorian refuges is still maintained. However, they are held together in the Office of Housing and Community Building division of the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS), where access is restricted to female bureaucrats.263

The secrecy of refuges’ addresses proved to be one of the most controversial issues facing the Victorian refuge movement. During the time under discussion here, the campaign served to publicise the issue of domestic violence, stimulating considerable support for refuges amongst bureaucrats, politicians and the public alike. VWRG’s advocacy persuaded the state government to support the refuge program to operate in unique and radical ways, thus giving recognition to gender as a critical factor in determining the provision of welfare. In addition to promoting the rights of residents to live without fear and with security, the address campaign symbolised the refuge movement’s resolve to maintain its autonomy from the state so that refuges might continue to politicise the issues, avoid operating as traditional welfare institutions by empowering their residents, and circumvent, as social work academics Wendy

258 Mendes, pp. 42–46.
259 Green interview.
260 WESP, Address holders meeting minutes, 29 April 1987, WLHWH papers. Prior to its election in March 1983, the Hawke government committed to the establishment of national funding for women’s refuges, incest centres and rape crisis centres via the establishment of WESP.
261 WESP, Address holders minutes.
262 Feldman interview.
Weeks and Kate Gilmore have argued, ‘approaches to policy making which ignore structural inequality, and which favour responding to violence as a clinical problem, to be addressed at the level of individuals or families’. 264

**Conclusion**

Despite differences, conflicts and struggles, a commitment to gaining funding and providing support for women in refuge was shared by all involved in the movement and, by 1976, many had begun to work together under the umbrella of the VWRG. The VWRG illustrated the capacity of feminists within the refuge movement to work strategically to generate a united front and counter the development of non-feminist refuges. The group was heavily influenced by Anglo activists from radical feminist refuges who undertook to politicise issues facing women in refuge as the product of unequal gender relations. The advocacy work of the feminist-led refuge movement from its beginnings in the mid-1970s to the end of the decade, was directed to a broad range of issues affecting the lives of women in refuge, including resources for women to access autonomous households and eliminate the need for refuge.

At the same time, activists drew on radical and socialist feminist ideas to engage in a process of politicising dominant constructions of gender. The origins of the domestic violence services movement thus illuminates the subjective nature of gender and discourse as women sought to reconstruct their identities and challenge society’s structures in new and empowering ways, in processes connecting ‘discursive process to social experience’. 265

Refuge activists made these connections by publicly demonstrating the way that dominant discourses relating to gender manifested themselves within the policy and practice of male-dominated institutions and structures that operated to perpetuate women’s inequality and oppression. In seeking to recast ‘relations of power’ 266 in a society that worked to perpetuate violence against women, the Victorian women’s refuge movement demonstrated the centrality of gender—as both socially constructed in discourse and lived experience for women—to the problems facing women in refuge.

Towards the end of the decade, the refuge movement’s analysis became much more refined as the focus narrowed to domestic violence. At the same time, for the purposes of limiting access to refuge, the movement had begun to differentiate between women who were homeless and women experiencing domestic violence. The corresponding focus on liberating women from...
marriage and the private home as the primary site of women’s oppression reflected a refuge movement dominated by Anglo, middle-class women. This had exclusionary implications for women who fell outside these boundaries. It can be argued, therefore, that whilst compromise, negotiation, creativity and struggle characterised the work of the VWRG in its early years, the group’s actions were also marred by conflict and exclusion, where whiteness was naturalised, the unity of ‘women’ as a social category idealised, and the differences produced by the intersections of class, race, ethnicity and sexuality were underplayed. However, the refuge movement did emphasise that domestic violence was a result of women’s inequality in society, and in particular, men’s power over women, a re-framing that challenged dominant constructions that considered it a problem of individual men and women.

It is clear that the refuge movement’s engagement with the state resulted in a range of considerable benefits for refuges as well as for women escaping violence. The advent of government funding, however inadequate, meant that the refuges were able to support women and focus their energy on political activity, whilst expanding the accommodation available. Moreover, the state’s support for the VWRG’s feminism, autonomy and unity meant the VWRG occupied a position of considerable power over the development of the refuge program to ensure feminist principles were embedded within government policy and adopted by new refuges. This included a determination that refuges would be organisationally distinct from traditional welfare services. It can be further argued that engagement with the state served to strengthen the unity of the movement, despite concerns about the potential for a split in the group and the capacity of the state to undermine them.

The assumption that refuges’ engagement with the state always results in a loss to the integrity of the refuge movement and is anti-feminist has, as its premise, the assumption of a monolithic state. This approach does not take into consideration the complexities of the ‘dynamics of power’, such as the capacity of bureaucrats within government to support the refuge movement’s agenda for social change, or the power struggles that were, and are, characteristic of bureaucracies. Power at this time was more commonly interpreted as ‘the ability of the state, institutions, and those who held positions of authority to impose their will on others’. This notion has simultaneously assumed ‘a shared view of coherent interests, which exist outside the state that can either influence the state or are represented by or embodied in it’. As we have seen, however, at no point was the Victorian refugee

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267 Reinelt, p. 99.
268 Reinelt, p. 99.
269 Pringle and Watson, p. 229.
movement, prior to its engagement with the state, characterised by a seamless unity and shared vision that was subsequently lost as a consequence. As well, it is clear that the refuge movement was made up of divergent interests, and the exercise of power in its complex and subtle forms, such as the capacity of an Anglo refuge movement to marginalise the needs of migrant or Aboriginal women, for example, was rarely acknowledged or understood.

This is not to dismiss the risks that are involved in engaging with the state, the most significant of which, according to Reinelt, is the threat to a movement’s solidarity.\textsuperscript{270} The fears of feminist refuges that engagement with the state would lead to a ‘watering down’ of their feminist agenda for social change was not unjustified in terms of their revolutionary perspective. Radical feminist organisations, including women’s refuges, held unyielding ideas about what feminism and social change meant. They sought revolution, and all hierarchical and patriarchal institutions, including the state, were categorised as the enemy and marked in opposition to their movement. This framework is problematic, because it allows ‘no way of conceptualising the politics of a movement that may include both collective and hierarchical structures, participatory and bureaucratic elements, outside and inside political strategies, grassroots mobilisation and organising within institutions’.\textsuperscript{271} However, there were some who appreciated the potential for engaging with and negotiating new terrain with the state. As Kaye Hargreaves recalls, ‘I think revolutionaries always underestimate how flexible the system is, and how it can accommodate change. But, I mean, the thing was, we had a radical-cum-revolutionary spirit which was really good fun’.\textsuperscript{272} The Victorian refuge movement’s engagement with the state certainly ensured that the latter ‘accommodated change’.

\textsuperscript{270} Reinelt, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{271} Reinelt, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{272} Hargreaves interview.
Chapter 4: The Domestic Violence Services Movement, 1980–1989

The groups that we spoke to in the early 80s would have said domestic violence is what? The groups that we spoke to in the end of the 80s knew about it. The community in general had a much better idea.¹

By the late 1980s, the refuge movement’s framing of domestic violence was virtually uncontested by government officials, professionals and the wider public and was eventually adopted at both state and national policy levels. This chapter begins by examining the refuge movement’s engagement with state institutions, policy makers and bureaucrats in the 1980s. It analyses the movement’s influence on the policy processes that led to increased funding for domestic violence services and to Victoria’s first broad-sweeping policy initiatives. These are investigated to show the influence of feminism on the development of programs dealing with domestic violence. This chapter also examines the funding and programmatic arrangements affecting domestic violence services in order to highlight the changing political and institutional context under which they operated as well as their impact on shifting the movement’s aims and objectives. The collaboration between movement activists and feminists in government to achieve co-ordinated policy and funding responses is also explored.

In examining the ongoing influence of feminism on the refuge movement’s aims and strategies in this period, the VWRG’s ideological diversity assumes greater significance. The influence of liberal feminism on the movement’s aims and activities became more evident, as less radical groups made tentative steps towards asserting their influence on the movement’s internal operations, and external relationships. Conservative refuges, for example, now worked in close partnership with the state government, reflecting the way domestic violence had become a legitimate part of the mainstream policy platform of government. By contrast, radical refuges continued to resist close engagement and sought to ensure their methods of organising and goals of social change were not compromised as a result. This chapter documents how the VWRG organised internally in the context of declining group solidarity during this period.

Domestic violence services grew exponentially during the 1980s, and the influence of feminism on their methods of operations and organisation was sustained despite internal

¹ Austin interview.
tensions. The services engaged with a range of external institutions such as the courts, police, and other non-government organisations, whilst continuing to agitate for social and cultural change by undertaking direct action to prevent the heinous impact of domestic violence on the lives of women and children.

**Engagement with the Bureaucracy**

**Funding and Political Action**

During the early 1980s, refuges faced federal Liberal government funding cuts (in real terms) and the transfer of responsibility for the administration of refuges to the states. Commonwealth funding allocated to women’s refuges in the 1980–81 budget was $3.82 million, and Victoria received $890,000 to be divided between its sixteen funded refuges. They were already struggling to survive and the budget did not include provisions for new ones or extensions to existing services. The Fraser government subsequently relinquished financial responsibility for refuges by submerging funding in general revenue grants to the states in the 1981–82 budget. Block grants to each state were to cover public hospitals, school dental schemes and the Community Health Program—from which refuges were funded. The sums allocated were equal to those in the previous year’s budget with an additional 10 per cent to cover CPI increases, and states could spend the appropriation however they chose.

The Victorian refuge movement was concerned that ‘state governments could opt to drop the refuge program entirely’. Whilst the government continued to make good on its contributions in Victoria, funding again decreased in real terms owing to inflation, and refuges were forced to cover the funding for the Women’s Refuge Referral Service out of existing funds.

Refuges condemned their lack of funding and drew public attention to the issues facing them. In 1980, protests were held on the steps of Parliament House and, in the following year, at their national refugee conference in Melbourne, refuge workers relayed stories of housing shortages, increasing demand on refuges and overcrowding. In response to the federal

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3 *CPD*, Senate, 24 February, 1981.
5 ‘Women’s Liberation Open Discussion Meetings on Refuges’, *Women’s Liberation Newsletter*, Melbourne, July 1981, p. 8, Chapman-Davis papers, 100/210, no. 12, box 1, MWLA.
6 ‘Women’s Services Cut’, *Women’s News Service*, July/August 1981, p. 3, Australian Union of Students Women’s Department papers, 100/155, box 2, MWLA.
7 ‘Meetings on Refuge’, p. 8.
10 ‘Refuge Conference’, *Girls Own*, no. 2 May–June 1981, p. 11, Vig Geddes papers, 100/164, box 1, MWLA.
government’s transfer of funding to the states, Victorian refuges joined a national women’s services campaign headed by feminist refuges from NSW.\textsuperscript{11} The campaign called for a national stream of funding under a special purpose grant for women’s services.\textsuperscript{12} A series of protests were held from May to early June, including a week long vigil on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra, and a sit-in at Kings Hall, which turned violent after police were called to remove protestors.\textsuperscript{13} While the protests may have ‘angered sections of the (NSW) refuge movement wanting to distance themselves form the more radical feminists’,\textsuperscript{14} they also served the purpose of generating ‘solidarity and strength’ amongst the women in attendance.\textsuperscript{15} In Victoria, the protests were endorsed by the VWRG, which had continued to remain relatively cohesive in its operations until this point.\textsuperscript{16} The protest was unsuccessful in achieving a women’s services funding stream, but it foregrounded the issue of women’s refuges and domestic violence amongst the public, Commonwealth femocrats and women politicians. Opposition ALP senators Pat Giles and Susan Ryan, for example, supported the provision of a women’s services program, and Ryan presented a petition signed by over a thousand members of the public in opposition to the federal government’s withdrawal.\textsuperscript{17}

During this period, Co-As-It refuge continued to advocate on behalf of migrant women, and organised a national conference in August 1981 where members demanded specific funding for ethnic refuge workers.\textsuperscript{18} Migrant activists were now demanding that Anglo refuge workers ‘adapt and overcome language and cultural barriers to offer support to these women’.\textsuperscript{19} The Co-As-It national conference made in-roads among femocrats in the Commonwealth, who publicised the conference findings noting that ‘migrant women will often experience severe guilt, and may return to the home rather than face total isolation from her community’.\textsuperscript{20}

Despite the election in March 1982 of the Cain Labor government, which had campaigned on a platform promoting social justice, the Victorian budget for refuges in 1982 resulted in only a nominal increase in funding, much of which was absorbed by increases in CPI and other non-

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\item \textsuperscript{12} ‘Women’s Services Cut’, \textit{Women’s News Service}, July-August, 1981, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{13} ‘Women’s Services’, p 142.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Melville, ‘Turbulent’, p. 142.
\item \textsuperscript{15} ‘Sparks Fly in Canberra’, \textit{Girls Own}, no. 3, July-August, Sydney 1981, Geddes papers, box 1.
\item \textsuperscript{16} ‘Open Discussions’, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{CPD}, Senate, 27 August 1981, p. 382; \textit{CPD}, Senate, 28 October 1981, p. 1713.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Co-As-It, ‘Annual Report’, p. ix; ‘Migrant Women’s Refuges’, \textit{Women’s Liberation Newsletter}, September 1981, Chapman-Davis papers, box 1, MWLA.
\item \textsuperscript{19} ‘Migrant Women’s Refuges’.
\item \textsuperscript{20} ‘Migrant Women and Women’s Refuges’, \textit{Office of Women’s Affairs Newsheet}, Department of Home Affairs and Environment, no. 4, August, Canberra 1981, Lesbian Open House papers, MWLA.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
recurrent costs.\textsuperscript{21} At their national refuge conference in Melbourne in November 1982, refuges protested to Commonwealth and state government representatives about these problems. They highlighted insufficient funds for operating costs, overcrowding, lack of award wages, inequitable distribution of funding between refuges and the high rate of turn-away. They also pointed to the desperate need for specialised services to respond to women with complex needs and migrant women and to the lack of housing for women leaving refuge.\textsuperscript{22} The Women’s Refuge Referral Service (WRRS) backed up these claims with data revealing that 78 per cent of women callers in Victoria were denied a service.\textsuperscript{23} Yet Victorian refuges fared better than WA and Queensland, where allocations were significantly less as a result of years of conservative governments and insufficient funding.\textsuperscript{24} Victoria’s refuges lobbied the new Labor Minister for Community Services, Pauline Toner, and set up camp outside St Paul’s Cathedral before Christmas, maintaining a vigil there for a week.\textsuperscript{25} However, they were again faced with significant funding cuts for the 1983-84 financial year, this time as a result of the state government’s across-the-board 2 per cent cut in community services spending.\textsuperscript{26} In response, refuges took to the streets in protest, gaining significant media coverage and again drawing public attention to domestic violence.\textsuperscript{27} It was not until after the Hawke-led Labor government’s election in March 1983 that an additional $4 million in funding was made available under the Women’s Emergency Services Program (WESP).\textsuperscript{28} Prior to its election, the Labor Party leader had been lobbied by members of the feminist bureaucracy and the refuge movement for a resumption of federal funding of refuges, rape crisis and incest centres and, in November 1982, the party committed to the establishment of a women’s services program.\textsuperscript{29} This supported the feminist position that ‘violence against women was not simply a matter of homelessness and that the solution … involved more than just the provision of emergency accommodation’.\textsuperscript{30} WESP funding aimed to ‘ensure refuge workers in all states receive appropriate wages’ and ‘new services in areas

\textsuperscript{23} OSW, ‘Refuge Conference’, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{24} Melville, ‘Funding’, p. 26; McFerran, ‘Interpretation’.
\textsuperscript{25} WLHWH to Minister for Community Welfare Services, 22 December 1982, WLHWH papers, box 16, MWLA.
\textsuperscript{26} Minister for Community Welfare Services to WLHWH, 8 September 1983, WLHWH papers, box 16, MWLA.
\textsuperscript{28} ‘Women’s Emergency Services Program’, Joint Media release by the Minister for Social Security and the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women, 3 July 1983, WLHWH papers, box 21, MWLA.
\textsuperscript{29} Melville, ‘Turbulent’, p. 154.
\textsuperscript{30} McGregor and Hopkins, p. 20.
of high need’. It included $200,000 earmarked for ‘ethnic workers’, an area of need gaining greater coverage in the media. With the support of Minister Toner, Victoria was approved $820,000 under WESP, taking its total budget to $1.7 million. This enabled the expansion of the program in Victoria to include a new refuge in Geelong, 4.5 positions for ethnic workers, 11.5 positions to bring all refuges to a staff level of 3.5, expansion of the WRRS, improved wages and conditions, increased funds for operating and funds for research and evaluation.

At this time, demands from the government for data, which might not seem unreasonable in the context of accountability for public funds, were growing. However, the majority of refuges were strongly opposed to providing it, arguing that they ‘should not be regarded or coerced into becoming welfare institution[s]’. Furthermore, with their campaign to safeguard refuges’ addresses, they were determined to protect the security of residents. They therefore resisted the Hawke government’s focus on the accountability of homelessness programs. As long-term refuge worker Wendy Austin explains:

[W]hen data came in we fought it like you wouldn’t believe … we were saying this is not about bums on beds, we're not counting women, this is not about what you can get from your money.

**Femocrats at Work in Victoria, ‘Punching above our weight’**

During the 1980s, the economic and social status of women was rapidly changing and women’s participation in education and the labour force increased markedly. In Victoria, this was further encouraged by the election of a progressive Labor government committed ‘to ensure the equal status and participation of women in our society’. Key policy developments included equal opportunity of access to the public service, which enabled many women with ‘a background of activity in the new wave of feminism’ to move into various arms of government. In turn this supported the rapid expansion of women’s services and...

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34 ‘Women’s Emergency Services Program Approved’, *Women’s Liberation Newsletter*, 1984, Lesbian Open House papers, MWLA.
36 Austin interview.
37 Setches interview.
40 Mary Draper, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 28 April 2009.
organisations, and general issues of concern to women assumed a central place on the government’s political agenda. The Women’s Information Referral Exchange played an important role in connecting and enabling women’s organisations to develop at this time, and was the result of a working party comprising government representatives from the OWA, and DCWS and women’s organisations such as the Women’s Electoral Lobby and Women’s Liberation Switchboard.

Kay Setches, a later Minister for Community Services, had been centrally involved in writing Labor Party welfare and health policy during the lead-up to the 1982 state election. The influence of Labor women was critical in the party’s decision to incorporate into their platform a commitment to ‘funding for women’s refuges and … support for children’. Prior to this time, as Setches recalls, ‘ALP policy was uncontaminated by any discussion about women at all’. In addition to Setches, ‘there was a very active lobby group amongst the women backbenchers in the Labor Party … who wanted to make sure that women’s issues were addressed’.

The first policy initiatives in relation to domestic violence in Victoria emerged under the Liberal Hamer government following the establishment of a Domestic Violence Committee (DVC) within the OWA in 1980. Alongside the advocacy of the refuge movement, the groundwork laid by small ‘l’ Liberal women such as Yolanda Klempfner was instrumental in enabling its formation as well as in ensuring that the VWRG was one of the few community organisations represented.

The DVC was initially mandated to make recommendations to the premier on a number of issues relating to domestic violence. In particular, it was charged with the task of investigating ‘the degree of domestic violence in the community’, as well as ‘the needs of victims’ and ‘the means of preventing or reducing the problem’. In addition to the VWRG, Maroondah Halfway House was also represented on the committee. Other community women’s groups invited included the Women’s Lawyers’ Association of Victoria. The committee also included

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41 See, for example, WPCU, Women’s Handbook.
42 WPCU, Handbook.
43 Feldman interview.
44 WRRS to WLHWH, 7 July 1982, WLHWH papers, MWLA.
45 Setches interview.
46 Setches interview.
47 Draper interview.
48 Sawer, Sisters, p. 163.
49 WPCU, Criminal, p. i.
representatives of the Victoria police, Springvale Legal Service, Equal Opportunity Board, Ministry of Housing and the psychiatric superintendent of Bouverie Clinic.\(^{51}\) At the same time, a Legal Subcommittee was formed to consider issues at law surrounding domestic violence, including the adequacy of police powers.\(^{52}\) Early in 1982, the newly formed Women’s Coalition for Family Law Action also joined the sub-committee. This group had emerged from the VWRG, but quickly drew in a number of women in the legal field, including Yolanda Klempfner.\(^{53}\)

The DVC undertook a phone-in from women experiencing domestic violence in July 1982, which formed a central component of a campaign against domestic violence launched in the same week by Premier Cain. Former MHWH worker Judy Johnson recalled that the phone-in came about because they were ‘trying to work out the extent of domestic violence in Victoria’.\(^{54}\) MHWH was central in charting the direction of the DVC campaign, which labelled the problem a ‘hidden crime surrounded by shame, fear and secrecy’.\(^{55}\) Volunteer refuge workers were arranged to receive phone-calls and administer questionnaires, which were adapted from a similar survey undertaken in South Australia in 1981. The phone-in proved distressing and frustrating for refuge workers talking with women who were unable or unwilling to leave violent husbands.\(^{56}\)

A number of important findings from the phone-in included that women of all classes experienced domestic violence. Moreover, a large proportion did not leave violent relationships because they lacked, as the report noted, ‘access to the resources which would enable them to live free of violence’.\(^{57}\) The phone-in made it clear that gender inequality was a central factor inhibiting the capacity of women to leave violent relationships. In addition, it identified a significant need for professional education, many women reporting that doctors and police were particularly unhelpful.\(^{58}\) The phone-in both complemented and built on the evidence that refuges had already produced.\(^{59}\)

In addition to the phone-in, a two-day conference was held at La Trobe University in July 1982 as part of the domestic violence week campaign. Refuge workers were on the planning

\(^{51}\) ‘Committee’, p. 255.
\(^{52}\) WPCU, Criminal, p. ii.
\(^{54}\) Johnson focus group.
\(^{56}\) Johnson focus group.
\(^{57}\) ‘Phone-in’, p. 231.
\(^{58}\) ‘Phone-in’, p. 269.
\(^{59}\) Data already gathered by Victorian refuges identified that refuges were turning away two thirds of requests, ‘Women’s Refuges—Victoria—Statistical Data’, April/June 1980, Svensson papers.
committee for the conference, which drew together a range of professionals including doctors, social workers, counsellors and teachers, with the aim of educating them about issues relating to domestic violence, such as that it ‘cut across all classes’, whilst attempting to drive home the ‘political perspective of it’. Among the recommendations that arose from the conference, a number related to the structural factors that would enhance women’s capacity to live independently and free of violence. These included: funding for a 24-hour service; improved income support for lone parents; increased government funding for public housing and training for women into employment; a new domestic violence Act; incorporation of intervention orders in legislation; additional resources and training for police involved in domestic violence access; and the need to canvass the needs of immigrants and ethnic communities.

Refuges like MHWH that were more aligned with liberal feminist values, sought to influence public policy relating to domestic violence. As former WLHWH activist Marie Rowan recounts: ‘liberal feminists would argue that the public policy outcome is the desired goal, and radical feminists would say it’s about power’. In this instance, these more moderate feminists utilised the results of the phone-in to support the expansion of the WRMS. Differences over such matters fuelled an on-going debate within the VWRG between conservative and radical feminist refuges and their approaches to redressing the problem of domestic violence. This I explore in more detail below.

In November 1983, a report produced by the legal subcommittee of the DVC was released to the public by Premier Cain. Building on the work undertaken by other states including NSW, it recommended amongst a number of proposals, that police ‘intervene to protect victims of domestic violence … [and] … commence proceedings for an intervention order … [and] … charge persons with criminal offences arising out of an incident of domestic violence’. The report was particularly significant because it marked a paradigmatic shift towards understanding domestic violence as a crime. The VWRG was centrally involved in producing this report via its involvement in the Women’s Coalition for Family Law Action. Maureen Teehan of the Springvale Legal Service was also a member of the subcommittee and had previously worked in collaboration with the VWRG for the Women’s Advisory Council to premier. Together they had produced a submission to the committee of inquiry into the

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62 Rowan interview.
63 VWRG minutes, 14 July 1982.
64 WCU, Report.
Victorian police force in which they argued that ‘police be required to intervene to protect victims of domestic violence’.  

The influence of the refuge movement in making domestic violence a central policy concern for both the Hamer Liberal and Cain Labor governments is unequivocal. The movement played a central role in the development of the DVC and the reports it subsequently produced. The outcome was a new body of evidence that could be utilised to press for social and legal responses to the problem of domestic violence. Furthermore, the refuge movement continued a process begun during the previous decade of providing leadership on the issue in the public domain and ensuring that other professionals were educated in accordance with a feminist structural and political analysis of the problem.

Social policy development in relation to women was expedited when Mary Draper was appointed head of Women’s Affairs in the Cain government in 1983. She swiftly got agreement to rename it the Women’s Policy Co-ordination Unit (WPCU).  Although Draper recalled she was ‘the first person in that role with … a background in the women’s movement’,  she also pointed out that her predecessor, Yolanda Klempfner, had ‘initiated whole areas of work that we continued to work on’.  While knowing that the newly elected Premier viewed feminists ‘with some suspicion’,  Draper ‘fought very hard’ to ensure that he ‘remained the person responsible for women’s policy … because of the strategic importance of that location’.  The impact of the refuge and broader women’s movement’s lobbying was significant in providing an impetus for Draper and others to initiate substantial policy development in the realms of employment, childcare, women’s health, and domestic violence. Indeed, Draper acknowledged that her:

[R]oom to move … was often created by what feminists did on the ground … [W]hen the women’s refuges demonstrated every Christmas eve … there had to be a response and they had to be dealt with … they created some of the room that I had … to get policy, and decisions, and resources. 

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67 Draper interview.
68 Draper interview.
69 Draper interview.
70 Sawer, Sisters, p. 162.
71 Draper interview.
72 For a detailed account of policy development in Victoria throughout the 1980s see Sawer, Sisters, pp. 162–170.
73 Draper interview.
Draper’s comments affirm the importance of the strategic work of feminists within and outside the government to ensure the Cain administration’s commitment to issues facing women.

In 1985 the Victorian government released its discussion paper on domestic violence: *Criminal Assault in the Home: Social and Legal Responses to Domestic Violence*. The report derived in part from the ‘politicisation of what happened in the women’s refuges … [who] … cut the path … around these kinds of questions’. It was also the culmination of their collaboration with feminists in government who initiated work on this report at the WPCU in October 1984. The report made a number of wide-ranging expansionary policy recommendations relating to the legal, economic and social support needs of women and children experiencing domestic violence.

The report was informed by a feminist analysis of domestic violence, emphasising its gendered nature and the importance of affording women ‘the economic, social and material resources to live free from physical harm’. Its title was reportedly a ‘deliberate decision’ directly influenced by feminist lawyer and advocate Jocelynne Scutt, who had strongly urged the WPCU to ‘underline that [domestic violence] was criminal’. The report emphasised the responsibility of perpetrators for their behaviour, and amongst a range of recommendations was the adoption of intervention orders to afford women ‘protection from violence’ in place of the largely ineffective system of family law orders. It also proposed a multi-pronged approach to domestic violence, acknowledging the social change agenda of refuges, and recommending their numbers be increased. The report proposed funding new initiatives, including specialist services for women with specific needs and an outreach service. It made recommendations relating to women and housing and, in particular, priority access to public housing for women escaping domestic violence. However, as Draper recounts, despite the fact that ‘the agenda that went up’ was an across-government response’, the Ministry of Housing, in particular, was seen to be ‘dragging their feet’. Notwithstanding the wide-

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74 WPCU, *Criminal*.
75 Green, interview.
76 Draper interview.
77 WPCU, *Criminal*.
78 WPCU, *Criminal*, p. 20.
79 Draper interview; Scutt.
80 WPCU, *Criminal*, p. 20.
81 WPCU, *Criminal*, p. 36.
82 WPCU, *Criminal*, pp. 36–43.
83 WPCU, *Criminal*, pp. 44–53.
84 Draper interview.
ranging recommendations included within the report, the adoption of intervention orders was its major achievement.

The report and subsequent legislation followed similar developments interstate, including those in New South Wales and South Australia in 1981 and the Northern Territory in 1983. Western Australia launched its domestic violence task force in 1985. By 1985, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales had all introduced similar systems of intervention orders. Other laws now came under review in Victoria in relation to violence against women; one recommendation from the Victorian Law Reform Commission’s (VLRC) was that the defence of provocation be overturned—a change only achieved in 2009.

The report provided the groundwork for Crimes (Family Violence) Act in 1987. Women in government like Setches, who chaired the ALP’s Community Services Committee from 1982 to 1988, were critical in getting it passed. Setches also generated influence within the party through the development a Women’s Caucus Committee, which consisted of ‘[t]he most influential women in that government’. Via this forum, ‘we could punch above our weight … and … get some attention to things. And it was a strong feminist group in that government. Absolutely amazing’. The emphasis on civil law as the key means to respond to domestic violence was strongly opposed by feminists, including Jocelynne Scutt, who reportedly argued that it would ‘decriminalise domestic violence’. Despite calls, for ‘something far more radical than was adopted by the Victorian government’, Setches surmised that, at the time, ‘society, community, the Labor Party, the government, the police, nobody was ready to face the full thing of men having to be put into jail, and removed from the home’. Despite the adoption of new legislation relating to domestic violence, the judicial system and society at large continued to assess the problem as one that should be dealt with outside the realm of criminality. Feminists like Setches and Scutt persisted but were left ‘exhausted all the time from trying to make people understand [including] those that were making laws’. However,

86 WPCU, Criminal, p. 148.
87 WPCU, Criminal, p. 153.
88 Setches interview.
89 Setches interview.
90 Setches interview.
91 Setches interview.
92 Setches interview.
93 Setches interview.
they did finally convince the then Attorney General, Jim Kennan, of the importance of passing a new Act with a title that did justice to the issue. This process was, as Setches recalls:

A knock-down, drag-out, behind-the-scenes struggle of immense proportions … They would say “we just need to have … a Domestic Violence Amendment Act” … to get it there was very hard. But it was done.\(^\text{94}\)

Despite the challenges involved, Setches considered they had ‘come a long way [between] 1980 to 1985 … [and] … thought [they] were riding a pretty good feminist boom’.\(^\text{95}\) However, both she and Draper would acknowledge that it was the refuge movement’s politicisation of domestic violence in the first instance that enabled them and others in government to harness the apparatus of the state and shift some power into the hands of women. As Hargreaves argues:

It wasn’t until the women’s movement had reframed the issue as being political rather than personal, and that had got through to a number of people in policy positions who could see that the law could be used on the side of the women.\(^\text{96}\)

The publication of *Criminal Assault in the Home* (1985), and the subsequent passing of the *Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987*, marked the beginning of a co-ordinated policy response to domestic violence in Victoria. Soon after, in August 1987, a Family Violence Prevention Committee was initiated within the Attorney General’s department with the aim of co-ordinating ‘interdepartmental initiatives on family violence’.\(^\text{97}\) The committee included representatives from a range of government departments as well as community organisations including women’s refuges, and the Federation of Community Legal Centres. Former refuge worker Robyn Kennedy recounts her experience on the committee as an important time that saw women’s organisations engage with the Attorney General’s department and Victoria police to improve implementation of the Act.\(^\text{98}\) Of central concern for refuges was to ensure that the court process was ‘humanising … for women’.\(^\text{99}\) The committee also conducted state-wide training for clerks of court and collected statistics on intervention orders.\(^\text{100}\)

\(^{94}\) Setches interview.

\(^{95}\) Setches interview.

\(^{96}\) Hargreaves interview.


\(^{98}\) Robyn Kennedy, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 16 November 2007.

\(^{99}\) Kennedy interview.

\(^{100}\) VCCAV, ‘Background’, p. 14.
At the same time, and as part of an overall reform package, the state government introduced a series of measures in community services, community education, housing and the education and training of police and other professionals. This was supported by federal grants made available as part of the Hawke government’s national education campaign on domestic violence. In Victoria, task forces were set up to plan and provide community and professional education and housing as part of the government’s family violence prevention program. The Community Education Task Force was convened by the Health Department to facilitate networking amongst those providing services to women experiencing domestic violence and to distribute information to those services and the wider community. They published a booklet that argued domestic violence resulted from the way ‘gender and power operated against women having economic freedom’.\(^{101}\) They also produced resource material for service providers and supported the development of family violence networks.

Funded by the Ministry of Education and Training, a Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce convened in 1988, its members representing a range of government and community organisations, including the Domestic Violence Incest Resource Centre (DVIRC), Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA) and the Victorian Legal Aid Commission. It was provided with ongoing support by the new Education Minister, Barry Pullen, and funds to publish a book on domestic violence that was designed as curriculum for universities.\(^{102}\) The book identified gendered power structures as central to the cause of domestic violence.\(^{103}\) Premier Joan Kirner commented on its publication as an ‘important step towards placing family violence firmly on the agenda for social change in Victoria’.\(^{104}\) However, funding was unfortunately not renewed for these groups, as it was ‘assumed that this work was finished’.\(^{105}\)

Despite the recommendations within *Criminal Assault* regarding structural issues such as housing, the policy direction adopted by the state at this time focused on ‘thinking about how you enforce legislation [and] getting police to respond’.\(^{106}\) This reflected a growing trend ‘toward criminalising violence against women through major law reform’.\(^{107}\) At the same time, community violence had been identified as a social issue following the Queen and

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105 Weeks and Gilmore, p. 146.
106 Draper interview.
107 Weeks and Gilmore, p. 152.
Hoddle streets murders in Melbourne. These events provided the impetus for a parliamentary inquiry by the Social Development Committee into public violence during 1987 and 1988. The committee recommended the establishment of the Victorian Community Council Against Violence (VCCAV) to ‘monitor the co-ordination of services which deal with family violence matters, identify inadequacies, and make recommendations’\(^{108}\) to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

During this time, the women’s health movement was also gaining ground, following the establishment of the first state-funded sexual assault clinic at the Queen Victoria Hospital in 1978.\(^{109}\) By the end of 1985 there were six CASA centres operating or due to commence.\(^{110}\) The development and funding of the majority of Victoria’s women’s health and CASA services occurred during the late 1980s. Funding was significantly increased in 1987 following the community consultation ‘Why Women’s Health?’—which had been instigated by Setches, who recalled that the challenge of establishing women’s services ‘with a feminist base … was a fight of immense proportions’.\(^{111}\) However, funding was made available from the Health Department, within which a Women’s Health Unit was established to administer the programs. At the same time, CASA House opened at the Royal Women’s Hospital, replacing the Queen Victoria Hospital as the central metropolitan CASA service in Melbourne. Furthermore, during this time, a range of organisations and activists external to the government were active in supporting the funding of women’s health services.\(^{112}\) As Feldman recalls: ‘[W]omen’s community health funding came out of, again, the drive from the community. It was quite an extraordinary thing that happened; there was a lot of lobbying from all sides’.\(^{113}\) The work was supported by feminists in government including Draper who developed a women’s policy plan in which women’s health services would operate according to a ‘dual strategy’.\(^{114}\) Draper recounts:

> [Y]ou aimed to set up services by women for women … [and] … influence mainstream services … women’s services would model, innovate, advocate …

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\(^{108}\) VCCAV, ‘Background’, p. 6.

\(^{109}\) Radical feminist groups such as Women Against Rape were opposed to the establishment of the service at the QVH, which they considered to be ‘a win for the medical model’. In an attempt to provide a non-institutionalised service response to rape victims, they negotiated use of a room as a Rape Crisis Centre in the casualty section of the Geelong Hospital in 1978; it received state funding from the Family and Community Services (FACS) program in 1982. See Orr, ‘Sexual Assault’, p. 75.

\(^{110}\) Hewitt and Worth.

\(^{111}\) Setches interview.

\(^{112}\) ‘Women Fight for a City Health Site’, The Sun, September 16, 1986, WLHWH papers; Orr, ‘Sexual Assault’, pp. 87–88.

\(^{113}\) Feldman interview.

\(^{114}\) Draper interview.
was the model that the CASA at the Women’s was set up on … a service with a feminist philosophy’.\textsuperscript{115}

In particular, the aim of feminist health services was to transform hospitals and the police response to women who had been raped.\textsuperscript{116} As a result, despite operating within a medical paradigm, CASA services developed with ‘a clear philosophy and model of service delivery which articulated its intention to advocate for victims’ rights at both an individual and a public policy level’.\textsuperscript{117}

The development of women’s health and sexual assault services during the 1980s was distinct from the growth of women’s refuges because of the leading role played by feminists in government in their establishment, as well as their collaboration within and co-location in existing mainstream health services. In contrast to the refuge movement, throughout the 1980s, feminist sexual assault services readily moved to a more central place within the apparatus of the state, whereas radical feminist refuges continued to resist government intervention and working alongside mainstream services. Moreover, whilst refuges operated as collectives, sexual assault services adopted hierarchical organisational structures. Orr comments that:

Funding for additional women’s health services and the new sexual assault services was primarily achieved because women activists were willing to negotiate about the management and accountability structures of these services. Compromises about older ways of operating were made.\textsuperscript{118}

Despite their different beginnings, and the impact this has had on their development, refuges and sexual assault services in the 1980s shared an underpinning commitment to feminism, both as a way of conceptualising men’s violence towards women, and as a basis for structuring their service responses. It is this commonality, Walker predicts, that will ensure their increasing convergence in the future, because ‘women working in the sector largely agree that sexual assault [and] domestic violence … run in the same family’.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{115} Draper interview.
\textsuperscript{116} Draper interview.
\textsuperscript{117} Orr, ‘Sexual Assault’, p. 96.
\textsuperscript{118} Orr, ‘Sexual Assault’, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{119} Walker interview.
Support Accommodation Assistance Program

In 1985 the Hawke Labor government introduced the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). SAAP I (1985–88) was underpinned by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act, and would continue as Australia’s major policy and program response to homelessness until changes made by the Rudd Labor government in 2009. SAAP reflected the Hawke government’s commitment to expand the provision of welfare, and, under a series of five-year agreements, it aligned existing services and provided for the establishment of new ones, using a cost-sharing arrangement between Commonwealth and state governments. Services were divided into the three program areas: general (single men and women), youth, and women’s emergency services (including domestic violence).

Nationally, women’s refuges largely rejected SAAP because of its focus on homelessness and emergency accommodation. Victorian refuges were vehemently opposed to being pigeonholed as accommodation providers and argued that ‘the operating budget proposed by SAAP is far from adequate for a women’s refuge, which sees itself as being more than simply an emergency accommodation service’. However, despite their protests, all services provided under WESP were incorporated into SAAP in 1985. Refuge workers staged a silent protest during a consultation on the issue with the DCWS. As Johnson recalls:

All the refuges were present … [and] … a decision had been taken … they would not speak at all at this meeting and they’d just hold up signs. So 60 women … and not a single woman said anything, and every now and then they’d hold up signs like “SAAP sucks” or something.

Refuges continued to argue that housing and homelessness were peripheral to their core business, which they identified as addressing the ‘causes of violence against women’. As we have seen, Victorian refuges had drawn this distinction from the late 1970s onwards as they focused their work in refuge on the needs of women and children experiencing domestic violence. In response to the SAAP funding proposal, Victorian refuges argued that:

An accommodation program is totally inappropriate to the needs of refuges, and their classification under SAAP completely misrepresents their primary objective … [to] … address the causes of violence against women in our society by initiating educational,

120 Melville, ‘Turbulent’, p. 158.
122 Johnson focus group.
public awareness and other social programs, therefore bringing them more appropriately under a preventative services classification rather than a band-aid type program … Whilst refuges do provide a whole range of services to meet the needs of women and children escaping domestic violence, the provision of housing and temporary accommodation is nevertheless peripheral to their major aims and objectives. Homelessness and domestic violence are two very different issues. Women who use refuges are not homeless. They have been forced to abandon their homes because of violence and abuse … However women’s refuges are NOT emergency/crisis accommodation services and we re-iterate that their inclusion in the SAAP program would be inappropriate and would underscore a gross misunderstanding of their definition and objectives.123

The above passage reveals the refuge movement’s approach to redressing the causes of domestic violence, which derived from their radical feminist commitment to social change. Thus, they emphasised the differences between homelessness and domestic violence, with the aim of ensuring that the gendered nature of domestic violence was not lost in the potentially homogenising discourse of homelessness and that their work would remain distinct. An emphasis on these differences was in contrast to the beginnings of the refuge movement, when similarities between all women’s experiences of oppression were emphasised. One consequence, according to state government bureaucrat Tony Newman, was the de-politicisation of women’s homelessness:

I think there were a group of people that missed out in that. In social security, probably the most disturbing group of people I dealt with were single woman who were probably over 35. And who just moved through very violent relationships … cohabitating for shelter until it got so bad. They moved in completely different circles as far as I could see from the family violence movement.124

A further consequence was that services in Victoria for women experiencing homelessness were ‘few in number’.125 In contrast, other states such as NSW, had more services for homeless women.126 The main focus of WESP nationally, however, remained on the support needs of ‘women and children escaping domestic violence’.127

125 Chesterman, p. 57.
126 Chesterman, p. 57.
During this time, refuges were successful in demanding that their position be considered distinct, and they were able ‘to … retain a corral around themselves in SAAP’. Under SAAP I, the WESP program was reportedly able to retain ‘to varying degrees, program development within the feminist framework and the continued funding of all existing non-accommodation services’. This was underpinned by the SAAP Act introduced in 1985, which acknowledged the special characteristics of refuges including their preventative work.

According to Ludo McFerran, the further immersion of refuges into SAAP was inevitable since they were ‘disadvantaged from the beginning because of their lack of national organisation’. On a practical level, however, SAAP brought recurrent dollars, which were not forthcoming under the disparate funding arrangements that refuges had faced under the Fraser government. As Tony Newman recounts:

The challenge that family violence experienced, was a common challenge, there was no growth funding, no commitment to expand services. And that’s the thing; SAAP did bring the opportunities along.

Alongside the rest of the social and community services labour force around the country, refuges remained outside the award system and industrially unregulated until the 1990s. While Victoria did have a Social and Community Services (SACS) award, it was reserved for a minority of professionally qualified social workers. As Kate Coleman notes; ‘There wasn’t a union who would take refuge, and housing workers … nobody would touch us because we weren’t social workers. And so we were nowhere, no award wages, no work cover, there was nothing’.

However, SAAP funding meant that Community Services Victoria (CSV) began to pay a salary subsidy to refuge workers that was loosely based on the welfare worker class of the Victorian SACS award. Until this time, workers’ salaries were simply pooled and divided according to need. As employers, refuges were expected to meet these wage levels, even though the subsidy awarded by CSV did not always cover this cost. This meant that funding

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128 Newman interview.
129 WESNET, *Raising the Roof*, p. 72.
132 Newman interview.
135 Coleman interview.
had to be diverted to meet award conditions, which led to a reduction of hours, and workers forfeited some entitlements.\textsuperscript{136} Recurrent funding did not fix the problem that refuge funding in Victoria had historically been cobbled together from various government funding streams, and was never appropriately costed or funded to any particular base or model. Although, refuges were now provided with funds for five full-time staff, there was no additional funding for management because of their collective model. Notably, the lack of management funding remains today, despite demands from government throughout the 1990s that they adopt hierarchical management structures.\textsuperscript{137}

At the same time, the growing pressure to become unionised presented a conflict for refuges, which were concerned to ensure women’s work was not exploited but rejected the growing chorus of calls for the ‘professionalisation’ of refuge work. Some were also concerned about how unions could work with refuges, particularly in relation to collectively run work places. They were therefore ‘extremely cautious about fixing their work … within the categories that are recognised and described by unions’.\textsuperscript{138} Moreover, they were alarmed at being placed under an award that emphasised the welfare nature of their work and argued instead for recognition of their attempts to eliminate domestic violence.\textsuperscript{139} The dilemma facing the refuge movement is reflected in the following excerpt:

Union award coverage must also be based on feminist principles of an autonomous, collectively run work place. Women’s services have always relied upon volunteer labour by women committed to women’s needs … Feminists in the women’s services area and the Australian Social Welfare Union are no longer prepared to let that continue. However workers in this area argue against professionalism. They foresee such demands for “professional” workers occurring.\textsuperscript{140}

By the end of the 1980s, ‘official intrusion into the daily affairs of feminist collectives [was] commonplace’.\textsuperscript{141} On reflection, former WLHWH activist Jenny Macmillan posited that this was a result of the movement having been ‘undermined from within’, which meant they had become ‘institutionalised’.\textsuperscript{142} By contrast, former WLHWH activist Hannah Kaiser reflected on the benefits of unionism, commenting how the ‘earlier approach meant that people allowed

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{137} Personal correspondence, Wendy Austin, 1 August 2010.
\item \textsuperscript{138} ‘Community Development Workers Award: The Work of Refuge Workers’, circa 1986, p. 1, Brenda House Archives (BHA).
\item \textsuperscript{139} ‘Community Development’, p. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Jane Inglis, ‘A Decade of Changes in Women's Refuges’, \textit{Tribune}, 30 May 1984.
\item \textsuperscript{141} WLHWH, ‘Annual Report’, 1987/88, Svensson papers.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Macmillan interview.
\end{itemize}
themselves to be exploited at times’. Others reflected that the institutionalisation and professionalisation that developed in refuge work were essential, particularly in relation to managing a complex environment. This kind of knowledge was often undeveloped with refuge workers pioneering processes and policies to manage complex events and workplaces. However, the challenges of working in such a stressful environment certainly took their toll on the health of workers for whom professionalism enabled a more sustainable approach to working in refuge. As former refuge worker Hanna Kaiser recounts:

While a ‘professional’ approach can have problems I came to be very quickly of the view that what was going on was ridiculous … and the lack of understanding of the work and the unprofessional culture was very problematic. In the early days of working for Halfway House there were occasions when I’d felt unable to breathe after collective meetings. I came to realise, it is just a job. It’s great to be really committed and all the rest of it, but it’s a job.

Under SAAP I, refuges were centrally involved in policy and program development, and participated in monthly steering committee meetings that made recommendations to the minister based on majority and preferential voting. The steering committee comprised representatives from women’s refuges with staff from the DCWS and Commonwealth government. Long-time refuge worker Janine Mahoney recalled the challenges of negotiating those meetings in her position as a Commonwealth bureaucrat: ‘[T]he whole sector would come, and a rep from the state government and myself would go to the WESP meetings, and basically it was just a full-on attack every time you walked in a room’. Similarly, within Community Services Victoria, which administered the refuge program, former bureaucrat Marg D’Arcy, recalled that, despite a receptive bureaucracy, refuge representatives were often a hostile group:

The people in the department … were actually quite committed to maintaining the refuge program and to being able to fund it properly. It wasn’t a hostile bureaucracy, so it’s interesting that despite that, the lines that were drawn were so strong, and there was so little allowance, and so little recognition of people wanting to work alongside you.

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145 Anne Mynot, focus group conducted by Jacqui Theobald, 8 June 2008.
146 Kaiser interview.
147 WLHWH to Victorian Women’s Refuges, circa 1985, WLHWH papers, box 16, MWLA.
148 Mahoney interview.
149 Marg D’Arcy, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 6 October 2008.
This resistance, as we have seen, reflected the priorities of radical refuges that were reluctant to engage with the state lest their goals of social change be thwarted.

Methods of collective decision making were also challenging for bureaucrats who ‘might have had one hour or two to get things decided, and then the collective wouldn’t sit’. Conversely, as former bureaucrat Susan Feldman articulates, it also had its benefits for her as a feminist because:

I kept my values alive around feminism … I knew that out there in the field there are women still not compromising and not rolling over without a battle, that the things we wanted to do or had to do, they would not just take on face value because of the money.

It also had the effect of ensuring that state and Commonwealth bureaucrats ‘needed to be respectful and understanding, and have some level of commitment, or they would have found it very difficult working with the sector’. While ongoing funding was assured under the SAAP agreements, this did not inhibit direct action tactics by refuge activists to ensure the government made good on its commitments. As Feldman noted:

Women used to come to the Department of Human Services on a Friday, waiting for their cheque … They would come into the building and protest in our office and sit there all day until they got a cheque written, because there was no security on the buildings. You try to do that these days.

From the other side, former WLWH refuge activist Karen Bird recalled that in 1987 she and a colleague sat in the refuge co-ordinator’s office demanding a cheque that had been promised to them for the purchase of a van for their child support worker:

so we drove into CSV… and said “look you promised us this van all year…we want the cheque today”… And the two of us … said “we’re not moving, we’re not leaving, we’re not going until we get the cheque”. Anyhow, we got the cheque for the van before five o’clock.

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150 Feldman interview.
151 Feldman interview.
152 Newman interview.
153 Feldman interview.
Newman recalled that as bureaucrats during the 1980s, ‘we’d jump in the lift and whip up to brief the Minister verbally’. ¹⁵⁵ These narratives highlight the different way that business was done during this period, and the fact that refuge workers were physically able to access government offices enabled them to continue to take this form of direct action. However, it must also be recognised that refuge activists throughout the 1970s pioneered new ground in their relationship with the state, forcing bureaucrats to be accessible instead of ‘oppressive, unaccountable, unapproachable, obstructionist’. ¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, as we have seen, by the early 1980s a large number of women had entered the bureaucracy, some of whom had spent time ‘breaking themselves in as feminists through the women’s refuges’. ¹⁵⁷ This meant for the refuge movement that, ‘there was a lot of good will from the quite new senior female bureaucrats’. ¹⁵⁸ SAAP bureaucrats of the 1980s were seasoned in community consultation and often understood the issues from first-hand experience. Moreover, they were operating in an institutional context where the government retained a commitment to the direct provision of social programs and these factors together meant that a particular ‘culture’ had developed within SAAP administration in Victoria by the 1980s. As Newman recalls:

SAAP was always viewed as these left wingers on level seven, and not to be trusted, and a few of them were ex-sector and a few of them were ex-Commonwealth bureaucrats … So while externally we were probably viewed as very conservative, internally we were viewed as representing a culture if you like. ¹⁵⁹

This is not to suggest that refuges faced no new pressures under SAAP, which reflected the Hawke government reforms of the public service based on a ‘managerialist’ philosophy. ¹⁶⁰ Along with other Western governments during this period, the Hawke government aimed to ‘improve performance by gaining greater control over public administration’. ¹⁶¹ SAAP was concerned with ‘increasing the efficiency and accountability’ of community organisations like women’s refuges, which subsequently faced ‘a drive to squeeze more from existing resources’, as governments exerted ‘tighter controls’. ¹⁶² As Kaiser puts it: ‘the problem was then that the government just got more and more power and ended up dictating our work to a

¹⁵⁵ Newman interview.
¹⁵⁶ Hargreaves interview.
¹⁵⁷ Draper interview.
¹⁵⁸ Newman interview.
¹⁵⁹ Newman interview.
¹⁶⁰ Bullen, p. 99.
¹⁶¹ Bullen, p. 87.
¹⁶² Bullen, p. 88.
much greater extent’. However, despite these increasing pressures, Marg D’Arcy argues that there was still capacity for autonomy within SAAP:

There was increased funding, there was more accountability, there was more guidelines, there was more people looking at what they were doing, but you could actually still work around the edges, you could actually still get away with a whole lot of stuff if you wanted to.

The work of refuges was supported in a national review of SAAP undertaken in 1988, which argued that ‘the current refuge/shelter model has been successful … [and] … the vast majority of residents and ex-residents of women’s refuges/shelters have a very high regard for the support they have received’. Along with a greater diversity of services, the review recommended that the number of refuges be increased, noting they ‘had been very successful in raising public awareness’ despite not having ‘had the authority or the resources to tackle all aspects of family violence’. Conversely, McFerran has argued that by the end of SAAP I, refuges had become invisible in the public domain because their lobbying now took place ‘closeted in the back rooms and committees’. To this extent, ‘the edge … [was taken] … off a debate, which was forced to be feminist, and has turned refuges into part of the welfare furniture’. However, during the second half of the 1980s, the refuge movement in Victoria was far from ‘welfare furniture’ and continued to force governments to recognise their needs. As Newman explains:

[T]hey had the benefits of being in a program where they got at least a third of the growth throughout the 80s and where new service models were encouraged, and where they were basically treated as a program within a program in many ways.

Refuges succeeded in avoiding becoming ‘welfare furniture’, not only because of their feminist analysis and public advocacy, but also because the institutional context meant where bureaucrats were less restricted by regulatory issues relating to risk and uniform governance than in later years. A key example is, as we have seen, the arrangements that maintained the secrecy of addresses of Victorian refuges.

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163 Kaiser interview.
164 D’Arcy interview.
165 Chesterman, p. 59.
166 Chesterman, p. 61.
169 Newman interview.
In the following decades, however, the capacity of refuges to operate outside conventional accountability and organisational boundaries was further restricted. Reflecting the Commonwealth and state governments’ commitment to ‘corporate models of governance, management and risk practices … Victoria led Australia … from the early 1990s’,\(^\text{170}\) on this trajectory. An increasing formalisation of processes correspondingly depersonalised the relationship between bureaucrats and the refuge movement. The next chapter further analyses this process.

‘Committed to the Women’\(^\text{171}\)

Throughout the 1980s, differences in ideologies and strategies persisted continued between conservative and ‘radical elements of the Victorian Women’s Refuge Group. Nevertheless, group members organised themselves strategically when necessary to ensure unanimity. This capacity was not unique to Victoria, as Murray has shown in a national context: ‘the ability of these diverse groups to cooperate and form strategic coalitions to successfully influence public policy’, constituted ‘a significant achievement of the women’s refuge movement’.\(^\text{172}\)

Working Together

With hindsight, the 1980s has been described as ‘a time when agreement was difficult, and peak body solidarity a bit shaky’.\(^\text{173}\) In particular, internal conflict combined with external pressures relating to state intervention soon led to a split within the Victorian Women’s Refuge Group.\(^\text{174}\) We have seen, for example, that refuges were reluctant to work in partnership with the state on the domestic violence phone-in, criticising it because it did not constitute ‘political action’.\(^\text{175}\) Reflecting radical feminism’s critique of the patriarchal home, they argued for changes that would, ‘give women a better bargaining position in marriage’,\(^\text{176}\) and contended that the main objective for the refuge movement should involve redressing the lack of resources available to women leaving refuge: ‘If we do not feel responsible for what happens to women after they leave refuges, then women’s refuges are indeed no solution at all’.\(^\text{177}\)

\(^{170}\) Green and Sawyer, p. 19.
\(^{171}\) Geddes interview.
\(^{172}\) Murray, ‘The Origins’, p. 11.
\(^{173}\) Austin, p. 18.
\(^{174}\) These pressures were evident in other state refuge movements throughout the 1980s, including NSW. See for example Melville, ‘Turbulent’, p. 140.
Liberal feminists at MHWH expressed their frustration with the VWRG, accusing it of overly lengthy decision-making processes, which, they claimed made the group ineffective for lobbying government. They further believed the focus of their work should relate to ‘improving funding and services … with decisions made on a majority vote’. The WLHWH argued, however, that this would undermine their principles of collectivism. Discord about such issues led the WLHWH to withdraw from the VWRG in 1982, which they now perceived to be operating from a ‘welfare state mentality’.

A number of radical feminist refuges, including the WLHWH, continued to meet as a ‘feminist caucus’, where they focused their energies on issues relating to ‘sexism, gender and power’ with the aim of achieving ‘equal opportunity, affirmative action, [and] self determination … so that domestic violence would become really minimal’. By 1985, a number of conservative refuges had also left the VWRG and formed a Coalition, whose stated aims were to ‘improve communication between refuges … and to work together on a united front’. The Coalition was not an overtly political group and saw engagement with the state as an integral part of its work. It also sought to encourage ‘respect of others in the refuge movement … freedom of expression’.

Significantly, the influence of radical feminist refuges meant that women who ‘started off with a community-based welfare aspect to what we were doing’, had become ‘more involved in the political aspects of it’. Austin argues that over time there developed a ‘recognition and understanding that both types of focus were important’. However, by the late 1980s, the relations between so-called ‘feminist’ and ‘non-feminist’ refuges were hostile to the point of being destructive:

There was hostility between those(?) who were perceived to be the feminists. It took a look time for the chasm to be bridged. I came to think it was a very destructive divide because essentially it was one group of woman deciding that they knew what was feminism, and treating the others with contempt. Ironically it was very hostile to women that whole environment.

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178 VWRG minutes, 14 July 1982.
179 VWRG minutes, 14 July 1982.
181 Bird interview.
182 Feldman, p. 72.
183 Feldman, p. 73
184 Austin interview.
185 Austin interview.
186 Kaiser interview.
Migrant women, as discussed in greater detail below, were often perceived in this context, as ‘inherently non-feminist’. Former DVIRC worker Maria Dimopoulos has argued that this was in part a result of failure by Anglo refuge activists ‘to recognise an intersectional analysis for immigrant and refugee women’ that might make evident the ‘relationship between racism and sexism’, and, by extension, the challenges faced by these women in addition to their gender. Instead, she argues, ‘radical feminism only ever saw it in terms of men and women’.

Despite the differences in ideology symbolised by the Caucus and the Coalition, refuges adopted an across-the-board commitment to organise according to feminist principles. As outlined in Chapter 2, it was the strategic capacity of the feminist-led VWRG to develop a definition of a refuge that in part enabled feminist principles to become enshrined in state government program and policy development. However, radical feminist refuges continued to be concerned that refuges of the future would be ‘staffed by social workers under hierarchical authority of boards of management’. These fears influenced the direction of the movement, and, over the course of the decade, refuges adopted collective structures in response. This included Coalition refuges such as Maroondah and Mordialloc, which became convinced a hierarchical ‘power structure was completely and utterly wrong’. These kinds of changes meant that refuges ‘considered conservative in the Victorian context, seem quite militant when viewed in the national context’.

Collectivism became part of what it meant to be a women’s refuge, and those that continued to operate with hierarchical models were considered to be outside of the women’s refuge movement. Former co-ordinator of Georgina women’s refuge during the 1980s, Robyn Gregory, recalled how it was ‘interesting that it wasn’t the nature of your client group, but the structure of your organisation that determined whether you were a women’s refuge’. Collective structures, however, did not always equate to collective principles, as Gregory comments, ‘We didn’t have the structure, but we were really committed to a collective process. Some refuges had a collective structure but not necessarily collective processes’.

These kinds of developments meant that refuges and other WESP services had developed

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187 Murdolo, p. 398.
188 Maria Dimopoulos, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 28 April 2009.
189 Dimopoulos interview.
191 Johnson focus group; Smith interview.
192 Women’s Liberation Newsletter, July 1981.
193 Robyn Gregory interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 6 August 2008.
194 Gregory interview.
their own identity as feminist service providers, and, by the end of the decade nationally, ‘many WESP services would still resist identification with SAAP’.\(^{195}\) As former refuge worker Sandra Morris notes, WESP services were characterised by:

A commitment to women and children. Tertiary qualifications do not a WESP worker make. There is a commitment to empowering residents and this is often evidenced by the number of ex-residents working in services or participating in the collective.\(^{196}\)

Whilst the VWRG was no longer a united organisation, like other women’s organisations in the past, they embraced ‘diversification not dichotomisation’.\(^{197}\) Refuges such as WLHWH had learned that separatism made them insular and, rather than allowing the movement to fracture permanently, the split was harnessed as a strategy to achieve a middle ground.\(^{198}\) The structures of the ‘Caucus’ and ‘Coalition’ allowed for the two groups to develop their different positions, which they then brought back to a larger group where they were better able to achieve ‘compromise rather than having massive ideas coming from all over the place and people not listening to each other’.\(^{199}\) The combined group was thus able to generate compromise on pertinent issues and present a unified position in negotiating with state bureaucrats. As D’Arcy recalls:

> Despite the different positions of people, once they actually got to a point where they were talking to the department, they were actually really good at being united. They would put up a very strong front.\(^{200}\)

As Austin reflects, working together and sharing information also enhanced their capacity for advocacy:

> Bit by bit the work that was being done by both of them came together in quite a good way because you'd go off to government and they'd say “well show me … is this true? Give me the story”, and we could.\(^{201}\)

Though the existence of dissent is indisputable, the way the Caucus and Coalition co-operated is evidence of the refuge movement’s capacity to work strategically when a united front was required. This resolve was held, as former WLHWH activist Vig Geddes argues, because

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\(^{195}\) Chesterman, p. 17.


\(^{199}\) Austin interview.

\(^{200}\) Darcy interview.

\(^{201}\) Austin interview.
‘everyone was just really committed to the women, to keeping women safe. I think that was really strong’. The capacity of the refuge movement to organise in response to both internal and external conflict supports Carol Mueller’s argument in relation to women’s organisations in the US that ‘the presence of a strong but not overpowering opposition—whether from a counter movement or the state—seems to overcome competing identities and create a sense of unity’.

The capacity of refuges to work together was further evidenced and enabled during the mid-1980s when funds of approximately $50,000 were made available through WESP for an evaluation of women’s refuges. Three workers were employed on a six-month project managed by a collective of all women’s refuges. Owing to the ambitious nature of the project, the evaluation was never completed but it was considered to have facilitated ‘a valuable learning experience for refuges … that laid the foundations of mutual respect … and the mature recognition that although we operate differently there is a common focus’. Further funds were made available for a project worker within CSV to produce a report based on the evaluation findings, which was later published.

A Growing Service System

By the end of the decade, a number of new programs had sprung out of the refuge movement and, in recognition of the growing diversity of organisations responding to domestic violence, the VWRG became known as the Victorian Women’s Refuge Services. In addition to the approximately twenty women’s refuges across the state, there were at least two new refuges for young women and an interim refuge opened in 1984. Federal funds were made available under the WESP program for establishing the Refuge Ethnic Workers Program (REWP) in the same year. By the end of the decade, a number of new organisations focused on community education, advocacy, outreach and research. These included DVIRC in 1986, Women in Supportive Housing (WISH) in 1987, and an outreach program in 1989. To a greater or lesser extent, refuges already undertook all of these roles, and some feminist refuges were reluctant to expand services, arguing that ‘empire building’, was antithetical to their goals of empowering women. However, many also saw the development of new services for women and children as crucial and were supported by femocrats in government, who

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202 Geddes interview.
205 Feldman.
played a vital role in enabling funding. Like women’s refuges, these organisations incorporated feminism in their modus-operandi and structured their organisations accordingly.

A young women’s refuge collective had formed as early as 1979 but was unsuccessful in its first submission for funds despite aligning itself with the VWRG.\textsuperscript{207} Following this, the Young Women’s Housing Collective was formed and funded in the early 1980s to provide ‘information and supported housing for young women’.\textsuperscript{208} At the same time, a Young Women’s Refuge Collective was again established. Former WLHWH activist Di Otto was centrally involved in these developments in her position as co-ordinator of the Victorian Youth Accommodation Coalition:

I was really quite keen on the idea of pursuing the establishment of a Young Women’s Refuge … I was approached by a group of women who had started talking about that quite separately from me, and a collective was again established to lobby for this … There was some resistance from the field to this idea of a women only space, but eventually the young women’s refuge did get funding.\textsuperscript{209}

The young women’s refuge was called, ‘At Last’, and, like other women’s refuges, its members opted for a secret address.\textsuperscript{210} Their success in gaining funding was undoubtedly related to the leadership of Otto and other refuge activists including Billi Clarke, who were ‘in the state bureaucrats offices every second day’.\textsuperscript{211} They were assisted by feminists working in CSV, who worked to influence the allocation of funding because of their own commitment to women’s services.\textsuperscript{212}

Despite the similar nature of issues facing women in the three SAAP programs (women, youth and general), Otto recalls that service providers ‘hardly ever spoke to each other’.\textsuperscript{213} As a result, in addition to supporting the establishment of a young-women’s-only refuge, Otto attempted to overcome what she perceived as the ‘separatist’ nature of the ‘feminist approach’ to service delivery and began to ‘advocate for young women’s housing rights in all youth services’.\textsuperscript{214} In particular, Otto sought to encourage these services ‘towards an awareness of class, race and gender issues in designing, delivering and developing their services’.\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{207} Young Women’s Refuge Collective, submission for funding to DCWS, 1979, KHA.
\textsuperscript{208} Otto interview.
\textsuperscript{209} Otto interview.
\textsuperscript{210} Young Women’s Refuge Collective Meeting, 12 July 1983, Lesbian Open House papers.
\textsuperscript{211} Newman interview.
\textsuperscript{212} Feldman interview.
\textsuperscript{213} Otto interview.
\textsuperscript{214} Otto interview.
\textsuperscript{215} Otto interview.
1986, another feminist collective, ‘Zelda’s Place’, was established in Melbourne to provide support and accommodation to young women who were victims of incest. They considered incest to be ‘a political issue’, and were supported in their work by the Women Against Incest collective established by Dympna House refuge in NSW.\(^\text{216}\)

The development of young women’s services was particularly important because, as former Young Women’s Refuge Collective member Jacqui Round recalled, ‘the youth sector wasn’t handling young women’s issues very well at all … [and] … DV refuges often wouldn’t take them’.\(^\text{217}\) Round argued that this was because young women’s experiences ‘didn’t come from that really narrow perception of what domestic violence was back then’; young women were often ‘left out in the cold’.\(^\text{218}\)

Otto’s work in raising awareness of gender, race and class in the youth sector was later reflected in the refuge movement, which was increasingly pressured by migrant activists to adopt an intersectional analysis of women’s experiences of violence that included ethnicity alongside gender. These changes also reflected broader trends in feminist scholarship that challenged the notion that all women shared the same experience of gender, and to suggested that ‘even if women are oppressed by sexism we cannot automatically conclude that the sexism all women experience is the same’.\(^\text{219}\)

Adele Murdolo has noted that by the early 1980s, ‘the migrant women’s refuge was unable to accommodate all who needed emergency accommodation, and the other fifteen women’s refuges continued to be inaccessible and inappropriate to many immigrant and refugee women’.\(^\text{220}\) Co-As-It worked to redress this lack of attention to the needs of migrant women from as early as 1980 by promoting discussion with other refuges regarding the ‘specific issues surrounding migrant women, and the steps to take for extending community facilities and services for migrants’.\(^\text{221}\) At the same time, they joined with community organisations, to initiate a migrant women’s group at Collingwood Health Centre.\(^\text{222}\) Under the leadership of migrant activists such as Anna Moo, Co-As-It adopted a ‘feminist model which recognised the underlying causes of domestic violence, and sought to bring about real change’.\(^\text{223}\) This

\(^{216}\) ‘Zelda’s Place Collective’, *Women’s Liberation Newsletter*, no. 4, 1986, Geddes papers, box 2, MWLA.
\(^{217}\) Jacqui Round, focus group by Jacqui Theobald, 27 August 2008.
\(^{218}\) Round, focus group.
\(^{220}\) Murdolo, p. 290.
\(^{221}\) ‘Drum’, 8 October 1980.
\(^{222}\) ‘Drum’, 26 September 1983.
\(^{223}\) Co.As.It, p. vi.
marked a shift from the beginnings of the Co-As-It refuge, as outlined in Chapter 1, when it promoted family reconciliation.

The national conference Co-As-It refuge hosted in August 1981 discussed effective accommodation strategies for migrant women escaping domestic violence. Following this, a submission was first made to the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs for Grant-in-Aid funding, which was rejected. However, the program was further discussed at a second national refuge conference held in Melbourne in 1982, where soon-to-be-appointed coordinator of the REWP, Anna Moo, addressed the conference, arguing that:

Ethnic workers must be employed to work with migrant women in refuges during and following refuge accommodation. Migrant women, more than their Anglosaxon counterparts need a great deal of support to overcome isolation and the fragmentation of their support systems … we further believe that all refuges should adopt a policy of employing some workers of ethnic extraction whenever possible … All refuges have to realise that they have to fulfil their responsibility in relation to migrant women.

Co-As-It finally received $121,919 via the WESP program for the REWP’s establishment in 1984. REWP employed six workers who were based in different refuges. By December 1985, they employed a liaison worker and nine workers fluent in a range of languages. The main objective of the program was to:

Focus on the special needs of migrant women and their children in refuges … [and] … to provide safe and secure shelter for women who want to leave intolerable domestic situations such as physical, emotional and psychological abuse from their spouse.

Notably, the program aimed to enable migrant women to ‘become independent and self-confident’ and identified ‘inequality between men and women, as the root cause of domestic violence’. While REWP workers claimed to operate ‘as a collective’, as Murdolo observes, ‘debate raged for over a period of ten years as to the appropriate structure of the organisation’. The REWP provided a much-needed link between the refuge movement, the Department of Community Welfare Services (DCWS) and other ethno-specific agencies.

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224 Co.As.It., p. ix; ‘Migrant Women’s Refuges’.
226 Consultative Group of the Refuge Ethnic Workers Program (REWP) meeting minutes, 17 April 1984, KHA.
228 REWP, Newsletter, p. 2.
229 REWP, Newsletter, p. 2.
230 Co.As.It., p. vi.
231 Murdolo, p. 308.
which formed a consultative committee and met on a bi-monthly basis to discuss issues facing
the program.232

Many Victorian refuges continued to implement policies that discriminated against migrant
women unless they ‘could speak English’.233 This was justified by one rural refuge on the
basis that they would otherwise be ‘isolated from their culture’.234 Other refuges also argued
that, for these sorts of reasons, ‘the needs of non-English speaking women could not be met’
by their service, but they were willing to ‘see both the problems and the possibilities’235
associated with migrant women in refuges. This supports Murdolo’s argument that migrant
women were primarily constructed as a ‘problem’ for refuges, with little regard for their rights
‘and the way in which to address their specific needs’.236 This approach was evident in the
REWp program itself, which was considered to be, as Dimopoulos has argued, an appendage
to the refuge program:

The Refuge Ethnic Workers Program felt very much on the margins of the Refuge
Program … They were regarded, and I think this would be fair to say at the time … as
there to service or support the refuge program, and that somehow the REWP was not a
legitimate body in its own right.237

Similarly, Murdolo has argued that the ‘location of migrant women’ outside of the history of
Australian feminism was mirrored in the similarly marginalised and subordinate location of
migrant women’s services in relation to other mainstream women’s services.238

REWp workers were quick to highlight these and other issues facing migrant women in
refuge. They also communicated the problems facing migrant women to the Anglo feminist
movement whilst challenging ‘false assumptions’ such as that ‘domestic violence is
particularly prevalent, and of worse degree, amongst the ethnic communities’.239 The work of
the REWP was also critical in ‘breaking down mistrust and fear … in the migrant community
about refuges’.240 They began immediately, and one of their first tasks was to reproduce the
women’s refuge pamphlet in partnership with the WPCU in the eight languages they

232 WREC, p. 72.
233 Emma House Women’s Refuge Collective, ‘Migrant Residents’, 1985, KHA.
234 Emma House.
235 Western Region Women’s Refuge, ‘Migrant Women’, 1985, KHA.
236 Anna Moo, quoted in Murdolo, p. 294.
237 Dimopoulos interview.
238 Murdolo, p. 342.
239 Co.As.It, p. v.
240 Co.As.It, p. vi.
represent.\textsuperscript{241} Despite a number of challenges, the program was, as Murdolo argues, successful in a number of ways, contributing to ‘the comparatively longer stays of non-English speaking women’, as well as increasing ‘community awareness of domestic violence and the situation of migrant women in refuges’ and developing ‘protocols which enhanced communication between refuges and the REWP’.\textsuperscript{242}

The challenges facing migrant women were raised again in national refuge conferences in 1986 and 1988, where discussion focused on racism.\textsuperscript{243} It was after forums such as these that refuges began to improve the accessibility of refuges for migrant women. By the late 1980s, the political activism of migrant women in the refuge program had begun to make inroads into the work of refuges such as WLHWH and Sheila West. In Kaiser’s words:

Halfway House made a critical decision in 1989 … when some of the woman went to a national conference, which was looking at the issues around non-English speaking background women not being supported adequately in the refuge program. That was when Halfway House said “okay we mostly take non-English speaking women, so let’s take this by the horns and we’ll make this a NESB-focused refuge”.\textsuperscript{244}

The Aboriginal women’s refuge, Elizabeth Hoffman House, faced similar issues relating to racism, which led to an alliance with the REWP as ‘marginalised groups’.\textsuperscript{245} Aboriginal activists within the refuge movement made it clear the range of issues facing women in their community, both inside and outside of the home, meant their refuge would provide ‘assistance to any Aboriginal woman who needs shelter/help’.\textsuperscript{246} Even at this early stage they challenged the mainstream refuge movement’s conceptualisation of domestic violence by arguing that the ‘majority of women who use our refuge are subject to domestic violence, whether it be from the husband or family members, i.e. sons, brothers, sisters and in-laws’.\textsuperscript{247} In part for this reason, they began to use ‘family violence’ interchangeably with ‘domestic violence’. In dealing with this, Aboriginal women’s services’ goals were different from those of their Anglo counterparts. For them, ‘the breaking up of the family would be the last resort’ in responding to family violence.\textsuperscript{248} The refuge movement came to acknowledge that the

\textsuperscript{241} WREC, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{242} Murdolo, p. 331.
\textsuperscript{244} Kaiser interview.
\textsuperscript{245} Dimopoulos interview.
\textsuperscript{246} Feldman, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{247} Aborigines Advancement League, Women’s Refuge, ‘Domestic Violence’, in WREC, Appendix B.
\textsuperscript{248} Vera Wiggs quoted in Education Taskforce, \textit{Break}, p. 10.
'Aboriginal women’s major struggle’, was ‘with the general Australian community as a whole’ as much as men’s violence.249

The different methods of operating at EHH extended to the way its workers engaged with government bureaucrats. As former Maroondah refuge worker Anne Mynot recounts:

The Elizabeth Hoffman women would come in, they would stand, they never sat, they would make their presentation, and they would leave … [I]t was really powerful. And the department was absolutely in awe of those women …250

EHH were also concerned to work in partnership with other refuges because many Aboriginal women accessed them. This meant that they would travel to different refuges to provide ‘support and links to the Aboriginal community’.251 EHH sought to ensure that other refuges maintained contact with them and were proactive in promoting ‘cultural events’ and ‘Aboriginal women’s news’.252 They also attempted workshops to educate improve the support response of other refuges but without adequate financial support. As a result, they lobbied for a funded program similar to the REWP for Aboriginal women but were unsuccessful.253

Predominantly, Aboriginal communities continued to work independently, arguing that they were ‘much better at dealing with their own problems’.254 State-based community representatives were moving towards a nationally co-ordinated policy approach to Indigenous family violence. In Victoria, a domestic violence taskforce was set up in August 1987 by the secretariat of the Aboriginal Childcare Association to co-ordinate their campaign against family violence.

For other marginalised women experiencing homelessness and violence, including those with disabilities, psychiatric illnesses, and drug and alcohol problems, refuges were often inaccessible. Refuge activists argued that these women needed 24-hour specialised support, which they were unable to provide.255 However, refuges did work alongside other women’s groups to advocate for these women. In 1982, for example, the Women’s Council on Homelessness and Addiction collective was formed in response to the ‘lack of appropriate

249 WREC, Appendix H.
250 Mynot focus group.
251 WREC, Appendix B.
252 WREC, Appendix K.
253 WREC, Appendix K.
254 Education Taskforce, Break, p. 10.
255 WREC, p. 59.
services catering to the needs of addicted women in Melbourne’.256 At the 1982 national refuge conference in Melbourne, refuges reported that they were receiving an ‘increasing number of requests from young and old homeless single women, women with drug, alcohol and psychiatric problems’.257 Like migrant women, they were seen as ‘problems for the refuges’, with their narrowed focus on ‘women and their children who were the victims of domestic violence’.258 This limited definition of ‘domestic violence’, thus worked to downplay other women’s public and/or institutionalised experiences of violence, which were seen as somehow less deserving of attention. The conference did, however, recommend that ‘there is a need for new refuges for other special groups of women’.259 A refuge was established in the mid-1980s to specifically support drug-and-alcohol affected women, but this was short lived and the question of ‘what do we do with women who have these problems’ continued to be raised by WESP-funded services.260

The refuge movement was nevertheless acutely aware of the relationship between domestic violence and women experiencing psychiatric illness, and, alongside the women’s health collective, radical refuges worked to politicise the psychiatric professions’ response to such women, including the use and abuse of tranquillisers.261 Refuges did also support women with these kinds of problems to some extent, despite their official policy. Because they were ill-equipped to do so, they took a considerable risk, as long-term refuge worker Angela Palmer recounts:

I remember having really complex clients. I think we walked a dangerous line with them. I remember sitting up in the night with women with mental health issues … and with women that were psychotic … [W]e didn’t have the training, and in all the mayhem we all decided that the psychiatric system was appallingly patriarchal, so we never sent them to hospital which was very dangerous. I think we were really lucky that more women didn’t suicide.262

Criticism on all these issues was growing from both within and outside the refuge movement but particularly in relation to the exclusion of women with disabilities.263 In the mid-1980s

261 Hargreaves interview; WREC, p. 98.
262 Angela Palmer, focus group by Jacqui Theobald, 8 June 2008.
Refuges began to meet with disability advocacy groups, including the Disabled Persons Information Bureau, the Disabled Women’s Resource Network, the Disability Resource Centre, and the Spastic Society. These groups conducted workshops with refuges to educate them about the difficulties facing women with disabilities.\textsuperscript{264}

Refuges also worked to improve the after-hours response to women and children, and placed a submission with DCWS for a feminist-staffed interim refuge in 1984 (later named Trish’s Place).\textsuperscript{265} After some negotiation, very limited funding was provided and the refuge began operating by the end of the year. It was combined with the phone service (Women’s Refuge Referral Service) and moved out of the women’s building into a suburban house where it operated 24 hours, seven days a week.\textsuperscript{266}

At this time, after-hours calls to the WRRS were answered by volunteers at the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), where many of these women were also accommodated. This assistance had been appreciated but was sometimes problematic because YWCA did not always have the resources to ‘cope with the women and children seeking their assistance’.\textsuperscript{267} The WRRS continually lobbied the government about their grossly inadequate funding. From the establishment of the service till 1988, there had been an 81 per cent increase in requests for refuge which left them little time to undertake community education.\textsuperscript{268} They requested funding for a toll-free number and larger premises with office space for workers.\textsuperscript{269} The effects of this under-funding were reported in a review of Victorian refuges, which noted that workers were often ‘overnight alone’ and faced an ever growing ‘volume of calls’.\textsuperscript{270} The lack of a rational funding model was also highlighted in a later review of the service.\textsuperscript{271} Inadequate funding continued to plague refuges generally; their workers faced growing demands to undertake after-hours on-call duties and carry beepers but no extra funding was provided.\textsuperscript{272} Former WRRS worker Liz Short describes the long hours of work juggling complex tasks and needs:

\textsuperscript{264} WREC, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{266} Walker, ‘Interim Refuge’, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{268} WRRS to Premier of Victoria, 3 October 1988, WLHWH papers; WRRS to Minister for Community Services, 4 January 1989, WLHWH papers. box 20.
\textsuperscript{269} WRRS, ‘Submission for Expansion of Existing Services’, 1988, WLHWH papers, box 20.
\textsuperscript{272} Mynot focus group.
We used to run the emergency interim refuge and the phone service … we’d be up all night on the phone, and also supporting women and children at the emergency refuge, and then also driving out to the local hospital to pick someone else up, maybe at 2am … There was scant occupational health and safety … and such low money at that point, because the award was low, and women did it, partly because … in our collective, it was an activist job … [B]ut they were twelve-hour shifts, running two crisis services …. driving round at night, usually alone, and occasionally getting lost, and picking up and supporting someone up who was in absolute crisis, with her kids, then back to do both jobs.²⁷³

This demonstrates that the problem of inadequate outreach services was reported as early as 1982 at the national refuge conference in Melbourne.²⁷⁴ Refuges first began to apply for funding for outreach workers in the mid-1980s. In 1987, five pilot outreach services were funded through SAAP and attached to separate refuges.²⁷⁵ These workers came mainly from refuges and worked in relative isolation with minimal funding that was often shared between services.²⁷⁶ In 1989, the Inner Eastern Women’s Outreach service was funded after a submission by Brenda House.²⁷⁷ Another such service was ‘Safe Place for Women’ established in 1989 by Billi Clarke to respond the particular needs of women with mental health issues combined with an experience of domestic violence.²⁷⁸

Refuges in rural areas faced unique problems issues because of their geographical location. They were, for example, often unable to access the WRRS and the interim refuge, and had to take referrals themselves from a range of other services including the police, hospitals and doctors. Issues of security were different because, as in the case of Emma House, they ‘found it difficult to keep their address confidential’.²⁷⁹ This meant that they were forced to develop good relationships with the police, who they noted were ‘always co-operative’.²⁸⁰ Some rural refuges like Coroonya found ways to operate with flexibility and ingenuity, which included taking referrals out as well as developing their own security measure such as two-way radios to keep themselves safe.²⁸¹

²⁷³ Liz Short, focus group conducted by Jacqui Theobald, 8 June 2008.
²⁷⁴ OSW, ‘Refuge Conference’, p. 5.
²⁷⁶ Austin, p. 17.
²⁷⁷ Roberts.
²⁷⁸ Clarke interview.
²⁷⁹ Aims and Objectives of Emma House Collective, KHA.
²⁸⁰ Emma House Collective.
²⁸¹ Kathy Russell, focus group conducted by Jacqui Theobald, June 2008.
Further, issues such as incest and child sexual abuse were evident from the beginnings of the women’s refuge movement. In Kaye Hargreaves’ recollection of those years, ‘The notion of incest was almost unheard of, and was beginning to be raised in the context of the sexual politics of the family’. The refuge movement played an important role in publicising and politicising incest, instigating a phone-in as early as May 1983. They also discovered through their own research that up to 90 per cent of women and children in some refuges reported being victims of incest. In August 1984, VWRG held a two-day workshop to draw attention to the problem and, in the same year, results of international research began to become available. Reflecting these developments, the Criminal Assault report recommended funding for a domestic violence and incest advocacy centre and, in 1986, the first discussion paper released by the state government on child sexual assault identified it as a ‘major social problem’.

Refuge workers drafted the submission for the advocacy centre, which was named the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (DVIRC). Approval was given for its establishment when one-off funds became available in late 1985. Matilda and Southern refuges received $50,000 to establish the centre. Despite some initial opposition, DVIRC eventually won overwhelming support on the grounds that it was ‘important to have a centre that wasn’t providing … accommodation services for women, because that freed people up to keep their eye on the campaigning and lobbying and the political issues’.

The centre’s philosophy and actions were informed by a feminist perspective that ‘child sexual assault and domestic violence’ were ‘crimes arising from the structural gendered power imbalance within patriarchal societies’. Founding worker Lynne Burgoyne recalled that its focus was on ‘changing attitudes and structures in our society, and on supporting and empowering children and women’. The service was first housed at the Women’s Information Referral Exchange, with access to a desk in a corner. Its work focused on treating support groups, collecting and sharing information, developing a referral database and a library, acting as a resource for survivors and workers, and undertaking community education.

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282 Hargreaves interview.
283 Feldman, p. 27.
285 WPCU, Criminal, p. 28.
287 Johnson focus group.
289 Marg D’Arcy, quoted in ‘Plotting DVIRC’s History’, p. 4; WREC, p. 134.
290 Otto interview.
291 Lynne Burgoyne, quoted in ‘Plotting DVIRC’s History’.
292 Burgoyne.
By the late 1980s, support groups for domestic violence and incest had spread throughout metropolitan Melbourne and had begun to publicise their members’ experiences. \(^{293}\) DVIRC also provided ‘seminars and public speaking to schools, TAFEs, community agencies, Fairlea women’s prison, refuge workers, ministry of housing tenants associations, and school nurses’. \(^{294}\) In addition, centre workers joined with other community organisations including CASA to form the Standing Strong Collective, which worked to develop a sexual abuse prevention kit aimed at adolescents for use in schools and by community education workers. \(^{295}\)

In 1989, an ethnic community education worker was appointed and this led to the establishment of a multilingual telephone service by 1991. Alongside workers from REWP and Co-As-It, the ethnic education officer at DVIRC challenged stereotypes relating to ethnicity and domestic violence and, in particular, the notion that migrant women were somehow more oppressed than their Anglo counterparts because of their culture. \(^{296}\) Within a short space of time, DVIRC had become the ‘group to go to if you wanted to talk about legislation or if you wanted to talk about policy’. \(^{297}\)

At the same time, funding was made available for the development of family violence networkers in each region of Melbourne. Like DVIRC, the networkers were intended to play a critical role in policy and program development but at a regional rather than state level, thus augmenting the state-wide work of DVIRC. \(^{298}\) Hannah Kaiser argues that, as a result of the role undertaken by these new domestic violence services, refuges had somewhat ‘less of an engagement on that policy type … political level’, which was ‘a pity because this possibly put us in a weaker position and diminished … our voice’. \(^{299}\) The feeling that, as a movement, refuges had suffered a ‘loss’ of power and voice over time was common amongst interviewees. This in part reflects a movement that had ‘become more weighed down by service provision’, which meant that ‘it was difficult to balance the political agenda with meeting, or being responsive to, the everyday needs of the women and children who came to the refuge’. \(^{300}\) Despite these changes, however, domestic violence services continued to drive


\(^{294}\) Burgoyne.

\(^{295}\) *DVIRC Newsletter*, May 1988.

\(^{296}\) Diana Orlando, ‘Women are Disadvantaged in all Cultures’, *DVIRC Newsletter*, December 1989.

\(^{297}\) D’Arcy interview.

\(^{298}\) D’Arcy interview.

\(^{299}\) Kaiser interview.

\(^{300}\) Otto interview.
policy change, just as they continued to bear witness to abused women’s experiences of injustice.

**Taking Action and Publicising Domestic Violence**

Despite the growing demands on domestic violence services workers in their day-to-day operations, they worked in growing collaboration with state institutions such as the courts, police, and other non-government organisations, whilst continuing to agitate for social and cultural change to prevent domestic violence. An early history of the refuge movement claimed that stress caused by the nature of the refuge work and ongoing funding shortages, women in refuges managed to direct much of their energy into campaigns, which brought to public notice the injustices of women and children’s position in society. Workers and residents lobbied for better pensions for women, for better public housing, and they spent many unpaid hours publicising the issue of domestic violence.\(^{301}\)

The work of Women’s Housing Action Group, for example, led to the establishment of a Housing Task Force chaired by the Ministry of Housing.\(^{302}\) One outcome was that women and children who were victims of domestic violence would be automatically eligible for priority housing.\(^{303}\) Whilst this response made real differences to the lives of women escaping violent partners, it was not an ideal outcome since they felt ‘forced into a position of … competing against other needy groups’.\(^{304}\) Major structural change in society would ideally lead to ‘provision of housing so there was no longer a waiting list, so that you would no longer need priority battles’.\(^{305}\) New organisations began to pick up this work, and, in 1988, Women in Supportive Housing undertook a major study to examine the relationship between domestic violence and poor access to housing after refuge.\(^{306}\)

DVIRC in particular began to take a lead in forming partnerships with external organisations as well as generating community awareness of the issues relating to domestic violence. They received ongoing funding from the Attorney General’s department to conduct community

\(^{301}\) ‘Political Herstory of Refuges’, circa 1984, Janine Berryman private papers, in possession of Jacqui Theobald.

\(^{302}\) Ministry of Housing to WRRS, 18 August 1986, WLHWH papers, box 20.

\(^{303}\) *DVIRC Quarterly*, December 1989.

\(^{304}\) Otto interview.

\(^{305}\) Otto interview.

education about the *Crimes (Family Violence) Act*. This enabled them to appoint additional staff, including legal worker Ariel Couchman, who undertook ‘educating and campaigning … all over the state’, which involved, ‘country trips, and extensive workshops in inner Melbourne [that] provided immense feedback from participants, including the names of sympathetic lawyers/doctors/social workers and others, who then became part of our referral network’. Work began in partnership with other community organisations concerned to raise awareness of the issues facing women experiencing domestic violence. In 1987, for example, DVIRC formed the Women’s Coalition against Family Violence (WCAFV), comprising a number of non-government organisations that included domestic violence services, legal centres, community health services, sexual assault services and community houses. Part of the focus of the WCAFV was ‘monitoring the effectiveness of the *Crimes (Family Violence) Act*, its utilisation and to educate the community and advocate for change’. In this context, the group promoted the use of intervention orders, whilst also arguing that they ‘should not be seen as a substitute for laying criminal charges’. Employing a feminist analysis of domestic violence, WCAFV argued that ‘violence in the home is about the abuse of power, particularly the power of men over women’.

WCAFV also undertook public campaigns to highlight the number of killings of women and children resulting from domestic violence, and, most significantly, they organised a domestic murders commemoration in May 1989 to raise the community’s understanding of domestic violence and domestic murder. At the same time, graffiti campaigns were undertaken as a ‘creative way’ to publicise the issue. Palmer reminds us however, that advocacy undertaken by refuge workers was unpaid and additional to the work with women in refuge:

We did a lot of political activity after hours … we turned up to rallies, and go to Canberra for things, graffiti art … and we were always involved in reclaim the night. We used part of our funding to set up Women Against Rape, and we went to the Anzac day marches as a protest group.

Work by refuges in collaboration with the Victorian police at this time was also extensive. In the early 1980s, members of the VWRG had gained influence within the Women’s Advisory

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308 Ariel Couchman, quoted in ‘Plotting DVIRC’s History’, p. 7.
310 Burgoyne, p. 6.
312 WCAFV, ‘New Laws’.
313 WCAFV, *Blood*, p. vi
314 Aurora McClean, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 4 September 2008.
315 Palmer focus group.
Council to the premier. In this capacity, they argued in a submission to an inquiry into the Victorian police force that the ‘needs of women, most particularly in situations of domestic violence’ must be given greater priority. They argued for an increase in the ‘amount and quality of training provided to police officers’ so that they would ‘provide assistance to women clients without being patronising’.

In the mid-1980s, criticism of police inaction in relation to domestic violence was mounted in the media. At this time, domestic violence services joined forces with community legal services to request that the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) undertake to respond to the lack of police action in relation to domestic assaults. By 1986, a police and domestic violence working party had been established in response to these complaints, and the EOC initiated a domestic violence monitoring group representing WRRS, refuges, the St Kilda legal service and the WPCU. In this forum, domestic violence services worked with the community policing squad and were invited to provide input into a police training manual. During 1987 refuges worked together with WRRS and DVIRC to develop a police training package. This group brought a feminist perspective to the materials and the package included information on the philosophy and function of refuges, including that ‘the most significant factor in domestic violence is the relative powerlessness of women in social, economic and physical terms’. The group adopted police training as a strategy to engage the support of police as allies without antagonising them, further evidence of the new resolve of the domestic violence services movement to work in partnership with state institutions.

A Family Violence Strategy Group was established within the Victorian police in September 1988. Marg D’Arcy took on the role of deputy chairperson after establishing the Family Violence Project Office within the Community Policing Co-ordination Office. She organised ‘training around the Crimes (Family Violence) Act, developing the policy and setting up the family violence incident database’. In 1989, a formal policy statement on family violence was released recognising the rights of victims to police protection. Whilst a struggle ensued

319 WRRS to Equal Opportunities Board, 7 October 1985, WLHWH papers.
320 WRRS to the Collective, 12 November 1986, WLHWH papers
321 Police Training meeting minutes, 11 May 1987, WLHWH papers.
323 D’Arcy interview.
to ensure that the police implemented the legislation, this marked a considerable improvement in the police response to domestic violence, now understood (in policy terms at least) as a crime. Domestic violence workers also pressed for family law reform, including the provision of child access centres, and development of a new child support system. They focused particularly on ensuring legal process met the needs of women and children and that they were fully informed of their entitlements.

By the late 1980s in Australia, domestic violence was commonly being named and responded to by both national and state governments. Significant shifts were also beginning to take place in public awareness of domestic violence. At a national level, the Commonwealth–State Coordinating Task Force on domestic violence was formed and April 1989 was named National Domestic Violence Awareness Month by the Hawke government. Country-wide publicity about the issue ensued and formed a part of the federal government’s three-year National Domestic Violence Campaign, managed under the slogan Break the Silence. This was preceded by the first Australian survey on community-wide attitudes towards domestic violence and was undertaken by the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women.

**Conclusion**

During the 1980s, the domestic violence service’s movement’s engagement with the state had made significant gains. These included recurrent funding, the expansion and diversification of services, and new legal and policing responses. These changes occurred in a social and political context of action by both state and Commonwealth governments to improve the status of women. Moreover, the Commonwealth expanded its welfare commitment through the introduction of the Women’s Emergency Services Program (WESP), and later SAAP, following the election of the Hawke-led Labor government in 1983. The advocacy of the refuge movement, combined with the work of femocrats in government, saw domestic violence adopted as a policy issue, which in turn enabled funding and legislative changes that had been inconceivable a decade earlier. This relationship was critical to ensuring that policy framings and recommendations on domestic violence reflected a feminist analysis of the problem.

328 See for example, Roxburgh, pp. 3–97.
Over this period it is clear that the domestic violence services movement had made some concessions towards working for reform within the system, in contrast to the refuge movement’s earlier radical feminist agenda demanding fundamental social and personal transformation as part of a revolutionary critique of society. This shift is illustrative of the ascendancy that liberal feminism had come to assume both within the domestic violence services movement and the women’s movement more broadly. But the changes in the movement’s aims and activities were also being shaped through engagement with the state. Specifically, domestic violence services had been forced to operate as part of a service system, and the government began to exert greater control over their work. Despite this growing trend, however, the Victorian movement resisted state control and had some success in maintaining a degree of autonomy in their operations and feminist approaches to service delivery. In this, paradoxically, they were assisted by feminists in government and other bureaucrats, who were both accommodating and supportive of the movement’s agenda.

This chapter has also traced the origins of a continuing and often counterproductive tension in the movement between homelessness and domestic violence as issues of concern. As a consequence of their forced inclusion into an emergency accommodation program, refuges sought to differentiate their organisations from homelessness service providers so they might pursue their feminist goals of social change. However, in doing so, they polarised the problems of women’s homelessness and domestic violence by insisting that their work was not concerned with the former because it derived from the latter, which was their key priority. Whilst this distinction has proved useful—in as much as it has highlighted violence as a contributing factor to women’s homelessness—it has also proved problematic because it obfuscates our understanding of the relationship between the two issues, which would be enhanced by a consideration of how they relate to women’s economic inequality, poverty and other experiences of violence.\(^{330}\) I have also noted that, whilst women’s access to affordable housing continued to form part of the advocacy work of the VWRG until the late 1980s, it was increasingly relegated to the periphery of the movement’s agenda. Moreover, the dichotomisation of these issues remains embedded within Victoria’s domestic violence and homelessness service system, and governments respond to them as if they are independent problems. This has important implications for women’s access to, and experience of, the domestic violence and homelessness service systems, for their experiences cannot be neatly categorised within such artificial programmatic boundaries. The following chapter explores

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how activists within the movement began to challenge these kinds of rigidities, with some limited success.

This chapter has examined hostilities between conservative and radical groups within the movement, reflecting their different feminisms and conflicting ideas about the aims of the movement and appropriate methods to achieve them. The outcome saw the majority of services embrace radical feminist ideas of organising and working with women. Despite their differences, refuge activists were adept at uniting in the face of external forces such as their state funding bodies. But political ideology was not the only factor that generated difficulties and drove change within the movement. I have also highlighted the role that activists from within and outside the movement played in filling the gaps in a service system established according to the universalisation of white middle-class women’s assumptions. These activists demanded consideration of the needs of women who were migrant, young, Aboriginal, disabled, homeless and with mental health and substance-use issues. As a result, new services emerged to cater for these groups, and the policies and practices of existing organisations were challenged to include differing requirements and subjectivities.

In the 1980s, that domestic violence services continued to engage with and respond to, the burgeoning policy responses to domestic violence by the state government. Despite the fact that they were now an integral part of a state-sponsored service system, they also continued to pursue goals of radical social change through direct action designed to publicise and politicise the issue of domestic violence. At the same time, they formed relationships with a range of state institutions and other non-government organisations that were developing programmatic and policy responses to domestic violence. The domestic violence services movement remained at the forefront of the policy process, ensuring its program implementation met the needs of women and that feminism continued as the dominant discourse by which domestic violence was understood. While many of these patterns continued into the 1990s, the decade would witness a flourishing of partnerships between domestic violence services and other external organisations.
Chapter 5: The Domestic Violence Services System, 1990–1999

In this competition period, the only way to survive was to pull our heads in and be as innovative as possible without making too much noise and then basically stamping our feet to say this works for women … we actually achieved quite a bit service by service.¹

This chapter analyses the rapidly changing political, institutional and policy context that domestic violence organisations confronted during the 1990s. Whilst the policy problem of domestic violence occupied a central place on both Commonwealth and state government agendas, other discursive and institutional shifts, including the onset of economic rationalism and changing conceptualisations of citizenship and welfare, dramatically changed the nature of the services’ relationship with government. In addition to being administered within the SAAP program, which was inadequately funded, Victorian services also faced what was arguably the most rigorous application of economic rationalist principles to public policy in the country under the Kennett-led Liberal government. I analyse how this confluence of factors generated a particularly inhospitable environment for domestic violence services, which sheds light on how a movement for social change transformed into one focused on service delivery. Specifically, I investigate the challenges the services faced, including the imposition of competitive tendering, techniques to enforce ‘accountable management’ structures, under-funding, the promotion of individualised service responses, and case management. Drawing partly on the narratives from domestic violence activists regarding the impact of these changes, I highlight the difficulty they faced in maintaining a radical structural and social change agenda in relation to their work.

This chapter also considers the resistance that organisations displayed in the face of adversity. I examine their responses to economic rationalism and, in particular, to the intermittent and real threat that they would face de-funding. The argument proposed challenges the view that, during this period, services simply rolled over or gave up on feminist principles or resisting the government’s agenda. It demonstrates that services opposed when they could, challenged where possible, and, over time, began to work in greater cooperation not only with each other but with external organisations. This section will also continue to examine the relationship between feminism and domestic violence services and, in particular, the impact of the

¹ Austin correspondence.
growing ascendancy of liberal feminism on their aims and activities. From the early 1990s onwards, domestic violence services were also increasingly challenged from within to incorporate the differing requirements and subjectivities of marginalised women into their services. The chapter documents the sustained efforts and advocacy of the women who undertook to respond to these needs, and demanded that mainstream organisations do the same.

**Domestic Violence Services and the State**

If you had the nineties as they should have been, we’d be ten years ahead of where we are now.\(^2\)

**The Policy Context**

In March 1990, the Hawke Labor government committed $1.35 million over three years to establish the Commonwealth–State National Committee on Violence Against Women.\(^3\) The committee aimed to deal with all forms of violence against women through the development of policy, research and community education. It replaced the existing State–Commonwealth Coordinating Task Force and built on the work already undertaken by the previous three-year National Domestic Violence Campaign. The committee’s National Strategy on Violence Against Women was informed by radical feminism\(^4\) and framed the problem as ‘male violence’ against women resulting from ‘male attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in relation to women, and from the abuse of power’.\(^5\) In addition, it argued that ‘violence against women has its origins in the social system which assigns subordinate status to women’.\(^6\) It recommended that ‘policy and practice need to be linked by a commitment to empower women, which results in women gaining a sense of entitlement; enjoying equal status; experiencing freedom, [and] achieving economic independence’.\(^7\) As historian Suellen Murray has noted, the solution had therefore to involve ‘improvements in the status of women, including those concerned with women’s access to economic independence, health and education’.\(^8\) Years of advocacy by activists in women’s refuges, combined with the work of feminists in government, had ultimately resulted in the problem of domestic violence becoming a key Commonwealth government priority. As feminist activist Maria Dimopoulos

\(^2\) Newman interview.
\(^5\) National Committee, p. 4.
\(^6\) National Committee, p. 5.
\(^7\) National Committee, p. 5.
\(^8\) Murray, *Refuge*, p. 5.
comments: ‘It was the first time that we have ever seen it feature in such a pronounced way on the government agenda … and I think we had used every strategy possible’.9

At the same time, however, and in a somewhat contradictory manner, other shifts in the administration and conceptualisation of social welfare were occurring. These posed considerable challenges to domestic violence services. Jane Bullen has argued that ‘governments employed technologies of performance management including techniques such as accountable management, derived from business, as a means to regulate the activities of non-government organisations’.10 Conceptualisations of welfare and citizenship were also shifting, welfare recipients being expected to take action to overcome their circumstances in return for government support.11 These changes had become dominant under the Hawke and Keating Labor governments, which also ‘granted priority to the economic imperative of the free market over social objectives’ with an emphasis on tackling ‘poverty rather than inequality’.12 In part, these shifts meant, as Bullen contends, that ‘during the 1990s, homelessness came to be viewed more as an issue of individual welfare or individual problems’.13

At a state level, Joan Kirner had become premier in 1990, following the sudden resignation of John Cain, and also took on the portfolio of Women’s Affairs. Despite the growing pressures facing the Kirner government—including an economic recession combined with mounting attacks from the Murdoch press—Kirner’s leadership signalled improvements in the status of Victorian women. Her government confirmed its commitment to ‘tackle family violence and its effects’ through the continuation of an ‘integrated approach to this issue across government agencies through education, prevention, enforcement, information and support services’.14 In its fourth report (1992) examining accommodation issues in the context of family violence, the Victorian Community Council Against Violence (VCCAV) made a series of recommendations relating to the housing and legal needs of women and children escaping domestic violence and argued for changes to be implemented across a number of ministerial portfolios. Like the National Strategy, the report was informed by radical feminism and argued that domestic violence was a result of ‘the position of women in our society … a great

9 Dimopolous interview.
10 Bullen, pp. 37–38.
12 Mendes, p. 158.
13 Bullen, p. 42.
many of whom suffer various forms of gender-based social disadvantage’.15 Part of the solution thus involved the improvement of women’s economic position, and in particular, their access to affordable housing. First and foremost, the report recommended increases in the supply and type of public housing stock.16 In relation to domestic violence services specifically, it recommended an expansion of refuge places, that WRRS be adequately resourced, and that the Victorian Women’s Refuges Service be funded to operate as a peak body.17 The report and recommendations were released shortly before the election of the Kennett Liberal government in October 1992.

For all the Kirner government’s rhetoric, however, and perhaps as a consequence of its short term in office and a recession, there were no significant policy developments specifically in relation to domestic violence, apart from a new focus on funding men’s behaviour-change programs, discussed in more detail below. Though little was actually achieved, the Kirner government undertook social policy development in a manner characterised by a commitment to social justice and feminism, including fostering community partnership and engagement. During the tenure of Kay Setches as Minister for Community Services, for example, the department commissioned feminist academic Wendy Weeks to undertake a review of women’s services in Victoria, which highlighted the strong support in national and international research for service provision for women by women.18 This approach was reflected in the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Women and Housing, which funded Women in Supportive Housing (WISH) to undertake a state-wide consultation ‘asking Victorian women what concerns them about housing’.19 Women were entering the Victorian parliament in record numbers at this time, though the trend was reversed with Kennett’s election in 1992. As Setches observes:

When we were in parliament, there were ten of us, we thought more and more women would come in, we’d broken the glass ceiling, we’ve done it. And then we lost in 1992, and there were four women left in the lower house, four altogether, or some bloody thing.20

In response, Setches later worked alongside Australian Labor Party (ALP) colleagues Joan Kirner, Julia Gillard and Jenny Macklin to develop and implement an affirmative action

16 VCCAV, Housing, p. ix.
17 VCCAV, Housing, pp. ix–xiii.
18 Women’s Services Coalition, p. 9.
20 Setches interview.
strategy for the pre-selection of women in winnable seats within Victoria. Getting such a policy adopted, as Setches recalled, involved a series of ‘drag-down fist fights with men in power’. Within two years, however, it had become policy in Victoria, then later federally.

The end of Kirner’s short run as premier meant that the future for feminist women’s services in Victoria looked doubtful. The new Kennett government defunded non-government services at an alarming rate. Somewhat remarkably, however, as will become apparent, domestic violence services were not amongst them, though they were not immune from the economic rationalist reforms that followed. What may have been achieved under a long-term Kirner government is impossible to say. The challenges of shifting entrenched male power structures within the Victorian state government were huge. In addition, governments at all levels became party to the global contraction of welfare states consequent upon the ascendancy of neo-liberal doctrines on the role of the state.

The welfare sector in Victoria was dealt a considerable blow following the election of a conservative government in 1992. Kennett immediately began a process of ‘promoting a contract culture’, consistent with ‘economic rationalist ideology’. This included reducing the public sector and focusing its activities on purchasing services, rather than providing them. In keeping with this approach, the new government imposed funding cuts and gradually introduced market-type funding mechanisms, including competitive tendering, which replaced traditional input-based funding arrangements. Whilst domestic violence services survived this period, many others did not. This apparent anomaly can be attributed to a commitment in the Liberal Party’s platform to reduce domestic violence, which was described as a ‘common form of assault’, where ‘women are overwhelmingly the victims’. Whilst the party’s policy certainly did not include a radical feminist analysis of the problem, the fact that domestic violence was a key part of Kennett’s election platform is evidence that violence against women and the need for refuges had become ‘institutionalised in the social landscape’.

The VCCAV continued to act as the key policy adviser to the government on violence against women and formed the Violence Against Women Task-Force in 1993. The taskforce undertook a wide-ranging consultation in 1995, resulting in the development of a state-wide...
strategy and an integrated policy approach. The taskforce also promoted a gendered understanding of the problem and focused attention on violence as a continuum. It argued that violence against women should be understood as a ‘consequence of inequalities based on gender, culture, religion, race, age, sexual preference and class, and it acts to reinforce the power disparity existing between men and women’. The report noted that ‘in Victoria there is currently no cross departmental approach to domestic violence or sexual assault’. In line with domestic violence policy in NSW, its recommendations included an integrated and co-ordinated response between police, courts, corrections, women’s services and men’s groups.

The Kennett government did not, however, formulate any semblance of a co-ordinated state government policy, or, indeed, a policy statement in relation to domestic violence, such as had been issued by the Cain government. Vig Geddes says of the 1990s, ‘students would ring up … and be doing something on family violence …[and say]… “I’m just wondering what bits of government policy I should be looking at?” I’d say “oh there isn’t any … not in Victoria … there are no documents”’. The Coalition did, however, ‘continue to provide funding for women’s refuges … and … support to enable women to leave violent relationships’. It also continued to promote and fund initiatives directed towards improving police responses to domestic violence, combined with community education campaigns and, as we shall see, programs for violent men.

‘Service delivery’ constituted the key element in the Kennett government’s overall response to domestic violence throughout the 1990s. But the model of service delivery underwent redevelopment which included regionalised administration for refuges, combined with a new focus on the provision of outreach services and regional service networks. However, funding and a practical framework for the much-touted redevelopment were lacking. The projected changes reflected the state government’s intention to withdraw from a direct role in the provision of community services, as well as the impact of the SAAP agenda, which had become focused on individual experiences of homelessness and domestic violence as opposed to the necessity of crisis accommodation based on a structural analysis of the problem of homelessness.

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30 Geddes interview.
31 ‘Coalition Policies for Women’.
During the 1990s, the Kennett government expedited the closing down of state government institutions, which had previously provided congregate care for people with mental health problems and disabilities and for children and young people unable to live at home. Whilst ‘deinstitutionalisation’ signalled a growing international recognition of human rights for such people, it simultaneously reflected the government’s determination to withdraw from providing human services and to reduce welfare spending. Indeed, the enormous funds saved as a result of deinstitutionalisation have never been fully redirected into community care. As a result, many people who would otherwise have been institutionalised failed to receive comparable support in the community, which meant that those without family support suffered homelessness and poverty. This served further to increase pressure on SAAP services and expanded the population of homeless people. SAAP became ‘the safety net that sat beneath other poorly resourced community functions and the complexity of client support required rose excessively’.

Across the country, other states were continuing to respond to domestic violence by developing co-ordinated strategies and establishing domestic violence committees and/or advisory councils. In NSW, for example, a domestic violence strategic plan was developed in 1991, incorporating recommendations to all departments. And, in WA, the Liberal state government implemented their ‘abuse in families’ campaign, reflecting the government’s conservative political orientation. In 1994, the NT government launched its five-year domestic violence strategy. However, it was criticised for failing to provide resources.

Whilst, nationally, domestic violence services were celebrating the fact that ‘domestic violence as an issue has finally made it onto the agenda of state and federal governments’, they were simultaneously reeling from the impact of economic rationalist policies, which left services ‘scrambling to compete against business plans and cost effective standardised bureaucratic agencies’. Nevertheless, strategies were devised to survive these challenges, including attempts to sell ‘expertise and knowledge in a competitive arena’.

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32 Austin correspondence.
36 Kristal, p. 50.
viable and efficient service providers, whilst trying to maintain their commitment to feminist ways of working.\textsuperscript{37}

**Funding, SAAP and Economic Rationalism**

We did all this ongoing work together and basically grew the program from bottom up. Through the 80s … bit by bit Department of Human Services actually took it over, and ran with it and owned it, without costing it mind you … and then they took it, called it DHS programs, and off they went with it into the 90s.\textsuperscript{38}

Throughout the 1990s, domestic violence services faced a number of challenges in their relationship with their state funding bodies. Whilst they managed to survive, they faced a barrage of changes as the state transformed its methods of administration and governance. In particular, the application of free market principles to the delivery of human services meant that services had to adopt different methods of operating. During the decade, SAAP continued to fund women’s refuges nationally, despite an attempt by the Hawke government to hand them back to the states in 1991 with untied federal grants rather than specific purpose payments.\textsuperscript{39} This was averted when Hawke was ousted as Prime Minister by Paul Keating, who opposed transferring Commonwealth financial powers to the states. However, there had been no real increases in SAAP funding from the early 1990s, which led state government bureaucrat Tony Newman to conclude ‘in ’91 SAAP died, and it took ten years in Victoria to revive it’.\textsuperscript{40}

In her position as Minister for Community Services in the Kirner government, Kay Setches was responsible for domestic violence services; she recalls that the onset of recession in 1991 made it difficult to expand their funding. Instead, as a committed feminist, she worked to protect services from funding cuts she had to make. As she recalls:

I just said “I can’t help you with an expansion of this program. You see, I’ve got to make $23 million savings without touching your sector. I’m not telling anyone I’m not touching your sector, but I’m not going to”.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{37} Eastern Services Group Working Party, ‘Strategic Alliance: What it Is and How Does it Work?’ 22 January 1999, BHA.
\textsuperscript{38} Wendy Austin, focus group by Jacqui Theobald, 8 June 2008.
\textsuperscript{39} Melville, ‘Refuge Funding’, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{40} Newman interview.
\textsuperscript{41} Setches interview.
But these years did see funding of perpetrator programs assume a new importance in Victoria as well as other states, including WA.\textsuperscript{42} A forum had been arranged in Melbourne by the VCCAV in November 1990 and attended by Kirner, who endorsed the employment of ‘diverse strategies’.\textsuperscript{43} Setches chose to fund some perpetrator programs because she considered that women’s refuges by themselves were not preventative.\textsuperscript{44} The issue was controversial because it was considered by some groups to divert resources away from women’s services. It was also condemned for seeming to ‘individualise, medicalise and psychologise’ the problem of violence, which ‘diverts attention away from the structural or social causes of this widespread behaviour towards band-aid solutions’.\textsuperscript{45} In this instance, Setches averted the first of these criticisms by negotiating with the Police Minister, Mal Sandon, for corrections money to be allocated to perpetrators.\textsuperscript{46} Nevertheless, at least one activist at DVIRC argued against funding programs considered to be ‘therapeutic’ in nature and challenged the Kirner government’s ‘inconsistency’.\textsuperscript{47} In keeping with a radical feminist analysis of domestic violence, DVIRC further argued that funding perpetrator programs as therapy groups ‘reinforces the myth’ that ‘violence is a marital problem’.\textsuperscript{48} Members further demanded ‘a clear policy statement in relation to domestic violence … [that] … would provide a direction against which new projects and initiatives could be prioritised’,\textsuperscript{49} and would ‘focus on the criminality of assault in the home and the protection of victims’.\textsuperscript{50}

Controversially, in the mid-1990s, the Department of Human Services funded a peak body, the Victorian Network for the Prevention of Male Family Violence, to co-ordinate behaviour-change programs for men, as well as the Men’s Referral Service, comprising a state-wide telephone counselling, information and referral facility for men. Donna Zander assumed the position off co-ordinator and developed a standards manual for men’s behaviour-change programs. Zander’s background was in women’s and youth services and she felt that the feminist movement saw her ‘as a bit of a traitor for going to work in men’s services’.\textsuperscript{51} However, she considered this work of critical importance: ‘I knew that if the women’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Murray, \textit{Refuge}, p. 153.
\item \textsuperscript{43} VVACV, ‘Background’, p. 10.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Setches interview.
\item \textsuperscript{45} National Association of Community Legal Centres, Media Release on Treatment Programs for Violent Men, in \textit{DVIRC Quarterly}, June 1991, p. 15.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Weeks and Gilmore, p. 149.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Vig Geddes for DVIRC to the Hon. Joan Kirner, Premier of Victoria, in \textit{DVIRC Quarterly}, June 1992.
\item \textsuperscript{48} DVIRC to Premier
\item \textsuperscript{49} DVIRC to Premier.
\item \textsuperscript{50} DVIRC to Premier.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Donna Zander, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 8 October 2008.
\end{itemize}
movement [was] going to go forward, we have to join with these services, and we have to start to shape these services and … hold them accountable.52 But she agreed that:

many men … will never change … I think the solution to all of this is long-term prevention by education and cultural and structural change, and that is not going to happen by having a support group and behaviour change program, it is one part of a fleet of services that we need.53

In 1998, the network became No to Violence and, by 2000, there were 25 men’s behaviour change programs operating in Victoria. However, only eighteen received government funding and were subject to the minimum standards.54 Whilst many domestic violence workers supported the decision to work with men in principle, the decision to fund men’s services angered some who saw it as money diverted from women’s services. Feminist activist and long-term domestic violence services worker Billi Clarke remarks:

The government fucking loved it. They threw money at them … The peak body of a men’s service got funded … before the women’s sector that had been going for 25 years got a cent … You could see there was a real trend [of] taking resources off the women’s movement and transferring them over to men.55

A greater threat of funding cuts seemed to follow the election of the Kennett government in October 1992, but, as we have seen, domestic violence services were somewhat protected. The Kennett government’s election pledge to continue funding women’s refuges had in part come about, Geddes argues, because: ‘[T]he feminist and all the women’s DV services lobbied, and lobbied, and lobbied, and lobbied, and made a noise and were really effective by it’.56 So effective were they, in Geddes view:

That one senior bureaucrat told me once, a few years ago … that … DV services didn’t get cut … because there was still fear amongst the Liberal backbenchers about the power of the women’s liberation movement.57

Domestic violence services survived this period by lobbying Liberal Party MPs, and it was Liberal Party women from whom they received support.58 In particular, they were supported

52 Zander interview.
53 Zander interview.
55 Clarke interview.
56 Geddes interview.
57 Geddes interview.
58 Natalie Tomas, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 26 September 2008.
by Jan Wade as Attorney General and Minister for Women’s Affairs, who was seen to be ‘quite committed’ to tackling the problem.59

Funding cuts in other areas nevertheless severely affected domestic violence services. As former Women’s Liberation Halfway House activist Hanna Kaiser pointed out, the resources that had been available for women on leaving refuge had disconcertingly gone:

[A]fter Kennett came in … so many people had lost their jobs and so many organisations lost their funding. That meant that for us working at Halfway House all the resources that we had used to tap women into and so on, were no longer there. That made a huge difference in terms of how we were able to support woman.60

At the federal level, in contrast to SAAP I (1985–89), SAAP II (1989–94) ‘marked a new emphasis on the ‘transition to “independent living” as the purpose of “support”’.61 It identified five target groups that included young people; women and women and children who are homeless and/or in crisis as a result of domestic violence; families including single-parent families; single men; and single women. SAAP III (1994–99), introduced ‘case management as the means to assist people to redress their circumstances’.62 Bullen judges that ‘these and other changes such as the encouragement of more diverse service models including outreach indicate the shift to a more individualised approach, and less emphasis on providing crisis accommodation’.63

In addition to funding cuts, compulsory competitive tendering was introduced for local government activity, including human services, and consultation with domestic violence services as a group ceased.64 Competitive tendering was not, however, technically imposed on SAAP-funded services in Victoria. These were instead faced with a ‘planning model’. Instead of ‘responding to submissions’, ‘government would determine in advance where services were needed and invite non-government organisations to provide’ them.65 Reflecting this shift, bureaucrat’s administering SAAP in the Health and Community Services (HACS) (formerly Community Services Victoria) division of the Department of Human Services increasingly spent their time ‘dealing with changes in funding models, and moving to a costed

59 D’Arcy interview.
60 Kaiser interview.
61 Bullen, p. 67.
63 Bullen, pp. 67–68.
64 Brenda House, ‘Change’.
65 Bullen, p. 130.
funding model where you had targets’.\textsuperscript{66} In this sense, SAAP changed from being ‘a service program’ to ‘a funding program’, which meant:

you stay in the office and you work the money … There’s a real difference … you stay indoors, you don’t go out into the community. We [had been] constantly with the community, helping them. We knew what was going on everywhere. It was a very different model’.\textsuperscript{67}

These kinds of changes reflected the ‘contract culture’ imposed by the Kennett government and the ‘priorities of SAAP became more consistent with those changes taking place in social policy and administration more broadly’.\textsuperscript{68} The resulting ‘corporate’ changes were implemented under John Patterson, the new director of DHS. As former state bureaucrat and feminist Susan Feldman recalls:

John Patterson brought that model into DHS. They corporatised. It was very clear when that happened, you could actually see it. So that means that the government takes a much more hands-off role in the management of the program … But you also lose the connections with the field.\textsuperscript{69}

Unlike the 1980s, when women had often been recruited into government to administer domestic violence programs because of their knowledge from working in the field and/or commitment to feminism, bureaucrats were now more often employed because of their management knowledge. Consequently, bureaucrats:

[H]ad no idea about domestic violence … You’d have people in a senior position who were responsible for a service agreement … and they really weren’t familiar with the domestic violence field … it makes it very difficult when people you’re accountable to … don’t really understand what you do. Or, they might understand what you do, but they don’t have the same political view of it.\textsuperscript{70}

Some feminists in government were reluctant to work under the new culture, and decided to move out. As Feldman says, ‘I realised that I didn’t want to be there anymore. Because you were not really supposed to engage with the community, the thing I enjoyed most’.\textsuperscript{71} Long-time DVIRC worker Margot Scott concurs, ‘it was very difficult for left-leaning bureaucrats

\textsuperscript{66} Sandra Morris, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 31 March 2009.
\textsuperscript{67} Feldman interview.
\textsuperscript{68} Bullen, p. 67
\textsuperscript{69} Feldman interview.
\textsuperscript{70} Margot Scott, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 28 April 2009.
\textsuperscript{71} Feldman interview.
in those days. It was all about economic rationalism and money, money, money’.72 Covert measures were adopted by domestic violence services that included meeting bureaucrats outside of the department because they were ‘quite frightened to talk. We used to have to go out to coffee to talk with some of the women in there that we were on side with’.73

In the context of this new ‘hands-off’ management of SAAP, Victorian domestic violence services ‘participate[d] in service reviews, service reconstructions, new accountability systems … signed service agreements … counted support periods, challenged data collection … [and] … learned to become accountants’.74 Service agreements became compulsory, providing a mechanism for the state to enforce regulation.75 In Austin’s words, because organisations ‘were being constrained by funding agreements, we were being directed to do particular things’.76 Bullen describes the process in Foucauldian terms as ‘interlinking set of techniques that affected and regulated the activities of services’.77

In a further attempt to improve accountability, the Victorian SAAP policy on collective management of domestic violence services was revised in 1993 by HACS, to draw a clear distinction between ‘the collective’, and the ‘management collective’, the latter being responsible for ‘staff selection and management, policy development, finances, accountability to government and service direction’.78 In addition, a SAAP service system review recommended that management collectives ‘should no longer be worker dominated’.79 As a result, HACS decreed that ‘service workers’ positions on management collectives should constitute 25 per cent or less’.80 As long-time refuge worker, Julie Oberin, comments:

They had a real issue about paid workers making decisions … So you had to have clear structures in place which showed that the workers weren’t making any decisions about their pay and conditions, whether clients got service or not, or the policy directions of the organisation.81

72 Scott interview.
73 Scott interview.
74 Austin, p. 18.
75 Community Services Victoria, ‘SAAP Service Agreement between Community Services Victoria and Brenda House Incorporated: 1 July 1991 to 20 June 1994’, BHA.
76 Austin interview.
77 Bullen, p. 116.
78 ‘SAAP Requirements in Relation to SAAP Funded Services Managed by Collectives’, in Ministerial Taskforce, p. 63.
80 ‘SAAP Requirements’, p. 63.
It also became mandatory that management collective members have particular skills and experience, including ‘basic management and financial management principles and procedures’. These changes enforced a degree of hierarchical management structures and formally reduced the decision-making power of workers and residents in services. As we have seen, collective organisational structures, including majority decision-making, had been central to the ideology of radical feminism, which saw hierarchical methods as oppressive. At first, refuges continued to resist hierarchical structures, as Oberin indicates:

We didn’t want to be a committee of management. We became a management collective and said, “okay we’ll do what government wants us to do, but we’re also going to keep our consensus decision making, and we’re not going to have these power structures, we’re going to do it the women’s way of doing it”.

Yet, towards the end of the 1990s, many refuges adopted management committees. This decision was often pragmatic, rather than ideological, because, as Oberin relates, those who resisted experienced funding discrimination. As Oberin recounts:

We stayed a management collective for quite a few years until we realised we’d put in a few submissions for funding and didn’t even get a look in. And we just felt that there was no respect or understanding of what a management collective was, and … we weren’t going to get any growth funding unless we became a little bit more standardised. So we made a political decision to turn into a committee of management … So we were able to grow a bit after that, we were actually able to start to gain some extra funding grants.

A new generation of domestic violence services’ workers had also become critical of collective decision-making processes. As former worker and present-day bureaucrat Alison Fraser recounts:

If you try and focus a collective meeting around examining a recent example of practice and seeing how we might improve … and examine it in a meeting, there’d be emotional sabotage and no notion of process and the whole thing would just end in shambles and tears, and the clients would be no better off. And that’s what used to shit me, because we didn’t have the process to examine practice. And that was a crime.

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82 ‘SAAP Requirements’, p. 63.
83 Oberin interview.
84 Oberin interview.
85 Alison Fraser, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 22 April 2009.
At the same time, the industrial organisation of refuge work over the 1990s inevitably meant that control was removed from domestic violence services in relation to ‘establish[ing] their own working conditions, and added pressure to abandon the collective form of governance’. However, refuges aimed to ensure that pay parity continued, and they lobbied to be recognised as community development workers under the state Social and Community Services (SACS) award so they could continue to ‘bring family violence to the attention of the community and fight for change’.

From their beginnings, refuges had been ideologically opposed to union membership because unions represented hierarchical organisational structures and wage disparity. In any case, no union would take refuge workers until such as time as peak organisations like Shelter Victoria, working with the Regional Housing Councils (both of which were partially defunded under Kennett), negotiated membership of the then Australian Social Welfare Union. But feminist refuge workers continued to see their organisations as political, not institutional. As Geddes points out: ‘Unions see [refuges] as a workplace … [and]… they wanted to put different workers on different awards … We weren’t interested in differential pay, it wasn’t about the work, it was a political thing’.

Following the introduction of SAAP II in 1991, SAAP services nationally were brought within state award structures and wages increased considerably, although they never became comparable with salaries for similar roles in government. Service agreements now assumed compliance with industrial awards. In Victoria, the SACS award was abolished in 1993 as part of the Kennett government’s general elimination of awards but was later reintroduced. Services were encouraged to seek coverage under the federal Crisis Assistance Supported Housing (CASH) award; however, this did not include salary conditions, and Victorian refuges continued to pay wages in accordance with the SACS award, pending further development to the CASH award. Regardless, the wage subsidy provided by HACS Victoria remained inadequate with no provision to pay workers over-time, penalty rates, on-call or long-service leave. Finance workers in refuges lobbied the government incessantly for

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87 Brenda House, ‘Change’.
88 Coleman interview.
89 Geddes interview.
90 Bullen, p. 119.
91 Community Services Victoria, ‘SAAP Service Agreement between Community Services Victoria and Brenda House Incorporated: 1 July 1991 to 20 June 1994’, BHA.
93 Brenda House, ‘Worker Agreement’, July 1993, BHA.
meagre increases so services could meet their obligations to workers with regard to superannuation and safety net award increases. Often the delays in funding meant services would have to ‘budget from other salary funds’.  

Workers also undertook an inordinate amount of unpaid over-time because, for the majority, it was always more than a job.

These kinds of industrial changes were often looked upon critically by an earlier generation of refuge activists who saw their adoption as signalling an end to the role of refuges as agents for social change and the whole-sale capitulation to ‘institutionalised welfare’. In WLHWH activist Jenny Macmillan’s words:

> People started being paid large amounts of money, and became obsessed by work conditions, and … that wasn’t what we were about … these were very different sorts of jobs. And it was all very well to be reasonably paid, and we probably should have had more time off than we did but … it certainly wasn’t about staying there and getting your long service leave and concentrating on your next increment … It had become an absolute institutionalised welfare service.

In fact, refuge workers were never paid ‘large amounts of money’, and workers across the social and community services ‘have long experienced some of the worst working conditions in Australia’. Domestic violence workers often received under-award pay, suggesting that they are likely to be amongst the most financially disadvantaged members of the SACS workforce. In addition, implementation of competitive tendering processes inevitably led to funding being won by large organisations that could afford to put in the lowest bids. This meant that many SAAP workers were offered less pay and poor conditions.

SAAP III (1994–99) was introduced nationally in December 1994, with the inclusion of case management, combined with the imposition of a uniform national data collection system. At this time, domestic violence services in Victoria received $8.25 million in recurrent annual funding. The 24 refuges in operation got the majority of this funding ($6.3 million), whilst the seventeen domestic violence outreach services received a total of $955,000. Other services, including WRRS, DVIRC, Women in Supported Housing (WISH) and the Refuge Ethnic Workers Program (REWP), received a total of $1.25 million annually. This funding,

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95 Brenda House to SAAP Central, 17 November 1995, BHA.
96 Brenda House to SAAP Central, 16 August 1995, BHA.
97 Macmillan interview.
98 Briggs, Meagher, and Healy, p. 501.
99 SAAP State-wide Industrial meeting minutes, 29 September 1997, BHA.
100 VWRADVS minutes, 29 September 1997, BHA.
101 Econsult, p. 2.
102 Econsult, p. 1.
particularly for refuges, continued to be inadequate and, in Kaiser’s words, it significantly inhibited their capacity to undertake the kind of ‘world-best’ practice they may have aspired to:

[A]t one point after Kennett came in at the peak of economic rationalism, there was suddenly all this discussion of world-best practice. And I remember a campaign, where a leading feminist academic who had a lot of influence in the sector spoke about how feminist services provide world-best practice. I was content with her efforts to recognise the really good work that was being done by feminist services but it was wrong in my view, to ignore the fact that this was in a context of being greatly under-resourced.103

During this period, domestic violence services faced both an external state-wide SAAP service systems review104 and the now infamous ‘SAAP triennial review’, undertaken internally by HACS.105 The latter is remembered as a ‘witch hunt from government’.106 This recollection is not surprising, given its stated aims to examine ‘service management, financial management practices and accountability, service performance, SAAP standards and data’.107 Interviewees speculated that part of the impetus derived from the ‘perception that we were unaccountable, and that we all just had our snouts in the trough … a few bad decisions with public funds have made it bad for everybody else’.108 However, that these kinds of changes were enacted across a range of human services organisations and were generally characteristic of the Kennett government’s new ‘contract state’.

Of particular note was the criticism in the Brenda House review of the refuge’s expressed commitment to non-professionalism in its constitution.109 The reviewer considered this to be inconsistent with the newly developed SAAP standards, which espoused ‘maintaining professional relationships between workers and service users’.110 As we have seen, the majority of women’s refuges had always worked against the dominance of professional welfare services in women’s lives and instead aimed to break down hierarchical barriers between women. Brenda House collective responded to the query by explaining that the inclusion of ‘non-professionals’ was based on the history of refuges as ‘women supporting

103 Kaiser interview.
104 Econsult.
106 Oberin interview.
107 Romano, p. 2.
108 Oberin interview.
109 Romano, p. 5.
women’. Non-professionalism was important, they argued, ‘because it provided an equality between worker and service user’, and they pressed for the continuation of their ‘non-professional focus without being unprofessional in our dealing with our funds and our service users’. However, the government’s conceptualisation of professionalism was clearly focused on the specific relationship between ‘workers’ and ‘service users’, which they sought to control through policy decreeing that workers must be ‘detached from their situation and offer objective opinions and advice’.112

The issue of underfunding was also raised in the review process and was recognised by senior state bureaucrats in HACS, who generated a working party to undertake a funding model review. The group aimed to examine the costs of running a refuge, as refuge representative Wendy Austin explains, ‘The intent was to find a costing base and use it to apply to treasury for more funds, or adjust targets to a more realistic base with the same funds’. This report was never completed, however, because, as Austin explains, it became ‘very obvious that [domestic violence] services would never catch up’.113 Whilst acknowledging the extent of ‘need in the wider community’ for domestic violence services and that ‘women in refuges are merely the tip of the iceberg’,114 the authors of the SAAP review emphasised the need to restructure the service system away from refuges to increase its ‘flexibility’ and ‘diversity’. A revised model of organisation for domestic violence services would give new priority to the funding of outreach services, facilitated by the transfer of funding from refuges.115 In addition, the review recommended regional management of services and increased focus on the development of regional family violence networks.116 Refuges were judged to have ‘insufficient connections with domestic violence outreach and wider SAAP networks’.117 Greater resourcing for the WRRS, REWP and DVIRC was recommended, as well as additional forms of supported accommodation for refuges to house and support additional women.118 But funding for the research and advocacy organisation, WISH, was not supported, which meant the organisation would be forced to close.119 The report also defined the problem of ‘service clogging’ as resulting from inefficient service practice rather than the lack of

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111 Wendy Austin for Brenda House Collective to Lucy Romano, SAAP Unit, 19 August 1994, BHA.
112 HACS.
113 Austin correspondence.
114 Austin correspondence.
115 Econsult, p. 1.
116 Econsult, p. 39.
117 Econsult, p. 39.
118 Econsult, p. 31
120 Econsult, p. 38.
affordable housing.\textsuperscript{121} The reviewers particularly criticised refuge practices that allowed women to remain for long periods of time to save money so they might obtain independent housing. This, they argued, was the reason the system became ‘clogged’.\textsuperscript{122}

The then Minister for Community Services, Michael John, announced the formation of a ministerial taskforce to advise him on the report’s recommendations. Representatives were appointed from domestic violence services, as well as the SAAP Ministerial Advisory Committee, only after advocacy from the non-government sector.\textsuperscript{123} Following a brief period of consultation with the services and other interested parties, the taskforce released its report to the minister. Referred to as the ‘Asher report’,\textsuperscript{124} it essentially endorsed the premise of the consultant’s recommendations, which included regionalised service networks and departmental administration for domestic violence services. It also supported an enhanced outreach capacity for the sector but did not approve funding it by ‘diverting funds from refuges’.\textsuperscript{125} Rather, the taskforce proposed additional funding to resource outreach services and other developments, a recommendation influenced by considerable lobbying on behalf of the domestic violence services movement.\textsuperscript{126} The report also recommended that the government tackle the housing and legal issues facing women and children experiencing domestic violence. In particular, it argued that the ‘acquisition of more housing stock’ should be prioritised and recommended that the minister work in partnership with the Housing Minister to generate ‘longer term affordable housing options for women and children’.\textsuperscript{127} As well, the taskforce recommended funding for a peak body and the development of a state-wide ‘NESB strategy’.\textsuperscript{128}

Despite the advantages promised by these recommendations, domestic violence services questioned the Asher report’s focus on service provision ‘with no recognition of the band-aid effect of such provision without ongoing community development/education and societal change’.\textsuperscript{129} Whilst the general directions of the report were agreed to by the minister, it appears that funding and leadership from HACS to support the bulk of the recommendations were not forthcoming.\textsuperscript{130} Instead, HACS took a piecemeal approach to reform, which included a focus on the service delivery aspects of the report’s recommendations, recurrent funding

\textsuperscript{121} Econsult, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{122} Econsult, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{123} Ministerial Taskforce, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{124} The ministerial taskforce had been chaired by Louise Asher, MLC for Monash.
\textsuperscript{125} Ministerial Taskforce, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{126} Brenda House, AGM Report, November 1994, BHA.
\textsuperscript{127} Ministerial Taskforce, p. 51
\textsuperscript{128} Ministerial Taskforce, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{129} Eastern Linkages Group (ELG) minutes, 29 March 1995, BHA.
\textsuperscript{130} ELG minutes, 18 January 1995.
being made available for the continuation and expansion of outreach services, which had previously only received one-off funds during the 1993–94 financial year.\textsuperscript{131} In addition, funding was made available for the development of family violence networks throughout the state.\textsuperscript{132} Moreover, regional family violence networkers were subject to considerable pressure to spend time on ‘direct service’ as opposed to community education.\textsuperscript{133} By October 1996, WISH had lost its core funding after the government decided that it would no longer fund ‘non-direct service delivery services, or research agencies’.\textsuperscript{134} The priority now given to funding outreach services and the focus on service delivery were in keeping with the shift in SAAP, which increasingly focused on the individual as opposed to the structural causes of homelessness.

A model of domestic violence service delivery dominated by outreach was also attractive to the bureaucracy, according to Newman, because it was seen as an opportunity to ‘crack the refuge model’.\textsuperscript{135} Refuges were perceived as unaccountable and certain incidents, including the ‘famous refuge in Victoria that didn’t exist’,\textsuperscript{136} inflamed this perception. It is also arguable that the refuge model made members of the Kennett government nervous, because it ‘took a woman from the home’.\textsuperscript{137} In addition, refuges had been criticised for producing an inadequate number of ‘outputs’,\textsuperscript{138} a judgment that took no account of the quality of service delivery. Moreover, with the shift of SAAP’s focus from the provision of crisis accommodation to the implementation of case management, governments were no longer in the business of affordable housing. Indeed, the provision of crisis accommodation through women’s refuges was described by at least one senior bureaucrat at the time as the ‘Rolls Royce’ option of service delivery.\textsuperscript{139} Further weight was also given to the implementation of domestic violence outreach services because high-security refuges were simply not the solution for every woman. As Clarke acknowledges:

\begin{quote}
The model of high security refuge did not suit a lot of women … [for example] … women who had older boy children, women who didn’t want to move from their region, women who couldn’t or wouldn’t live communally, women who had
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{131} ELG minutes.
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{DVIRC Quarterly}, no. 3, November 1993, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{133} \textit{DVIRC Quarterly}, no. 3, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{134} VWRADVS minutes, 11 October 1996.
\textsuperscript{135} Newman interview.
\textsuperscript{136} Newman interview. This comment refers to one particular refuge allegedly receiving funds without providing a service.
\textsuperscript{137} Newman interview.
\textsuperscript{138} Econsult, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{139} Austin correspondence.
mental/physical health issues, women who didn’t want to sever contact with their partner—good, bad or ugly—that is a choice thing.  

Taken together, these factors meant that, ‘people were very attracted to the newer Domestic Violence Outreach Services’, which were considered to be ‘flexible … much cheaper … [and] … you could therefore get a lot more coverage on the ground. You could set higher targets. Hopefully they were about more flexibility in service delivery’. While bureaucrat Tony Newman acknowledged there were ‘some individuals who were very strong around the value of the [outreach] model’, he was led to question whether ‘the sector grew that model as much as the bureaucrats’. This might perhaps explain the degree of animosity that developed between refuges and outreach services in Victoria, exemplified by the development of a separate peak body to represent outreach services. As former long-term refuge worker Con Smith notes: ‘[R]efuge workers saw outreach services as a bit of a threat to their service. They felt that they would take over and refuges would lose their funding’.

In line with the recommendations of the Asher report, regionalisation became a core component of the state government’s domestic violence services redevelopment plan and its implementation was incorporated into domestic violence services 1995–1996 service agreements. Regionalisation was also in keeping with the newly developing SAAP regional service networks that arose out of the 1993 National Evaluation of SAAP. Networks were proposed to ‘strengthen the non-government involvement in program planning, coordination and service development’ as part of the growing trend towards the outsourcing of service provision. As a consequence, ‘regional offices became more responsible for funding and service agreements, and there was a whole devolution of a whole lot of things … and the refuges were one of the last things that were centrally held, and the refuges fought it’. In addition, and as a part of this process, services were encouraged to amalgamate for the sake of efficiency. Domestic violence services opposed regionalisation, particularly because it inhibited their capacity to work together with the same level of unity that had characterised past negotiations and they were concerned that it would mean a ‘watering down’ of their

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140 Clarke interview.
141 Newman interview.
142 Newman interview.
143 State Outreach Combined Services was formed in 1991 as a forum to represent outreach workers at the broader VWRADVS collective meetings.
144 Smith interview.
145 VWRADVS minutes, 3 May 1995.
146 Lindsey.
147 SAAP Unit, ‘SAAP Regional Networks: Interim Guidelines’, Melbourne 1995, BHA.
148 Morris interview.
149 VWRADVS Finance worker minutes, 17 July 1995, BHA.
‘basic philosophies’. In response, DVIRC applied to the department for funds to evaluate the impact of regionalisation on domestic violence services. The application was refused, further signalling the government’s intent to control the direction and operations of the domestic violence service system.

At the same time, service agreements became annual and were standardised across all SAAP services, which were now required through case management to ‘meet particular targets within specified hours of service provision’. As already noted, by 1996, Victoria had moved to prioritise funding service provision over community development and the latter was removed from agreements with most services, which were informed the government no longer wanted to ‘purchase community education’. Bullen has argued that the implementation of case management worked to ‘individualise and to make specific the form of support that was offered’, which meant that, the focus of services activity was less on structural explanations of homelessness, than on ‘individual factors and on techniques of service delivery’. Case management was also deemed to be consistent with reformers’ aims of ‘activating homeless people’ to maximise their ‘self-reliance’. At this time, domestic violence workers were generally opposed to these techniques and noted that, in the past, workers would not:

[D]are suggest to somebody that “I need to do a case management plan”, because we saw ourselves as being equal to them and everybody else. So you would sit round a table like this, and talk about what was the best was to solve your problems … It was a much more participatory thing than it is now.

In addition, services were particularly concerned about the ‘prescriptive nature’ of the service agreements, which gave little ‘attention and allowance for the real demands on services as employers and the ever-changing needs of the women and children we support’. Services criticised the ‘arbitrary targets’ they faced, arguing that ‘meeting targets really says nothing about the quality of service provision’. Domestic violence services were fundamentally opposed to output-based funding and targets, insisting they ‘encourage[d] services to move women and children through’ rather than focus on ‘developing and improving service

152 VWRADVS minutes, September 1995.
153 VWRADVS minutes, August 1996; Inter–Refuge minutes, 10 October 1996, BHA.
154 Bullen, p. 154.
155 Bullen, p. 154.
157 Brenda House to SAAP Central, 16 August 1996, BHA.
158 VWRADVS finance worker minutes, 5 January 1995.
provision’.

This view is supported by management academic Dierdre O’Neil, who has argued that output-based funding increases the ‘risk that what will be judged in the funded program will be its efficiency, rather than its effectiveness in terms of quality outcomes for clients’.

As well as the ever-increasing accountability expectations, services were expected to ‘develop and expand’ service delivery with what appears to have been, in effect, a decrease in real funding. Funding for the 1995–96 year did not allow for CPI rises, national safety net increases, superannuation increase, increments, or work-care levy subsidy.

Indeed, in Victoria, there had been no indexation of SAAP funds for domestic violence services since 1987. Where monies had been available, they were instead used for the funding of one-off projects. Women’s refuges continued to receive funding for five full-time workers, but for case management of women only, not for their work with children. Moreover, funding did not take into account capital/asset replacement requirements of services, though some of these were met through one-off grants until 1999, at which time such grants were discontinued.

The pressure for services to expand meant that some, including Brenda House, were running numerous programs on an inadequate budget designed for one refuge. Consequently, they made the controversial decision to begin charging service users. However, other refuges, including WLHWH, would not consider this as an option. Services received insufficient funding ‘to attract qualified and experienced staff’, and also argued that, ‘in order to comply with the service agreement specification on hours, workers would need to take a large drop in pay’.

In response to these concerns, a number of services refused to sign their 1995–96 annual service agreements. In doing so, Brenda House was concerned to emphasise it was an ‘accountable and responsible service’, but that its representatives could not ‘sign a document which does not recognise the real obligations of the service as employers and provides no response to the request for some flexibility in the hours of service provision’.

In an attempt at unity, domestic violence services examined the inconsistencies in their services agreements and approached the Commonwealth SAAP department, arguing that whilst they as ‘services [were] expected to operate with accountability to their funding body, service users, employment responsibilities, etc’, this was not being reciprocated, and their

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159 VWRADVS finance worker minutes, 5 January 1995.
160 O’Neill, p. 132.
161 VWRADVS finance worker minutes, 5 January 1995.
162 ELG minutes, 18 January 1995.
163 ELG minutes, 20 September 1999.
165 VWRADVS finance worker minutes, 5 January 1995.
166 Brenda House to SAAP Central, 16 August 1995, BHA.
167 VWRADVS minutes, 10 January 1996.
funding bodies had begun to fund refuges on a month-to-month basis, leaving them without the interest on funds they had previously been accruing when they were paid in six-monthly allotments. They should receive compensation, they argued, adding politely that it would be ‘appreciated if the change in conditions of SAAP III could be negotiated to meet the needs of all parties’.  

Services also felt that bureaucrats were imposing unrealistic expectations on them, whilst criticising their work, without acknowledging the financially depleted context in which they were operating. As Hanna Kaiser comments:

They would criticise you for what you weren’t doing when they weren’t funding you properly … a simple concept but that was always there. [They would] come and tell us of their perception of what we were doing wrong, with very little understanding of what work was actually being done and very little knowledge of domestic violence … and it’s like “but hang on a sec, this is in a context, and the context is that you’re not enabling us to do this as well as we might”.

Increasing the accountability of services has been perceived with hindsight by workers in domestic violence services as a necessary development. Oberin recalls, for example, that, ‘it did clean us and our processes up … which wasn’t a bad thing’.  

By the end of the 1990s, domestic violence services were perceived by some as being ‘much more professionalised … [and] … more bureaucratic … which wasn't always a bad thing’. Others, however, saw the negative consequences of their enhanced professionalism. As former refuge worker Kate Coleman observes:

[P]eople who worked in the refuge thought being professional was having your hair done once a week, wearing nice clothes and keep a safe distance from the resides … so sometimes it was a negative sort of growth rather than a positive.

While most workers saw benefits in improving the accountability of services, many felt the ‘overly prescriptive’ approach of government stifled services’ ability to be innovative and creative in their work. Kaiser recalled that:

We were always trying to match the service to what they were saying was the direction we had to go … I could see why the government wanted to direct the work of refuges [and] I certainly don’t think they were evil in their intent. They were trying to

168 Finance workers to Commonwealth SAAP, 17 April 1995, BHA.
169 Kaiser interview.
170 Oberin interview.
171 Tomas interview.
172 Coleman interview.
deliver more and more bang for their buck … Ironically, the more requirements that they imposed upon our work the more that what we were doing became limited, and we were so busy trying to satisfy them that it just made it really hard to do the work as well as we had. Our capacity to be innovative was impeded.  

According to Clarke, the effects of having a domestic violence service system tightly controlled from the ‘top-down’ meant that ‘a woman had to fit the model rather than the model fitting the woman’. And, by implication, ‘it stopped that grassroots evolving … and this is where things, I think, went horribly wrong’. Whilst it is clear that the original refuge model could not meet the needs of all women, it was certainly driven by them.

Government policy in response to domestic violence continued to be fragmented during this period. It appears, for example, that funding for perpetrator programs was made available through one government department, but bureaucrats in HACS were ignorant of this until informed by domestic violence services. This may in part explain the development of a family violence reference group and the appointment of a dedicated worker within the newly formed Homelessness and Family Violence Services Division (formerly SAAP) of DHS. There was also a lack of clarity regarding the commitment of $3 million tagged for domestic violence by the Kennett government during the 1996 re-election campaign. However, at the initiative of DHS, a new high-security refuge was funded in the Grampians region at this time. And, shortly thereafter, funding was also made available for each region to provide an after-hours response to women and children, although the proposed budget was grossly inadequate at $20,000 per annum.

Overall, from the middle of the decade onwards, domestic violence services policy was fundamentally altered. No longer were services being driven by the perspective and needs of women accessing and running them, but increasingly by the agendas of government, and services were forced to compete with each other to survive. One consequence of this was that ‘people got stuck in service delivery’ and, despite the fact that many were ‘incredibly personally motivated’, it was not ‘an easy world to be operating in’.

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173 Kaiser interview.
174 Clarke interview.
175 Clarke interview.
176 VWRADS minutes, December 1995.
177 VWRADS minutes, April 1996.
179 Finance worker minutes, 3 June 1998.
180 Newman interview.
Competitive tendering principles also served the government’s agenda to amalgamate and mainstream specialist women’s services. As Scott recounts, these processes meant that ‘the domestic violence field radically changed … [and] … very small services just went under … So, it was a rationalisation of the field in a way’. In addition, as Kaiser explains, these kinds of policies meant that it became harder for services to work together:

So there became a bit of competition. And eventually over time, the government and the bureaucrats more and more controlled the agenda. Then people played into the hands of the government … and competed against each other, ultimately to our detriment, rather than working together.

From a bureaucrat’s perspective, Newman noted the particular combination of policies such as ‘regionalisation, lack of money, and the doubt about the future of the program’ meant ‘people were incredibly frustrated with the SAAP administration’. These factors, he argues, ‘fundamentally changed the nature of the relationship [during] that period’. For Newman personally, ‘working on the inside’, whilst ‘thinking your program might be pulled apart and knowing how important it is’, was a ‘really hard’ balancing act. Lack of funding and uncertainty about the future had always plagued the national refuge movement, but it had never retreated from challenging state government policies that were perceived to undermine its core aims and objectives. Scott suggests that the imposition of competitive tendering and like policies did, however, inhibit the capacity of community sector organisations to be openly critical of government, and thwarted their capacity to undertake political protest: ‘if your funding relied, to some extent, on competitive tendering, then you weren’t going to make a big enormous noise about being critical to government’.

In 1997, the Kennett government took a further step in an attempt to restrict the capacity of SAAP services to speak publicly about their work by incorporating a ‘confidentiality clause’ into their service agreements. Legal advice to refuges was that the clause was an ‘extraordinarily onerous restriction’ that would confine ‘open and informed debate by agencies’ as well as ‘making it difficult for the agency to promote its value to the community’. In response, the finance workers group of the Victorian Women’s Refuges

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181 Scott interview.
182 Kaiser interview.
183 Newman interview.
184 Newman interview.
185 Newman interview.
186 Scott interview.
187 Finance worker minutes, 6 August 1997.
188 Nicola Roxon for Maurice Blackburn and Co. to Finance Workers Sub-Group of VWRADVS, 31 July 1997, BHA.
and Associated Domestic Violence Services (VWRADVS, the renamed and reformed peak body, to be discussed further shortly) recommended that member services refuse to sign their 1997–98 agreements and, with the change of government in 1999, the issue was sidelined. It seems undeniable then, as Clarke argues, that ‘some of the political agitation stopped because there was a bit of a threat you might lose your funding if you were seen to be criticising’. Relentless and dogmatic implementation of economic rationalist policies to the public management of domestic violence services did therefore radically change their relationship with government. As Kaiser concludes, the balance of power had dramatically shifted:

The big achievement of the feminist movement was that it took this government money and put it in the hands of a community … And what happened when Kennett came in [was] they took it back and put the control in the government.190

As the decade progressed, the Kennett government’s application of free-market principles to the delivery of government-funded human services in Victoria was furthered by other major reforms. These included a Community Housing restructure. Redevelopment of Youth and Family Services (YAFS) was also proposed but not implemented before the Kennett government left office in 1999. Only the former will be discussed here.191

The Community Housing restructure was initiated within the Office of Housing (OoH) in DHS. A key element was the implementation of the Transitional Housing Management (THM) program to restructure the provision of accommodation through many SAAP services by separating the housing (tenancy administration) and support provision roles. This was achieved by selecting new THMs via competitive tender to provide the housing component.192

The restructure represented a ‘rationalisation of both programs and providers’, and it resulted in ‘fewer and larger not-for-profit organisations’.193 A key aim of the THM program was to create new governance structures for organisations providing transitional accommodation, which were required to become companies so as to improve financial management skills and accountability. A further aim was the establishment of large geographical catchments aimed at economies of scale across the program.194

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189 Clarke interview.
190 Kaiser interview.
Commencing in July 1997, sixteen organisations were contracted to provide THM services. Prior to this, more than 350 agencies delivered tenancy management and support services across the state, and, as a consequence, many of these were de-funded with the aim of improving the efficiency and effectiveness in planning, funding and program management.\(^{195}\) By contrast with SAAP-funded domestic violence services, organisations auspiced under the THM program were appropriately costed and funded from the outset.\(^{196}\) By the end of the decade, the difference between services like refuges funded in the 1980s, and others funded in the 1990s, including domestic violence outreach services was estimated to be in the vicinity of $10 million per annum.\(^{197}\)

This restructure of housing provision represented a further ‘change in the way of thinking about the role of government and the nature of state intervention’.\(^{198}\) In keeping with the Kennett government’s economic rationalist principles, it reflected a shift in ‘responsibility … from the government to the non-government sector’.\(^{199}\) The changes were not implemented without considerable opposition and discord. Indeed, some argued that they there resulted in a less flexible and accessible response than before the THM restructure.\(^{200}\) Regional housing councils spoke out against the new contracts, arguing that they made it increasingly ‘difficult for [service providers] to criticise government policies and programs’, and led to the ‘the de-funding of services that provided advocacy to people in housing need’.\(^{201}\) They also passed costs on to service users that had previously been covered in SAAP.\(^{202}\) Moreover, because organisations were encouraged to act in an entrepreneurial capacity, they developed uneven responses to working with SAAP agencies. In particular, domestic violence services found gaining access to the properties managed in their regions very difficult.\(^{203}\)

The separation of ‘housing’ and ‘support’ functions in the provision of accommodation to homeless people in Victoria, combined with the SAAP III agenda of focusing on case management, created an environment where Victorian SAAP agencies had no choice but to focus on therapeutic and individualised responses to the problems of homelessness and domestic violence. This was counteracted to some degree at the end of the decade when

\(^{196}\) Austin correspondence.
\(^{197}\) Austin correspondence.
\(^{198}\) Menner, p. 9.
\(^{199}\) Menner, p. 9.
\(^{201}\) Menner, p. 9.
\(^{202}\) Oberin, ‘Restructuring’, p. 53.
additional funding for the THM program saw increased provision of accommodation. This was largely attributable to the Victorian Homelessness Strategy introduced by the new Bracks-led Labor government.

Around the same time, the OoH developed a new method of prioritising public housing for people experiencing homelessness. As we have seen, domestic violence had been judged a worthy reason for priority public housing in the late 1980s. But by 1998, for unknown reasons, the OoH planned to remove it as a category under the new model, which included the introduction of a three-tiered segmented waiting list.\footnote{204 VWRADVS minutes, 25 May 1998.} In response, VWRADVS protested in writing to the new director of OoH, Howard Robinson, as well to the Attorney General, Jan Wade.\footnote{205 VWRADVS minutes, 24 April and 15 May 1998.} At the same time, a direct action approach was adopted by one member of the segmented waiting list steering committee, representing by Westernport Accommodation and Youth Support Services (WAYSS),\footnote{206 WAYSS provided a range of THM and SAAP services including a women’s refuge and family violence outreach service.} who refused to leave the OoH building until domestic violence was included.\footnote{207 Newman interview.} As a result, it was reinstated and included within the new system. This suggests, as Newman argues, that whilst you should ‘work on the inside … you always need a few wild cards out there on the outside’.\footnote{208 Newman interview.}

These kinds of policies changed the way people viewed government. Needless to say, this became increasingly negative, as relationships between bureaucrats and workers in community organisations came under strain. Victorian state bureaucrat Di Godfrey describes how this eroded trust that had taken a long time to develop:

> Everything that we did was through a competitive tendering process. So it was all value for money, not best practice … especially in the Kennett era. So it was a difficult time and it damaged a lot of the relationships that people had built up over many years … There will still be people around who lived through that, and remember that governments can change at whim and they never can be trusted.\footnote{209 Godfrey interview.}

Social work academic Lee FitzRoy has contended that, by the end of the 1990s, dominant gender power relations in Australia had ‘remained largely unchallenged with the main policy response being an array of reactive policies and services to apply after the fact of violence’.\footnote{210 Lee FitzRoy, ‘Just Outcomes for Women? State Responses to Violence Against Women’, in Linda Hancock (ed.), Women, Public Policy and the State, Macmillan, Melbourne 1999, pp. 163–178, p. 167.}
In Victoria, the confluence of factors I have outlined, generated a particularly inhospitable environment in the 1990s for the domestic violence services movement to tackle structural issues relating to women’s inequality and men’s violence. This provides a large part of the answer to the question posed by former WLHWH activist Jenny Macmillan: ‘Why weren’t refuges shouting out during the Kennett era about some of the stuff Kennett was doing?’

**Working Together: ‘Desperate for Survival’**

The economic rationalist environment of the 1990s, in Victoria as well as nationally, already created immense difficulties for feminist women’s services in general. In a study of feminist services in Melbourne, social work academics Lesley Hoatson and Ronnie Egan argued that it required organisations ‘to totally rethink practice’, with services turning inwards to survive: ‘relationships with sister services have frayed and a sense of increasing siege is evident’.

Victoria’s domestic violence services were not immune from these effects, but, over the course of the decade, they undertook a range of strategies to counteract them, and some worked strategically together in the face of adversity.

**A Struggle for Unity: Victorian Women’s Refuges and Associated Domestic Violence Services (VWRADVS)**

In September 1992, the Victorian Women’s Refuges Services adopted a title—Victorian Women’s Refuges and Associated Domestic Violence Services—reflecting the growing role and acceptance of outreach services. VWRADVS was incorporated as the new peak body representing women’s refuges, outreach services, REWP, and other related services including the Women’s Refuge Referral Service, DVIRC and WISH. This signalled a turning point in the direction of the movement, which resolved to ‘develop a more united front’ and gain ‘ideological clarity about what the movement in Victoria looks like’.

The VWRADVS constitution signalled a clear intention by the group to ‘formalise a peak group that wasn’t divided along ideological grounds’. The constitution stipulated ‘co-operation and support between member services’ and attempted to discourage a tendency, as Maria Dimopoulos puts it, to ‘finger point around’ to determine whether ‘you are a decent feminist or not’. It aimed to forge unity because activists believed that ‘the only way we were going to survive

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211 Macmillan interview.
212 Kaiser interview.
213 Egan and Hoatson, p. 413.
214 Dimopolous interview.
215 Dimopolous interview.
216 Constitution of VWRADVS, 12 August 1992, BHA.
217 Dimopolous interview.
was if we all banded together’.\textsuperscript{218} It was also designed to bridge the divide that had long existed between refuges and outreach services.\textsuperscript{219} The Statewide Outreach Combined Services of Victoria (SOCS) had been incorporated as a peak body in 1991.\textsuperscript{220} At this time, Clarke recalls, ‘outreach services … used to meet separately’, before they ‘got permission from the refuges to finally attend peak body meetings’.\textsuperscript{221} Following its incorporation the following year, VWRADVS immediately placed a funding submission with the government to support their work, and lobbied the then Community Services Minister, Kay Setches.\textsuperscript{222} Funding was not forthcoming, however, until 2004, when Domestic Violence Victoria was financed as the new peak body for all domestic violence services.

The move to unite refuges had been furthered in 1993 when Victorian Women’s Refuges Inc. (VWRI) was initiated by, and later replaced, the Coalition. VWRI represented refuges in the wider VWRADVS forum. Not surprisingly, VWRI was dominated by refuges informed by liberal feminism, which reflected the more conservative focus of the Coalition group.\textsuperscript{223} Over time, the VWRI effectively replaced both the Coalition and the Caucus groups, and it was argued by the former that, since its establishment, members of the two groups ‘now co-ordinate and consult with each other with far better understanding’.\textsuperscript{224} Throughout the course of the decade, this coming together proved necessary because services were ‘inundated with Government demands’, which meant that ‘the split between the “right on” feminists and the so-called conservatives died, and people got on together and worked together’.\textsuperscript{225} This was corroborated by Billi Clarke, who recounts that, whilst it was always a challenge for her to work with conservative women, over time, as a result of both government pressure and a growing level of maturity, it became necessary to bridge the gap:

there was a real dilemma of supporting women who identified with conservative politics … it was always a struggle. But … what initially started out as … an angry way of responding … started to evolve into a healthy respect and a way of doing business … [W]omen like myself grew up a bit, in terms of how we needed to actually help each other, rather than be divisive. And … there was a lot of government pressure

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{218} Kathy Russell, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 13 October 2008.
\textsuperscript{219} Dimopolous interview.
\textsuperscript{221} Clarke interview.
\textsuperscript{222} VWRADVS to SAAP Unit – Community Services Victoria, 29 September 1992; VWRADVS to Kay Setches, 29 September 1992, BHA.
\textsuperscript{223} ‘Constitution of VWRI’, 12 October 1993, BHA.
\textsuperscript{224} VWRADVS, ‘Worker Information’, November 1993, BHA.
\textsuperscript{225} Kaiser interview.
\end{footnotesize}
… for us to become a bit more professional, to be more accountable. And we actually realised that we had to help each other do this … 226

Eventually, SOCS and VWRI provided a mechanism for outreach services and refuges to be formally represented at the wider VWRADVS forum. This strategy was not unlike the earlier Caucus and Coalition division, which had allowed different views to be represented within the Victorian Women’s Refuge Group.

Nevertheless, refuges continued to see outreach ‘as a real threat’ and ‘a watered down response to domestic violence’. 227 This position can in part be explained by the concerns of refuges about the government’s agenda to undermine the aims and objectives of their work. Refuges were running a model that enabled women to leave men and advocated a policy response to the problems of homelessness and domestic violence based on the increased economic independence of women through the provision of housing. Whilst a refuge was clearly not what every woman needed, and outreach services offered an important new service, the refuge movement was probably right in believing government support for outreach symbolised a preference for tackling domestic violence and homelessness at the level of individuals.

The hostile political environment of the 1990s goes some way to explaining why it was that refuges were perceived as, and sometimes were, reluctant to engage with outreach services, and confirms Egan and Hoatson’s view that ‘economic rationalist policies … exacerbate existing conflicts and create new ones by … playing off agencies including sister services in a tendering environment’. 228 Refuges were perceived to have ‘marginalised themselves’ whilst ‘everyone was getting on with it and working around domestic violence’, leaving refuges largely ‘out of the picture’. 229 However, despite the apparent inward-looking focus of refuges and the fraying of relationships between members of the movement more broadly, the process of coming together to form a new peak body and constitution marked a continued commitment to putting the needs of women first. It represented a ‘beginning … of the willingness to talk about different models … and not all had to be high security, [because] it didn’t seem to suit every woman to be whisked away’. 230 Despite the debate over appropriate models of service provision and continuing of differing ideological differences, the domestic violence services movement celebrated the fact that, by the late 1990s, ‘gaps in philosophy

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226 Clarke interview.
227 Clarke interview.
228 Egan and Hoatson, p. 413.
229 Kaiser interview.
230 Dimopolous interview.
[had] been narrowed to the point where services [could] openly consult, swap ideas and work together'.

In 1994 VWRADVS restructured itself to include a coordinating collective ‘to bring all the state-wide issues together’, and this operated until 1998, ensuring a strong unified voice. Through the development of various subgroup representatives, the restructure also facilitated access to the ‘direct experiences’ of women using the services. Despite the emphasis on ‘greater efficiency’, the coordinating collective did not perceive itself to be operating from ‘a traditional hierarchical model’ because its processes were ‘consultative and collaborative’. However, some members were concerned about the stricter decision-making processes, and there was ‘a reluctance to pass over to a representative body the negotiation and decision making role’. There was also concern about how the ‘the proposed new peak body would represent different, and at times conflicting, views of VWRADVS members’. The organisational change, as well as the debate that it generated, mirrored the differing positions of individual services and was mainly driven by ‘an increasingly competitive and rationalised environment’. The ‘streamlin[ed] processes and structures’ were considered to have gained VWRADVS ‘credibility with the SAAP unit and other outsiders’, as well as greater legitimacy with the government. The coordinating collective represented and advocated for VWRADVS members in response to policy changes. In doing so, continually sought government funding for their work as a peak body. When the government failed to act on the proposed redevelopment of domestic violence services, for example, they submitted a funding proposal to undertake the work themselves. VWRADVS also proposed where government funds should be allocated now that activities concerned with community development and social change had been deleted from their service agreements.

Towards the end of the decade, and in response to the immediate threat of competitive tendering, domestic violence and women’s health services in the eastern region of Melbourne

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231 Brenda House, ‘Change’.
232 Russell interview; Julie Oberin for VWRADVS, ‘The Future of VWRADVS as an effective peak-body for women’s domestic violence services in Victoria’, October 1997, BHA.
234 VWRADVS minutes, 1 April 1996, BHA.
235 VWRADVS minutes, 8 November 1995.
236 WLHWH, ‘Issues Around a Funded Peak for VWRADVS’, 8 March 1996, WLHWH papers, MWLA.
237 Paper by VWRADVS co-ordinating collective, September 1995, BHA.
238 WLHWH, ‘Funded Peak’.
239 Oberin, ‘VWRADVS’.
240 Coordinating Collective to VWRADVS, September 1995, BHA.
241 VWRADVS minutes, June 1995.
243 VWRADVS to Assistant Director of Protection and Care Department, 6 February 1997, BHA.
formed a strategic alliance and established the Eastern Services Group (ESG). ESG met throughout 1998 to discuss how they might work collaboratively to survive with their services intact. They hired consultants to help them develop formal business plans and enhance their understanding of purchaser–provider relationships and tendering.\textsuperscript{244} ESG nevertheless wanted their work to continue to be informed by a feminist philosophy, and sought to combine ‘the strengths of collectivism’ with the ‘strengths of a governance structure’.\textsuperscript{245} Rather than withholding information from other services out of concern that ‘it may give the organisation the successful edge on a tender’,\textsuperscript{246} they adopted a policy of unity in adversity.

Within VWRADVS itself, and in response to the perceived threat to all women’s services, the initiative was taken to form a coalition to promote the achievements of feminist women’s services generally.\textsuperscript{247} This was supported by research undertaken into the impacts of these services, headed by passionate feminist campaigner and academic, Wendy Weeks, who argued that:

[W]omen working for other women in services such as refuges are making history. They are taking steps to ensure our daughters and granddaughters will grow up in a safer, more respectful and just Australia for women.\textsuperscript{248}

In response to these initiatives, meetings took place between VWRADVS and Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA), with the ‘aim of forming a lobby group of the women’s sector’.\textsuperscript{249} Arguments were also made for VWRADVS to widen its membership and to work in greater partnership with the Women’s Emergency Services Network (WESNET), which had operated since 1992 as the Australia-wide women’s peak advocacy body for women and children experiencing domestic violence.\textsuperscript{250} There had been little communication before this time between domestic violence services and other women’s services.\textsuperscript{251} This was also the beginning of cross-government discussions between the Department of Justice and the Office of Women’s Affairs regarding ‘general directions in the field of violence against women’, which resulted in the development of an interdepartmental government Committee on Violence Against Women in mid-1998.\textsuperscript{252} It coincided with the beginnings of research aimed

\textsuperscript{244} ESG, ‘Information Package’, 22 January 1999, pp. 12–13, BHA.
\textsuperscript{245} ESG, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{246} Egan and Hoatson, p. 412.
\textsuperscript{247} Women’s Services Coalition; Jane Homewood, Accommodating Women: An Overview of Women and Housing System, Women in Supportive Housing, Melbourne 1994.
\textsuperscript{249} VWRADVS minutes, June 1997.
\textsuperscript{250} VWRADVS minutes, 8 April 1998.
\textsuperscript{251} Inter-Refuge minutes, January 1997.
\textsuperscript{252} VWRADVS minutes, 10 June 1998.
at documenting the experience of sexual assault by women in domestic violence services,\textsuperscript{253} though this project was not pursued, partly because of the movement’s preoccupation with issues of service delivery above political action.

**Recognising Difference, and Responding to Diversity**

Women aren’t just victims of domestic violence; there are a range of other things going on in their lives’.\textsuperscript{254}

From the early 1990s onwards, domestic violence services were increasingly challenged to incorporate the differing requirements and subjectivities of women into their services. This presented new opportunities for the movement, in which conceptualisations of feminism and domestic violence had tended to universalise the experiences of Anglo, able-bodied and heterosexual women. At the same time, a long tradition in Victorian women’s refuges emphasising the safety and security needs of women above other kinds of needs was also being challenged. Critics argued, for example, that policies aimed at protecting residents had the unintended consequence of disempowering women.

As we have seen, Victorian refuges were particularly safety-focused from their beginnings, an emphasis exemplified by their powerful campaign to maintain the secrecy of their addresses during the 1970s. Former refuge co-ordinator Judy Line has argued that a consequence of this emphasis was the adoption of some ‘draconian rules and regulations’,\textsuperscript{255} which served to undermine refuges’ goal of empowering women. As Billi Clarke puts it, ‘feminism was replaced by security procedures’.\textsuperscript{256} This meant that, at times, as Line admits, refuge workers made decisions for women, or put down bottom lines where women didn’t really have much room to think about things. It was either black or it was white, and there was no grey in between, and it was quite harsh when I think about it.\textsuperscript{257}

One problem with this kind of approach, according to political scientist Carol Bacchi, is that it runs the risk of ‘framing the problem [of domestic violence] as a matter of violent men who need disciplining, and passive women who need protecting’, which potentially ‘transforms an understanding of the problem as a critique of patriarchal power, to demands for protection

\textsuperscript{253} VWRADVS minutes, 10 June 1998.
\textsuperscript{254} Kaiser interview.
\textsuperscript{255} Line interview.
\textsuperscript{256} Clarke interview.
\textsuperscript{257} Line interview.
from male power’. With hindsight, Line believes how this representation of the problem failed to recognise that:

The women that came through the women’s refuges, they were strong intelligent women, that survived some of the worst experiences under the sun. Don’t tell me that they’re not resilient and not brave women.

Rural refuges were often forced to approach the issue of security differently because they ‘had to assume that everybody in town knew where the refuge was’. As a result, they often worked in close collaboration with their local communities, and some did not adopt secrecy of address policies, which also meant that they adopted more flexible rules and regulations within their refuges. For example, programs developed in the Bendigo region were less concerned with security than with the human rights of women accessing their services. In a similar vein, a Ballarat service during the mid-1990s worked from an understanding that ‘women have come from a situation where they’ve had rules [and] they’ve had to answer to somebody else’, and consequently should not be subject to regulation or ‘answerable … to our service. So we threw all of that out’.

The growing pressure on refuges to respond to the diverse needs of women resulted in the movement’s 1991 state conference making a commitment to enhance access to refuge for special groups and to increase the availability of refuges in ‘ethnic communities’. This coincided with greater attention being given to the rights of service users as part of the SAAP II (1989–94) agenda, which had included the introduction of grievance procedures and user rights strategies into services policies and procedures. During 1994, VWRADVS also developed a document detailing minimum inter-refuge standards, signalling their intent to provide a consistent approach to supporting women within refuges. At the same time, and in response to the growing range of organisations responding to domestic violence, a standards of practice project was auspiced through the Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis

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259 Line interview.
260 Line interview.
262 Kneale interview.
263 Wierenga interview.
265 VWRADS minutes, 3 May 1995.
266 VWRADVS, ‘Inter-Refuge Minimum Standards’, 13 July 1995, BHA.
Service (WDVCS) (formerly WRRS) with the aim of improving the ‘consistency of service provision’, and ensuring ‘an appropriate, skilled and ethical response to service users’.  

In this context then, domestic violence services began to question the efficacy of their rules, regulations and service model and recognised their service response ‘required diversification’. In particular, with the growing acknowledgment that ‘not everybody needs high security or wants high security’, they were forced to undertake a process of ‘tailor[ing] our responses’. However, there were rarely any available to support services to do this, and they often had to ‘generate this stuff ourselves’. VWRADVS list of minimum standards, for example, was developed without financial support but the principles were incorporated into government standards.

Growing criticism of refuges’ lack of accessibility for particular women continued. Activists like Clarke, for example, asked publicly whether refuges ‘want women to fit the model of service that we operate, or should we be changing the model to actually fit the women that we are supposed to be servicing?’. In particular, Clarke criticised the current refuge model for not being open to the needs of ‘women who work, to NESB women, or to women whom we may describe as having difficult behaviours’. These criticisms were supported by advocates for Koori and migrant women. Domestic violence workers were thus forced to reflect on the aims and objectives of their work, which meant that some adapted their ways of operating to become responsive to the different needs and subjectivities of women and the range of issues with which they presented. As mentioned previously, in 1989 Clarke respond to the particular needs of women with mental health issues by establishing ‘Safe Place for Women’, which was a specialised for such women when they were also experiencing domestic violence, ‘because those women were not being catered for anywhere and unfortunately probably still are not’. Other services also began to become more responsive, including Brenda House, which undertook to implement a dispersed model of accommodation, enabling workers to support women with mental health and substance abuse issues outside a communal

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269 Kneale interview.
270 VWRADS minutes, 15 January 1998.
271 Clarke interview.
273 Clarke, ‘St Kilda’, p. 60.
274 Clarke interview.
setting. It is important to note that refuges were never allocated additional funding to support these innovations and that many provided additional services by ‘operating on the smell of an oily rag’. As we have seen, from the early 1980s the issue of discrimination against women with disabilities in women’s refuges was being raised from within and outside of the refuge movement. By the mid-1990s, violence against women with disabilities had been adopted as a key advocacy issue by Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA). Advocacy was also being undertaken by the Victorian Women’s Disability Collective (VWDC), later the Victorian Women’s Disability Network (VWDN), which argued the need to ‘make refuges more accessible’. Feminist and disability advocate Natalie Tomas recalls how her work with domestic violence services during the 1990s had made her ‘quite concerned about their attitude to women with disabilities’. In particular, Tomas argues that ‘white dominant class able-bodied’ women in the refuge movement often constructed women with disabilities as ‘other’. And, whilst ‘race, sex and class was something everybody would talk about’, women with disabilities were not included in these discussions. This relates in part, as women with disabilities have long argued, to the fact that they were not perceived as ‘women first’, and have had to ‘to fight to have recognition of [their] gender’. This has occurred not only within the feminist movement, but also, as CEO of VWDN Keran Howe points out, ‘the issue of gender has never and continues to not be recognised within the disability movement’. Women with disabilities found that some refuges were ‘very dogmatic about things like “we don’t care if there’s a Disability Discrimination Act that says we can’t discriminate because we can’t put people at risk and we don’t have the skills”’. Indeed, some refuges even considered seeking exemption from anti-discrimination legislation. Women with psychiatric disabilities were also excluded. As Tomas recounts:

276 Austin correspondence, 1 August 2010.
277 Austin correspondence.
278 Tomas interview.
280 Tomas interview.
281 Chris Jennings, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 9 April 2009.
282 Keran Howe, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 7 April 2009.
283 Tomas interview.
The refuges had this rule if you were a woman taking psychiatric medication, then they weren’t wanting you in the refuge because they didn’t want to be responsible. But they were often the women who needed it most because mental illness is often brought on by domestic violence trauma.  

Some refuges did make attempts to support women with disabilities. This required modifications to their premises, but they often had no access to funds to carry out the work needed. In 1995, for example, Brenda House applied for funds to transform one of its transitional housing properties into three units built to disability standards. The idea was well received but there was no money at this time and this project was not finally completed until late 2010.

The exclusion of women with disabilities from women’s refuges, Tomas has argued, was further aggravated by radical feminism’s emphasis on challenging women’s traditional roles as nurturers and carers. This combined with a focus on supporting women to independence, worked against the needs of women with disabilities. As Tomas reflects:

> There was a sense that I got, nobody would directly say it to me, but often the feminist argument that went around in the late 70s, 80s and probably continued a little bit into the 90s was that … women with disabilities need care … therefore this is oppressing other women who have to do it … if they can’t look after themselves they can’t be here. 

As Tomas indicates, these arguments soon came under serious challenge, particularly when women with disabilities began to voice their concerns about being denied access to services, thus providing the catalyst for the WWDA to form a Violence Against Women with Disabilities reference group. At the same time, the WWDA presented a paper at the national domestic violence forum in Canberra in 1996, which in part recommended that domestic violence services should co-operate with them to ‘get refuges to start realising that women in wheelchairs have a right to be in a refuge if they need it, and they need to be made accessible and inclusive’. The reference group applied for funds from the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women (OSW) to employ a project worker to develop an action plan

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286 Tomas interview.
287 Tomas interview.
290 Tomas interview.
for refuges, and VWRADVS took on the project.\footnote{VWRADVS minutes, April 1997.} It was led by consultant Fiona Strahan, and Woorarra was nominated as the participating refuge. As former Woorarra co-ordinator, Kathy Russell, remembers:

Fiona Strahan … came to a VWRADVS meeting, and said what she wanted to do. And we all agreed it needed to happen. And [I] said, “if you can make Woorarra accessible, you can do it anywhere”. That’s how it started … [and] … it was a good two years work [where] … we were able to learn about providing access to services for women with disabilities’.\footnote{Russell interview.}

The WWDA continued its advocacy work into the late 1990s, arguing that the current SAAP arrangements were grossly inadequate to meet the needs of women with disabilities.\footnote{WWDA, Submission to the National Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Review, 1998, accessed on-line at \url{www.wwda.org.au/madge.htm}, 2 March 2010.} On the matter of violence, members developed an information kit on women with disabilities and further funding was gained from the OSW to host a national workshop, which was ‘planned, organised, attended and run by, women with disabilities’.\footnote{WWDA, Violence Against Women with Disabilities: A Report from the National Women with Disabilities and Violence Workshop, prepared by Carolyn Frohmader for WWDA, Melbourne 1998, p. 1, Keran Howe private papers, in possession of Jacqui Theobald.} The workshop produced a range of strategies designed to respond to the issue, involving education, services, information, research, direct action and networking.\footnote{WWDA, Workshop, pp. 30–38.}

During the 1990s, response by the refuge movement to the needs of migrant and Aboriginal women also came about primarily as a result of advocacy from these groups. Migrant workers at the Domestic Violence Incest Resource Centre (DVIRC), for example, aimed to improve the organisation’s ‘NESB’ focus, with the development of an Access and Equity Policy in 1991, which included the implementation of a multi-lingual phone service.\footnote{DVIRC Quarterly, June 1991, p. 3.} An Access and Equity Working Group was established as a sub-group of VWRADVS to work with refuges.\footnote{VWRADVS minutes, 10 January 1996.} The Immigrant Women’s Domestic Violence Service (IWDVS) (formerly REWP) received funding to develop audio tapes and booklets in 1996 so that migrant women were informed about services in their first language.\footnote{VWRADVS minutes, April 1996.} In addition, multi-lingual brochures were provided to women accessing Victorian CASA centres.\footnote{Cathy Henenberg, ‘Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault: Multi-lingual Information Brochures’, in DVIRC (ed.), \textit{Not the Same: Conference Proceedings and a Strategy on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault for non-English Speaking Background Women}, Melbourne, DVIRC 1996, p. 38.}
The influence of post-structuralist feminist ideas regarding the recognition of differences between women, and the role of discourse in determining identity, are evident in the writings of migrant activists at this time, who began overtly to challenge institutions that constructed migrant women as ‘deviant’.\(^{300}\) These activists were central in arguing for a government strategy to redress ‘the gaps in service provision to NESB women’.\(^{301}\) Furthermore, in March 1996, a working group comprising representatives from DVIRC, IWDVS, Women in Industry and Community Health, and the VCCAV put together a conference that developed a set of strategies to respond to migrant women experiencing domestic violence and/or sexual assault.\(^{302}\)

Around the same time, Aboriginal workers from Elizabeth Hoffman House, with support from the IWDVS, argued that the government and VWRADVS needed to develop a strategy for the specific needs of Koori women.\(^{303}\) Drawing on the IWDVS model as an example of culturally appropriate support, they developed a funding submission to employ additional Koori workers in domestic violence services to support Aboriginal women.\(^{304}\) Meanwhile, the Koori representative from VWRADVS resigned in protest at the organisation’s inaction.\(^{305}\) This prompted the coordinating collective of VWRADVS to acknowledge that ‘no strategic response to Koori women had been effected within the VWRADVS’,\(^{306}\) and to start developing a strategy to improve their services for Indigenous women. This strategy incorporated proposals for training, employment and policy and resource development.\(^{307}\) A Koori worker was later employed by Department of Human Services. However, in keeping with the government’s preference for tackling domestic violence at the level of individuals, the department implemented a case management program specifically targeting Koori and NESB women.\(^{308}\)

At the same time, Aboriginal women across the country began to speak publicly about the impact of violence against women and children on themselves and their communities.\(^{309}\) This


\(\text{\textsuperscript{302}}\) See Not the Same.


\(\text{\textsuperscript{304}}\) ‘Submission for SAAP Funding to Employ Two Koori Support, Advocacy and Community Consultant Workers for the VWRADVS’, 1996, BHA.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{305}}\) VWRADVS minutes, August 1996.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{306}}\) VWRADVS to EHH, 12 June 1996, BHA.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{307}}\) ‘VWRADVS Strategy for Improved Service Provision to Koori Women’, 1996, BHA.


process was in part facilitated in Victoria by DVIRC, which initiated the first forum for workers providing domestic violence and sexual assault services to Aboriginal women and children in 1997. Inter-state Aboriginal activists Pam Greer and Judy Atkinson attended the forum, sharing their experiences of tackling the problem in NSW and Queensland.310 Victorian Aboriginal women also continued to suffer overt discrimination in terms of their access to housing, a problem compounded by the lack of available housing for Aboriginal women across the country.311 Feminist activist and long-term refuge worker Rose Solomon recalled that racism was central to the discrimination experienced by the Aboriginal women she engaged with in her work in a Gippsland refuge:

I had to give the message to Indigenous women I came across that it is not acceptable for people to be racist. It is not acceptable for them to deny you a service based on your colour ... [A]nd we needed to empower those women to make a stand. And in those days we didn’t have some of the systems and the support services and the cross-cultural understanding that are existent today … so we took extreme measures.312

Once such measure adopted by Solomon on several occasions, involved posing as clients seeking to obtain private rental housing, so they would avoid the blatant discrimination characteristic of real estate agents. In one particular instance, Solomon recalled initiating the process of renting a house immediately after it was refused for let to her client on the grounds it was unavailable. The property was approved for Solomon to rent, and she immediately confronted the estate agent about their discriminatory practices, who quickly overturned their decision.313

Lesbians were also marginalised in terms of access to domestic violence services and activists in Melbourne began to tackle this problem from the early 1990s. Feminist activist and former DVIRC lesbian services worker Karen Bird initiated a Lesbian Violence Action Group (LVAG) in 1991. Prior to this time, Bird argues, lesbian domestic violence was an issue that feminists ‘want[ed] to ignore’ because it was considered to ‘water down’ their ‘argument … that it’s because of patriarchy’.314 The LVAG prepared a paper on the issue315 that was delivered to a Sydney conference and publicised in the lesbian and gay press.316 This led to an

312 Rose Solomon, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 21 April 2009.
313 Solomon interview.
314 Bird interview.
increase in demand for support services by lesbians, which resulted in a support group at DVIRC. In partnership with this group, Bird produced the first pamphlet on lesbian domestic violence, which was later adapted across the country. DVIRC also implemented internal training on ‘lesophobia’ as well as a telephone counselling and referral service. The issue of lesbian domestic violence was soon being debated nationally and, at a conference to discuss the issue held in Adelaide in 1997, a number of recommendations including that ‘all women’s refuges become lesbian appropriate services’ were made.

The issue of lesbian domestic violence facing women from migrant backgrounds had been raised at the 1996 migrant women’s conference in Melbourne. In her capacity as a representative from Interlesbian, which formed in 1994 as a referral network for lesbians from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds in Melbourne, Audrey Yue argued that ‘mainstream heterosexual, NESB and lesbian services, more often than not, do not meet the needs of NESBians because our specificities—as simultaneously NESB, women and lesbian—are not recognised’. Yue further contended that, because ‘of our lived experiences of racism and homophobia’, there can ‘often be no clear demarcation as to the source of violence or upon which domestic sphere it is occurring and enacted’. Advocates for young migrant women, argued along similar lines, noting they were unlikely to contact domestic violence services because they do not identify ‘what they are experiencing as domestic violence’. This highlights again the exclusionary consequences of defining violence solely within the parameters of gender inequality and the patriarchal home. Yue thus argued that definitions and analyses of domestic needed to be expanded because current understanding ‘defined at the local level of the domestic home … do not take into account the disparate and diverse experiences of lesbians from non-English speaking backgrounds’.

**Relationship to Feminism**

A commitment to feminism was reflected in VWRADVS first constitution, which aimed ‘to promote social justice for all women and children’ and work towards ‘changing community

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317 Geddes, ‘Twenty-One’, p. 3.
318 Bird interview.
321 Cribb, p. 29.
322 Audrey Yue, ‘Battered Homes: Some NESBian Que(e)ries’, in *Not the Same*, pp. 24–26, p. 25.
323 Yue, p. 25.
325 Yue, p. 24.
attitudes towards the crimes and issues of domestic violence and incest’. The influence of liberal feminist philosophy was particularly evident in its commitment to ‘lobby for legal reform’. Likewise, the influence of marginalised groups was reflected in the commitment to ‘promote equal opportunity and access for all women and children’. The continued influence of the movement’s radical feminist origins was also evident in VWRADV’S concern for services to be ‘run by women, for women and children’ according to ‘non-hierarchical collective working structures’. However, whilst the 1992 constitution expressed a commitment to ‘promote a feminist analysis of the crime of domestic violence’, feminism as an ideological framework for understanding violence against women was not integrated into most of its provisions. As least one person involved at the time has argued that the constitution was more concerned with ‘the structural aspects of the program than the ideological framework of violence itself’. In particular, the constitution was ‘less articulate about [a] causal analysis of violence, [and] more focused on interventions’. This is in contrast to the refuge movement of the 1970s, whose main purpose was to undertake political action and engagement in a debate over the politics of gendered representations in relation to women and domestic violence. The vastly different institutional and political environment in which the movement operated in the 1990s meant that the services had become desperate just for survival. Domestic violence services were under ‘siege’, and their mandate above all else to survive. As long-term refuge worker Kathy Russell recounts, within this context, what feminism meant to the movement was re-evaluated:

We were all under threat … [and] … that siege mentality brings you all in, and we started to talk on a different level. We were talking about survival. Survival of the DV sector. Did we still want it? Did we want the feminist philosophy to go away altogether? Did we want the collective principles?

Radical feminism in particular was interrogated by domestic violence activists, who, argued against its focus on:

[G]ender as the primary tool of analysis … where …. issues of race, class, sexuality, have all too often been excluded from the core of those discussions, resulting in the

326 VWRADVS Constitution, 12 August 1992, BHA.
330 Dimopolous interview
331 Dimopolous interview.
332 Kaiser interview.
333 Russell interview.
marginalisation and trivialisation of the needs of working class women, indigenous women, non English speaking women, and lesbians.\textsuperscript{334}

Solomon recalls that she was forced to re-evaluate what feminism meant in her work with Aboriginal women in refuge.\textsuperscript{335} Radical feminist responses to domestic violence, supporting women to live without violent men, were designed for Anglo women and merely signalled a continuation of past injustices into the present for many Aboriginal women:

There was a time in the early-to-mid-90s, where Indigenous communities were saying, “We want the violence to stop but we don’t want to lose our men” And that was a fair enough comment.\textsuperscript{336}

Domestic violence remained as understood within radical feminism, combined with a recognition of the ‘intersections of the oppressive societal structures which affect the lives of women’.\textsuperscript{337} However, the outcome of this period of introspection eventually resulted in a renewed commitment to feminist principles that, for the most part, built on the tenets of liberal feminism. While the 1996 VWRADVS constitution, for example, reaffirmed the objectives of 1992, it omitted the previous commitment to collective working structures, and instead referred to ‘structures which give workers involvement in decision making’.\textsuperscript{338} As discussed previously, this change also reflected the pressure from government funding bodies to conform to hierarchical methods of operating.

VWRADVS members were particularly active in arguing for the continuation of specialist domestic violence services in the face of funding cuts.\textsuperscript{339} In doing so, they argued the need to make certain that their ‘basic philosophies [were] not compromised’, which included ensuring that the ‘needs of the service users, in terms of self-esteem, and other personal issues, are not undermined in order to achieve perceived accountability requirements’.\textsuperscript{340} Domestic violence services thus sought to prioritise the needs of the women in their services above those of their funding bodies and in a manner congruent with their feminist philosophy. Moreover, despite the shifting ideological ground, feminist activists continued to assert the need to ‘spend some time making sure our processes are consistent with the kind of world we are trying to

\textsuperscript{335} Solomon interview.
\textsuperscript{336} Solomon interview.
\textsuperscript{338} VWRADVS Constitution, 28 August 1996, BHA.
\textsuperscript{339} Russell, ‘Model Diversity’; Austin, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{340} Russell, ‘Model Diversity’. 

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create’. Similarly, Russell recalls that the maintenance of collective process was an important part of her work at this time:

\[\text{[E]ven though a lot of us were starting to work then with managers and co-ordinators, we still argued you could do that, and uphold collective principles. For me, personally, I worked really hard to do that. For a long, long time.}\]

In keeping with this approach, and in the face of the government’s refusal to fund the community development component of their work, services argued that it was ‘imperative that … the focus on community education remain’. This was the reason they resisted signing their service agreements over a number of years as an attempt to ‘stand united in our decisions’. In this sense, services stood up against attempts to change the nature of their work from that dealing with both the individual and structural factors underpinning domestic violence to an approach one that increasingly focused just on the individual. Services argued that the government should recognise ‘those involved in community based service provision are expert in that field’. Furthermore, and in keeping with the now dominant liberal feminist approach, they implored the government to work in partnership, arguing that ‘outcomes that are best for service users can only be reached if each listens to the other with a decent measure of trust’.

Arguably, as a consequence of the ascendancy of liberal feminism within VWRADVS, the movement was now considered ‘less political’ in the sense that the focus of the group was domestic violence rather than the wider agenda of the earlier women’s liberation movement. There was not the same concern ‘about the power imbalance in society’. The liberal feminist tradition of reform within the system was also evident in the fact that in ‘many instances political action had become community education’. As we have seen, however, this change in emphasis was also a result of government regulations prohibiting public criticism of funding bodies, which refused to fund social change activities. Some have argued that ‘within feminist services there had been an ideological swing to the right, and a watering down of feminist philosophy’. Russell, for example, remembers the mid-1990s as a turning point, and asks why it was that the work they had accomplished thus far was suddenly ‘watered down’:

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342 Russell interview.
343 Russell, ‘Model Diversity’.
345 Kaiser interview.
346 Brenda House Worker’s Report 1992–93, BHA.
347 Egan and Hoatson, p. 410.
[W]hat they started back in the ‘70s was built on through the ‘80s and the ‘90s. Well up until probably the mid-90s. And I think that’s when the watering-down processes began. And I don’t know whether the governments out there did it to us, or whether we did it to us? Trying to be seen to be more professional … and to be more acceptable.\textsuperscript{349}

Taken together, these factors help to explain why the 1996 VWRADVS constitution placed more attention on the nature of service provision. It incorporated statements endorsing priority for developing ‘funding submissions to government to ensure the growth and development of VWRADVS services’.\textsuperscript{350} The 1996 constitution thus elevated the running of services above personal politics and political action and put greater emphasis on ‘the role of a refuge program as a viable response to crisis for women’.\textsuperscript{351} In 1992, for example, the constitution included women’s ‘equal opportunity and access’, which by 1996 was made specific to their access to ‘DV services, for women and children where the primary issue is DV’.\textsuperscript{352} Dimopolous considers this was ‘an attempt … to respond to a recognition that funding was changing, [with] tendering and contract management stuff, [that was] very different to what the sector had been used to’.\textsuperscript{353}

As Chapters 2 and 3 have demonstrated, the refuge movement had prioritised the problem of domestic violence above other issues relating to women’s inequality since the late 1970s. However, in the 1990s, the locus of attention shifted from politicising the problem of domestic violence to providing domestic violence services. In Bird’s summation: ‘by 1992, which is when I left DVIRC, I think it was much more about how can we provide a better service, rather than how can we influence society to provide equal opportunities for men and women’.\textsuperscript{354}

By the mid-1990s, the domestic violence services movement’s ‘basic philosophy’ was summarised as ‘women supporting women escaping domestic violence in a manner, which promotes equality and responsibilities’.\textsuperscript{355} The particular stress on equality and responsibility reflected the dominance of liberal feminism within VWRADVS combined with a new focus on accountable management. The latter had been imposed on, and then adopted by, the

\textsuperscript{349} Russell interview.
\textsuperscript{350} Constitution, 1996.
\textsuperscript{351} Dimopolous interview.
\textsuperscript{352} Constitution, 1996. Original emphasis.
\textsuperscript{353} Dimopolous interview.
\textsuperscript{354} Bird interview.
\textsuperscript{355} Brenda House, ‘Change’. My emphasis.
movement and some celebrated their achievement as ‘effectively running small businesses’.356 This supports Egan and Hoatson’s view that, ‘in order to survive [feminist services] have been forced to adopt [a market] philosophy themselves’.357 In light of these changes, they thus implored the services to:

fight to retain core feminist principles, which include having women as the service focus and a gender analysis as the critique, creating change at the individual and structural level, using a diversity of strategies and rebuilding trust and collaboration within feminist service networks.358

Looking to the Outside

The ‘legal developments’ that occurred in relation to domestic violence throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s, were also significant in terms of the direction of the domestic violence services movement. This reflected in part the new emphasis on responding to domestic violence via reform within the system. Whilst the implementation of the Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987 was heralded as a key achievement for the movement, domestic violence services still faced a range of challenges that included a lack of police response to breaches of intervention orders,359 and a family court system that continued to overlook the safety needs of women and children in access and custody arrangements.360 Throughout the 1990s, domestic violence services workers spoke out about these issues, and began to argue for a greater level of cooperation and co-ordination amongst service providers to redress these inadequate responses.361 Dimopoulos, for example, describes how legal challenges led better ‘relationships with feminist lawyers’, as well as a renewed engagement with ‘community legal centres’.362 These kinds of developments had not been ‘happening in the mid-to-late 1980s’.363

The refuge program in particular had been criticised for adopting an insular approach to their work, reflecting an apparent unwillingness to concede that ‘their view of the world isn’t

356 Brenda House, ‘Change’.
357 Egan and Hoatson, p. 410.
358 Egan and Hoatson, p. 413.
361 ‘Community’.
362 Dimopolous interview.
363 Dimopolous interview.
However, over the course of the 1990s, the movement was increasingly perceived as becoming ‘more inclusive’ and ‘willing to learn’. As Kaiser comments, ‘it wasn’t just the conservative and so-called radical refuges working together, the group were working with a lot of community groups again’. A growing willingness to work in partnership with outside organisations came to characterise a sector that had begun to realise there were ‘benefits to building a coalition … of activists that weren’t just refuge focused’. Dimopoulos notes:

[M]ulti sector partnerships in the late 90s were really starting to build in a way that was reducing the silos of the refuge program … key individuals, personality driven … were outreaching and saying that we need to talk.

The work undertaken by both the DVIRC and the Women’s Coalition Against Family Violence (WCAFV) at this time was significant in generating awareness of domestic violence and incest in the community. Of particular importance was the publication of a book that told the stories of murdered women and children. This work was also effective in educating other professionals, like magistrate Sally Brown, who from the mid-1990s undertook a leadership role in promoting the issue amongst her colleagues and ensured it was addressed at their annual conferences. At these gatherings, Brown challenged them to ‘accept our share of accountability for stopping family violence’. It was also the role of key individuals like Brown that enabled important links to be forged between the judiciary and the domestic violence services movement:

Sally Brown … was the Chief Magistrate at the time, now a Family Court Judge, [and] she was coming out to the sector and saying, “How can the courts be working together with you?” And that was unknown, unheard of. My goodness, a judge … one of those bad guys … doing this. So … relationships then started to develop with the courts, and with … individual magistrates and judges.

The role of feminist lawyers, who over time rose in the ranks of the legal profession, combined with the advocacy of refuge workers who had ‘fought for ages’, influenced the
family court to take into account the needs of women and children experiencing domestic violence. In 1993, the then Chief Justice of the Family Court, Alistair Nicholson, for example, developed a statement of principles to guide conduct in matters relating to domestic violence. In 1996, Nicholson also established a Gender Awareness Committee to implement training programs for court personnel. Around the same time, the Act was amended to ensure that the court took into account the impact on children of witnessing family violence. DVIRC also continued to be involved in the changes occurring within the family law arena and hosted forums in partnership with the Federation of Community Legal Centres, at one of which Nicholson provided the opening address. As a consequence of the development of these relationships, ‘joint initiatives with the judiciary became frequent’.

A Family Violence Law Committee was established, for example, between DVIRC and the legal community to standardise practices for intervention orders. DVIRC drove this relationship and facilitated the inclusion of the VWRADVS Legal Subgroup as a participant. Sally Brown began chairing a courts and family violence protocols committee, which included representatives from DVIRC, the VWRADVS Legal Subgroup, police, magistrates, courts management, and the Attorney General’s Department. In addition, the Women’s Legal Resource Group presented a series of educational sessions on the legal system and domestic violence.

The VWRADS Legal Subgroup also began to develop external relationships that were expanded under the leadership of key individuals such as Billi Clarke. They engaged the legal community in forums that encouraged debate about legal justice for women and children, particularly in relation to Legal Aid funding, which had been slashed following the 1996 election of the Howard Commonwealth Liberal government. In doing so, they continued to involve key Melbourne magistrates such as Brown, and later Anne Goldsborough and Sue Blashki, to stress that courts must take into account the safety needs of women and children.

376 Hewitt, Brown, Frederico, and Martyn, p. 19
379 VWRADVS minutes, 29 February, 1996.
380 VWRADVS Legal Subgroup minutes, January 1997.
382 VWRADVS Legal Subgroup minutes, January 1997.
experiencing violence during legal proceedings.\textsuperscript{383} They were supported in their work by the then state Attorney General, Jan Wade, who met with VWRADVS on numerous occasions during which representatives raised their concerns, particularly about the impact of Legal Aid funding cuts on women and children experiencing domestic violence.\textsuperscript{384} Wade was an advocate for the domestic violence services movement, fending off attacks in parliament on the use of intervention orders and arguing for attention to be focused instead on the ‘greater issue of domestic violence’.\textsuperscript{385}

Around the same time, the relationship between domestic violence and the legal system was undergoing interrogation, particularly in terms of the appalling experiences of many women within the system\textsuperscript{386} that were exposed in a published report, \textit{Trial by Legal Aid},\textsuperscript{387} by then domestic violence outreach worker Billi Clarke. The report followed Jan Wade’s appointment of Clarke to the community member position on the Legal Aid Consultative Committee, which enhanced Clarke’s awareness of the ‘blatant discrimination’ in the allocation of Legal Aid funding to women experiencing domestic violence. Clarke argued that funding decisions were made arbitrarily and on the basis of whether the committee liked or disliked a woman.\textsuperscript{388} She had obtained funding from the Women’s Trust to write the report, which included a number of case studies of women whose Legal Aid funding had ceased once their allocation was exhausted. This often saw them losing legal representation, which at times resulted in them being cross-examined by the men who had committed crimes against them. As Clarke recounts:

\begin{quote}
I did the case studies, and then [a lawyer] was able to write up the legal disadvantages that particular woman faced by not having representation. And some of the women had disabilities, no English, so there’s obvious already disadvantages without having a lawyer representing you. Fortunately I was working for the Salvos and we were able to have a huge launch, attract media attention and get a meeting with the Federal Attorney General.\textsuperscript{389}
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{383} VWRADVS and Co-ordinating Magistrate Sue Blashki meeting minutes, 12 February 1996; VWRADS Legal Subgroup minutes, September 1998, BHA.
\item \textsuperscript{384} VWRADS minutes, 11 June 1997.
\item \textsuperscript{385} \textit{VPD}, Legislative Assembly, 16 September 1997, p. 72.
\item \textsuperscript{387} Billi Clarke and Helen Mathews, \textit{Trial by Legal Aid: A Legal Aid Impact Study}, Crossroads Family and Domestic Violence Unit and VWRADVS Legal Sub group, Melbourne 1999.
\item \textsuperscript{388} Clarke interview.
\item \textsuperscript{389} Clarke interview.
\end{itemize}
Continuing a long tradition by feminists of challenging the provision of welfare to women within a deserving and non-deserving paradigm, Clarke’s report ensured change ‘within the practice of the grants division’, which was ‘made much more accountable for decisions of not granting aid rather than just, “we’re not doing it”’. \(^{390}\)

The report also occurred in the broader context of growing frustration within the sector concerning the gross lack of resources available for women facing the legal system. This issue was particularly significant for migrant and refugee women whose advocates in domestic violence services and other community groups engaged in research and lobbying to highlight the deleterious impacts of the legal system on a particularly marginalised group. \(^{391}\) This problem was also under scrutiny in a national context, as demonstrated in a book published by law academic Patricia Easteal in 1996 detailing the impact of violence against overseas-born women in Australia. \(^{392}\)

**Conclusion**

Throughout the 1990s in Victoria, the relentless implementation of economic rationalist policies to human service delivery operated to radically change the relationship between domestic violence services and the state. I have argued that the imposition of competitive tendering and like policies inhibited the capacity of community sector organisations to be openly critical of government and thwarted their ability to operate autonomously or undertake political protest. Domestic violence services were also forced to respond to innumerable administrative and organisational demands from government from the 1990s onwards, including expanding their service delivery—all without additional financial support.

In the face of these challenges, this chapter has also shown that the refuge movement did not, as some would suggest, simply give up confronting the government and politicising the issues facing women in their services. Despite the threatening and competitive environment, services opposed when they could, challenged where possible, particularly in relation to funding threats, and, over time, began to work in greater cooperation with each other to survive. I have suggested that the influence of liberal feminists was critical to this strategy and, more broadly, that liberal feminism assumed a significant role in directing the movement’s engagement with the state at this time. This was reflected in the movement’s growing focus on achieving

\(^{390}\) Clarke interview.


reform within the system, which was evident in their participation in countless government committees and taskforces.

I have also argued that the influence of liberal feminism on the movement’s aims during the 1990s can be seen in the greater focus on improving the efficiency of their organisations and the effectiveness of their service delivery above social change. However, the Kennett and Howard governments overwhelmingly led this charge, and domestic violence services were unable to halt or reverse the dominating emphasis on professionalism across all realms of their practice, or the gradual adoption of hierarchical organisational structures within domestic violence organisations. Some adopted market philosophies in order to survive.

This chapter has further argued that the influence of liberal feminists in the movement enhanced the level of mutual respect and tolerance for the ideological diversity of women working in domestic violence services. Moreover, I have shown that in correlation with broader post-structuralist influences on feminist theory and activism, differences between women were now being articulated, recognised and responded to within a domestic violence services movement that had previously conceptualised feminism and domestic violence in terms of the experiences of Anglo, able-bodied and heterosexual women. At the same time, the external environment in Victoria was particularly hostile to feminist services by the mid-1990s, and to feminism more broadly, which meant that a growing number of activists deliberately and strategically distanced themselves from identification with it, particularly when engaging with external organisations.

Throughout the 1990s, members of the Victorian movement continued to organise strategically and work together because of a shared commitment to women and children experiencing domestic violence. The instigation of VWRADVS is an example of the capacity of the movement to work cooperatively with both internally and with external bodies. Under the growing leadership of liberal feminists within the movement, refuge activists’ tactics became less public and confrontational, and its leaders sought both to work in partnership and to generate reform within mainstream organisations. This enabled the movement to position itself successfully to influence mainstream policy and programmatic development in relation to domestic violence across a range of non-government and government institutions, particularly within the judiciary. I have also documented how, within the movement, marginalised groups of women operated strategically to ensure their voices were heard, and successfully advocated for their needs to be met.
Chapter 6: Integrating the Service System, 2000–2005

In Victoria during the early 2000s, a number of dramatic changes to policy responses to domestic violence occurred, culminating in part in the state government contributing approximately $30 million from the 2005 budget to tackle the problem. A particular confluence of factors—not the least of which included the appointment of a knowledgeable and sympathetic woman chief police commissioner—provided the catalyst for these developments. Other factors included the election in 1999 of a Victorian state Labor government, which implemented a whole-of-government policy framework designed to deal with violence against women. These achievements built on foundations established by the activism of the Victorian domestic violence services movement over a 30-year period. They represented, as state government bureaucrat Di Godfrey recounts, ‘a ground-swell movement’ that ‘brought with it recognition that violence against women shouldn’t be tolerated and that we needed to address it’.¹

This chapter examines the lead-up to these major developments, with particular attention to the policy context of government initiatives and the ongoing relationship between domestic violence services and ‘the state’. In particular, this period was characterised by an approach to public administration that reflected the new Victorian Labor government’s commitment to ‘partnering’ non-government organisations, and in this regard, marked a significant point of departure from the divisive approach of the former Liberal government. Indeed, by the turn of the decade, domestic violence services believed they were ‘entering a phase of real consultation’ and were relieved to hear that the era of competitive tendering was over.² However, during this period of transformation, the services were forced to respond to a range of policy initiatives, some of which sought to diversify and expand their models of service delivery without the provision of adequate funding. As well as and alongside many other human services organisations, they faced an onslaught of regulatory requirements as governments increased their control over community organisations. An historical legacy of insufficient funding, combined with the reduction in welfare state investment by the Commonwealth government, made these tasks particularly burdensome for stand-alone community organisations like women’s refuges still heavily dependent on the unpaid work of committed women.

¹ Godfrey interview.
This chapter continues to explore the external strategies and actions of the domestic violence services movement, largely characterised by liberal feminist methods of working within mainstream systems. This approach was further bedded down by the new Labor government’s ‘partnership’ approach. Domestic violence activists began working in closer collaboration with a wider range of government institutions in the context of an emerging integrated policy response. Whilst these relationships can be characterised as constructive and collaborative, they also raised serious concerns for domestic violence activists, as ‘the government takes [domestic violence] on as its own thing’. Concerns about the growing extent of government control, particularly via the funding bodies in DHS, flared into internal divisions about how to respond. These grew more pronounced as the domestic violence services peak body formalised and transformed its organisational structure and methods of advocacy in line with government demands. Nevertheless, domestic violence services continued to work together for funding purposes and for the women accessing their services. Overall, they became less concerned to challenge the ongoing application of business principles to their governance, which had by now become institutionalised. But domestic violence services now also faced new expectations to work in collaboration with mainstream service providers, including those providing services to men. This has proved challenging because, as we have seen, domestic violence services had operated quite separately until the 1990s.

This chapter also continues to trace the activism of marginalised groups of women determined to ensure their voices were heard and their needs met. In recent years, this has resulted in specialised funding and taskforces to tackle particular issues confronting migrant and Aboriginal women and women with disabilities. Perhaps in part as a result, domestic violence services have become less explicit about their relationship to, and identification with, feminism. I conclude this chapter by exploring this shift, noting that this transition occurred despite the fact that feminism had become implicit in government policy and sector guidelines for understanding the problem of domestic violence.

The Policy Context

At a national level, the Howard-led Coalition government continued its Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV). Initially funded until 2001 (and extended until 2005), the government initially injected $25.3 million to implement policies under four key areas relating to working with children and young people at risk, perpetrators, Aboriginal

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3 Geddes interview.
communities and community education. As we have seen, and as historian Suellen Murray has reminded us, ‘policy changes’ in relation to domestic violence and homelessness have occurred ‘within a context of competing discourses’. PADV, for example, reflected the Howard government’s ideological orientation towards individualism and self-reliance, which also shaped its broader approach to welfare reform. Whilst PADV acknowledged gender as the principal cause of domestic violence—defined as ‘an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in relationship and after separation’—unlike the former Labor government’s National Committee on Violence Against Women (NCVAW), it did not recognise that ‘domestic violence occurs within the wider context of social disadvantage and inequality experienced by women relative to men’. Domestic violence, then, was articulated as an ‘individualised’ problem, rather than one that was ‘gender-based’. Moreover, as Murray has pointed out, PADV formed ‘a major part of the Government’s strategy for strengthening families’. A harmful consequence of this ‘family harmony’ discourse was that it placed the ‘responsibility for “managing” violence upon women’.

The Howard government’s focus on self-reliance and strengthening families was further developed in the ‘Stronger Families and Communities’ policy initiative in 2000. Minister for Family and Community Services Amanda Vanstone saw its purpose as enabling ‘families and communities’ to ‘build strength and resilience’, so they could ‘resolve their local issues’. The government’s minimalist role would be to deliver one-off funds to ‘“can do” communities’ and ‘kick start local responses’. Social policy academic Sheila Shaver has argued that this approach to social welfare reflected a continued emphasis on economic rationalist principles, combined with ‘a newly salient appeal to moral ideas about the responsibility of citizens to be self-sustaining’.

The concept of ‘self-sustaining’ citizens was also evident in the revised principles of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) IV (2000–05), which continued to fund the majority of domestic violence services in Victoria. SAAP IV aimed to ‘improve

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5 Murray, ‘Ambitious?’ p. 29.
6 PADV, p. 2.
7 Murray, ‘Ambitious?’ p. 29.
10 Murray, ‘Ambitious?’ p. 30; See also Murray and Powell, p. 541; Phillips, pp 205–208; Webster, p. 17; McDonald, p. 282; Summers, Equality, p. 98.
11 Department of Family and Community Services, Stronger Families and Communities Strategy: Community Kit, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra 2000, BHA.
12 Department of Family and Community Services, Stronger Families.
13 Shaver, p. 331.
outcomes for homeless people and those affected by domestic violence’, through ‘preventing dependency by supporting individuals and families to secure their own economic and social participation to the greatest degree possible’.14 Jane Bullen has argued that homelessness ‘was now to be conceptualised more in terms of the characteristics of individual homeless people and individual self-management rather than provision by governments, markets and other entities and forces’.15 Though responsibility for SAAP funding had always been shared by Commonwealth and state governments’ the former’s contribution decreased over the years to the point of being insufficient to cover increases in awards and inflation.16 Thus expansion in service delivery in Victoria under SAAP IV was solely funded by the state government.17

In Victoria at this time a range of new public policy initiatives specifically designed to tackle inequality and promote the safety of Victorian women came into being. Following the 1999 election, the Bracks-led Labor government unveiled its policy framework for improving the position of Victorian women in education, work, economic independence, health, wellbeing, justice and safety.18 Consistent with this, the government in July 2000 announced ‘a co-ordinated approach to violence against women across the whole of government’.19 To develop this objective, an across-government Women’s Safety Committee was formed in October 2000 and state government ministers convened in December for their first annual meeting to oversee a proposed Women’s Safety Strategy (WSS).20 The resulting policy framework was launched in October 2002, its principal aim being to reduce the level of violence against women. A whole-of-government action plan outlined how various government departments would meet WSS objectives,21 which were grouped under the four key themes: protection and justice; options for women (including enabling women to stay at home); prevention and education; and community action and co-ordination.22 Domestic violence was defined in WSS as a form of violence against women in a wider context of inequality:

An abuse of power that occurs in a particular social and cultural context. The power imbalance between men and women in society contributes to violence against women,

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14 Department of Family and Community Services, Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) 2000–2005: Memorandum of Understanding, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 3, BHA.
15 Bullen, p. 79.
17 OoH, ‘Submission’, p. 16.
along with other factors such as racism, homophobia, other forms of prejudice and the dispossession of Aboriginal people from traditional lands.\textsuperscript{23}

This policy direction marked a turning point. The former state Liberal government had acknowledged domestic violence as a gendered issue but had not placed it within the broader context of gender inequality. It had also ‘individualised’ the problem, responding to it at the level of service delivery and case management. Under the Labor government, individual case management continued to form the bulk of the work undertaken by SAAP-funded domestic violence services, but WSS expanded on this response, not only by re-framing the problem, but by pledging to reform government institutions and employing a whole-of-government response that focused on protection and prevention-based initiatives.\textsuperscript{24} This was reinforced by policy development in relation to other issues affecting women including housing, health, and homelessness.\textsuperscript{25} Unlike the policies of the federal Coalition and former state Liberal governments, Labor’s reforms in relation to domestic violence were thus part of a broader agenda to improve the status and equality of Victorian women.

These developments reveal the extent to which the aims and objectives of feminist domestic violence services had become ‘absorbed as part of government policy’.\textsuperscript{26} It is perhaps, in part because of this achievement that broader goals concerning women’s equality became less central to domestic violence services work. However, as we have seen, this change of emphasis also stemmed from shifting ideological persuasions within the services, alongside demands arising from the plethora of policy reforms and regulations imposed by government. As former refuge co-ordinator Robyn Gregory puts it, ‘If you’ve got poor funding, high targets and masses of need, it is difficult to find time to maintain a strong political focus’.\textsuperscript{27}

Another key policy initiative was Victoria’s \textit{Family and Domestic Violence Crisis Protection Framework (FDVCPF)},\textsuperscript{28} which was developed in partnership between the Office of Housing and the Community Care divisions of DHS and sought to guide future delivery of crisis

\textsuperscript{23} OWP, \textit{Women’s Safety Strategy}, p. 5
\textsuperscript{26} Davis interview.
\textsuperscript{27} Gregory interview.
responses to women and children experiencing domestic violence. Domestic violence services were included in consultations from as early as 2000. The framework released in 2002 was underpinned by a commitment to the safety needs of women and children and to refocusing the work of services to better respond their ‘individual needs’ and to the growing ‘complexity’ of the problems. The report argued that traditional accommodation and support models (that is, refuges) were ‘struggling to adequately respond to this complexity’, and ‘some refocussing of resources’, was required to increase the ‘emphasis on support responses through family and domestic violence outreach’. Services would also be expected to carry out more work in their local areas, including supporting women to remain at home, which marked a reversal of the state-wide removal response that had characterised their work from inception. In summary, services would be required to provide greater ‘flexibility, diversity and choice in access to, and delivery of, crisis protection responses’. This approach implicitly acknowledged that Victorian women’s refuges emphasis on security and protecting residents had had the unintended consequence of disempowering residents and that the variety of women’s needs required a variety of responses.

Whilst FDVCPF’s recommendations on better responding to ‘individual’ needs were laudable, they were not new. As Chapter 4 has demonstrated, responding to the diverse needs and subjectivities of women and children, including supporting them to remain at home and developing different models of accommodation, had been part of the service’s work since the 1990s. In the 2000s, refuges increasingly adopted dispersed models of accommodation and supported women who chose to remain in their homes. However, as we have seen, domestic violence services, and refuges in particular, were never offered additional funding to implement these reforms, which meant that responses occurred unevenly and the typical model of refuge remained communal high security. FDVCPF was no different in this respect from other reform proposals. That is, implementation of its proposals was not supported by funding. VWRADVS raised these concerns time and time again, arguing both for recognition of the innovative work already undertaken by the services and for financial

29 DHS to Brenda House, 23 November 2000, BHA.
30 DHS, Crisis Protection Framework, p. 7.
31 DHS, Crisis Protection Framework, p. 10.
32 DHS, Crisis Protection Framework, p. 9.
35 For a detailed description of the Victorian domestic violence service system at this time, see Weeks and Oberin, From Sydney Squat, pp. 62–64.
support to implement FDVCPF:

It must be stated that the sector as a whole has expanded its breadth of service delivery to provide a flexible, innovative response to women and children across regions and across the state … thus having more than doubled capacity and expanded serviced provision options to an enormous degree from the original model, services are now seeking recognition of these initiatives in the form of DHS funding …

It is altogether unsurprising that domestic violence services, and refuges in particular, were ‘struggling’ to respond to the growing complexity of their clients’ needs and demands. Their difficulties simply reflected the government’s meagre resource allocation, combined with the flow-on effects of deinstitutionalisation. What is surprising, however, is the assumption that a transfer of resources to outreach services would solve these problems. This bears a striking resemblance to the proposed SAAP service system redevelopment of 1994, which, as we have seen, was rejected following recommendations from a Ministerial Taskforce. State government bureaucrat Tony Newman has argued that the growing focus on outreach services reflected a more general inadequacy in of government response:

The problem with government is that it’s often simplistic. So refuges were good, are bad, domestic violence outreach now is good. The world doesn’t operate like that … but that is the flavour of government.

Whilst Newman’s comments are no doubt accurate, the government’s ongoing support for outreach services through FDVCPF was also equally reflective of a policy context characterised by an aversion to redressing homelessness and domestic violence through investment in accommodation-based services, combined with a continuing preference for individual support. Whilst this focus on the needs of ‘individuals’ was designed to enhance services’ capacity to provide much-needed flexible and individually tailored support, it also reflected the prevailing emphasis of welfare provision on regulating individual behaviour to prevent dependency rather than increasing the availability of crisis accommodation. That being said, FDVCPF was also in principle concerned to diversify the accommodation responses of domestic violence services. Former refuge worker and bureaucrat Sandra Morris describes some of the options:

We were considering models that meant women didn't have to live in close proximity in share housing with women who they didn't know, and came from a range of diverse

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37 VWRADVS to Minister for Housing, 5 June 2002, BHA.
38 Newman interview.
39 Department of Family and Community Services, Supported Accommodation Assistance Program 2000–2005: Memorandum of Understanding, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 3.
backgrounds. Whilst this model of communal living could provide support it was often challenging and difficult.\textsuperscript{40}

In addition, funding support was never forthcoming, despite the largely agreed-upon need for new models of crisis housing.

FDVCPF also challenged the accessibility of refuges, which remained primarily the responsibility of WDVCS, thus enabling refuges to keep their addresses secret. Refuges had long followed a policy of not accepting women from their local area, a product of the need to move them away from the perpetrator. This was considered particularly necessary at a time when police intervention was unreliable, to say the least. However, over time, criticism of this approach grew, particularly in relation to the isolation and disruption it caused the women.

State bureaucrat Alison Fraser, who was involved in developing FDVCPF, recalled that a key motivation was to minimise the displacement experienced by women and children escaping domestic violence:

It brought into question the high security of the refuges, and whether the practice of relocating women and their kids a long way away for safety’s sake was actually serving their best interests … It was just such a massive amount of dislocation for the family and the resultant legwork for the woman and the workers then to either rebuild a new life or to repatriate her back safely to where she was. It was just unworkable.\textsuperscript{41}

Despite considerable work towards its implementation,\textsuperscript{42} FDVCPF ‘never got finalised’.\textsuperscript{43} While the reasons for the framework’s abandonment remain unclear, the opening up discussion about ways to improve and diversify service responses to women and children were considered valuable and necessary. Former outreach and Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) worker Bree Oliver has argued, for example, that these conversations were critical to ensuring services would be based on ‘what is in the best interests of the women … [and] … not what is in the best interest of the service system’.\textsuperscript{44} If diversity is not encouraged, Oliver contends ‘then we are excluding a whole lot of women that need support’.\textsuperscript{45} Similarly, feminist and former WRRS and CASA worker Lyn Walker raised concerns about the existing service system:

I completely and utterly respect the front line work that refuge workers do. I also think that the system is not designed to meet the needs of the full range of women it is

\textsuperscript{40} Morris interview.
\textsuperscript{41} Fraser interview.
\textsuperscript{42} DHS Southern Metropolitan Region, ‘FDVCPF: Regional Implementation Plan’, April 2003, BHA.
\textsuperscript{43} Fraser interview.
\textsuperscript{44} Bree Oliver, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 27 January 2009.
\textsuperscript{45} Oliver interview.
required to service and that’s terrible because most vulnerable women actually fall through the cracks.\(^{46}\)

‘Partnering’ the State: Challenges and Achievements

Funding and Regulation: Collaboration or Co-option?

Despite the considerable mistrust that accumulated during the Kennett government’s period in office, relationships between domestic violence services and bureaucrats in DHS improved considerably by the mid-2000s to the point where annual ‘address holder’ visits to monitor the operation of refuge services were no longer considered necessary.\(^{47}\) The appointment of sympathetic bureaucrats with past histories of working in the sector (reminiscent of the 1980s and early 1990s) helped forge a new foundation for relations. In addition, those involved in domestic violence services adapted their methods of engagement, with some positive results. However, the ability to achieve true ‘partnership’ in a context of unequal power relations has, not surprisingly, been questioned. In particular, activists have queried whether domestic violence services continue to reflect the ‘the voice of community’,\(^{48}\) and in particular, of women experiencing violence.

The Bracks Labor government’s approach to the governance of community organisations continued to reflect global trends away from ‘macro-economic stabilisation and redistributive welfare policies towards the improvement of economic efficiency’.\(^{49}\) Not surprisingly, then, domestic violence SAAP-funded services have continued to receive inadequate funding, combined with growing demands in relation to accountability, self-regulation and output-based funding measures. VWRDAVS continued to speak out against these impositions, but with less emphasis on opposition to the nature of these reforms than to a lack of funding to implement them.

Immediately after the Labor government’s election, the administration of Victorian SAAP-funded services, including women’s refuges and outreach services, was transferred from Community Care to the Office of Housing division of DHS. Before this time, according to bureaucrat and former refuge worker Alison Fraser, there had been ‘a lot of internal toing-

\(^{46}\) Walker interview.
\(^{47}\) Godfrey interview.
\(^{48}\) Dimopoulos interview.
and-froing about who had policy responsibilities for domestic violence services.\textsuperscript{50} Non-SAAP-funded domestic violence related programs continued to be administered under Community Care within the Family Violence Prevention and Support Program (FVPSP), which included family violence networkers, children’s counselling services, after-hours family violence support and men’s behaviour-change programs. Following the shift, SAAP-funded domestic violence services came under the responsibility of the new Minister for Housing and Aged Care, Bronwyn Pike, who promptly met with VWRADVS representatives committed herself to ‘better collaboration’ by inviting their input into new policy developments.\textsuperscript{51} This administrative shift appears to have occurred without significant controversy, and support for Minister Pike was strengthened during 2000 after she took an active role in securing an additional $5 million in funding for Victorian SAAP-funded services.\textsuperscript{52} Of this amount, $2.1 million went to SAAP-funded domestic violence services,\textsuperscript{53} which included 27 women’s refuges, to outreach services that existed in every DHS region, and to WDVCS (and the interim refuge), IWDVS, and DVIRC.

These funding increases allowed the salary subsidy benchmark for domestic violence services to be increased, which improved wage conditions.\textsuperscript{54} Domestic violence services could thus roll back cost-saving measures that had included reducing the number of hours dedicated to service delivery.\textsuperscript{55} However, many services remained inadequately funded for a range of employee-related costs, including long service leave, work cover, award and superannuation increases.\textsuperscript{56} Although domestic violence services raised these problems with their funding bodies, they were informed that no further funding would be made available from the state coffers at this time.\textsuperscript{57} Furthermore, because the government’s funding injection only resulted in a 1.39 per cent increase for operating costs,\textsuperscript{58} much of it was absorbed into existing budget deficits, and the ‘gap between funding and real costs continue[d] to grow’.\textsuperscript{59} Despite a nominal increase in recurrent SAAP funding from $8.25 million per annum in 1994 to $13.5 million per annum in 2002,\textsuperscript{60} budget deficits existed in women’s refuges because they had

\textsuperscript{50} Fraser interview.
\textsuperscript{52} Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) SAAP network minutes, 20 December 2000, BHA.
\textsuperscript{53} DHS, \textit{Crisis Protection Framework}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{54} Minister for Housing and Aged Care to Brenda House Collective, 20 December 2000, BHA; Minister for Housing and Aged Care, ‘Improved Funding Arrangements for SAAP Agencies’, 11 September 2000, BHA.
\textsuperscript{57} Eastern Metropolitan Region SAAP network meeting minutes, 20 December 2000, BHA.
\textsuperscript{60} DHS, \textit{Crisis Protection Framework}, p. 9.
received no real increase in operating funds since the late 1980s. They had therefore been forced to absorb the growing costs of running a service while expanding their service models as government demands increased. For example, growing demands for financial accountability increased three-fold between 1995 and 2000.

From 2002 onwards, funding concerns for SAAP-funded domestic violence services intensified under new financial pressures arising from OoH’s cancellation of one-off annual SAAP-funded grants previously made available to cover costs in relation to vehicle replacement and long service leave. Thus, when the services heard rumours that new funding would be made available in the 2002 state budget, VWRADVS representatives forwarded a ‘budget issues’ paper to Minister Pike outlining the historical and current context for funding inadequacies. In particular, they pointed out that, in contrast to Transitional Housing Management organisations, domestic violence services were ‘operating with minimal funding for administration and with unfunded management’, and had received ‘no operating funds’ for the additional accommodation services that many refuges operated.

It is arguable that the shift in administration of domestic violence SAAP-funded services did not help domestic violence services. Refuge workers highlighted the disparity between salaries of SAAP-funded domestic violence services and government-run Family Support Services (FSS) administered within Community Care. This gap continued to grow to the detriment of the former, and it was estimated that, by 2002–2003, the difference in funding was approximately $20 million per annum. VWRADVS therefore argued for ‘salary increments’, without which there would always be a lack of ‘value on the work of staff in our services’. VWRADVS further argued that services were already faced with a ‘workload that is unsustainable’, which had only been made possible because ‘there is far more commitment than career in this field’. Furthermore, the shift to OoH, long-time refuge worker Julie Oberin has argued, was particularly disadvantageous for women’s refuges because of OoH’s allegiance to economic rationalist ideas, marked by a scrupulous focus on cost effectiveness and accountability, reflected in the requirement that services increase their ‘outputs’ before gaining new funding. VWRADVS opposed these demands and continued to argue their

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61 VWRADVS budget minutes, 22 May 2002, BHA.
63 VWRADVS to Minister for Housing, 6 June 2002, BHA.
65 Austin correspondence.
66 VWRADVS to Minister for Housing, 6 June 2002.
67 VWRADVS to Minister for Housing, 6 June 2002.
68 Oberin interview.
69 VWRADVS budget minutes, 22 May 2002,
services had been historically under-funded and that, since the early 1980s, increasing costs associated with property upkeep, combined with a changing client base, had gone ‘largely unrecognised’. They requested that the minister undertake to determine ‘the real costs of running services’ with ‘appropriate recurrent funding provided on this basis’, and they to meet with them to respond to the issues raised in their paper. However, despite repeated calls, there was no response at this level. Domestic violence services were, however, granted an increase in salary as a result of an increase in the Social and Community Services (SACS) award, and a small increase in operating costs towards the end of 2002. Notably, domestic violence outreach services fared better than refuges from this funding, a pattern that would continue into 2005. As a further consequence of the administrative shift to the OoH, domestic violence services have been subject to a process of homogenisation amongst generic homelessness services and are often treated in terms of a causal relationship to homelessness, as opposed to gender inequality. This trend has meant that, throughout the 2000s, domestic violence services have been ‘constantly arguing for the visibility of family violence within the Office of Housing’. Many have argued that the need for domestic violence funding should be administered instead by a ‘women’s unit or … a family violence unit’.

The Commonwealth government’s inadequate funding for the SAAP program nationally was counteracted to some extent in Victoria by the state Labor government, which committed to modest increases between 2000 and 2003, thereby shifting the proportion of Commonwealth-state SAAP funding over this time from 58:42 to 50:50. However, as we have seen, numerous attempts by bureaucrats to review the funding model for domestic violence services have resulted in only small increases and tinkering at the edges of the problem has proved ineffective in the face of an historical legacy of inadequate and disproportional funding for OoH-funded organisations.

Bureaucrats within DHS openly acknowledged that domestic violence services were underfunded, but reiterated the mantra that no money was available, and therefore the option services should ‘reduce targets or reduce services over time’ to achieve funding equity with

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70 VWRADVS to Minister for Housing, 6 June 2002.
71 DHS to VWRADVS, 30 October 2002, BHA.
72 Ministerial Advisory Committee of Women’s Housing, Report to the Minister for Community Services and Housing, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2002, p. 40; VWRADVS and DHS meeting minutes, 24 February 2003, BHA.
73 DHS, Crisis Protection Framework, p. 7.
74 Alison Macdonald, interviewed Jacqui Theobald, 28 April 2009.
75 Geddes interview.
other DHS-funded services. Services were quick to highlight the immorality of this proposition, faced as they were with an already over-stretched service system, combined with an anticipated increase in demand resulting from the publicity generated by the Women’s Safety Strategy (WSS) and forthcoming changes to police standing orders. The funding differential between SAAP-funded services and FSS was also of concern to bureaucrats within the Office of Women’s Policy (OWP), who made the somewhat more astute suggestion that DHS increase its annual bid to the treasury’s Economic Review Committee (ERC) in order to improve salaries for SAAP workers. This has not, however been realised to date. Therefore, whilst the perception exists today that women’s refuges ‘no longer have to go cap in hand and prove their case all the time’, the funding issues continue largely unredressed, as Women’s Liberation Halfway House manager Kathy Russell explains:

The THM system came into play, many years behind us, funded from the outset at a realistic level. You go to some of their office buildings now, and you think, “this is not fair”! Come to Halfway House, and see the conditions that we’ve got. I’m fighting to get air conditioning in for this summer. Basics.

Lack of funding was raised by many interviewees as a key challenge to the future of domestic violence services. This issue is particularly dire for small independent organisations like women’s refuges that continue to face increasing numbers of compulsory government regulatory requirements without any funding to support their implementation. As long-term domestic violence services worker Vig Geddes puts it:

Family violence services are under resourced. I worry that the specialist women’s domestic violence services will be swallowed up by big organisations, that the family violence program in these organisations might then lose their gendered approach to violence.

Workforce sustainability is also increasingly uncertain without improved funding for salaries, as long-time refuge worker Janine Mahoney argues:

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77 VWRADVS and DHS meeting minutes, 20 August 2003. BHA.
78 VWRADVS and DHS meeting minutes, 20 August 2003. BHA.
79 VWRADVS Finance worker minutes, 5 November 2003. BHA.
80 In recent years the Australian Services Union campaigned nationally under the slogan ‘Respect the Workers, Sustain the Services’, and lodged a claim with Fair Work Australia in April 2010 to improve pay and conditions for workers under the SACS Award, which includes SAAP workers. The then Labor state government committed to fund a pay increase however, early in 2011, the newly elected state Liberal government cast doubt on its pre-election commitment to support the wage increase.
81 Setches interview.
82 Russell interview.
There’s been initiative after initiative dumped on the sector … they’re underpaid, they have massive stress on them in their workplace, they have high-risk jobs, and there’s no recognition of that given by government … So why would anybody want to work in our sector? Unless they’ve got a strong commitment, which is the only reason we have the staff we’ve got now.\textsuperscript{84}

SAAP services continued to be underfunded despite the emergence of cross-government investment and collaboration in response to domestic violence at this time via policy initiatives arising from the Women’s Safety Strategy, and the Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS). Funding associated with some of these initiatives was not in general provided for SAAP-funded services but instead directed towards prevention-focused initiatives such as the family violence networkers, whose program was expanded after receiving an additional $1.5 million in funding in 2002.\textsuperscript{85}

Another initiative included the allocation of $1.8 million in funding to support women experiencing domestic violence to access the private rental market.\textsuperscript{86} Consistent with its aversion to welfare, the Commonwealth government had, over the previous decade rigorously pursued policies geared towards enhancing people’s access to the private rental market in favour of investment in public housing. Rent assistance, for example, trebled in real terms between 1990 and 2001,\textsuperscript{87} usurping funding for public housing, which declined by 31 per cent over the same period.\textsuperscript{88} Additional investment in social housing by the state Labor government between 2001 and 2003 had begun to peter out by 2004.\textsuperscript{89} Capital investment in the THM program, for example, came to a virtual standstill by 2004-05.\textsuperscript{90} The peak body for homelessness organisations, the Council to Homeless Persons, argued publicly that the state government’s commitment to tackling affordable housing and homelessness had stalled,\textsuperscript{91} and that ‘the lack of affordable, sustainable and long-term housing is the major issue that needs to be addressed’.\textsuperscript{92}

By the middle of the decade, diminished government funding for SAAP and social housing was paralleled by the ongoing transfer of responsibility for welfare service provision from the

\textsuperscript{84} Mahoney interview.
\textsuperscript{86} Minister for Housing to VWRADVS, July 2002, BHA.
\textsuperscript{87} DHS, \textit{Women’s Housing Policy}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{88} MAC, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{89} MAC, p. 19
\textsuperscript{90} THM Program Indicators, Office of Housing and Community Building, 2009.
\textsuperscript{91} CHP, Media Release, May 2004.
\textsuperscript{92} CHP, Submission to the SAAP IV National Evaluation, Melbourne 2003, BHA.
government to the non-government sector, which was combined with an ever-growing emphasis on their regulation. Government continued to implement ‘accountability techniques to measure whether non-government organisations … were meeting government objectives’.\footnote{Bullen, p. 101.}

As we have seen, this trajectory was firmly established in Victoria by the Kennett government in the 1990s when it implemented a purchaser–provider model, which radically shifted the locus of power from the community sector to the government. Whilst the Bracks-led Labor government opted for a model characterised by ‘partnership’ above competition, which worked to soften the edges of the more extreme market-inspired measures imposed by the Kennett government, it continued to operate within the same paradigm as its predecessors. In practice, the Labor government continued to work within a purchaser–provider model, although it replaced techniques of competitive tendering with the somewhat less market-driven ‘expressions of interest’, as a method of purchasing services.\footnote{Goofrey interview.} The paradox that characterises this form of partnership was not lost on domestic violence services, and the tensions it generated will be considered in greater detail below.

The trends outlined above continued into 2003, when DHS proposed three-year service agreements for all SAAP-funded services. Services were informed that the agreements would incorporate a greater emphasis on ‘output-based funding, increased standardisation, visibility and accountability’.\footnote{VWRADVS minutes, 4 December 2002.} The finance group of VWRADVS was particularly concerned about the proposed inclusion of a common price index for all services, and undertook extraordinary efforts to analyse the proposed funding formula, which, they concluded, would lead to funding cuts since it was not tied to an award.\footnote{VWRADVS Finance worker minutes, 4 June and 6 August 2003.} VWRADVS also challenged the government resolution that ‘funds will be reduced if targets are not met but will not be increased if targets are exceeded’.\footnote{VWRADVS minutes, 13 August 2003.} They were told that the key driving force behind the agreements derived from the fact that ‘the state does not have the capacity to continue to fill the [funding] gap left by the Commonwealth’.\footnote{VWRADVS and DHS minutes, 24 February 2003.} However, a clause inserted into the agreements defining the agency as an ‘independent contractor for the purpose of this agreement’, was both reminiscent of the ‘contract culture’ instigated by the Kennett government and suggestive of Labor’s intention to extend the ongoing ‘devolution of responsibility from DHS to the services’.\footnote{VWRADVS minutes, 13 August 2003.} The Victorian Council of Social Services led a campaign in opposition to the service agreements, including a sector-wide day of action. As in the 1990s, many domestic violence services refused to sign

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Bullen} Bullen, p. 101.
\bibitem{Goofrey} Godfrey interview.
\bibitem{VWRADVS1} VWRADVS minutes, 4 December 2002.
\bibitem{VWRADVS2} VWRADVS Finance worker minutes, 4 June and 6 August 2003.
\bibitem{VWRADVS3} VWRADVS minutes, 13 August 2003.
\bibitem{VWRADVS4} VWRADVS and DHS minutes, 24 February 2003.
\bibitem{VWRADVS5} VWRADVS minutes, 13 August 2003.
\end{thebibliography}
their agreements until 2004, when they were forced to do so under threat of de-funding.\textsuperscript{100}

It seems somewhat paradoxical that within a state government policy context designed to promote the wellbeing and equality of women, inadequate funding for domestic violence services, combined with their increased regulation, has had the effect, in Julie Oberin’s words, of ‘work[ing] people to the bone’ and inhibiting the capacity of services to have ‘quality time with the women and children that they’re supporting’.\textsuperscript{101} However, despite the widespread consensus that services were, and are ‘constrained by service agreements and targets and numbers and occupational health and safety’, the implementation of these controls was also considered by some as ‘really important’.\textsuperscript{102} Indeed, VWRADVS made evident their in-principle commitment to ‘embrace further outputs’, combined with the ‘need to operate as professional small businesses’.\textsuperscript{103} Correspondingly, case management was no longer challenged on the basis that it undermined the ability of workers to break down hierarchical power relations between themselves and their clients, or that it limited the capacity of services to undertake political work. On the contrary, as Kennedy says, it was now assumed ‘that everyone should work that way’.\textsuperscript{104} Thus, unlike the 1990s, when domestic violence services voiced their principled opposition to economic rationalist proposals, by the 2000s their objections focused entirely on inadequate funding. This adoption of business techniques to the governance of individuals through case management had thus become normalised and institutionalised.

Despite their now widespread acceptance, some activists have continued to raise concerns about the disproportionate attention such techniques have received in contrast to other objectives of domestic violence services, including the elimination of family violence. The achievement of this goal, Vig Geddes has argued, should encompass a continued dedication to redress family violence at the ‘level of power and redistribution of power’.\textsuperscript{105} Without this ongoing commitment, Geddes contended, an ‘increasing emphasis on accreditation, good governance, unit costing, and risk management will distract us’.\textsuperscript{106} There is no doubt that this has indeed occurred to a large extent, and, despite the fact that activists continue to identify the need for equality and redistribution of power to reduce domestic violence, the onerous regulation from government has made it difficult to apply these goals in their work. As long-

\textsuperscript{100} VWRADVS Finance worker minutes, 5 November 2003.
\textsuperscript{101} Oberin interview.
\textsuperscript{102} Kennedy interview.
\textsuperscript{103} VWRADVS to Minister for Housing.
\textsuperscript{104} Kennedy interview.
\textsuperscript{105} Geddes, ‘Twenty-One’, p. 8.
term refuge worker Judy Kneale explains:

[W]hen you’re embroiled in producing that fabulous service system … how do you have the time and energy to do that other stuff? … Our aim is not just to develop the best service system for women experiencing violence, it’s to actually change society so that it doesn’t happen, and when are we getting the chance to do that?  

The new level of scrutiny applied to domestic violence services was reflected in the government’s funding and regulation of community services generally, as well as the direction of the FDVCPF as outlined above. The requirement that VWRADVS become a more ‘formal’ body and change its methods of operation and organisational structure was thus congruent with these wider shifts, and had been in progress since the 1990s when VWRADVS had moved away from collective structures in the name of efficiency and to legitimate its standing with the state. VWRADVS finally received funding for a project worker in late 2000 and rewrote its constitution in 2001 to enable wider membership and remove any reference to collective forms of operating. Following the receipt of further funding in 2002, it ‘tightened processes for decision making’, and represented itself as now playing a ‘far more pro-active, visible and accountable role’. Two years later, VWRADVS restructured again, wider members no longer taking part in the peak body’s decision making, which was instead undertaken at monthly coordinating collective meetings.

The 2002 funding allocation for a VWRADVS policy co-ordinator was couched in terms of the government’s ‘commitment to working collaboratively’ and ‘a result of the relationship VWRADVS members and DHS staff have fostered’. It was the culmination of a long campaign, as bureaucrat Alison Fraser confirms, ‘the sector had lobbied for years to get a funded peak’. However, funding came with conditions intended to alter VWRADVS methods of operating and to improve its capacity to negotiate ‘in a constructive way’. DHS funded VWRADVS in order to foster broader critical ‘debate about practice’ and ‘examination of the way things were’, and to generate ‘dialogue [and] some scrutiny, a level of empirical evidence, [and] a diversity of approaches’. By extension, DHS saw reform of VWRADVS as a means to increase services’ accountability, a goal most domestic violence

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107 Kneale interview.  
108 Finance worker minutes, 6 December 2000, BHA archives.  
110 VWRADVS CC minutes, 9 October 2002, BHA.  
111 VWRADVS CC minutes, 16 October 2002, BHA.  
112 Minister for Community Services and Housing to VWRADVS, 18 June 2002, BHA.  
114 Fraser interview.  
115 Fraser interview.  
116 Fraser interview.
service providers now supported. They still, however, demanded that the government recognise its own lack of responsibility and accountability in failing to fund the services adequately.\footnote{Austin correspondence, 1 August 2010.}

The adoption of hierarchical decision-making processes was mirrored in an endeavour to bridge the ‘historical differences between refuge, outreach and state-wide services’.\footnote{DV Vic, ‘Annual Report: 2003–2004’, p. 2.} With this aim, VWRADVS voted to adopt the title of Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) at its annual general meeting in 2003. This change was also driven by the government’s desire for just one ‘formal body to talk to’.\footnote{Fraser interview.} It was in part, therefore, an attempt to generate efficiency, as well as replace ‘informal relationships’ with those that were ‘formal, concrete, open’.\footnote{Fraser interview.} DV Vic’s founding coordinator Janine Bush describes the merit in: ‘having a feminist organisational structure, that’s got some hierarchy but that’s ethical, transparent and with clear processes and acknowledging the power and where it lies and making that power accountable’.\footnote{Janine Bush, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 22 April 2009.} Current CEO of DV Vic Fiona McCormack also perceived the change as positive: ‘I would much rather have a formal relationship with bureaucrats because it’s acknowledging that we have very different roles … and that your responsibility is to keep government accountable and that it’s not personal’.\footnote{Fiona McCormack, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 21 April 2008.}

These transitions were not surprisingly contentious, member services being largely suspicious of DV Vic’s engagement with the state, and less than willing to compromise on their tactics and principles. DV Vic also incurred criticism by some members for being unwilling to adopt militant protest tactics during their negotiations with government. Some perceived that their achievements and ‘power’ as a group had been ‘weakened’ as a result.\footnote{Russell interview.} This criticism from their membership led to concerns by some within DV Vic that a ‘legitimacy crisis’ had developed.\footnote{DV Vic minutes, May 2004, BHA.} They were accused, McCormack recounts, of ‘being co-opted by the department’, an ‘unhappy’ constituency assuming that, when controversial decisions ‘have been made that people aren’t happy with … that we’ve been party to those decisions.’\footnote{McCormack interview.}

However, it was not DV Vic's changing methods and tactics that reduced domestic violence services position of power in their negotiations with their funding bodies, but instead the growing capacity and desire of modern government to exert control over the planning and
operation of human service organisations. Ironically, this paralleled the government’s determination to relocate responsibility away from the state to ‘reduce their exposure to risk’. These changes were combined with a preference for funding prevention-based policy initiatives and reluctance to invest in bricks-and-mortar, including women’s refuges and other forms of medium and long-term social housing. The emergence of this new administrative regime over the 1990s, and first half of the 2000s also worked to constrain domestic violence services’ capacity to undertake political work.

DV Vic’s decision to adopt a partnership approach to working with the state was a pragmatic one as old ways of interacting with government were proving ineffective. Challenging government decisions via direct action tactics and public campaigns, for example, was not ‘appropriate when you at least have some sort of accord with the government’. McCormack contends that such strategies would have resulted in DV Vic being considered ‘a risk and they wouldn’t give us any information and they would be really loathe to negotiate with us … we actually need more sophisticated strategies’. Similarly, Bush argues that militant tactics ‘are no longer effective because they place you at risk of being frozen out and having the door slammed in your face’. Adopting a partnership approach has meant, as long-term bureaucrat Peter Lake suggests, that DV Vic was perceived as ‘shift[ing] from being an organisation that made its own decisions, and was assertive, and demanded certain things … into something that we can partner’.

Adopting conciliatory methods of negotiating with the state does not necessarily deny services the opportunity to politicise issues. As DV Vic policy worker Alison Macdonald has argued, ‘keeping up the political struggle’ and ‘going along with change’ are not necessarily ‘mutually exclusive processes’. Moreover, adopting a partnership approach does not necessarily make the job of the bureaucracy an effortless one. As Di Godfrey has argued in relation to working with representatives of domestic violence services:

[T]hose women haven’t changed, they’re still strong, driven, and opinionated and determined. And if you are going to try and go in and have a discussion with them, where you want to influence their decision making, or implement anything, and you aren’t really articulate about what you’re saying … and you haven’t got a good

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126 Green and Sawyer, p. 13.
127 McCormack interview.
128 McCormack interview.
129 Bush interview.
130 Peter Lake, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 12 February 2009.
131 Macdonald interview.
rationale, you are going to be like pushing shit up hill."{132}

Clearly, despite the perils inherent in partnering the state, there remains capacity for resistance, and positive outcomes have been achieved through the adoption of new techniques of engaging with the state. Whilst discussion of the late 2000s period is beyond the scope of this thesis, Macdonald contends that, in recent years, as DV Vic has developed a positive relationship with state bureaucrats, their work has continued to be ‘inherently political’, thus challenging the view that ‘by going along with change you’re therefore complicit, or you’re watering down your radicalism’. However, Dimopoulos has cautioned Australian domestic violence services against becoming 'locked into government’, and losing the drive to ensure ‘the voice [we represent] is about the voice of community’. She warns that in Australia the ‘government has been very clever about co-opting us … we have become the government voice … I am not naive and I participate in it myself, but … I think we really need to watch how we have been co-opted into some of it’. Similarly, disability activist Chris Jennings notes that governments in the past ‘funded the community sector to be a voice of the community’, but that, in recent years, ‘the bureaucracy wants to control the voice of the community. They want to purchase community services to be a spokesperson for government’. Dimopoulos explicitly asks whether that 'compromises us in terms of toeing the government line or not being critical?’{137}

As we have seen, until the late 1990s, domestic violence services were determined to promote collectivism within their organisations, in order to encourage full participation in decision making. Whilst there had been a variety of problems associated with this method of organising, many of which have been canvassed in this thesis, there can be little doubt that collective processes enabled the voices of women in the community to be heard. Though a partnership approach to working with government may be perceived as ‘a really positive thing’, it has also represented ‘a real change from groups of collective women coming together’{138} as long-time DVIRC worker Margot Scott notes. Other long-time activists have also reflected on the impact that partnering the state has had, particularly in terms of the changes to the modus operandi of domestic violence services and what these have meant for women and children. Dimopoulos suggests, for example, that central to the refuge

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[132]{Godfrey interview.}
\footnotetext[133]{Macdonald interview.}
\footnotetext[134]{Dimopoulos interview.}
\footnotetext[135]{Dimopoulos interview.}
\footnotetext[136]{Jennings interview.}
\footnotetext[137]{Dimopoulos interview.}
\footnotetext[138]{Scott interview.}
\end{footnotes}
movement’s past success was that it represented ‘a remarkable opportunity to say that the wisdom that women have through their own experiences can shift thinking’. Whilst acknowledging the importance of ‘boundaries’ and ‘professionalism’, she contends ‘there is also a loss that comes with that’, which includes ‘less willingness to see women as wise about their own lives’. It was collectivism, according to former refuge worker and bureaucrat Marg D’Arcy, that enabled women experiencing domestic violence a voice that they no longer had. However, she acknowledges that the suppression of these women’s voices today also derives from a concern to protect the sensibility of workers:

[T]he women who were victims of domestic violence had the voice because of the way the service was operated, because they operated as a collective … and they don’t have that any more … we actually had a discussion about whether it was okay to have victims speaking at the conference, because one of the workers actually said “well the problem is if you do that it could be too confronting for workers”.  

Donna Zander, sees this as indicative of basic values being jeopardised: ‘[I]f we can’t hear survivors tell us about their lived experience … then we should pack up our bags and go home is my opinion’.  

Dimopoulos’s views canvass the main areas of criticism of current practices from the perspective of the founder’s values. Domestic violence services, she argues, are no longer concerned with ‘taking risks around community education, or promoting a more grass-roots or revolutionary idea’. She points out that ‘we don’t talk about the institutions or the systems reinforcing it … are we really agitating for social change? Maybe I am outdated, I don’t know’. These comments draw attention to the pattern of change in domestic violence services from a focus on politicising the problem of domestic violence itself, to concentrating on the problems facing provision of domestic violence services. This shift has also been paralleled by withdrawal from advocacy in relation to housing issues facing women, which had been central to the work of the movement from the early 1970s until the 1980s. As this thesis has shown, these changes occurred in part in response to a neo-liberal environment, which led ‘feminists [to] adapt their efforts’. But we have seen that the change of focus was also a consequence of the early refuge movement’s decision to champion the problem of domestic violence above other issues relating to gender inequality, reflecting the priorities of

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139 Dimopoulos interview.
140 D’Arcy interview.
141 Zander interview.
142 Dimopoulos interview.
143 Dimopoulos interview.
144 Andrew and Maddison, p. 176.
radical feminists who sought to liberate women from violent marriages. Former WLHWH activist and academic Di Otto voices her frustration at the effects of this change:

I feel frustrated now because there is so much focus on gendered violence and all these other things, like women’s economic position, maybe even women’s housing, get lost. This focus can also portray women as victims, as vulnerable and in need of protection—it produces a very stereotyped gender discourse about women needing state protection or the protection of men.\(^{145}\)

The policy context of the mid-2000s stands in contrast to that of twenty years earlier when policies designed to tackle domestic violence gave greater attention to supporting women to leave their homes via the direct provision and administration of social housing by the state.\(^{146}\) Whilst this response was undertaken in a context where there were significantly fewer options available to women other than leaving their home, it was also occurring in a period when governments remained comparatively more committed to ‘ameliorating the economic and social consequences of free market policies—such as poverty’\(^{147}\).

Consideration of poverty and inequality, particularly in terms of the relationship between domestic violence and homelessness remains critical, particularly in light of the fact that two-thirds of people in Victoria seeking homelessness support are women, principally because of domestic violence.\(^{148}\) Ludo McFerran has also recently reminded us, ‘poverty is as greater determinant of women’s need for support, as domestic violence’.\(^{149}\) This issue of women’s poverty remains at the forefront of outreach worker Karen Bird’s daily work with women and children experiencing domestic violence, and it significantly hinders their ability to leave: ‘The feminisation of poverty is big … the clients I have today that are living in domestic violence, are hampered and hindered, and feel they can’t change their situation because there’s not enough money’.\(^{150}\) By contrast, for many women who do leave their homes because of domestic violence, the ensuing problems of homelessness and poverty have enormous implications for their own wellbeing, as well as that of their children. As one rural outreach worker comments:

There’s this big push about the wellbeing of children, but at the same time we’ve got a housing system that’s not in the best interest of children, in that, you’ve got to keep

\(^{145}\) Otto interview.
\(^{146}\) WPCU, *Criminal*, pp. 44–74.
\(^{147}\) Mendes, p. 33.
\(^{149}\) McFerran, ‘Beginning’, p. 16.
\(^{150}\) Bird interview.
moving ... and find some accommodation with friends and family. So it might be a few nights here, a few nights there, some of them are outstaying their welcome and that's just commonplace ... Or there’s five or six people in one bedroom because it’s the only bedroom that’s available ... What happens to their schooling and stability and those sorts of things at a time when things are so disrupted for them and uncertain ... [when] ... you haven’t got secure and affordable housing?\textsuperscript{151}

Similarly, as mentioned above, McFerran has also recently commented on the lack of attention to women’s poverty, arguing that ‘it has been evident since the first evaluation of women’s refuges that poverty is as great a determinant of women’s need for support, as domestic violence’.\textsuperscript{152} Indeed, a lack of attention to the broad range of issues relating to or resulting from gender inequality has therefore meant that there has been comparatively little inroad made into tackling women’s housing, homelessness and poverty.\textsuperscript{153}

**Policing and Legal Developments**

The doubts of some notwithstanding, the Labor government’s ‘partnership’ approach enabled domestic violence services to engage in the development and implementation of substantial cross-government policy and funding initiatives and it became standard practice for government working groups to invite VWRADVS to participate.\textsuperscript{154} Despite the contests around funding and regulation in their negotiations with DHS, working in partnership continued and was also characteristic of VWRDVS relationship with other arms of the state such as the police. The appointment of Christine Nixon as Chief Commissioner of Police in 2001 proved a key catalyst for change in the state government’s response to violence against women. Nixon accorded a new priority to domestic violence in the police force that encouraged an unprecedented number of government-led legislative and other initiatives designed to tackle domestic violence and improve service system responses to women and children, particularly in the legal system. As Tony Newman comments, ‘when Labor was elected in 1999, these ... policy initiatives weren’t even on the radar ... the police almost

\textsuperscript{151} Anonymous, interviewed by Jacqui Theobald, 22 October 2008.

\textsuperscript{152} McFerran, ‘Beginning’, p. 16. See also Weeks and Oberin, p. 124.


drove us up the road into this. So their role cannot be underestimated’. The kinds of legal changes Nixon initiated, as Dimopoulos argues, ‘impacted profoundly on those relationships, because police were our enemy and now they are our friends’.

As we have seen, since the early 1980s, feminists inside and outside of government had worked to challenge police attitudes and responses to domestic violence as well as other forms of violence against women including sexual assault. While their advocacy had resulted in many achievements along the way, a proactive response from the police was something new, as former Labor MP Kay Setches observes:

You dreamt about, [that] there’d be a police commissioner that would say, “this is serious, and we’re going to do something about it, and we’re going to put resources into it, and I’m going to measure it”.

News of Nixon’s appointment was welcomed by the domestic violence services, whose representatives swiftly undertook to meet with and impress upon her the extent of domestic violence and the inadequacy of existing police responses. Geddes recounts how immediately after she learned of Nixon’s appointment, as DVIRC co-ordinator, she organised a letter to be sent from all the domestic violence services requesting a meeting, to which Nixon ‘responded pretty immediately, and there was a meeting, and it wasn’t long after that she announced that she’d make family violence a priority’. Nixon’s personal experience of witnessing violence against women as a young police officer generated her commitment to improving police reactions to these problems. Long-time domestic violence services advocate Billi Clarke explained how this initial meeting was utilised to provide Nixon with evidence that the police were failing to respond adequately:

The first meeting we had with Christine Nixon we were able to give her … the figures of the number of intervention orders that police took out on behalf of women … [and] … the number of figures where women have reported violence where there’s been no follow up, no charges laid from breaches of intervention orders, and she was just horrified.

Soon after, in August 2001, Nixon appointed Police Commander Leigh Gassner to lead a review of police responses and policy with regard to violence against women. The review

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155 Newman interview.
156 Dimopoulos interview.
157 Setches interview.
158 Geddes interview.
160 Clarke interview.
engaged in extensive consultations, including with representatives from domestic violence services, who recommended change in relation to matters such as police not treating domestic violence as a criminal matter and putting the onus on the woman to press charges.\textsuperscript{161} VWRADVS and family violence networker representatives continued to meet with Nixon and press their concerns, including the need for a ‘shared philosophy across sectors about the dynamics of domestic violence’ and the importance of ensuring that separate consultations would be undertaken with Aboriginal women and those of non-English speaking background.\textsuperscript{162}

The review was published with a series of recommendations, many of which reflected concerns raised by the domestic violence service sector.\textsuperscript{163} In particular, the report’s authors labelled the inadequacy of police responses to domestic violence as ‘disturbing’, and argued for them to assume a ‘role which exhibits commitment, collaboration, influence and leadership, together with other similar service providers, domestic violence workers and agencies, both government and non-government’.\textsuperscript{164} The report also recommended the establishment of a state-wide domestic violence steering committee sponsored by the chief commissioner and to include a range of key stakeholders. The aim of the committee would be ‘to develop an integrated strategic direction to the operational response of agencies to domestic violence’, and Victoria Police would be tasked with ‘a leading role in the establishment and commitment to this process’.\textsuperscript{165} The review further proposed additional training and education for police, the development of a code of practice for police responses to domestic violence, an accountability framework to monitor police responses to family violence incidents, improved data collection and a review of the role of family violence liaison officers.\textsuperscript{166} It also made a range of recommendations on police responses to sexual assault and violence against women in the workplace, both of which also included the establishment of state-wide steering committees.

The new \textit{Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence} was released in August 2004 and adopted standing orders that stressed the criminal nature of domestic violence and prioritised the safety of and sensitivity to victims.\textsuperscript{167} In particular, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{161} Domestic Violence Services and Victoria Police Meeting Minutes, 18 October 2001, BHA.
\item \textsuperscript{162} VWRADVS to Chief Commissioner of Police, 20 November 2001, BHA.
\item \textsuperscript{164} Victoria Police, \textit{‘A Way Forward’}, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{165} Victoria Police, \textit{‘A Way Forward’}, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{166} Victoria Police, \textit{A Summary}, p. 5.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Code of Practice specified that police must make an application for an intervention order ‘wherever the safety, welfare or property of a family member appears to be endangered by another’.\textsuperscript{168} This policy resulted in a 72 per cent increase in the number of intervention orders sought by police between 2003–04 and 2004–05.\textsuperscript{169} The Code also adopted a pro-arrest policy, which resulted in a 73 per cent increase in the number of charges being laid by police in 2004–05.\textsuperscript{170} VWRADVS representatives were invited to attend consultation forums held in August 2003 and utilised the opportunity to stress the importance of providing ‘additional resources to increase the capacity of the women’s domestic violence services system’, which would be faced with ‘rising demand as police began to increase their reporting of incidents’.\textsuperscript{171} The consultation also enabled improved communication between domestic violence services and police more broadly. As VWRADVS representative Rose Solomon recalls, there were ‘[O]pportunities … to actually have consultations at a local level with police officers. There was an opportunity for us to go and speak to the trainees out at Waverly who were training to be police officers around family violence. Lots of doors started opening’.\textsuperscript{172} The historical significance of the changes adopted by Victoria Police has not gone unnoticed, as Oliver reflects:

> When you look back in fifty years time it will be the most significant thing that ever happened. It was just the turning point I think. If you have got Victoria Police making change, it makes everybody else sit up and take notice. You have Victoria Police holding the government accountable to what they are doing for their services, what they are doing to support the police to have a better response and it is a good change agent.\textsuperscript{173}

Domestic violence services also worked collaboratively with the courts and other legal professions, further cementing the productive working relationships they had established throughout the 1990s. They were consulted on a number of legislative reviews, including the \textit{Crimes (Family Violence) Act}, which was referred for review by Attorney General Rob Hulls to the Victorian Law Reform Commission in November 2002.\textsuperscript{174} The Department of Justice (DoJ) consulted widely on the terms of reference for the review, sent to the Victorian Law Reform Commission in August 2003, and continued to engage with domestic violence

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{168} Victoria Police, \textit{Code}, p. 38.  
\textsuperscript{170} VCCAV, \textit{Database}, p. 21.  
\textsuperscript{171} VWRADVS Response to Victoria Police Code of Practice, 7 August 2003, BHA.  
\textsuperscript{172} Solomon interview.  
\textsuperscript{173} Oliver interview.  
\textsuperscript{174} Attorney General to Victorian Law Reform Commission, 1 November 2002, BHA.}
services during the review process.\textsuperscript{175} Whilst the Women’s Safety Strategy provided impetus for the review of the Act, it came off the back of many years of advocacy by domestic violence services.\textsuperscript{176} At the forefront of the problems identified with the existing legislation was the inadequate and unaccountable legal requirements for ‘police response to family violence’.\textsuperscript{177} As Geddes recounts:

[W]e hammered for years and years and years for a review of the Crimes Family Violence Act … and in the end when they indicated that they might be willing to have a review … I remember racing upstairs getting a letter together and immediately sending it off to Rob Hulls. There had been lobbying for that for a long time … there’s been a lot of noise for a long time about the police response and how it wasn’t good enough.\textsuperscript{178}

The VLRC commenced its review in August 2003. It was delivered to government in March 2006 with a range of recommendations in relation to family violence laws. The review found that ‘an alarming number of Victorians experience violence and abuse within their families [and] in many instances victims find the justice system fails to protect them’.\textsuperscript{179} In response to the VLRC’s recommendations, the DoJ commenced drafting a Family Violence bill and at the same time a Victorian Family Violence Justice Reform campaign was coordinated by DV Vic and the Federation of Community Legal Services (Vic), which sought to ensure that the government responded to the VLRC’s recommendations in a manner that was ‘comprehensive, timely and accountable’.\textsuperscript{180} The DoJ continued to work in a consultative manner that enabled the campaign group to make submissions on issues of concern, including protecting people with disabilities experiencing violence from their carers, as well as enabling women to make changes to their leases once an exclusion order was in place.\textsuperscript{181} These recommendations were incorporated in the bill, alongside promoting the accountability of perpetrators and the presumption that the respondent is to be excluded from the home. An expanded definition of family violence was adopted to include non-physical forms, and, in response to calls for greater protection for women with disabilities, ‘family member’ was extended to ‘family like’ relationships. Police were also empowered to apply for an order

\textsuperscript{175} VWRADVS, ‘Annual Report: 2003–04’, BHA.
\textsuperscript{177} Nunn and D’Arcy, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{178} Geddes interview.
\textsuperscript{181} Macdonald, p. 10.
regardless of the person’s wishes. The new *Family Violence Protection Act (2008)* was finally adopted in December 2008. The significance of these developments cannot be underestimated, their achievement having been considered inconceivable only a few years earlier, as Oliver recounts:

The fact that you have got legislative change, and therefore you might get some changes at the Magistrate’s level is phenomenal, huge, and absolutely massive. I didn’t think that it would ever happen. I thought we would have an almost integrated family violence response.

Other legal developments at this time concerned the Magistrates Court of Victoria, which now appointed a state supervisory magistrate for family violence matters. This position was assumed by Anne Goldsbrough in February 2002. Goldsbrough, as we have seen, had a long-standing record of working in partnership with domestic violence services. She also held the position of Magistrates Court representative on the State-wide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence (SSCRFV) in relation to a range of issues, including the development of protocols for family violence and stalking and a roster system at the court to provide support for women and children experiencing domestic violence.

Through SSCRFV, Goldsbrough was instrumental in leading consultations on the establishment of family violence courts in 2004. In the campaign that saw the re-election of Labor in November 2002, the government had committed $2.7 million over four years to the development of these courts as a division of the Magistrates Court. Making good on this promise, the DoJ initiated consultations in 2003 to develop a pilot domestic violence court. As with the review by Victoria Police into domestic violence, DoJ undertook to consult widely on the court’s development and implementation and sought representatives from domestic violence services on its reference group to provide important information in relation to the support needs of women and children. The family violence courts commenced in 2005 at Ballarat and Heidelberg and, amongst their many aims, they aimed to:

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183 Oliver interview.
185 VWRADVS minutes, 9 July 2003.
188 VWRADVS minutes, 9 April 2003.
Simplify access to the justice system for people involved in family violence; increase recognition of the rights of children as people affected by family violence … and … make accountable people who used family violence toward family members’.  

The family violence courts also included provision for court-appointed behaviour-change programs for men subject to intervention orders. This was a key initiative of WSS and a reference group that included VWRADVS representative Samiro Douglas was established by DoJ as part of SSCRVF to guide the program’s development. The main task of the reference group was to provide feedback on a preferred model for the program. However, for ‘feminists and advocates on behalf of women and children’, Douglas recounts, the task at hand was to maintain an emphasis on their particular needs. A best-practice framework for men’s behaviour-change groups, which promoted the safety of women and children as the key goal, had previously been developed by OWP and the new model was guided by this framework.

Feminist domestic violence services have raised concerns about behaviour-change programs for men since they began in the early 1990s. In particular, they have been alarmed by the lack of evidence to support the effectiveness of this form of intervention. More recently, concern has also been raised about the emphasis on men’s behaviour-change programs within the state government’s prevention-focused initiatives. As long-time domestic violence services worker Sandra Morris argues:

A lot of the prevention activities that [government] looked at or have funded have been geared towards men. It’s all about changing men’s behaviours but we actually don’t know whether it really works or not … Do they just learn the language of family violence so they’re better able to speak about it, and better able to hide it? … [and]… it doesn’t deal with the structural inequities [facing women] that we still have.

Despite these concerns and on-going debates, domestic violence service providers over time became involved in the running of men’s programs because they wanted them, as men’s group facilitator Judy Kneale recounts, ‘based on feminist principles’. Similarly, as CEO of

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189 Court Services, ‘Family Violence Court Liaison Model’, November 2004, BHA.
193 Morris interview.
194 Kneale interview.
DV Vic Fiona McCormack has argued, engaging with men’s services is critical to ensuring their ability to ‘have any control or opportunities to influence their service provision … to make sure that it’s working from a position that absolutely puts the responsibility on the perpetrator as opposed to seeing it as some sort of dysfunctional family dynamic’.195

With regard to the wider issue of engaging with men in the response to violence against women, Lyn Walker maintains ‘the view that it’s inappropriate for men to provide direct support to women experiencing or escaping violence’. However, she argues that, ‘in terms of prevention you’ve got to work with [men], they’ve got to be part of the equation … I reckon we’ll see an escalation of men’s participation and involvement in the prevention agenda’.196

On the wider prevention agenda, Dimopoulos raises the concern that if it ‘is solely about social context and not about dislodging institutionalised power’, then we might fail in our attempts to eliminate domestic violence and continue to question ‘why are we still in the situation that we are in?’ As she continues, there may ‘more murders than we have ever had before … more intervention orders than ever before … [and] … family violence at the same rate if not higher’.197

**The State-Wide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence**

Following the release of Victoria Police’s review into domestic violence, the establishment of SSCRFV was announced by Chief Commissioner Nixon. SSCRFV was to be co-chaired by Commander Leigh Gassner and director of OWP, reflecting the high priority it was accorded by Victoria Police. SSCRFV would include representatives from a range of government and non-government organisations, including the police, courts, health, welfare and specialist domestic violence services. Domestic violence services representatives included members from VWRADVS, the Domestic Violence Incest Resource Centre, the Immigrant Women’s Domestic Violence Service and the Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service. VWRADVS was successful in lobbying for further representation from the Federation of Community Legal Services.198

The central focus of the committee’s work leading up to 2005 included the development of a best practice framework for a whole-of-government integrated response to family violence,

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195 McCormack interview.
196 Walker interview.
197 Dimopoulos interview.
which OWP took a lead role in developing.\textsuperscript{199} The proposed model was based on overseas experience and, in particular, a model of integration developed in Duluth, Minnesota, USA, known as the ‘Duluth Model’.\textsuperscript{200} The committee argued for an integrated response combining a ‘strengthened justice system’, and ‘integrated multi-agency’ responses to ensure ‘that women receive an appropriate response, regardless of the pathway through which they choose to receive assistance’.\textsuperscript{201} DVIRC took an active role in developing a discussion paper leading up to the committee’s report and argued that, ‘within a climate of shrinking resources’, women’s and children’s needs should not be overlooked. It called for the development of a ‘unifying philosophy which established the need to ensure victims’ safety as the basis for all interventions’.\textsuperscript{202} Like WSS, the integrated framework prioritised the safety of women and children as a ‘paramount consideration in any response’ but was equally concerned to emphasise that ‘responses to family violence must recognise and address the power imbalance and gender inequality between those using violence (predominantly men) and those experiencing violence (predominantly women and children)’.\textsuperscript{203} As we have seen, since the 1990s, feminism has been the dominant discourse by which domestic violence has been understood at federal and state government policy levels. Whilst reaching agreement on these kinds of issues within the context of SSCRVF involved, as long-term domestic violence services activist and committee representative Rose Solomon recounts, ‘robust discussions and debates … in the first couple of years’,\textsuperscript{204} SSCRVF was nevertheless operating within a policy context framed by WSS that had articulated domestic violence as a form of violence against women, reflecting the gender-based nature of the problem.

SSCRVF was also a point of consultation on other developments that were occurring as part of WSS, including the police code of conduct. WSS identified law reform as one it its key objectives and this gave rise to many Department of Justice (DoJ) initiatives that were developed in consultation with the committee. They included the development of the family violence courts, the review of the \textit{Crimes (Family Violence) Act}, and an inquiry into the defences and partial excuses commonly presented for homicide. In order to advance their


\textsuperscript{200} Melanie F. Shepard and Ellen L. Pence (eds), \textit{Coordinating Community Responses to Domestic Violence: Lessons from Duluth and Beyond}, Sage, Thousand Oaks 1999.

\textsuperscript{201} SSCRVF, \textit{Reforming}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{202} DVIRC, \textit{Integrated Response}, p.10.

\textsuperscript{203} SSCRVF, \textit{Reforming}, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{204} Solomon interview.
recommendations to government on these kinds of policy developments, SSCRFV initiated a

Throughout 2004 and 2005, cross-government and community sector collaboration continued
in accordance with the objectives of WSS and was facilitated by SSCRFV and its framework
for an integrated services system, as outlined above. In 2004, this led to the development of a
whole-of-government bid to Treasury’s Economic Review Committee (ERC) to improve
funding for existing domestic violence services and to access new funding for non-specialist
domestic violence organisations to deliver domestic violence programs. Victoria Police
played an important role in driving this work, as Newman explains: ‘I sat in meetings where
police told us to lift our game, which was exciting, but the problem with being in DHS is that
you’re competing with health for dollars.’\footnote{Newman interview.} The challenges of competing for funding
amongst other divisions of government thus goes some way to explaining why this bid was
unsuccessful in its first attempt and did not attract additional funding.\footnote{DV Vic minutes, 9 June 2004, BHA.}

However, despite this initial set-back, the committee continued to pursue its agenda, the outcome being that in 2005
a second bid was successful, and $35.1 million was allocated over four years to support the
reforms proposed by SSCRFV. Newman recounts how the bid succeeded by gaining higher
profile across senior ranks of government:

It really took two goes, because the first year we bid for the budget we didn’t get it and
a lot more work was done behind the scenes, and we got much more senior
sponsorship. So I think that part of the problem in the bureaucracy, while there was a
lot of goodwill, the bureaucrats driving it were generally people at my level trying to
convince their bosses that the police are really serious about this and we’ve got a state-
wide committee and we really need to be putting in … So it got a life of its own
eventually, whereby bidding across whole of government and by the police really
upped-the-ante.\footnote{Newman interview.}

Also significant in enabling this achievement, as former refuge worker and bureaucrat Marg
D’Arcy recounts, was that domestic violence services were organised at ‘getting together and
actually lobbying the politicians for funding … They spent a day in parliament, they met with
Ministers, they met with backbenchers’.\footnote{D’Arcy interview.} The bid was further enhanced by the release of a
VicHealth report in 2004 assessing the health impact of intimate partner violence on

\footnotesize{206 Newman interview.}
\footnotesize{207 DV Vic minutes, 9 June 2004, BHA.}
\footnotesize{208 Newman interview.}
\footnotesize{209 D’Arcy interview.}
women. It concluded that this was the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44 years. This project was co-ordinated by Lyn Walker, who recounted that the publicity it generated was well timed to stimulate further momentum:

We got front page in the Age, it was on every TV and radio station across the state and probably across the country and globally, and hit the papers at the same time as a bid was being prepared to support further integration of the service system. The acting premier and Christine Nixon launched the report and I’m sure that the focus on the issue assisted a cabinet decision to allocate resources to improve the service response.

In relation to domestic violence service delivery, funding was earmarked for outreach services, after-hours support, intensive case management, counselling and support services, and regional private rental brokerage. Notably, funding for refuges or other forms of social housing was not incorporated in the funding package. So, while the success of the bid was cause for great optimism amongst domestic violence services, it soon became grounds for considerable distress when DHS distributed the funding through a form of competitive tendering and adopted ‘expressions of interest’ as their preferred method of purchasing the domestic violence services. Bureaucrat Di Godfrey explains that this process was undertaken with the view that DHS ‘needed all of the services to sign onto the [policy] directions and … not just for the growth money’. The tendering process caused ‘great grief’ amongst domestic violence services because of the uncertainty and competition it generated. However, despite these obstacles, there were examples of domestic violence services collaborating to strengthen the calibre of their tenders. In the eastern region, for example, domestic violence services worked together in order to prevent therapeutic-oriented organisations such as Relationships Australia gaining funding for domestic violence outreach services, reflecting, as long-term domestic violence services worker Wendy Austin recounts, that the ‘women working together thing is still very strong’.

The DHS process reflected, in former bureaucrat David Green’s words, ‘the ahistorical and short term-ist perspective’ of ‘DHS handling’:

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211 VicHealth, Health Cost, p. 10.
212 Walker interview.
214 Godfrey interview.
215 Mahoney interview.
216 Austin interview.
If significant people in DHS had an appreciation, had a historical perspective of the policy area that they’re working in, even if they’re not feminist in orientation, or they're not particularly passionate about the issues, but at least if they had it, there would be some cause to say can “we learn from history … we learn from the evolution of this process”.  

The assumption that domestic violence services were averse to taking part in an integrated reform agenda, and were therefore in need of coercion, is indeed ‘ahistorical’ because members had argued for a greater level of cooperation and co-ordination amongst service providers for the better part of a decade. What would appear even more incongruous is that the bulk of criticism regarding domestic violence services’ disinclination to engage with external organisations had been directed towards women’s refuges, which were surprisingly left out of the funding and reform process altogether. This can in part be explained, as Austin has commented, by the fact that DHS was not capable of tendering women’s refuges because they did not have access to their property titles, many of which had been purchased by services with DHS funds in the late 1980s, which made the process too difficult. Godfrey confirmed that refuges were excluded from the tendering and reform process because DHS hadn’t ‘sorted out the ongoing issues around who owns them’. This did not alter the fact that the government was determined to regulate community service organisations according to a model of business-style competition and to avoid investment in bricks-and-mortar. As Janine Mahoney recounts:

The government has done a lot with domestic violence in recent years, but I don’t think it listens to the sector as much as it should on what else is needed. Yes, they’ve brought in an integrated model, and yes they have provided additional funding for things such as counselling but the actual refuges, the crisis accommodation, got nothing, and they haven’t actually had any increase in funding for probably seventeen or eighteen years.  

Equally disappointing for domestic violence services at this time, as Oberin argues below, was the fact that the majority of the 2005 funding, which had been publicly announced as a new investment, was mostly recycled:

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217 Green interview.  
218 Austin interview.  
219 Godfrey interview.  
220 Mahoney interview.  
It was a smoke screen when they announced the $35 million. It was already existing money that they re-announced. So they actually put the domestic violence outreach services up for tender, which was a shocking thing to do, and they never should have done that, that was outrageous … most of that 35 million was repackaged outreach money.\textsuperscript{222}

The integrated focus of the new reforms meant organisations external to the domestic violence services movement would increasingly be engaged in the direct provision of services to women and children experiencing domestic violence. This process has been referred to as ‘mainstreaming’ and concern has been expressed that, as it occurs, ‘issues lose their power or get whittled down somehow’.\textsuperscript{223} As Chapters 1 and 2 have documented, similar concerns were held by feminists who launched the refuge movement in Victoria. They had been reluctant to engage with conservative organisations because of concerns that their movement would become fragmented and depoliticised. However, despite the funding of a large number of diverse women’s refuges during the 1970s, the movement retained a surprising degree of unity, and feminist principles were enshrined in their policies and practice.

Despite misgivings by some about the effects of mainstream service delivery in response to domestic violence, others have espoused its benefits, perceiving it as ‘a good thing’ because women experiencing domestic violence do not only present at specialist domestic violence organisations, and should still ‘receive a professional response informed by a gendered understanding of violence against women that prioritises their safety’.\textsuperscript{224} Similarly, Walker has argued that ‘on the one hand you’d never want to see the demise of specialist feminist women’s services, but also you don’t want to block progression of good mainstream service delivery. We need both’.\textsuperscript{225} On this issue, former DVIRC worker Donna Zander raises the pertinent point that the incidence of women seeking support for domestic violence has never been limited to domestic violence services, and argues that, whilst she has often worked outside the ‘DV sector’, she has always undertaken ‘DV work’:

[T]he domestic violence sector often sees itself as a sector … outside the mainstream, where domestic violence happens a lot of the time. So I find this notion of the DV sector quite an interesting one, because what is it? And when are you doing DV work? And when are you not? Because I don’t think I’ve ever stopped doing DV work.\textsuperscript{226}

\textsuperscript{222} Oberin interview.  
\textsuperscript{223} Morris interview.  
\textsuperscript{224} McCormack interview.  
\textsuperscript{225} Walker interview.  
\textsuperscript{226} Zander interview.
McCormack raises the significant point that a worker’s gender does not automatically equate to a feminist perspective, arguing that ‘you can have women who are workers who don’t necessarily believe or understand that violence is gendered’. 227 In a similar vein, Bush has argued that the seemingly arbitrary separation between women’s services, including sexual assault and domestic violence services, has only served to weaken the focus on the needs of women, arguing that they should instead ‘all come together and create some kind of broader women’s focus’. 228 During the 1990s, as we have seen, there were some attempts to forge greater unity between women’s services but they were not pursued. However, in 2001, Australia’s inaugural conference focusing on domestic violence and sexual assault was convened in Queensland and later, in 2004, a Victorian conference convened by DV Vic and the Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA) was designed to highlight the commonalities between the two policy areas. Walker has predicted that this trend will continue into the future, resulting in the ongoing diminution of ‘the lines between DV and sexual assault’. 229 Reflecting this trend, in 2009 the Victorian government released its plan to prevent violence against women. 230 These developments also reflect contemporary feminist theorisations that have constructed violence against women as a continuum. 231

Forging New Ground and Looking Ahead

As we have seen, responding to the different requirements and subjectivities of women presented opportunities for the domestic violence services, whose conceptualisations of feminism and domestic violence had tended to universalise the experiences of Anglo, able-bodied and heterosexual women. However, in the face of challenges by marginalised groups of women, domestic violence services acknowledged their shortcomings and, by the early 2000s, were attempting to better respond to the needs of these women. This process was expedited by government bureaucracy. A long history of advocacy and action by migrant activists, for example, meant that by 2003 the IWDVS offered a range of services that included telephone information, case management, secondary consultation and community education. IWDVS also worked to ensure that mainstream domestic violence services offered

227 McCormack interview.
228 Bush interview.
229 Walker interview.
culturally appropriate support by providing them with audit checklists.\textsuperscript{232} Years of migrant women’s activism had resulted in domestic violence services having achieved:

   terrific things to be inclusive of women of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds … they worked very hard to be inclusive and put practices in place … Now you wouldn’t come close to that in general homelessness services. I’m proud of the movement for that.\textsuperscript{233}

Other marginalised groups, though they had not been able to achieve the same outcomes, continued to work towards their own objectives and, during the first half of the 2000s, a number of important developments occurred to assist women with disabilities and Aboriginal women. This section will pay particular attention to these developments, which also informed domestic violence services’ ongoing relationship to feminism, a concluding point of discussion in this chapter.

\textbf{Aboriginal Taskforce}

From the mid-1990s onwards and in response to their experiences of marginalisation within domestic violence services, Aboriginal activists had, as we have seen, argued for a strategy to tackle domestic violence in their communities that would focus on their particular needs. The state government recognised the needs and began to develop an Indigenous Victorian Family Violence Strategy as a priority area for whole-of-government action under their \textit{Forward Plan for Women 2000–2003}.\textsuperscript{234} This was followed by an Indigenous-led task force appointed in October 2001 with the dual aims of engaging Indigenous people throughout the state to develop ‘community-led’ strategies for dealing with Indigenous family violence and providing a report to the Victorian government with recommendations for ‘a culturally appropriate state-wide strategy for addressing family violence issues in an integrated and holistic manner’.\textsuperscript{235}

Joint responsibility for overseeing the strategy would be shared between Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV) and DHS. In 2002–2003, the Victorian state budget allocated $7.6 million over four years to support its development. This was complemented by a range of initiatives, including regional action groups, support officers, a whole-of-government departmental

\textsuperscript{232} ‘Immigrant Women’s Domestic Violence Services Update’, 2003, BHA.
\textsuperscript{233} Fraser interview; In 2010 IWDVS became InTouch Inc. Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence. See InTouch Inc. Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, \textit{Barriers to the Justice System Faced by CALD Women Experiencing Family Violence}, InTouch Inc., Melbourne 2010.
\textsuperscript{234} OWP, \textit{Valuing Victoria’s Women}.
working group and a state-wide Indigenous family violence forum.\textsuperscript{236} Money was also allocated for an Indigenous family violence community initiatives fund, reflecting the taskforce’s concern to ‘facilitate a process whereby communities begin to take ownership of the issue of family violence’.\textsuperscript{237} In December 2003, the taskforce released a report identifying ‘key points’ that should underpin the development of a state-wide strategy.\textsuperscript{238} The report emphasised the importance of implementing measures, ‘which are owned and driven by communities and create an environment which empowers individuals, families and community groups to take control of their lives by dealing directly with the underlying issues’.\textsuperscript{239} In their response to the report, the government acknowledged ‘that Indigenous people want not only to identify the priorities but also drive the process at the local community level’.\textsuperscript{240} In 2005, an Indigenous partnership forum was established to develop and implement a ten-year plan to tackle the issue of Indigenous family violence. This ‘community-driven’ approach stands in contrast to mainstream responses to domestic violence, which, as we have seen, were taken on by government in a way that has been criticised for failing to reflect the voice of the community.

A detailed history of Aboriginal people’s activism in response to the problem of domestic violence remains to be written and is beyond the scope of this thesis for reasons already stated. However, I have sought to provide brief accounts of Aboriginal people’s responses and protests, both to the problem of domestic violence and to Anglo domestic violence services. I have done this to stress the continuity of their efforts, the distinctiveness of their demands and the centrality of whiteness, not only to the domestic violence services movement but to feminism and the process of history writing itself, where ‘assumptions [can] disremember the structural advantage of being white, and [can] generalise specifically white cultural practices and ways of seeing and being in the world as normal’.\textsuperscript{241}

\textsuperscript{236} VWRADVS minutes, July 2002, BHA.
\textsuperscript{237} VIFVT, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{238} VIFVT, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{239} VIFVT, p. 17.
Women with Disabilities

We have successfully locked out all sorts of women and we’ve locked them out by reframing what it is that we’re talking about.\textsuperscript{242}

As we have seen, throughout the 1990s, Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) and the Victorian Women’s Disability Network (VWDN) publicised the issue of violence against women with disabilities and, as a direct result, an action plan for refuges was developed in Victoria in order to improve their responsiveness.\textsuperscript{243} During the first half of the 2000s, activists continued to publicise these women’s needs, which meant that Victorian services moved from the point of not ‘want[ing] to deal with this issue’ to ‘realis[ing] that [they are] one of their key target groups … that are primarily the most vulnerable’.\textsuperscript{244} However, the struggle by women with disabilities for recognition and inclusion in domestic violence services has been particularly long and arduous, in part because of their particularly disadvantaged position in society and lack of representation as workers in services. This lack of representation reflects their double marginalisation, as executive director of Women With Disabilities Victoria (WWDV) (formerly VWDN) Keran Howe reminds us, ‘by virtue of having a disability and by virtue of being women’.\textsuperscript{245}

In the follow-up to recommendations from a national work group run by and for women with disabilities in 1998, members of VWDN and DVIRC lobbied the Minister for Community Services and Disability, Christine Campbell, for funding to support a project to further ‘develop relationships between the disability and domestic violence sector’.\textsuperscript{246} Chris Jennings was appointed project director in 2002; she recalls the invisibility of women with disabilities in government policy at this time:

\begin{quote}
Almost all Government policy documents [and] position statements around violence against women excluded any mention of women with disabilities. They all included mention of Indigenous women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds. Now I’m not suggesting for one moment that those women are getting appropriate responses … I am saying that as recent as seven years ago, they were acknowledged as groups of women for whom gender violence had an impact on their lives. Women with disabilities were not.\textsuperscript{247}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{242} Howe interview.
\textsuperscript{243} WWDA, \textit{Ramp}.
\textsuperscript{244} Tomas interview.
\textsuperscript{245} Howe interview.
\textsuperscript{246} Howe interview.
\textsuperscript{247} Jennings interview.
While Jennings’ position was initially funded for only twelve months, she was able to continue until 2009 largely through the support of philanthropic organisations, including the Reichstein Foundation. Part of her role included publicising ‘the need for a funded focus on violence against women with disabilities’. VWDN also continued to lobby for funding, which was eventually forthcoming in 2005 when they partnered with Women’s Health Victoria and established the VWDN Advocacy Information Service (VWDN AIS). Keran Howe was appointed project manager to further develop the new service and was appointed the inaugural executive officer in 2007. The organisation became the ‘first port of call for advice by organisations and government with regard to issues concerning women with disabilities’. At the same time, and also as a result of years of lobbying, VWDN won a place on the SSCRFV.

From that time, WWDV, as Howe recounts, ‘worked really closely with DV Vic’, reflecting a conscious decision by the network to ‘work with our sisters’. Disability advocates have been concerned to redress the past failings of the feminist movement, which did not ‘recognise women with disabilities, just as black women were not recognised’. Similarly, Jennings recalls her efforts to persuade those whose ‘core work is violence against women’ to also accept that their ‘core work is supporting women with disabilities’. Jennings asked domestic violence workers if they intended just to be ‘advocates for some women or does your feminist understanding include all women?’ Her challenge eventually elicited a positive response:

When I first started here I would probably have been a very lone voice that would be at a meeting that would raise the issue of violence against women with disabilities. Seven years down the track that’s not the case anymore, there’s a number of people and services that take an interest and carriage of that.

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248 Jennings interview.
250 Howe interview; For a detailed history of WWDV, including achievements of more recent years, see Rosemary Francis and Nikki Henningham, Women With Disabilities Victoria: Empowering Women, Claiming our Future, Women with Disabilities Victoria, Melbourne 2010.
251 Howe interview.
253 Jennings interview.
254 Jennings interview.
255 Jennings interview.
At the same time, advocates have pointed out the disability movement’s failure to recognise gender issues, leading Howe to reflect—despite the inadequacy of feminism where women and disability are concerned—that there remains little doubt amongst disability advocates that ‘we still need feminists’.256 For example, feminists have been able to expose the fact that the oppression of women with disabilities is compounded by their gender because, as Jennings observes, they may not ‘really understand the impact of the violence in their lives’, because ‘they haven’t had a lot of support … to engage with thinking about and understanding themselves as women first’.257

Concern has also been expressed by Jennings that the domestic violence sector was at risk of being ‘co-opted by the resource issue’, that is, using the chronic underfunding of services to focus on ‘how difficult it is to provide a service’ to women with disabilities, a response that ‘allows us … the space to shirk our responsibility’.258 The impact of such action on women with disabilities would be unthinkable, Jennings points out, because ‘you are saying it’s okay for these women to experience abuse’.259 As we have seen, however, domestic violence workers have in fact adapted their ways of operating to become responsive to different needs and subjectivities and the range of issues with which women present. Despite these achievements, Jennings’ concerns are shared by others, including Dimopoulos, who maintains that some services still fail to consider ‘the diversity of women’s experiences’, which tells us … as a movement, [because] we are still fixated on the imaginary universal woman that doesn’t exist. Women are complex and diverse and to that extent I think the refuge program has had to be really challenged, and some of them have really understood it, and really moved forward with it, and others haven’t.260

**Feminism and Domestic Violence Services: ‘A Dirty Word?’**261

Identification with ‘feminism’ or ‘feminist service provision’ was explicit in the domestic violence services until the late 1990s. However, by 2005, this was no longer as apparent, despite feminism’s long-lasting impact on conceptualisations of domestic violence articulated by DV Vic as ‘a gendered political issue’ resulting from ‘patriarchal structures’ that worked to ‘sanction violence against women and children’.262 Moreover, the practice of Victorian domestic violence services has continued to be informed by a commitment to supporting

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256 Howe interview.
257 Jennings interview.
258 Jennings interview.
259 Jennings interview.
260 Dimopoulos interview.
261 Dimopoulos interview.
women in our services to understand that they are not responsible for the violence and to assist them to see the ways in which our society supports violence towards women and children’. Feminism, then, has been well and truly institutionalised as the dominant discourse by which domestic violence is understood and its influence is evident ‘in the way that many state and territory policies situate domestic violence within a gendered analysis’. This section considers why it was then that, by the mid-2000s, the domestic violence services movement had become increasingly equivocal about its relationship to, and identification with feminism, prompting one long-term activist to conclude that ‘feminism is a dirty word’.

One explanation, as this thesis has argued, can be seen in feminism’s propensity to universalise the experiences of Anglo, able-bodied and heterosexual women, which left many women, including migrants, Aboriginal women and women with disabilities, experiencing ‘frustration and anger about being left out of the feminist dialogue’. In particular, radical feminism provided the theoretical basis for the refuge movement’s construction of domestic violence, which came to be defined within the parameters not only of gender inequality but also of the patriarchal home, leaving many other women’s experiences of violence silenced. This framework has been criticised by feminist scholar Anannya Bhattacharjee who has argued that, in the context of domestic violence, feminism’s constructions of the private and public, based as they are upon the experiences of white middle-class women, have been largely imaginary.

Radical feminism’s influence on the adoption of collective forms of organising in domestic violence services has been supplanted in recent years by government bureaucracy’s insistence on hierarchical modes of administration. So too has the long-held feminist resolve to limit membership of domestic violence services to women, come under growing pressure to be inclusive of, and work alongside, external organisations that include men. These changes have resulted in a widening gap between the feminist base of domestic violence services and their increasingly non-feminist methods of organising. Growing disenchantment with feminism as a ‘politics of emancipation’ has added to this dilemma and has been paralleled in other spheres, as documented in the conceptual chapter of this thesis.

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264 Murray and Powell, p. 532.
265 Dimopoulos interview.
266 Jennings interview.
267 Bhattacharjee, p. 313.
268 Lake, Equal, p. 15.
What has also been characteristic of domestic violence services in years gone by is the sometimes bitter internal conflict and ‘finger pointing’ that has characterised its internal negotiations, particularly in relation to differences between feminists themselves and forms of service provision. This has resulted in considerable anguish for activists such as Rose Solomon, who comments, if ‘being feminist means impos[ing] my beliefs and my philosophies on other women, then I don’t want to be a feminist’. Although, in more recent years, these politics have settled to a considerable degree, resulting in greater unity and tolerance, it was only recently, that as ‘a young woman’, Bree Oliver’s experience was less than ‘warm and fuzzy’. As Oliver explains, she made the decision to leave DV Vic because she became ‘sick of feeling so undeserving and alienated’. This raises another issue that may help explain domestic violence services’ current reluctance to promulgate feminism as its raison d’être—that is, its lack of favour with a young generation of women who do not want ‘to associate themselves with the concept or notion of feminism in any way’. The services’ relationship to feminism, Oliver contends, should be actively contested:

[F]eminism should be an active discussion and ongoing debate and ongoing reflection about what it means to do what we do, and whether what we we’re doing now is the most appropriate way to do it … I think it is always important that our history informs the present, I just don’t know whether we need to bring every little bit of it with us because it prevents us from picking stuff up which might be useful.

From the 1990s onwards, many activists deliberately distanced themselves from identification with feminism because the political climate was so hostile to feminist women’s services. Despite the improved context of the latter 2000s for domestic violence services, scepticism about feminism remained widespread. For example, in the context of giving training to domestic violence workers, Geddes warned providers ‘to be careful so that you don’t come across as too ratbag feminist in what you do … you don’t want to lose anybody because they’re a bit nervous about feminism’.

The human rights framework adopted at the Beijing world conference for women in 1995 reflecting the fact that various forms of gendered violence was increasingly being understood as a human rights violation. From the 2000s onwards, a human rights framework became an important guiding element in policy, legislation and practice in relation to domestic violence

269 Solomon interview.
270 Oliver interview.
271 Oliver interview.
272 Bush interview.
273 Oliver interview.
274 Geddes interview.
in Victoria and nationally.\footnote{Domestic Violence Victoria, \textit{Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children}, DV Vic, Melbourne 2006; OWP, \textit{A Right to Respect}; National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children, \textit{Time For Action}.} In Victoria, the introduction of the \textit{Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006} has meant that public and statutory authorities, and state and local governments, are required to take human rights into consideration when providing services, making laws and setting policies. A human rights–based framework has significant implications for domestic violence services, because it provides greater impetus to recognition of the needs and rights of different groups of women as citizens. However, the concept of human rights in this context arguably also generates additional reluctance for domestic violence services to persist in seeing feminism as ‘a natural political destination for all women’.\footnote{Ang, p. 57.} As historian Marilyn Lake puts it, ‘feminism might not be the most appropriate or urgent politics for all women … For different oppressions are differences not necessarily of degree, but of kind’.\footnote{Lake, \textit{Equal}, p. 15.} On the other hand, Bush believes that the domestic violence services sector should pursue its commitment to feminism but in a manner that enables others entry. She concedes that this poses a ‘major challenge for the sector in terms of how do we bring on board people and look at ourselves and diversify in ways that we can appeal to more people and in different ways?’.\footnote{Bush interview.} As a starting point, she suggests that the sector should adapt ‘older understandings of feminism to more contemporary … understandings of feminism, bringing younger feminists along the way’.\footnote{Bush interview.}

**Conclusion**

By 2005, as this chapter demonstrates, many of the aims and objectives of domestic violence services—including the promotion of gender equity and the development of an inclusive service system—had become absorbed in the Victorian state Labor government’s policy framework for tackling violence against women. At the same time, a positive foundation for cooperative relations was re-established between bureaucrats and member activists. However, the ability to achieve true ‘partnership’ with government in a context of unequal power relations—where the government has continued to make use of its capacity to exert rigid control over the planning and operation of human service organisations—has, unsurprisingly, been questioned. These questions have included concerns raised by activists as to whether domestic violence services have continued to reflect the needs of women in the community. Nevertheless, as I have outlined above, those involved in the domestic violence services have
continued to adapt to their changing environment by altering their aims and methods with many positive results. Whilst concerns that the sector would become depoliticised have to some degree been realised, this was largely the result of economic rationalist and/or neo-liberal agendas of government, rather than a consequence of mainstream service delivery or changing methods of engagement by the movement’s peak body with the state.

I have also documented how, within the movement, marginalised groups of women worked strategically to ensure their voices were heard, and continued to press for their needs to be met. In recent years, this has resulted in specialised funding and taskforces to tackle particular issues confronting migrant and Aboriginal women and women with disabilities. This represents a considerable modification of the original feminist framework. Even though foundational feminist principles are now implicit in government policy and sector guidelines for working with women in domestic violence services, ironically the movement itself has become less explicitly identified with the politics of feminism. I have argued that this can in part be explained by a backlash against exclusionary practices and dogmatic interpretations of feminism and/or feminist service provision. In addition, the external environment in Victoria was particularly hostile to feminist services from the mid-1990s, and to feminism more broadly, which caused a growing number of activists deliberately and strategically to distance themselves from identification with it, particularly when engaging with external organisations.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Only when [women] are seen as equal partners with men in the decisions that are made in the world will they then not be seen as a punching bag.¹

In the 1970s, feminists in Victoria and across Australia established women’s refuges, and, amongst their many goals, they sought the elimination of what they soon named ‘domestic violence’. They argued that the problem arose as a result of men’s power over women, and their powerful re-framing of its causes contested dominant understandings that had previously constructed such violence as arising from the nature of individual men and women. This thesis has examined the development of this new understanding and its emergence as the dominant discourse underpinning policy during the past three decades. It is important because women’s activism in history all too often becomes invisible. Whilst the achievement of Australian feminists in exposing and re-framing this long-term social problem has been well documented, the research findings presented here augment our knowledge—not only in relation to how this critical naming and framing process occurred in Victoria but also in explicating the ongoing and sustained commitment of movement activists to redress domestic violence over the subsequent thirty-year period. As this thesis has documented, there have been many hard-fought achievements throughout this time. Significantly, and as former Victorian Labor Party Minister, Kay Setches contends above, feminists in the 1970s argued that the eradication of domestic violence would necessitate a change in the role and status of women in society. Three decades later, such change has been uneven and is far from complete.

In this thesis I have shown that feminism was fundamental to the work of domestic violence services across the time frame examined, though some types of feminisms were stronger than others at different times. The influence of radical feminism was significant for the direction of the movement in its early years, whereas, from the early 1990s onwards, liberal feminism assumed a dominant influence. This shift has been reflected in each of the three interdependent themes that emerged from the research, which I discuss below. I have further argued that the movement’s endeavours were played out on a field marked by internal conflict, under-resourcing, ethnocentrism, and a shifting political and institutional context that included the particularly exigent onset of economic rationalism. Despite these challenges, and the ideological diversity that was characteristic of the Victorian movement, my research

¹ Setches interview.
shows that activists maintained a sustained and overwhelming commitment to supporting the needs of women and children in their services. The remainder of these concluding remarks is dedicated to summarising the key findings of the thesis in accordance with the three specified themes.

The first of the three themes explored—the influence of feminism on the movement’s ideas and aims—describes how feminists from Melbourne’s women’s liberation movement instigated the refuge movement in Victoria. Feminist discourses, and in particular radical feminism, informed their ideas and aims. Stressing the role of women’s agency in historical transformations, I have documented how these feminists took action by establishing refuges with the aim of shifting the allocation of society’s resources so that women could establish autonomous households financially independent of men, and thus eliminate the need for refuge. Simultaneously, radical feminists sought to politicise the issues facing women in refuge, claiming they resulted from unequal gender relations. Their advocacy work until the end of the decade was directed to a broad range of issues affecting the lives of these women, and the issue of homelessness and housing for women and children was central to their campaigns. As an extension of their radical feminist philosophy and aims to change the structures of society, refuge activists rejected traditional forms of charitable welfare provision, and also deliberately adopted methods of working with women that set them apart from the professional social worker. Although the movement was constituted by women of diverse feminisms and backgrounds, not all of whom identified with feminist ideas, they generally shared a commitment to challenging the judgemental approach that characterised traditional charities, and the assumption of superiority through professional expertise that was the hallmark of the modern social worker.

The thesis further documents the process whereby, at the end of the 1970s, the refuge movement had successfully constructed the problem of domestic violence as a feminist issue. Specifically, domestic violence came to be defined by the refuge movement within the parameters of gender inequality and the patriarchal home. As a corollary, I have argued that refuges did not respond to the pre-existing problem of domestic violence, but instead engaged in the process of reframing it as a feminist issue over time according to radical feminist theorisations of gender and the family. In making these points, I have drawn on the work of post-structuralist feminists who highlight the way that social problems are contested and influenced by competing discourses and subjectivities.
Further, I have shown how, over the same time period, this definition of domestic violence underpinned the criteria for women entering refuge, as well as the emergence of a high-security refuge model based on secret addresses that was unique to Victoria. With regard to the latter, the Victorian movement’s insistence on secret addresses for women’s refuges reflected their commitment to organisational autonomy and women’s safety. Yet the thesis also shows that these developments reflected a refuge movement dominated by Anglo, able-bodied, and middle-class women; this generated exclusionary practices towards those who fell outside its boundaries. Indeed, by the end of the 1970s, it was the official policy of the Victorian movement to exclude women from their services who were experiencing homelessness, English language difficulties, disabilities, and psychiatric, drug and alcohol issues; and it was their unofficial policy to target married, Anglo, able-bodied, and heterosexual women with children experiencing domestic violence.

Oblivious to the contradictions involved in the exclusions that characterised the early refuge movement’s practices, radical feminists claimed to promote the unity of all women in their modus operandi by removing oppressive hierarchical structures and adopting collective organisational structures and processes. These were gradually implemented by all women’s refuges by the 1980s. I have argued that this process was at times empowering for the women involved, but it also meant that the differences between women in refuge, and their needs, were often overlooked or minimised, and collective methods did not always operate smoothly. As a result of the activism of marginalised groups of women, new refuges emerged to cater for their particular needs. And, from the 1980s onwards, these groups further demanded that mainstream services be more inclusive of their differing requirements, and subjectivities. By the 1990s, then, and in correlation with broader trends including the ‘cultural turn’ and its influence on feminist theory and activism, differences between women were being articulated, recognised and responded to within domestic violence services.

This growth in inclusiveness by the early 1990s was not the only change. The thesis also documents the rising influence of liberal feminism on the movement’s aims in focusing greater attention on improving the efficiency of their organisations and the effectiveness of their service delivery, above social change and gender equity. Evidence adduced here demonstrates the influence of conservative groups in bringing about these shifts, alongside an enhanced level of mutual respect and tolerance for the ideological diversity of women working in domestic violence services. However, these changes were met with resistance by radical elements in the movement that feared their goals of achieving women’s equality would be compromised. Despite the impetus by conservative groups to professionalise behaviour
and enhance efficiency in decision-making processes, by the 1990s Commonwealth and state governments were overwhelmingly leading the charge in these shifts, as they became increasingly determined to regulate community organisations at arms length according to the principles of managerialism and privatisation policy. Domestic violence services were unable to halt or reverse the overriding emphasis on professionalism across all realms of their practice, or the gradual adoption of hierarchical organisational structures within domestic violence organisations, and some adopted market philosophies in order to survive. However, until very recently, domestic violence services across all ideological persuasions continued to resist the outright adoption of hierarchical structures, and instead organised according to modified collective structures.

Whilst feminist principles are now implicit in government policy and sector guidelines for working with women in domestic violence services, it is also evident that the movement itself has become less explicitly identified with the politics of feminism. I argue that this can in part be explained by a backlash against the exclusionary practices of some women’s refuges, and dogmatic interpretations of feminism and/or feminist service provision. In addition, the external environment in Victoria was particularly hostile to feminist services by the mid-1990s, and to feminism more broadly, which meant that a growing number of activists deliberately and strategically distanced themselves from identification with feminism, particularly when engaging with external organisations.

The second thesis theme—the movement’s internal and external strategies and actions—describes in detail the changing tactics and methods adopted by the movement to achieve their goals. Direct action outside of mainstream institutions was central to the spirit of activism during the 1970s, and the first half of the 1980s. Activists in Victoria, and across Australia, protested by holding vigils, squatting, marching, and publicising the issues facing women in refuge during the 1970s, and continued to do so into the mid-1980s. The approach of radical feminists, in particular, was confrontational and forceful, and this extended to their interactions with other activists both inside and outside their movement. I have argued that, whilst this approach was challenging for many, including conservative members of the movement and government bureaucrats, it was also effective because the issues being articulated were of such gravity, and their analysis so powerful, groundbreaking and articulate, that many were forced to listen. From the early 1990s onwards, as I have demonstrated, under the growing leadership of liberal feminists within the movement, refuge activists’ tactics became less public and confrontational, as these leaders sought to work in partnership with external organisations, and generate reform within mainstream organisations.
This enabled the movement to position itself successfully so as to influence mainstream policy and programmatic development in relation to domestic violence across a range of non-government and government institutions, particularly within the judiciary. Notably, their capacity to do so had in part derived from the movement’s history of radicalism, which forced government institutions in particular to become more open and responsive.

For all the differences between the groups in the domestic violence services movement, the thesis demonstrates that participants in the Victorian movement were able to organise strategically and work together because of a shared commitment to women and children experiencing domestic violence. This commitment is evident over the three decades covered by this thesis. The instigation of the various unfunded peak bodies described here is an example of the capacity of the movement to work strategically both internally and with external bodies. I have also documented how, within the movement, marginalised groups of women operated strategically to ensure their voices were heard, and continued to press for their needs to be met. In recent years, this has resulted in specialised funding and taskforces to tackle particular issues confronting migrant and Aboriginal women, and women with disabilities.

Examination of particular incidents and crises has shown that working together was not always harmonious, and the movement’s history should not therefore be characterised as one of unmitigated feminist heroism and success, though certainly much was accomplished. Domestic violence activism was characterised by significant internal and external conflict until the 2000s, and there were clearly negative experiences for individual movement members as a result. Histories to date that have sought to minimise these tensions have been criticised for a propensity to generate seamless narratives of feminist achievement. This dissertation provides some counterbalance to those accounts of the women’s refuge movement that have glossed over the unruly nature of women’s political experiences. However, I also contend that the movement’s monumental achievements should not be minimised, but instead acknowledged publicly and given the dignity of serious historical analysis. This thesis has endeavoured to provide such an analysis and appreciation.

The final thesis theme—the relationship between the movement and external institutions such as ‘the state’—focuses on the domestic violence services movement’s engagement with state institutions, which resulted in considerable benefits for women and children escaping violence. These included the achievement of recurrent government funding, the expansion of services, the implementation of whole-of-government co-ordinated policy responses,
legislative and judicial reforms, and the ongoing adoption of a feminist framing of domestic violence in the construction of public policy. I have demonstrated how these changes have primarily come about because of the movement’s tireless advocacy, which forced governments to tackle the issue.

The thesis argues that the movement’s engagement with government bureaucrats, particularly during the 1970s, served to strengthen activists’ unity, despite initial fears among radical feminist refuge workers that the funding of refuges by the state would serve to undermine them. I have shown that, contrary to these feminists’ fears, state bureaucrats and other members of government during the 1970s and 1980s were very often supportive of the movement’s agenda. And women of all political persuasions played a critical role in supporting the movement to achieve co-ordinated policy development and funding for domestic violence services.

As we have seen, the influence of liberal feminism from the 1990s onwards had a significant effect in directing the movement’s engagement with the state. The movement became increasingly focused on achieving reform within the system, and lobbied for policy development, legislative change, and improved funding for services. Domestic violence services remained at the forefront of these processes, participating in countless committees and taskforces with the aim of ensuring that policy development and implementation met the practical needs of women, and that feminism continued to be the dominant discourse through which domestic violence was understood. However, the thesis makes it clear that this level of influence was only possible because radical feminists waged a long and hard-fought battle to force the issue onto the government’s agenda, thus making it a ‘legitimate’ policy problem, and therefore one of more central concern to liberal feminists.

Throughout the dissertation, I have demonstrated how these shifts in feminist ideology were also influenced by broader institutional and political transformations such as governments’ change of emphasis to economic efficiency rather than redistributive welfare in human services delivery. Reflecting this process, the relentless implementation in Victoria of economic rationalist policies in the 1990s radically changed the nature of the relationship between domestic violence services and the state. In particular, the imposition of competitive tendering inhibited open criticism of the government by community sector organisations, and thwarted their ability to operate autonomously or undertake political protest. However, I have shown here that the refuge movement did not, as some would suggest, simply give up on challenging government and politicising the issues facing women in their services. Despite
the threatening and competitive environment, domestic violence services opposed when they could, resisted where possible, and, over time, began to work in greater cooperation with each other to survive.

Domestic violence services have continued to undertake political advocacy in addition to service provision, despite dramatic underfunding; this continues today and places an unsustainable burden on small independent community organisations. Continued advocacy has only been possible because of the unpaid work of women who remain committed to redressing domestic violence. Significantly, refuges have been the most under-funded of all domestic violence services, and they have often been unable to meet minimum requirements in relation to basic staff entitlements. I have argued that this has stemmed, in part, from a changing institutional culture in which the government moved to redress domestic violence at the level of individuals over and above structural factors. Domestic violence services were forced to respond to innumerable administrative and organisational demands from government from the 1990s onwards, including expanding their service delivery—and all without additional financial support. I argue that successive Liberal and Labor governments in Victoria did little to tackle underfunding and under-resourcing, despite unrelenting advocacy by the movement and recommendations from numerous government advisory committees.

By 2005, as the last substantive chapter demonstrates, many of the aims and objectives of the domestic violence services movement—including the promotion of gender equity and the development of an inclusive service system—had been absorbed in the Victorian Labor government’s policy framework for tackling violence against women. At the same time, a new cooperative relation was re-established between bureaucrats and movement activists. This relationship, however, bore little resemblance to the movement’s engagement with the state during the 1970s and early 1980s; indeed, the locus of power had indelibly shifted. The ability to achieve true ‘partnership’ with government in a context of unequal power relations—where the government has continued to make use of its capacity to exert rigid control over the planning and operation of human service organisations—has, not surprisingly, been questioned. Activists have, for example, queried whether the domestic violence services movement continues to reflect the needs of women in the community. Nevertheless, as I have made clear, those involved in the movement have adapted to their changing environment by altering their aims and methods, and with many positive results.

The domestic violence services movement has had a powerful and transformative impact on the way that domestic violence is commonly understood and responded to in Victoria, and
more broadly, in Australia. The advocacy work of activists has resulted in the development of a plethora of services, programs, legislation, and government investment designed to tackle domestic violence, and this has real impacts on the daily lives of countless women and children. Yet the incidence of violence remains widespread, and the intractability of the problem is indicated by its responsibility for causing major health problems for women and substantial economic costs. Reflecting on the refuge movement’s origins provides us with some opportunity to consider why this social problem persists.

Activists in the 1970s sought the elimination of all the causes for women seeking refuge, including domestic violence, and, in order to achieve their goals, they set about attempting to redress issues of gender inequity. In particular, they tackled problems relating to women’s poverty, including their need for access to safe and affordable housing and economic independence. These problems remain stubbornly apparent today, and should therefore remain at the forefront of any social policy response designed to eliminate domestic violence. But there are other unresolved problems that need attention too. It is now widely recognised that the problem of violence in the home is located on a continuum of mistreatment that stems from inequality between women and men. However, compartmentalisation at a programmatic level generates exclusionary consequences for particular women, including those whose experience of interpersonal violence occurs outside the home. The factors that connect women’s different experiences of violence require specific attention and research, as well as policy and programmatic coordination and response. It is also critical that domestic violence services, and in particular women’s refuges, receive improved funding so as to avoid disastrous impending workforce retention problems. It is at once a failure of successive governments, as well as a feat of committed activists, that many of the movement’s achievements have come as a result of the unpaid work of women. This cannot continue indefinitely.

Recent policy initiatives reflect the consensus that, in addition to the need for wide-ranging integrated responses to support the diverse needs of women and children, the support needs of violent men also require recognition and resourcing. It is critical, therefore, that the domestic violence services movement leads future policy directions designed to deal with domestic violence. This is to ensure that programs continue to be informed by an analysis of domestic violence in which gendered power structures are understood to be the central cause of this devastating problem—and so that men’s violence can never again be framed simply as a problem arising from violent individuals, requiring policy responses targeted to the protection of passive women.
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