

# “No Room... Homelessness and the Experiences of Women of Non-English Speaking Backgrounds”

Annabelle Allimant and Stephanie Anne

Paper presented at  
5<sup>th</sup> National Homelessness Conference in Adelaide, Australia  
21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2008

## Abstract

Access to emergency accommodation and long term housing that is both secure and affordable is an issue relevant to many Australians, but especially for women and children of non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) escaping domestic and family violence in Australia. Women from NESB experience a heightened risk of homelessness due to multiple barriers in reporting their experiences of domestic violence and in accessing relevant information and support services. Women from NESB are often unaware of their rights in Australia and lack an understanding of what constitutes domestic violence and what protection is available to them. Violence towards women is prevalent within all cultures and across all socio-economic backgrounds. Different issues arise in working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities in Australia as there are varying levels of community recognition and responses to these issues. Cultural values and traditions that foster violence against women and children may remain unchallenged, and gender related roles may result in restrictive behaviours, beliefs and institutional arrangements. Women from NESB are further disadvantaged by prevalent practices of discrimination and a lack of cultural sensitivity and competency shown by service providers. Working with CaLD communities, particularly women from NESB, requires workers to engage in continuing professional development and self reflection to ensure the development of ethical, sensitive and responsive practices. This paper will critically examine service responses to women from NESB who have experienced domestic and family violence and address specific barriers that may be experienced. Factors leading to and compounding experiences of homelessness will also be addressed.

## Introduction

Working with women from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) requires knowledge, skills, competencies, resources and ongoing self reflection from service providers who are at the forefront of direct service delivery. These aptitudes do not happen by accident rather they have to be ensured through cross-cultural practices firmly embedded, funded and supported within an organisation. The practice framework of service providers is partly driven by a critical and inclusive organisational culture in place. Furthermore we suggest that it requires that workers hold a commitment to deliver services in a manner that is effective and efficient whilst respecting diversity at many levels. The coined phrase often used which continues to be applicable is that “*one size does not fit all*” and anyone working with CaLD communities would agree with this.

It is acknowledged that a service that is cross-culturally inclusive requires appropriate funding by government departments as well as sound financial management practices of ensuring money is allocated for costs related to working with people from CaLD. This would include working with professional interpreters, providing opportunities for cross-cultural training of staff and of course ensuring backfilling of positions so staff can be supported to attend appropriate professional development activities. This is not always the case and people from CaLD, as a result may receive services that are not inclusive of diversity and therefore are discriminatory. At the end of the day services often make decisions of distribution of funds with one paint stroke thereby disadvantaging some in the community who don't share the same culture and/or language as the dominant group. Unfortunately we continue to hear from workers that “*everybody is treated equally*” and we are well aware that this approach doesn't work as we are not all the same.

This paper is informed by the combined experiences of Annabelle, Stephanie and the staff team at the Immigrant Women's Support Service (IWSS) working with women and their accompanying children escaping domestic and family violence. We are aware of the risks associated to being

“No Room ... Homelessness and the Experiences of Women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds”

homeless and difficulties experienced by women from NESB to secure safe crisis accommodation and permanent housing when escaping domestic and family violence. The situations encountered in the work undertaken with women in violence are never easy. Working with people who are homeless irrespective of their ethnicity, who are marginalized, are disadvantaged and are oppressed by their predicament is never easy work. The title of this paper arose out of the deep frustration regularly felt by workers at IWSS. We have seen continuing and pervasive discrimination experienced by women from NESB when accessing support services. We acknowledge the multiple challenges faced by advocates in doing their work as can be experienced by anyone working in the community based sector with marginalized people however, the face of homelessness has multiple shades and it is only with shared understandings and knowledge that we can aim to make sense of some of the challenges we work with. We hope to do that with this paper and thereby continue to advocate for this target group to bring forth another reality that may not always be seen, understood, considered or acted on by organisations.

### **Immigrant Women's Support Services**

IWSS has a history of 23 years of direct service delivery to women and their accompanying children who are from NESB experiencing domestic and family violence and/or sexual violence in Queensland.

IWSS is the only service in the state that works specifically with women from NESB and their children in relation to issues of violence. Direct service delivery includes the provision of culturally and linguistically sensitive services that includes crisis support, short-term counselling, advocacy, court support, assisted referral to relevant services, and ongoing practical and emotional support to women and their children using a case management approach. Although IWSS is not funded as a statewide service it does extend its expertise and resources to domestic and sexual violence services and multicultural services throughout the state of Queensland. This is achieved through newsletters, mail outs, and telephone support to women and service providers. IWSS produces resources (brochures, fact sheets and others) in a number of community languages. These resources are provided to groups when involved in community education and training.

IWSS provides assistance to women from NESB who may have entered Australia as:

- o Refugee and Humanitarian entrants
- o Asylum Seekers or Unauthorised Arrivals
- o Migrants (Skilled, Business, Family, etc)
- o Temporary residents, in particular those arriving on a Prospective Partner (Fiancé) Visa or Provisional Partner (Spouse) Visa
- o Second generation born in Australia

### **The Difference between NESB and CaLD**

The term 'Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds' covers a diverse range of people from many countries, races, ethnicities, speaking hundreds of different languages and following the entire spectrum of religious, political and philosophical beliefs. The term 'Non-English Speaking Backgrounds' refers specifically to individuals whose first language is not English.

We acknowledge that there has been a wide critique of the term NESB which includes its demonstrable focus on the 'lack' of English skills and its failure to acknowledge the diverse and

"No Room ... Homelessness and the Experiences of Women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds"

often multiple language skills of people from diverse communities. The term CaLD has since become popular and incorporates those communities from other English speaking backgrounds who have migrated to Australia.

IWSS chooses to continue to use the term NESB as we recognise and work in response to the language barriers that may be experienced by women arriving from countries where English is not spoken. Individuals from all communities experience challenges in transition when arriving in Australia and adjusting to a new environment. These experiences are often made more difficult where English is not the first language. IWSS seeks to use the term NESB to acknowledge the language barriers with a recognition for the many skills and contributions made by those arriving from countries where English is not a first language.

We note that in South Australia and in Queensland, 16-23% of the population was born overseas (ABS 2006). A significant number were born in countries where English is a second language.

### **Specific Personal Barriers for Women from NESB**

There are a broad range of barriers and considerations in talking about women from NESB. This is not a homogenous group, but one characterized by diverse levels of education, literacy, cultural practices, socio-economic backgrounds, rural and urban backgrounds, religious beliefs, family structures, race and ethnicity. Generally speaking however, this group predominantly comes from low socio-economic situations. The work undertaken as well as research identifies specific personal barriers for women from NESB particularly those escaping domestic and family violence. This paper talks about some of these personal barriers including recognising and defining violence; knowledge of rights/access to information; communication barriers; personal fears; isolation; cultural barriers; residency status of women and income support.

#### *Recognising the Violence*

Women from NESB may have limited or no understanding of what constitutes domestic and sexual violence in the context of living in Australia. Differences can be observed in both legal and community recognition for sexual violence as a crime within an intimate partner or spousal relationship. In some countries lawful sexual activity within a marital relationship is not determined by a woman's consent. Anecdotal evidence suggests that sexual violence is often experienced by women where other forms of domestic violence are present as women's capacity to negotiate intimacy is diminished within a relationship where there is unequal power and use of violence by a partner.

#### *Knowledge of Rights / Access to Information*

- Women from NESB often experience significant barriers in accessing information and reporting their experiences of domestic and family violence. They are often unaware of their rights, support services available, and legislation in relation to domestic and family violence. Additionally, this information is not always readily available and/or accessible in community languages.
- Women on temporary visas are often intentionally misinformed by their sponsoring partner or spouse. We frequently hear women report that they have been told by a violent or abusive partner that if they choose to leave the relationship they will be deported and forced to return to their country of origin, or that they will lose residency of their children in Australia. This serves to instill fear, anxiety and confusion and may lead women to believe they have no

choice but to stay in violent relationships where their personal safety and that of their children is at continued risk.

- Limited or no understanding of the short-term nature of 'refuge' accommodation (safe emergency accommodation). For example refugees are often misunderstood by women to be refugee camps or women believe that once they go to refuge they can never go back to their homes or change their decisions and that they will have to follow the instructions from workers.

### Communication Barriers

Lack of proficiency in the English language makes it extremely difficult for women to access information about domestic and family violence and relevant support services; and to report their experiences and confidently negotiate systems in Australia.

### Personal Fears

- Women may have a legitimate fear of reprisal or escalating domestic violence if they speak out against domestic and family violence.
- Women may fear being disbelieved or blamed; and fear exclusion or persecution from their community.
- Women may have concerns in relation to confidentiality and the use of interpreters who are known to them in their community.
- There may be well founded fears of authority such as Police, courts and the legal system in Australia particularly for women where state sanctioned oppression was enforced in their country of origin. Past experiences of torture and trauma restrict women's confidence in some environments.

### Isolation

- Isolation is frequently experienced by women who have an absence of immediate and/or extended family or community support in Australia; or when the only significant connection to their identity and ethnicity in Australia is their abusive partner.
- Isolation from family and community may be a direct result of the control and abuse experienced within a violent or abusive relationship; or exclusion from community when reporting experiences of domestic and family violence or following separation.
- Some women may be taken to live in rural and remote areas where there are limited services and social connections thus exacerbating issues of isolation, access to services and dependency on abusive partners.
- Women from NESB frequently experience social marginalization and discrimination in Australia.
- Isolation may severely impact on women's mental, physical, emotional well being creating long term implications for women.

Stigma associated with domestic and/or sexual violence in all communities creates further isolation. Violence in the home continues to be seen as a private issue (Chapman 1999 in S. Rees 2004) making it difficult for individuals to openly talk about issues of violence in the family. This is particularly so if the perpetrator of violence is a person who is well regarded and respected within the community.

Women who are sponsored to come to Australia are often kept away from their communities and forbidden to have contact with family and friends in Australia or overseas. They are often exposed to cultural abuse which may include not being allowed to speak their language (even with their

"No Room ... Homelessness and the Experiences of Women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds"

children), practice their spiritual beliefs, cook traditional food or practice traditional grooming and attire.

### Cultural Barriers

- Many communities minimize or deny the incidence of violence against women and children, and women may experience significant pressure from their family or community to not disclose their experience of domestic and family violence.
- Women may have a strong internal sense of responsibility to protect the identity and reputation of their family and community.
- There may be cultural values and traditions that foster violence against women and children that remain unchallenged, and gender related roles that may result in restrictive behaviors, beliefs and institutional arrangements. In some cultures women may not have shared rights nor have life experience and skills in many areas. Examples of these are: finance, employment, and independent living that may present challenges for women in being able to negotiate independent living in Australia.
- Women's socialisation may include placing greater value on keeping the family together no matter what the consequences are for women and children. Women may be expected to fulfill their husband's demands and take greater responsibility for making the relationship "work".
- Spiritual beliefs that can act as the link to strongly encourage women to stay in relationships where domestic and family violence is present. Inaccurate interpretations of religious texts may be employed to advocate or support the use of violence.
- Stigma associated with domestic and/or sexual violence. Domestic and family violence continues to be the "family secrets" with the broader society absolving itself of responsibility.

### Residency Status of Women

- Limited or no knowledge of legal options to remain in Australia if the woman is a temporary visa holder and the relationship with the sponsoring partner / spouse had ended as a result of domestic and family violence.
- We often learn that women have invested significant financial and emotional resources in their preparations to marry, leaving family, friends, established jobs and all that is familiar in their country of origin to move to Australia with the intention of creating a shared life with their partner. For many women the prospect of returning to their country of origin after separation is unfathomable and is often accompanied by significant challenges and hardship. Some women face serious discrimination, rejection and even human rights abuses in returning to their country of origin where they may be blamed for the breakdown of the relationship and/or for causing shame to their families.
- When the woman is pregnant her Australian resident partner may threaten that the child will have to remain in Australia when born and the woman will be deported if she leaves the abusive relationship.
- Women may have no access to independent income. This often means that when they leave the abusive partner they are left without income for lengthy periods.

### Income Support

Women who are temporary visa holders may be eligible to access limited income support from Centrelink depending on which visa subclass they have at the time of escaping domestic violence. Some women can access special benefits, others may be eligible to access some payment for their children, and others may have a visa which allows them to work. Although the latter may be the case women escaping domestic violence may not necessarily be able to work due to their inability to speak English, access childcare, access to affordable and available public transport and instability in housing arrangements. Women who receive limited income may manage to cover the

"No Room ... Homelessness and the Experiences of Women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds"

costs of accommodation, but may not have adequate resources for other expenses. It is not uncommon for workers at IWSS to hear that women restrict their food intake and/or access to appropriate health care.

Some women can access financial support from their financial assessor of support. This is an option that is rarely taken as it implies that the assessor incurs a debt from Centrelink. In the context of case management, women disclose their fears around accessing this due to threats made against their family overseas, intimidation from the spouse/partner or assessor not to access this support or where the woman knows that the assessor does not have the financial capacity to pay.

In the majority of cases women have no access to income support while their applications for permanent residency is being determined by either the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), the Migration Review Tribunal (MRT), the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) and/or the Minister of DIAC. Women may wait months or years to have their applications finalised without access to income support and in some circumstances without eligibility to work.

### **Systemic Barriers for Women from NESB**

The personal experiences outlined for women from NESB present multiple areas for consideration when delivering services. This particular target group in the community has unique issues of access resulting from their ethnicity, culture and world views. To ease and maximise their experiences of accessing services organisations need to ensure their service meets the needs of all communities in their area including those of CaLD backgrounds.

Whilst most workers can name barriers or difficulties experienced by people from CaLD there are systemic barriers and a worker's practice framework may actually compound and often exacerbate the personal experiences of women from NESB, particularly when reporting domestic and family violence. These may include inappropriate use of professional interpreters; limited understandings of refugee experience; experiences of racism and discrimination; poor recruitment of people from CaLD and limited or no provision of information in community languages.

Services don't always engage professional interpreters when working with women; engaging inappropriate interpreters, wrong language or dialect or do not consider the gender of the interpreter. The use of children, friends and abusive partners as interpreters continues to be an ongoing concern in the work at IWSS. Women are being asked to sign forms or have serious processes undertaken without understanding content and/or consequences. The following is an example of how this can impact on a woman's well being and human rights.

*A woman arrived in Australia to join her husband; within weeks she was taken to a GP where her husband and mother-in-law acted as interpreters. She later presented to IWSS because of domestic violence and in the assessment she showed the worker what happened at the GP. She had been implanted with a contraceptive device – IMPLANON without her knowledge or consent.*

Lack of understanding by professionals of issues related to the refugee experience and multiple trauma of women that may include torture and trauma in their country of origin, sexual violence and trauma in refugee camps, and/or trauma on and after arrival in Australia.

"No Room ... Homelessness and the Experiences of Women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds"

Experiences of racism and discrimination from service providers in government and non-government agencies hinder women's access to services and support when needed. The responses heard by workers at IWSS and often women include experiences of racism in that they receive judgmental responses; being questioned in relation to their family structure; being questioned around spiritual beliefs or being told that they have been here long enough to speak English.

A service may appear unwelcoming or intimidating as the service image does not reflect cultural diversity of the community around them. For example the employment of staff from CaLD backgrounds may not be evident.

Service providers fail to provide relevant information in community languages. This point extends to considering the dissemination of information to women who may not be literate in their own language.

### Assessment of Domestic and Family Violence

Appropriate and timely assessment of domestic and family violence is critical when women from NESB seek to break patterns of violence. This requires levels of understanding of the complexity involved and appropriate cross-cultural skills that can breach gaps of culture, language and the myriad of issues already identified. As for many women in domestic and family violence there are windows of opportunities, hence it becomes the responsibility of the worker to ensure that this opportunity is utilised in the best interest of the woman. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the service provider to have the levels of competencies necessary to deal with the situation in a manner that would ensure confidence, accuracy of information and most of all clear understandings of what possible options are available. It is noted that assessment of domestic and family violence is an area that requires ongoing development and reflection in all areas. We continue to work with settlement support workers to ensure that women who are new arrivals in this country receive the support required in times of crisis. Women from new emerging communities are particularly vulnerable with limited female interpreters available, limited resources in the community and compounded issues of unemployment, racism and language skills. (Keel, M., et al, 2005). The following is an example of how an inappropriate assessment can impact on women's well being and human rights.

*Police attend a home following a report of a domestic disturbance. Police find a woman from NESB who is married to an Australian citizen from Anglo-Saxon descent. The woman has no English proficiency and appears reluctant to speak to the Police officers. The man reports that his wife became violent and shows Police scratches to his chest and face. Police do not interview the woman from NESB with a professional interpreter. Police concluded, based on this limited assessment, that domestic violence has occurred and that the woman was the perpetrator. Police take out an application for a Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) which lists the woman as the Respondent. This was later contested by the woman who, with the support of a professional interpreter, reported a history of domestic violence perpetrated against her by her husband. In this instance the woman discloses that the scratches on her husband's face and chest were caused in self defense as her husband had attempted to strangle her. Bruising to her neck did not appear until the following day. This DVPO was successfully contested by the woman.*

## Crisis Accommodation

This conference focuses on homelessness issues and this is an area that is of critical concern for IWSS in working with women from NESB escaping domestic and family violence. Women and their accompanying children often require crisis accommodation. This implies that refuges accommodate women without income, sometimes for lengthy periods of time. The ramification of this is that there are increasingly limited places for women and their children to go to irrespective of their residential status. Refuges housing a woman without income find it difficult to accommodate a second family with the same financial needs without causing a financial burden on their limited resources. It is IWSS experience that many refuge staff ask if the woman has income before taking on the referral.

The issue of accommodation for women without income causes significant concern to IWSS workers who work with the woman and are intimately aware of the crisis. IWSS staff work closely with DVConnect (a 24 hour domestic violence emergency line in Queensland), and often both services are powerless to provide accommodation as refuges may be unwilling to take the woman and her family. The only alternative being a temporary placement in a hotel room without support. Issues for women placed in hotels include lack of support, woman's perception of 'hotels' as being dirty and associated with improper conduct such as prostitution. This option therefore is never the optimum outcome as it often results in women returning to unsafe homes because of the isolation; lack of facilities including cooking facilities; inappropriate space for children and lack of support when compared to a refuge accommodation.

IWSS observes SAAP funded services refusal to provide emergency accommodation to women and their children from NESB who are escaping domestic and family violence is based on the following:

- Women who are without income or with limited income (including Special Benefit);
- Women who do not have proficient English language skills and require interpreting services;
- Women from specific ethnic backgrounds;
- Women with a large number of accompanying children;
- Women with no accompanying children; and
- Where women require emergency accommodation after hours.

The financial costs can be further examined as women are rendered dependant on emergency relief from refuges and welfare agencies and are unable to provide for their basic needs. Women who receive limited income often manage to cover costs for accommodation, but have little else for other expenses. It is not rare to hear that women restrict their food intake or health care as access to health services may be restricted depending on the visa and thus the woman may not be eligible to access public health care. The only health care women access is for emergencies which can incur costs that are covered by the refuge and / or supported by IWSS, charitable organisations and in very few cases friends or family support.

The issue of health care for women without residency status leaves women in fear of being deported or forcibly separated from their children as mentioned earlier. This misunderstanding of their residential status is often communicated by their Australian fiancé / husband / partner and can exacerbate depression and general well being of women (VicHealth, 2004). Further health concerns may include that women experience ongoing anxiety and uncertainty about the future while they wait for their application for permanent residency to be processed (Pham, A., 2000).

“No Room ... Homelessness and the Experiences of Women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds”



## **Medium Term or Independent Housing**

Additional challenges are faced when assisting women to access medium to long term independent housing that is safe, secure and affordable. Transitional housing is scarce and women face lengthy waiting lists when accessing community rent schemes or other housing options. Women awaiting determination on their applications for permanent residency cannot access Department of Housing or community rent schemes in Queensland as a direct result of the new One Social Housing Policy. Private rental is also becoming increasingly difficult for women to access. Some identified issues and specifics for women from NESB include:

- Competitive selection processes for tenancy;
- High rental costs;
- Lack of tenancy history;
- Knowledge of tenancy rights;
- Eligibility to apply based on stable/sufficient income;
- Large families and lack of suitable accommodation; and
- Discrimination against women from NESB.

## **Child Safety**

Women may also be required to demonstrate to the Department of Child Safety that they have secure housing in order for their children to remain in their primary care or to be returned to their care. IWSS is aware of instances where women have been unable to maintain tenancy agreements due to the loss of income following the removal of their children by the Department of Child Safety only to face further challenges in securing appropriate accommodation required for reunification. Women with large numbers of accompanying children may also experience difficulties in securing affordable housing.

Homelessness and child safety are inextricably linked and consideration for the needs of women as non-abusive parents is critical in supporting families who have been subject to domestic and family violence.

## **Setting a Culture of Inclusive Practice**

This paper has highlighted experiences for women from NESB escaping domestic and family violence, compounding systemic barriers and issues for consideration in meeting their specific needs. The actions required, do not happen by accident, but are part of an overriding culture that is maintained, supported and enforced within the organisation providing the service. It is the organisational culture in place that ensures services delivered are sensitive and appropriate to the needs of a diverse client base. It is appropriate to assume that workers have a professional and sound inclusive framework that ensures best practice according to the culture of the organisation they represent.

We argue that organisational culture is imperative in how a worker can operate and strongly influences practice. Inherent in this is the organisation's philosophy and values on service delivery that can uphold or constrain outcomes. In our experience of working with individuals from CaLD backgrounds and women from NESB, workers are effectively restricted or open to inclusive practice depending on the organisational environment they operate. Some of the critical areas for

"No Room ... Homelessness and the Experiences of Women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds"

consideration in ensuring an inclusive organisation are: policies and planning; participation; employment and staff recruitment; communication; training; use of media and marketing; data collection; and networking / programs.

### Policies and Planning

The organisational policies, including the Constitution, incorporate clear and direct statements around social justice, and access and equity principles. These policies need to incorporate equal employment opportunities, anti-discrimination legislation and effective consumer rights. On this point it is critical that policies are combined with operational processes that ensure access and equity.

Organisational planning needs to consider a commitment to provide accessible services to people from CaLD backgrounds and like all other service delivered such strategies need to be evaluated to ensure they are working.

### Participation

The participation of CaLD communities in our services require engagement as it does for others in our local community. It is pertinent to question participation from the point of view of do CaLD communities know of your services? What strategies does the organisation have in place to consult with people from diverse cultural backgrounds? Who are the members in the management committee of your organisation? Does it reflect diversity of cultures, spiritual beliefs as well as the broad range of diversity that exist in your local community?

### Communication

Appropriate communication with CaLD communities is critical to bridge the gap that may be experienced by individuals within a community. It is essential to consider the engagement of professional interpreters in the service delivered. It is best practice to ensure that the organisational budget maintains funds for translating and interpreting costs. The practical operational implications of ensuring appropriate communication with clients from NESB include:

- The development of organisational policies and procedures for working with professional interpreters.
- The service has the appropriate equipment such as conference options and speaker telephones to work with interpreters over the telephone if necessary.
- Training of staff around cross-cultural skills development including how to work effectively with professional interpreters.
- Consideration of allocating additional time when working with women from NESB and/or people from CaLD backgrounds and a professional interpreter.
- Ensuring the effective and efficient dissemination of organisational policies at all levels. This should include administrative staff, case workers and volunteers.
- Incorporating mechanisms and processes where women and/or people from CaLD backgrounds are provided opportunities to inform workers of the success or otherwise of having a particular interpreter present. This requires a broad understanding of power dynamics that dominate the relationship when a woman accesses the service and does not understand

"No Room ... Homelessness and the Experiences of Women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds"

the dominant language. Language and cultural differences make it difficult for a woman from NESB to refuse an interpreter in their presence. The outcomes will not be satisfactory if the person is not comfortable with the interpreter used.

### Employment and Staff Recruitment

The organisation maintains processes of recruitment that are inclusive of diversity. This point considers the development of position descriptions incorporating principles of equity; the organisation considers applicants from diverse backgrounds; the organisation values workers who have language skills other than English; diverse mode of advertising positions is considered; skills in cultural diversity are appraised regularly and people from diverse cultural backgrounds are included in interview panels. Other considerations for diversifying organisational culture in relation to staff recruitment are:

- A person with a second language is not necessarily a cross-culturally competent individual.
- Development of a cross-cultural framework is ongoing and requires training as well as individual and organisational reflection to influence the culture of the organisation.
- A person with language skills other than English requires organisational support and should not be used as the person 'who solves' all issues related to women and/or people from CaLD from NESB. The risk on this point is of having a person feel overwhelmed with the demands on that position. Furthermore the professional skills of other workers are not developed.

### Training

The organisation's management needs to allocate funds and opportunities for staff to attend relevant cross-cultural training. These opportunities are best supported when positions are backfilled ensuring compliance by workers attending and consideration to their respective workloads. Other issues in relation to training include: management committee members receive induction material and information in relation to the culture of inclusive practice the organisation adheres to, and that management committees are informed of issues of access and equity in the organisation. Additionally, training needs to be provided to all staff within an organisation to ensure that one person is not given all the tasks thereby running the risk that individuals with 'special interests' have the sole responsibility of meeting the demand of people from CaLD and/or women from NESB.

Training for all staff in the identification, assessment and response to domestic and family violence and sexual assault is essential to ensure the safety of women, their accompanying children and staff. Organisations should undertake the following:

- The development of assessment tools to assist the early identification of domestic and family violence and sexual assault and hence develop mechanisms to minimise or prevent the risks women and their children are exposed to.
- Screening for domestic violence needs to encompass an understanding of patterns of abuse that may not present with physical assault initially. For example psychological and financial abuse is part of a continuum of violence and can have detrimental effects on women and children.

"No Room ... Homelessness and the Experiences of Women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds"

- The development of policies in relation to managing risk.

### Use of Media and Marketing

This point takes into account that organisations consider disseminating information in CaLD communities by utilising material in community languages; use of ethnic media and images that reflect diversity in publications produced and displayed within the service.

### Data Collection

Consideration for collecting specific data is essential for organisations that are interested in measuring and reporting on the level of access from CaLD communities, specific issues presented and areas for further development/change. This can potentially identify resourcing required within organisations to meet the demand from CaLD communities. For example data may indicate that a number of clients were temporary visa holders and did not have access to regular income. This may require significant financial contributions from an organisation and appropriate planning is essential to ensure the continued delivery of services to this target group.

Other considerations may include identifying who is accessing the service, their language proficiencies; people from CaLD from the local population are accessing the service.

### Networking and Programs

Establishing and maintaining partnership and collaborative relationships with a variety of specialist services is essential when working with CaLD communities and in particular women from NESB. This may include ethno specific services, settlement support programs, domestic violence and sexual assault services, and legal and migration services. Women from NESB will often rely on information and assistance from organisations to access other relevant services and it is critical staff are familiar with the type of services provided by other organisations so that they can make appropriate referrals.

Specialist services can also provide vital resources and assist in the development of policies and procedures to support best practice.

The organisation maintains regular network meetings with groups, community members and multicultural services and their expertise is utilized in the development of groups and programs. Similarly staff members are well aware of the services provided by ethno specific services in our regions.

Programs are developed reflecting on the needs of the local population and adequate resources are allocated to ensure they are culturally appropriate and relevant.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has documented multiple issues that overlap and are interrelated in relation to women from NESB escaping domestic and family violence. These women are at times at heightened risk of being homeless because of the violence they experience and the personal and systemic barriers outlined herein.

The issues identified in governance are critical for consideration by services and funding bodies. It is not possible, at times, for organisations to enforce strategic operational practices that require funding that may not be made available hence issues for CaLD communities and/or women from NESB are often dropped in the list of competing priorities in the homelessness sector. It is however a responsibility that must be addressed even in small steps given that core business of any service encompasses all people from their community. Small steps can build on existing services with consideration for further development to ensuring recruitment processes and organisational policies that reflect inclusive practices. We value and respect the work of many services; in our role as advocates we believe that good intentions and good will by workers are not sufficient. Changes happen incrementally, but must be supported, enforced and monitored by a change in culture within services.

Australia is a multicultural society that supports many cultures and a broad range of diversity within. The global environment in which we live is constantly changing and with it the patterns of migration that we continue to see. Australia has been built on the strengths and resilience of migrants and refugees who have chosen to make this their chosen country. It is the responsibility of those who have supportive roles in the community to ensure that access and equity issues are consistently maintained. It is this opportunity that makes the work we undertake of great personal satisfaction for those of us who choose to work in this field.

## Bibliography

1. Allimant A. and Allimant Holas A.M., The Social Face of Global Violence – Community Development Work with People from CALD Backgrounds especially Women from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds Surviving Interpersonal and Political Violence, April 2004, paper presented at the Community Development Human Rights & The Grassroots Conference, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.
2. Allimant A., Service Profile – Immigrant Women’s Support Service (Queensland), January 2005, Newsletter No. 5, Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, Australia.
3. Issues No. 1, Buckley, Amma, Persecution Complex: Women, Gender and Refugee Determination in Australia, April 2003, Thesis submitted in the School of Social Work and Social Policy, The University of Queensland in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Queensland, Australia.
4. Gunn, Y., Clare Dart and Rochelle Archer in conjunction with Louise Whitaker, People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds Project, Final Report, December 2003, Legal Aid Queensland, Queensland, Australia.
5. Keel, M., Lara Fergus and Melanie Heenan, Home Truths – A Conference in review, Issues No. 3 March 2005, Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, Australia.
6. McCarthy, Terry, Poverty and Disadvantage in Australia, October 2004, paper presented at the Public Forum: Poverty and Disadvantage in Australia organized by St. Vincent de Paul Society, Brisbane, Australia.
7. Migrant Women’s Emergency Support Service Inc. (MWESS), Annual Report, 2004, Brisbane, Australia.
8. Pham, April, ‘Trapped in Violence’ – NESB Women and Children Without Income Support Survey, 2000, Results of a Survey of NSW Women’s Refugees, A Project by Immigrant Women’s Speakout Association in collaboration with NSW Refuge Movement Migrant Support Group, NSW, Australia.
9. Rees, S., Human rights and the significance of psychosocial and cultural issues in domestic violence policy and intervention for refugee women, 2004, Australian Journal of Human Rights, Volume 10 No. 1, LexisNexis Butterworths, NSW, Australia.
10. South Brisbane Immigration Community Legal Service, Information provided by a training organized by Immigrant Women’s Support Service - “Domestic Violence Provision under the Immigration Act”, June 2004.
11. State Government Victoria, Department of Human Services/Victoria Health, The Health Costs of Violence – Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence, A Summary of Findings, 2004, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Victoria, Australia.