

Dawn House Inc Submission to the Northern Territory Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Framework

ACTION AREA 1: Preventing sexual violence

What are the problems related to sexual violence in your community and in the NT that the Framework should consider?

Shame, fear, unhelpful coping practices (such as drug/alcohol misuse), unhappy relationships, dissociation, self-loathing, self-limiting agency, the prevalence of pornography and its impact on relationships.

What can be done to prevent sexual violence in your community and across the NT?

Review the recommendations of the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* “Little Children are Sacred” report. Ninety-seven recommendations to protect Aboriginal children from sexual abuse were made - two have been implemented.

Ensure everyone knows what ‘consent’ means – how to ask the question and listen to the answer.

Support women to: recognise that their wants and needs are important; insist that those wants and needs be considered; learn to speak up and state what they are; expect to have them met; and to take action to remedy situations when they are not met.

Know who to report to and be able to do so with support.

Prohibit sexual harassment in all walks of life, not just employment, goods and services etc (as currently proscribed by the Anti-Discrimination Act)

What are the key elements of a successful sexual violence prevention program?

Recognise gender inequality, cultural issues of power and control, and misogyny as underpinning all forms of sexual violence against women and children. ‘Respect’ for women won’t cut it, as this can be used as another means of patronising and minimising the experience of women and children.

Educate police and court officials about the dynamics involved in sexual violence – both subtle and overt, and develop and apply legislation that indicates to offenders that sexual violence is a serious crime.

Place accountability where it belongs. Shame attaches to survivors of sexual violence, and this must be challenged at every opportunity.

Sexual violence prevention programs need to be delivered in an age appropriate way to everyone in the community, from pre-school (protective behaviours) through to adults (consent, respectful relationships etc).

Locally based non-government organisations are best placed to deliver sexual violence prevention programs. They know their community and what is appropriate and needed in their community. Community members will not be receptive to 'experts' from southern states who do not understand or represent Territory culture. One of the legacies of the NT Emergency Response is a deep-seated suspicion of and resistance to any 'intervention' that assumes expertise, and lacks sensitivity and respect.

A baseline education program that has been delivered and evaluated as effective is required. It will need the flexibility to adapt content to the audience eg remote communities, CALD communities, people with a disability, children, teenagers, men's groups, domestic violence survivors, Girl Guides, football teams and so on – see ANROWS research and program delivery.

ACTION AREA 2: Responding to children and young people who have experienced sexual violence

Judgement, and loaded language is not helpful. If the aim is to ensure people hear a message, it needs to be delivered in a way that does not shut down listening. At the same time, a balance must be maintained that ensures accountability. There are consequences to actions – these may be in the form of criminal charges, fractured relationships, or family shame.

ACTION AREA 3: Responding to adults who have experienced sexual violence

Free, accessible, flexible sources of information and support is required. This may be in the form of local face to face counselling, healing groups, art therapy, web site, online counselling (in a language of choice), legal advice and court support. Counselling services to be specifically skilled in the dynamics and impact of sexual violence.

ACTION AREA 4: Responding to adults who commit sexual violence

For adults who commit sexual violence, access to free, trauma informed, culturally appropriate, evaluated programs that incorporate accountability for behaviours, but leave open pathways, guidance and support to bring about change are required. Ongoing contact and support are essential.

ACTION AREA 5: Strengthening the systems that respond to sexual violence

Very few sexual assault matters are prosecuted, and of those that are, a miniscule number result in conviction. It is a stressful and often public process. Women are fearful of disclosing their experience of sexual violence. Knowledge and support minimises fear.

Ensure all adults have access to comprehensive information about processes and support every step of the way.

In the Northern Territory, the identity of sexual assault victims is suppressed. Legislation needs to be reviewed to allow victims of abuse or assault to speak publicly if they wish to do so. This should apply to adult survivors of child sexual abuse who wish to speak about their experience once they reach adulthood.

It is unclear why a victim should be required to prove they did not give consent, and yet there seems to be no expectation that a person accused of committing sexual violence sought and was given consent.

The NTPS introduce a Sexual Harassment Policy Immediately and ensure staff are appropriately trained in it.

Announce proposed reforms to the modernisation of the Anti-Discrimination Act .

Equip NT WorkSafe to deal with gender-based violence.