



# P A C C O A

## Probation and Community Corrections Officers' Association Incorporated

PO Box 1327  
PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

PACCOA Conference 24-26 October 2007 Adelaide.

### **Indigenous Family Violence Offender Program (IFVOP) -The Northern Territory experience-**

#### **IFVOP in the Northern Territory**

##### **Introduction**

In 1996/7 a need to address Indigenous Family Violence in the community and prison was identified as a priority in an attempt to stem the increasing numbers of people entering the prison system who were being charged with family violence related matters and the increasing numbers of victims reporting violence.

The Office of Women's Policy in the Northern Territory Government undertook this project in conjunction with the Commonwealth Government through Partnerships Against Domestic Violence. A program was developed with the assistance of many service providers and people with expertise working in the field.

The original Indigenous Family Violence Offender Program (IFVOP) was piloted in Darwin Correctional Centre and in the Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Unit (CAAPS) in 1999. The prison-based program continues today, but the focus of this presentation is on the programs taking place in remote Indigenous communities.

These programs began more recently. In 2005, Northern Territory Community Corrections gained funding from ATSIC to pilot a domestic violence program in four Indigenous communities: Nguiu, Oenpelli (Gunbalanya), Hermannsburg (Ntaria), and Yuendumu. The program delivery was individually tailored to suit the community, eg Nguiu's program ran 3 half days per week.

The pilot program proved successful and it was extended to run in at least eight communities to mid-2008, jointly resourced by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments through Family Violence Partnership Program funding. NT Community Corrections within the NT Department of Justice has been the lead agency in the implementation of the program.

The principles on which the program is based have not changed since 2005 as the Office Women's Policy Unit ratified the session headings and what content was to be covered but the manual continues to evolve to be friendlier for remote community Indigenous Facilitators, with updated terminology.

## **Program Aims**

The program aims to reduce re-offending and provide the court with a program in the community that addresses family violence.

The specific aims of the program are:

- To reduce the incidence of Indigenous family violence in communities.
- To reinforce that family violence in any form is unacceptable and never has been an accepted part of Indigenous culture
- To educate and provide alternative strategies for addressing issues that result in anger and inappropriate responses to triggers.
- For offenders to be given the opportunity to actively practice skills being learnt while residing in the community.
- For the community to facilitate and own the program themselves

## **Methodology**

Initiating the program in a community requires considerable negotiation, particularly as the program delivery is tailored to the local community dynamic, and must take into account the other community services or individuals who work and/or reside with the client.

Upon the program's acceptance by a community, the next step is to identify suitable community facilitators. A minimum of three Indigenous facilitators from each community nominated by their community members, elders, and council or a combination of these as suitable and respected as anti-violence role models are employed on a by Community Corrections as casuals on a two year contract, supported by a Community Corrections Program Coordinator based in Darwin (for Top End workers) or Alice Springs (for Centre-based workers).

Facilitators once nominated by the community are interviewed for suitability for training and the position. They undergo a verbal interview based on the written job description and are not required to apply in writing. They sign a Release of Information document giving the coordinator permission to complete a criminal history check on the Integrated Justice Information System (IJIS). The criminal history check does not preclude a person from training as a facilitator if they have a criminal history other than violence offences. If a person has been found to have a criminal history of violence this would then be discussed with them and depending on the length of time they have been offence free could be considered as suitable for training.

## **Facilitator Duties and Code of Conduct**

Facilitators work under the following *Code of Conduct*

- Treat our clients as valuable members of our communities.
- Model the behaviours we are teaching our clients.

- Provide a safe and supportive work environment for program staff and clients
- Ensure that all contact details of IFVOP are kept up-to-date and distributed.
- Promote the program and network with other agencies in our communities.
- IFVOP staff will respect and maintain client confidentiality.

Facilitators' duties are extensive and do not just involve the facilitation of the program. Skills and expertise are gained in:

- Court duty
- Interviewing offenders/ victims and completing assessments
- Providing progress reports to Court
- Keeping a daily attendance record
- Giving offenders letter of warning if they are not attending the program
- Producing and maintaining client files
- Photocopying of all materials for the program on a daily basis
- Collecting the food for lunch from the local store
- Referral to other community agencies eg substance abuse problems
- Producing final reports on completion of the program

The Aboriginal facilitators receive two weeks nationally accredited training with CAAPS and then, supported by their Program Coordinator, deliver a series of 48 hour programs in their local community on how to manage behaviour so that family violence does not occur, using a mix of English and local language.

The Coordinator sits in to observe and provide support if needed for the first two to three programs. After this, the Coordinator begins to withdraw their physical presence to allow the Facilitators more autonomy, and to build the Facilitators' confidence. Once Facilitators are comfortable with running the group and feel confident with the content of the program, the duties previously mentioned above are introduced one by one. The Coordinator remains available to provide advice by phone and provides ongoing support.

### **Referral and Assessment of Clients**

Clients – usually but not always male - are primarily referred through the court system. Charges can include Assault Female - Offender Male, Assault, Aggravated Assault, Failing to Comply with a Restraining Order. The Court requests an initial assessment of suitability for the offender to attend the community-based program. A two-page assessment is completed and a copy provided to the Court. If the offender is found suitable they are Court ordered, "to attend the program and do nothing to cause his/her early discharge therefrom."

A complete assessment is then conducted on both the offender and the victim, who may or may not be in a current relationship with the offender to ascertain relationship patterns, issues that are argued and fought over, personal/family history, the levels of violence and their perception on whether the violence is escalating, and substance abuse history.

This assessment provides information on past and current violence and is one section of the thirty page assessment forms. The assessment form are divided into sections that

allow the offender and victim to be interviewed at six month, and twelve monthly intervals for approximately two years to ascertain if violence is still an issue, if so has it lessened or escalated.

Clients are referred from Child protection workers who may advise parents to attend, and in some cases the local pub/club will bar violent patrons until they have completed the course. Increasingly, programs are attracting volunteer participants, both men and women, who realise that, although they have never been charged, they have problems with anger and want to learn how to manage their behaviour.

## **Program Content**

The IFVOP consists of 16 modular 3-hour sessions over 48 hours.

The following topics are covered:

- Indigenous family violence
- Past life experience
- Personal values and beliefs
- Cultural context of violence
- Intergenerational aspects of violence
- The law and family violence
- Recognising and responding appropriately to anger
- Violence and substance abuse
- Motivation to change
- Controlling behaviours versus equality
- Power versus equality
- Elder Abuse
- Dynamics of family violence and self-talk
- Relationships and taking responsibility for own behaviours
- Resolving conflict without violence
- Indigenous spiritual healing.
- Revision and relapse prevention

The program utilises various resources such as painting, pictures, video & DVD, brainstorming and discussion. Guest speakers may be invited for particular sessions. The participants demonstrate a commitment to change and acknowledge the ramifications of violence not just on themselves and the victim, but extended family and the community in general. The participants in each group have clearly identified they do not want their own children repeating their patterns, or their children becoming victims of family violence.

## **Programs Available**

- Male offender program
- Female offender program
- Female victim program
- Male victim program

Ideally, each program consists of eight to ten participants.

Offender program participants have typically been found guilty of family violence related offences, and enter the program through referrals from the Courts, probation and parole officers, and the Parole Board. As noted above, volunteer participants may also attend.

Partners are able to participate in a six session program in which they learn a portion of the content the offender is learning and are given strategies to address their own anger, conflict resolution skills and good communication. Attendance is voluntary. Women are provided with a safety plan and list of safe places they can go if required. At this time many communities do not have safe places for men to go, so a list is generated in each community from the men's input.

### **Programs to date**

From April 2005 to June 2007, the IFVOP in the Top End had facilitated a total of 15 programs with 100 men and 20 women participating:

A total of 120 people began the program with a further 5 women to complete the program at Galiwinku.

Of these 120 clients 90 had completed the program, providing a completion rate of 75%.

58 people were court ordered.

62 people attended the program voluntarily.

4 have been breached for non-attendance, as they were court ordered.

7 people have reoffended since the beginning of the program

In Alice Springs region fifteen people had completed the program with three people reoffending. Alice Springs has experienced problems in facilitating programs and getting the program happening due to the quick turnover of coordinators. Alice Springs now has its eighth coordinator, who is currently running programs in Hermannsburg and Yuendumu, with plans to expand the program to Lajamanu and Tennant Creek.

### **Program Impact**

a) Recidivism appears to be reduced, although more work is being done to substantiate this. An independent evaluation of the program is being conducted by a team from Charles Darwin University.

b) The reporting of family violence to police may increase. As the offender often remains in the community, the victims do not have to fear payback for sending their partner to prison. In many cases partners do not want the offender to go to jail; they want the violence to cease. The program provides an alternative option for victims to report violence with a lesser chance of reprisal, and for the offender to not necessarily be sentenced to imprisonment.

c) Increased employment and skills development for local facilitators, with access to nationally accredited training as well as support in taking on a range of justice-related tasks.

### **Program Difficulties**

Finding suitable people to train in remote communities is one of the most difficult tasks in the initial stages and this has either stopped programs running or caused a delay in the time frames envisaged. Facilitator commitment to working and running programs in some

communities has been an issue, with facilitators not turning up for work at the allocated time, leaving due to other distractions half way through a work day, and not being contactable.

The administrative duties required of the facilitators can at times be difficult for them to keep up with and understand; better ways of supporting them need to be explored to build their confidence to perform these duties.

### **Program Cost**

The major costs are in setting up of program, including coordinator travel, (eg return flight to Elcho Island \$680.00), accommodation, travel allowance, facilitator training and wages (currently AO3 \$27.06 an hour), office set up costs, food for program, resources, communication i.e. mobile phone and mimimax and other expenses.

The cost of maintaining the program once it has been set up is approximately \$15,000 per program, or \$1500 to \$2,000 per participant.

This cost should be compared to prison daily costs as the majority of the participants who have attended the program would not have previously had the option of staying in the community to do such a program and would have been incarcerated.

### **Factors required for this program to be successful**

- Individualising the program to suit community needs.
- Support from the Court (referrals)
- Support from the police,
- Support from the community/ council.
- Woman not afraid to report domestic violence.
- Respect for the law and Court system.
- Support from local Aboriginal Community Corrections Officer (ACCO).
- Support from other community agencies.
- Program being available one to two months after facilitators trained
- Room/Facilities being available at no cost or low cost
- Commitment of the Facilitators

For example, the commitment of the Nguiu facilitators, ACCO, and community to address local family violence has been integral to the success of the program. The Facilitators are from four different skin groups, which allows for diversity when dealing with cultural issues such as avoidance relationships. If a facilitator is not allowed to directly address an offender then one of the other facilitators will do this. Teamwork and shared commitment are vital to community based offender programs in Indigenous communities.

Trainee facilitators in other communities were inspired by the Nguiu facilitators and wanted to duplicate the success of the Nguiu experience. Programs have now been facilitated at Galiwinku, Nauiyu Naimbiyu, Pirlangimpi and Milikapiti. Pirlangimpi and Nauiyu Naimbiyu have shown considerable success

## **Future program directions**

The IFVOP coordinator was approached by Nguiu primary school to develop and run an anti-bullying and family violence program with the children. IFVOP participants endorsed these ideas, and have encouraged the development of a program for children, as they have become aware of the effects of violence on their children, through participating in the program.

A children's program, auspiced by NT Health and Community Services, will be trialled in 2007/8, and there are plans for a youth program run by peer youth facilitators. Adult programs for men and women that focus less on partner violence, but look at also at other forms of family violence and abuse, such as lateral violence and with a stronger focus on parenting and effects of violence on children are also in development.

These programs, with participants ranging from 6 to 80 years of age, will have a family focus in an attempt to break the cycle of violence before it can impact on the next generation.

Domestic Violence is a crime. Victims of Domestic Violence want the violence to stop and most offenders have the ability to stop their violent behaviour.

## **The Indigenous Family Violence Program thanks the following organisations for their support:**

- The Australian Government Dept. Family and Community Services
- The Northern Territory Dept. of Health
- Northern Territory Correctional Services
- Northern Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service and numerous individuals, organisations and Aboriginal communities that have provided a variety of assistance to the success of this program.

Debra White  
NT Dept Health & Community Services  
Phone 08 8999 2458