

Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit Aboriginal Corporation

A Family
Violence Prevention Legal Service

Family Violence IS Everyone's Business Frontline service delivery in Central Australia

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We are a justice, advisory and referral centre for Indigenous victims of family violence located in Alice Springs, and funded by the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department.

Our primary focus is to provide Indigenous woman, children, and men who are victims of family violence, including sexual abuse, with legal advice and casework assistance, and related services including initial counselling, support, and referral.

Our priority areas of law are family violence restraining orders, sexual assault, child protection, criminal compensation, and, family law where the legal matters relates to family violence.

We provide cross culturally appropriate legal and related services. We use Aboriginal and Australian law to address Indigenous family violence. We visit target remote communities, and engage interpreters or cultural brokers to ensure our clients can participate in their legal matters in a fully informed way. We provide services in culturally appropriate spaces, and employ Indigenous and other appropriate staff. In addition to appropriate and effective service delivery we participate in community education and law reform.

What stories do our client's tell?

'Jasmine' was married Aboriginal way at age 20 and has 3 adult children. Jasmine's husband assaulted her throughout the marriage causing a broken jaw, arm, leg and ribs, multiple lacerations, scars, a ruptured spleen and the death of an in-utero baby. After 25 years of abuse, Jasmine has obtained a Restraining Order.

'Brigette' is the mother of a 4 year old boy, recently separated from her Aboriginal way husband as a consequence of his violence towards her and her son. The husbands' family have threatened to assault Brigette if she does not return to her husband. The paternal grandmother has taken the child. Brigette has obtained a Recovery Order.

'Mary' is 17. She has been in a promised marriage with an older man for some years. Mary did not consent to the marriage and does not consent to sexual relations with her husband who also physically assaults her. Mary's family are unable to intervene to help her. Mary has not reported the physical assaults or sexual assaults to police, and has been unable to separate from her promised husband or obtain a Restraining Order.

'Maureen' is a child who was repeatedly sexually assaulted by a male relative for 8 years. Maureen was exiled from her community when the sexual abuse became public. She was unable to complete her schooling or access culturally appropriate counselling, and is at risk of substance abuse. Maureen received assistance under the Crimes (Victims Assistance) Act.

What do our client's stories tell us?

As a consequence of our work in Alice Springs, Ntaria, Papunya, Yuendumu and Tennant Creek our staff hear and respond to stories of extreme and repeated family violence. As a consequence of this work there are a number of features of family violence staff observed:

1. Indigenous women are more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women, and the physical injuries sustained are more severe.
2. Few physical assaults and very few sexual assaults are reported to police. Children often witness the assaults.
3. Most physical assault victims and all sexual assault victims have mental injuries as a consequence of the assault.
4. The mental injuries last for years and often include post traumatic stress disorder and or depression.
5. The impact of family violence affects the immediate and extended family, and the broader community.
6. A number of factors prevent victims from engaging effectively with Australian family violence legal protections. This compounds the rate of offences and the injuries sustained. The factors include:
 - Lack of information regarding Australian family violence legal protections;
 - Lack of community support for reporting;
 - Lack of community intervention in abusive situations;
 - Inappropriate police service and response;
 - Cultural pressures against discussion of family violence, and in particular sexual violence;
 - Fear of and actual recrimination from offenders and /or extended family members;
 - Lack of culturally appropriate and accessible services to reduce psychological injuries incurred.

Our clients stories reflect and encapsulate recent research findings that outline some of the reasons why Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) women continue not to report family violence. They include intimidation by authority figures; intimidation at attending a police station; treatment by police when reporting family violence; fear for reprisals or shame; and unfamiliarity with the legal process.

