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Northern Integrated Family Violence Services'  
Counselling and Support Alliance

## Family Violence Group Work Forum



**WOMEN'S HEALTH  
IN THE NORTH**



# Overview

Welcome

Launch of 'Healing, Together'

## Presentations:

- Cath Lancaster, Collected Wisdom
- Yvonne, Arabic Speaking Women's Group

[BREAK]

## Panel:

- Sunbury Community Health (children)
- Darebin Community Health (Aboriginal women)
- InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (CALD women)
- Anglicare Victoria (art therapy with women and children)





# About NIFVS

Northern Integrated Family Violence Services (NIFVS) is the partnership that leads the integration of family violence and related services in Melbourne's northern metropolitan region (NMR).

## Our Vision

For women and children to live safe and free from family violence.

## Our Mission

To maintain and continually develop the integrated family violence service system in the north, in order to improve the safety of women and children.

The *NIFVS Regional Plan 2013-2017* sets out the priorities and key initiatives of the organisations involved in the partnership.





# NIFVS coordination team

The NIFVS coordination team includes the Regional Integration Coordinator (RIC) and two project workers. The team resources, coordinates and supports integration by:

- providing leadership for regional integration
- convening and supporting regional networks and groups
- disseminating key family violence information
- identifying and promoting good practice models
- delivering training and facilitating forums to the sector
- facilitating links between local, regional and statewide family violence structures.

The team is employed by Women's Health In the North and funded by the Department of Health and Human Services.





# Counselling and Support Alliance

The NIFVS Counselling and Support Alliance (CSA) was established in 2006 as a multi-agency service model.

It is based on a coordinated regional framework for the planning, implementation and evaluation of quality family violence counselling and group work service provision.

Nine community health services are part of this funded alliance along with Anglicare, Berry Street, Elizabeth Morgan House and InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Violence.

Member agencies meet bi-monthly and staff attend two tailored professional development sessions each year.



# Why are we here?

For nearly ten years, CSA members have worked together to strengthen their delivery of high quality family violence counselling and group work to women and children.

In 2013 member organisations were funded to provide additional one-off groups or counselling to respond to the needs of their specific client groups.

‘Healing, Together’ captures the work undertaken through these focused activities.



# Healing, Together

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# Collected Wisdom

'Healing, Together' has been written as a companion resource to sit alongside the foundational work of Collected Wisdom.

Collected Wisdom is a manual for facilitating family violence support groups for women and was developed by the CSA in 2010

Cath Lancaster

Collected Wisdom Project Coordinator

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# ...The importance of family violence group work...

Australia's newest, and one of the country's largest not for profit community health organisations.

Established 1 May 2014, through the merge of three leading community health services – North Yarra, Doutta Galla, and Western Region Health Centre.

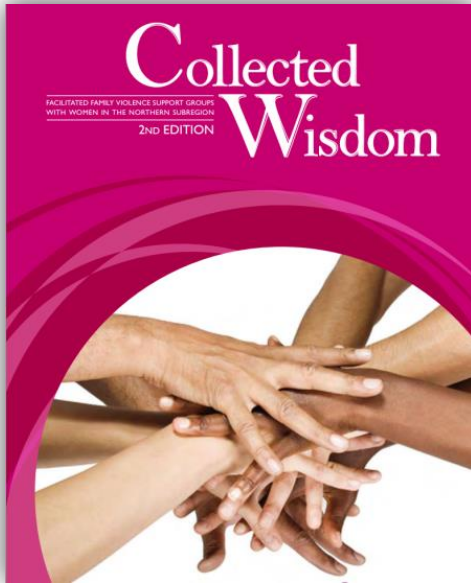
Provides vital local health and support services including medical, dental, allied health, mental health, and counselling, and many specialist health services, to people in Melbourne's northern, western and inner northern suburbs.

# Collected Wisdom

FACILITATED FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT GROUPS  
WITH WOMEN IN THE NORTHERN SUBREGION

2ND EDITION





Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre and Joanne Donne (1998), 'Creating a post group narrative', Paper at Victorian Women's Health Conference, unpublished document, Melbourne, pp1-5.

Australian Domestic & Family Violence  
**CLEARINGHOUSE**  
 ISSUES PAPER 4

**Working with women:  
 Exploring individual  
 and group work  
 approaches**

Dr Lesley Laing

**Introduction**

This issues paper explores individual and group work approaches to intervention with women subjected to violence and abuse in their intimate relationships. There is considerable debate, particularly amongst feminist practitioners, about the use and meaning of terms such as 'counselling' and 'therapy' to describe the types of interventions which comprise much of the focus of this paper. Some practitioners regard the use of such terms as inappropriate for describing the empowering practice they engage in with individual women, while others are more comfortable in defining their work with women within a framework of counselling/therapy. This dilemma about terminology reflects some of the debates and controversies which are canvassed in this paper. Hence the terms 'practice' and 'intervention' are used where

The recognition of domestic violence as a serious social problem is an achievement of second wave feminism, a social movement originating in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Feminist activists provided safety and shelter for women and children escaping violence, and located the roots of domestic violence in gender inequality in social relationships. This formulation challenged the existing medical model which located the causes of domestic violence within the pathology of individual men and women. From a feminist perspective, women escaping violence were in need, not of counselling or therapy, but of legal redress for crimes committed against them, and of access to income support, housing and other resources to enable them to establish lives free of violence and abuse. The longer term solutions to violence against women lay in the reform of gender relations and measures that fostered women's social and economic autonomy.

Given this historical context, reservations about the contribution of counselling or therapy to working with women, are understandable. Carlson (1997) identifies four concerns underlying these reservations. Firstly, offering counselling may imply that the woman has pre-existing personality deficits which somehow contributed to her victimisation. Hence there is a danger that counselling responses may perpetuate victim-blaming and obscure the responsibility of perpetrators. Secondly, many women report judgemental and unhelpful contacts with mental health and other therapeutic service

Practice guidelines:  
 Women and children's family violence  
 counselling and support programs

A Victorian

**Northern Integrated Family  
 Violence Services**

**A Report on the Northern Sub-Region  
 Counselling and Group work Service  
 Partnership Model for Women**

Prepared for Women's Health In The North  
 by Fiona Tinney

October 2008

Three themes I will touch on that came from family violence group work research in 2006:

- Use of spaces
- The use of our bodies and other peoples bodies
- Playing with meaning

## Women talked about the way the group used “spaces”

- different ways of seating, standing, sharing, sitting, moving and being still
- the use of the presence of others and referring to others in their absence
- the spaces between group members,
- the spaces that run through group members and the special quality of that space.

## What can facilitators do with “spaces”?

Attention to the creation and processes of a safe space (comfort, noise, pace, relaxation) and safe personal, bodily and interactional processes , as this allowed a safe reconnection with oneself, others and the world.



*Healing vibes...Books and computers can give you all the information but you don't get the same vibes as you do when you are with other people, and it's important to have healing contact I believe.*

*(The vibes are) more soft. I am saying the vibes are different. I don't mean they are like really strong staggering kind of thing; they are like soft waves, between and through people.*

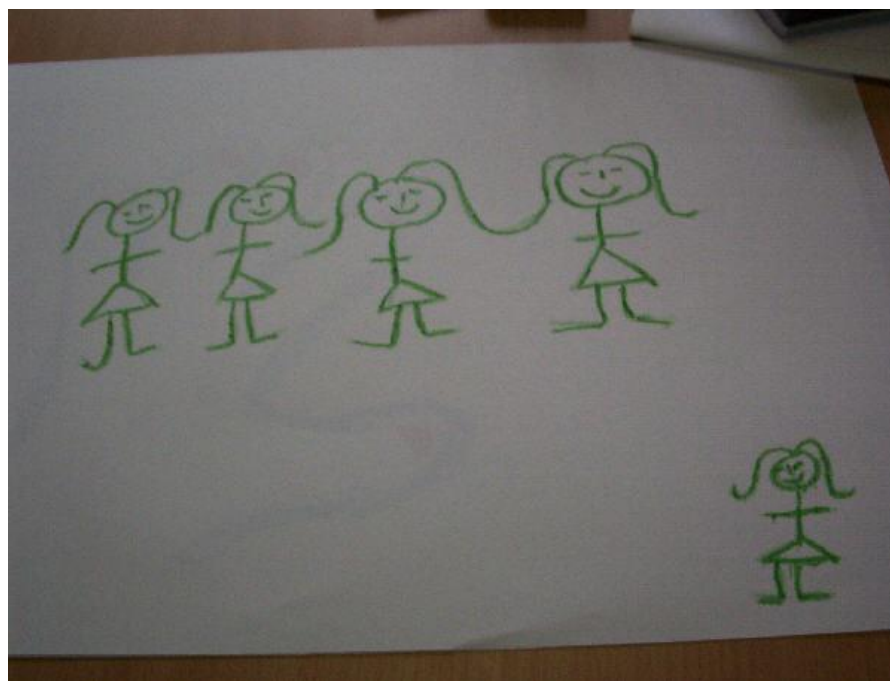


## Women talked about the use of their bodies

- different ways of seating, standing, sharing, sitting, moving and being still
- the use of the presence of others and referring to others in their absence
- the spaces between group members,
- the spaces that run through group members and the special quality of that space.

## What can facilitators do with the use of bodies?

- moving in ways that feel respectful, safe, fun, and not self-conscious.
- offer chances for women positioning differently to each other.  
give women a chance to practise a new sense of their own bodily integrity
- demonstrate facilitator pair integrity and power sharing.



## Women talked about the “playing with meaning”

- the group’s creative use of drawings, symbols, games, and words.
- use of metaphors and times for informal chat, which often lead to what some of the women refer to as ‘wow moments’ of learning.

## What can facilitators do about “playing with meaning?”

- useful when offered in a timely way and when the creations are collated to look back on, kept to refer to group members are invited to participate or to see things differently. For example, new wordings allow the issue to be shaped differently, and in ways that can reduce guilt and shame.
- facilitators at times negotiate these things, like a type of shorthand, succinct and clear offer new, fresh, first time or useful perspectives offer them new insights (eg, an old issue could be turned on its head).
- metaphors were helpful for this, especially if women could be taught how to select more enabling metaphors that gave more movement and choice.

Beyond the wall is the sun and two hearts; my daughter and I...



## Co-facilitation

co-facilitators may have to offer ;

- an overt awareness of using language that does not replicate disempowering categories
- an honouring of groups by recording group process and wisdom, and offer overt attention to their own position within emerging group learning patterns.

cohealth



thank you for your  
company





# My experience

Yvonne  
Arabic Speaking Women's Group  
Merri Community Health

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# Children

Ashtyn Vella

Sunbury Community Health

Bright Futures: A 6 week support group for primary school aged children who are homeless and/or experiencing family violence.

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# Aboriginal Women

Anne Robertson

Darebin Community Health

Pathways to Health: A 10 week group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women working with mosaic and clay

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TELLING STORIES IN WAYS  
THAT MAKE US STRONGER



*stepping on stones*



# Creating art

AND SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS CAN  
OFFER A 'TANGIBLE PRODUCT THAT  
RECORDS MEANINGS, EXPERIENCES  
AND FEELINGS

Malchiodi, 2007

IN ADDITION TO THESE BENEFITS, THE ACTUAL PROCESS OF ART MAKING CAN BE HELPFUL FOR EMOTIONAL RELEASE, GENERATE SELF ESTEEM, BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION, ENCOURAGE EXPERIMENTATION, AND TEACH NEW SKILLS. ROLLO MAY OBSERVES THAT ART CAN ALLOW PEOPLE TO IMAGINE NEW POSSIBILITIES AND EXPERIENCE THEMSELVES IN NEW WAYS.

Malchiodi, 2007



They have learnt new skills, worked solo, worked together supporting each other and helping finishing work.

As a participant noted:

“this was such an achievement. They look amazing. We did these, we are not dumb, we can do things and teach each other. I’m ready to keep learning new ways now...like each step is a new step.”

There was such an excitement in her tone sharing.

These symbolic representations, as well as acknowledging harms experienced, has begun the support needed to support the emergence of new stories of resilience and courage.

Another excerpt from dialogue with a participant:

“doing the stone was trying to find acceptance, as I kept coming to group my piece also got stronger, it started a lighter colour, and then I chose a stronger colour.. this was positive’.





EXCERPT TAKEN FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT

“Learn new skills is an important achievement...And getting confidence within ourselves some of us have been through stuff like domestic violence you get put down and end up with negativity put in your mind.. now getting confidence – now we can do this we started you know grouting and got to see that woman could do this not only men that can do these things, the way we smashed up and created what we wanted to do.

Found parts of ourselves we didn't know we had .. we thought we couldn't do it because we thought we were too stupid or careless.”

‘I felt a bit uncomfortable at first but the facilitators, helped me through the hiccups and ...it was a bit of a struggle I was unsure and insecure. I questioned where is this heading and could I go through with this and I was proud that I could work it through and come to the end.

‘even catch public transport to get here.. She hasn't been on public transport for many many years always scared... now I get up and get here for group’





EXCERPT TAKEN FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT

As I got more confident,... I really started to look forward to the steps of my picture, telling my story. Everyone did a story and we had paper and feathers, crayons and try to put something out on paper you can't always do it. When we were given the stone we had to really think and find another step – how we were going to represent our stories and another step a growing step and achieve the next stage of creating our story'.

"I can get out of the house now'

'its brought families together'.

'we need more groups, we need more groups like these to help us heal'

'Just getting people involved and getting them to enjoy and making them feel relaxed is important to come, no pressure on them to do anything, they can just take their time, watch and give it a go'.



EXCERPT TAKEN FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT

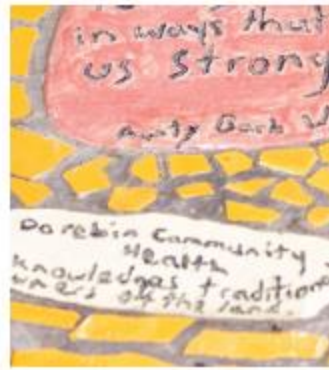
'coming in taking photos of our work, that was good too, checking how we were doing'

'I've been to Women Standing Strong group, and counselling, this was another step, another learning step, different, made things, did things'.

'deadly'

'We learnt from the elders as well and they talked and shared stories and that was really important and they asked how we were, strong woman that led the group, setting the room up, making it safe and comfortable'

This project will provide opportunities to strengthen the relationships with counselling services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and create an accepting safe space for nurturing and healing within a health service.





EXCERPT TAKEN FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT

“always sincerely asking how we were and we linked up, it was like a big family connection, like a tree with all these branches together now ...we felt all equal, there was no judgement.



Through participation, this project has increased connectedness between participants and the community health centre with the hope of better access to culturally safe health services.





# CALD Women

Jennifer Dawson

InTouch Multicultural Centre  
Against Family Violence

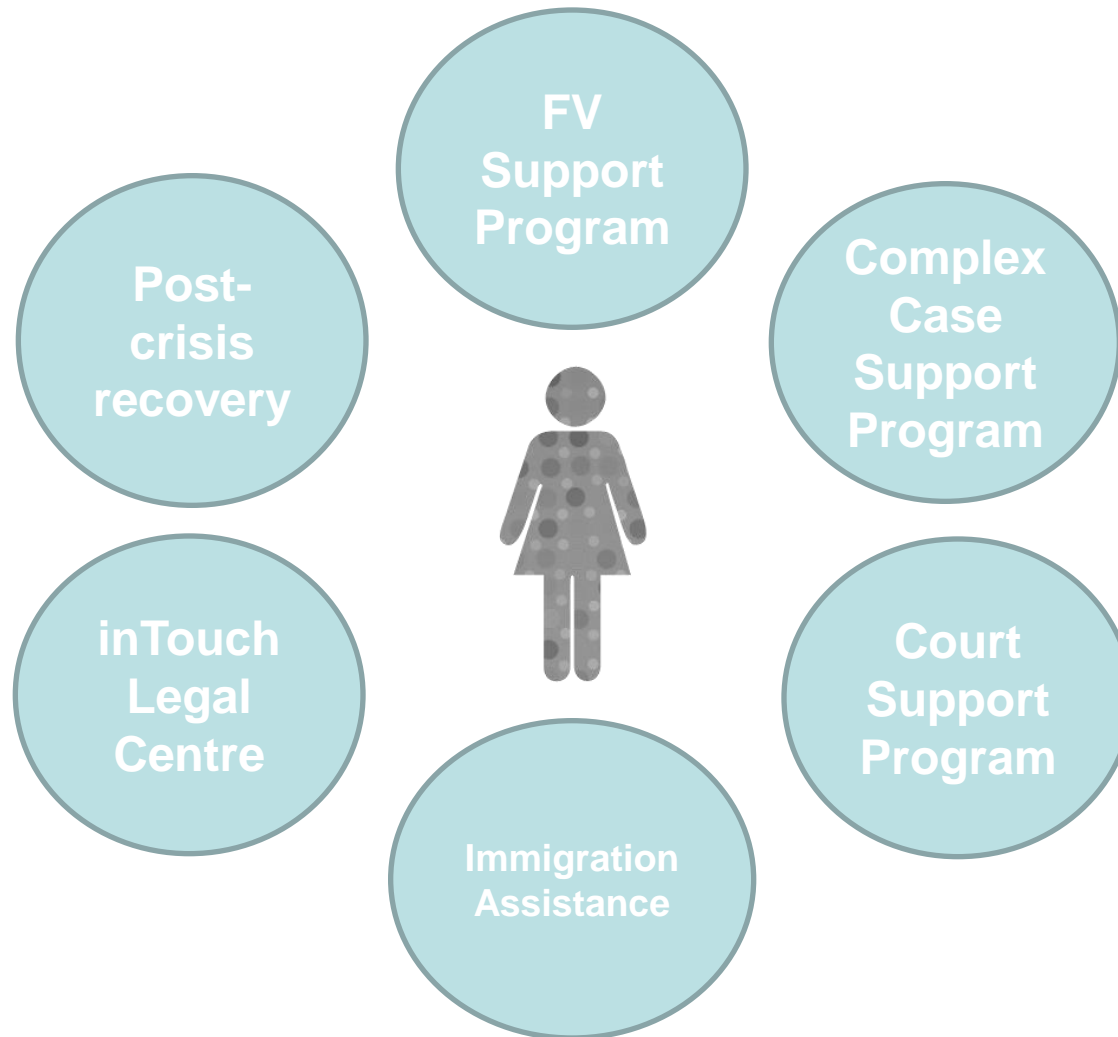
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# Therapeutic Group Work

**Senior Practitioner Counselling Program**  
**Jennifer Dawson**

# Crisis Intervention





# Intouch Direct Service Team

inTouch workers:

- 80% first generation migrants and refugees
- Languages spoken within the service

- Arabic
- Cantonese
- Greek
- Kikuyu
- Nepali
- Punjabi
- Spanish
- Turkish
- Bosnian
- Croatian
- Hindi
- Macedonian
- Nuer
- Russian
- Sudanese
- Vietnamese
- Bulgarian
- Dinka
- Indonesian
- Mandarin
- Serbian
- Swahili

# Group Work Models

## **WOMENS CIRCLES OF SUPPORT**

- New and emerging communities
- Established communities
- Recovery groups
- Parenting after violence
- Leadership groups to share information in communities

## **HOLIDAY PROGRAMS**

- Children
- Children and Mothers

## **FAMILY CAMPS**

- Engaging mothers and their children

# Working in Partnership

- Seeking partnerships
- Identify areas of need
- Engage bicultural/bilingual facilitators
- Meet to determine goals/aims/roles of specific community
- Consider adaptations to reflect the cultural and religious context
- Create a delivery timeline
- Develop session plans
- Train Facilitators
- Consider evaluations

# Welcome to Australia



# Community Drumming



# Community Quilt



# Family therapy disguised as fun



# Making childhood memories

“It’s been a long time since I slept peacefully at night, with my children by my side I felt like I slept for 100 years” - 22 year old mother of two.





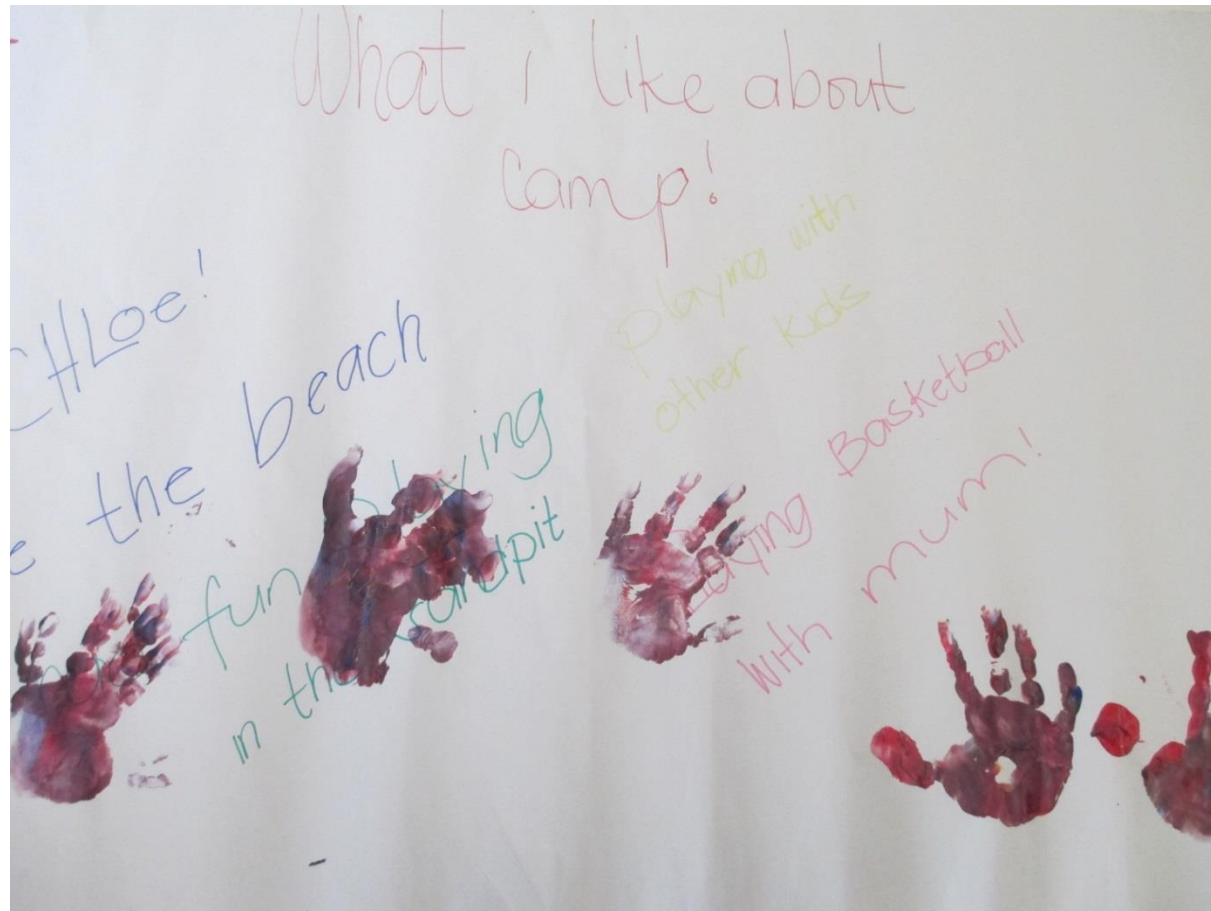
# First time at the beach

A group of young mothers, children not long ago themselves had never seen the sea before. Their children watched with wide eyes as they splashed, wrestled and laughed in the surf.



# Families at Play

“I’d never seen my mum running and playing basketball it was fun” 7 year old girl



# Family Activities

With a history of dislocation, trauma & disrupted relationships it's important to have fun



# Group Work Best Practice Learnings

- Curiosity about women's history and culture
- Identify issues that a community is open to explore and use this to build rapport
- Employ a bilingual/bicultural facilitator
- Offer reciprocal respect that acknowledges the value and strength inherent in all cultures
- Non-judgemental
- Avoid assumptions - ask if you don't understand
- Children may need help to find words to share their stories
- Adopt a flexible model
- Celebrate achievements



You can get more information  
about inTouch by calling us on:  
**(03) 9413 6500**

Free legal advice line 9413 6528 (Tuesday afternoons)



# Using Art Therapy

Jan Pfeiffer

Anglicare

Growing Connections: A 7 week creative arts based group for women and children who have experienced family violence.

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# Stay Connected

Visit our new website at [www.nifvs.org.au](http://www.nifvs.org.au) to:

- Access 'Healing, Together' and 'Collected Wisdom'
- Stay in touch via the monthly NIFVS eNews
- Join a regional network or group
- Order Women's and Men's Family Violence Help Cards
- RSVP to Identifying Family Violence Training (19 August or 21 October)
- RSVP to Regional Family Violence Sector Induction (21 October)
- Host a Week Without Violence event (3rd week of October)

# Contact Details

## Northern Integrated Family Violence Services Women's Health In the North

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