

Court Assistance Presentations

Speaker - Anita Dorante – Lena Passi Refuge, Thursday Island

Anita Dorante is the court assistance worker in the Torres Strait. She covered the following in her talk:

Provision of Court Assistance

- Language Barrier
- Attend court with women
- Encourage women to speak for themselves in court
- Represent clients on their behalf in court
- Act as an Interpreter for clients in court and when dealing with Police

The nature of our service

- Assist women & children at risk throughout the Torres Strait (especially women & children escaping DV & other crises).
- Assist clients obtaining Protection Order.
- Court Support & Assistance
- Homelessness.
- DV intervention & prevention programs – visit schools/communities
- Children's Program 3 days a week at the Shelter
- Commencing a program for women (Lightening the load) – at the Shelter
- Free Self Defence Classes for Women & Girls

Some of the difficulties we face

- **Geographic:**- Location / Living on Islands – “ We still have to be taught to walk on water “
- **Social Problems** – We tend to ‘look’ at the person – not try to identify the problem
- **Economic:**- Most do Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) – people do not make application for advertised positions because of language barrier.
- **Education:**- Literacy and Numeracy problems prevail throughout Torres Strait
- **Health:**- Diabetes & heart diseases prevail
- **Isolation:**- Services still not as up to date as they are on mainland Australia
- **Inter-island travel** - depends on weather & airstrip conditions; costing of airfare is extravagant for locals - reason being everybody works for CDEP (Work for the Dole).
- **Costing of airfare** out of Horn Island to Cairns excessive (CEO Challenge doesn't include Torres Strait in their 50% off airfares for women escaping DV).
- Contacting State Police after 5pm - **all calls are diverted to Cairns Police.**

- Clients fear of court system (not understanding court procedure).
- **Language barrier** (locals don't understand English very well. English is not Torres Strait Islanders first language).

Women feeling safer

- Cultural protocol interferes with Domestic Violence in their communities (with community police).

Challenges for the future

- Empower our women.
- Have safe house & Domestic Violence worker in each community (21).
- Establish Coordinated Community Response Group (family social group to address social problems & issues) in each community