

Promoting Refugee Women's Safety

African Women's Federation of South Australia (AWFOSA) 2021/2022



Settlement
Council
of Australia

AT A GLANCE

Target participants:

African women in the local community

Aim of program:

Recognising that cultural barriers affects the way the target participants respond to domestic and family violence, the aim of the program was to create a safe space for the women to openly discuss issues and to share their experiences, and ultimately to increase awareness of available support services.

Organisations involved / partnerships:

AWFOSA, Australian Refugee Association and Relationships Australia

Location:

Adelaide and Mylor, South Australia

Funding:

Department of Home Affairs & Australian Refugee Association



The AWFOSA team

INTRODUCTION

AWFOSA delivers strengthening Relationship Program in partnership with other organisations such as Australian Refugee Association, Relationship Australia to support women on educational topics relating to Domestic and Family Violence and Healthy Relationships. One to one Well-being checks, referrals to appropriate services, including counselling are also provided.

As part of the **Promoting Refugee and Migrant Women's Safety project**, AWFOSA organised a consultation meeting with various African Community female leaders to discuss the concerns and challenges that African Women face within the African communities. **18 leaders** attended the initial meeting, as well as other relevant community organisations.

In late November 2021, as part of AWFOSA's strategy of building trust and creating a safe space for clients, organised a Weekend Camp at Mylor Adventure Camp to take women affected by DFV with their children, to learn about Domestic & Family Violence, talk about their challenges and share their experiences. This camp was funded by the Australian Refugee Association.

15 Adults attended with 8 children, who were supervised by a creche worker. (Seven other women who showed interest in the camp were either not allowed to attend or did not come due to fear of disclosing information about their situations.) The three-day event included:

Day 1 – Introductions and sharing of stories

Women introduced themselves and their cultural and community backgrounds. They talked about the challenges of moving to a country where the legal and cultural frameworks around women's rights are very different from those in their own countries, and the effect that this has on them and on the men in their households. Discussions focused on cultural values and change, effects on parenting and children, the role of women in the home and the effect this has on increases in domestic and family violence. Another key discussion topic centred around the impact of shame and pressure they felt from their communities here and in their home countries if they were to leave their homes and partners. The main positive outcome of this day was that women learned that they were not alone and that there was support available to them.



Women attending the AWFOSA Maternal Healthcare Information Session

Day 2 – Information on Prevention of FDV within CALD Communities

As part of the Communities for Change project with ARA, AWFOSA delivered sessions on prevention of domestic and family violence within CALD Communities, including a thorough briefing on safety services and contacts. Topics focused on understanding FDV, types of violence and drivers of FDV. Interactive group discussions were held on a range of topics such as risks and barriers, recognising someone experiencing DFV, supporting people experiencing DFV, case scenarios, responding to DFV disclosure and safety-first principles.

Day 3 – Focused on Self Care activities.

The last day was a 'My Wellness Program', given that the first two days were challenging and emotional for many of the participants. ARA facilitated exercises focusing on living in the moment, wellness strategies, RAIN activities, speaking from the heart, a nature mandala, sharing wisdom and looking forward. These highly interactive and nurturing activities were very therapeutic for participants and created a sense of safety, bonding and belonging.

Follow up activities in December 2021 and March 2022 build on the program through consultations with 20 female community leaders and clients. These sessions provided further information around DVF, and planning strategies for the future. It was agreed that the work around women's safety would continue, and that involving men in the discussions to gain their perspectives was the next important step in the journey.

In June 2022 a session was attended by 12 women and one man focusing on '**A man's perspective**', as part of '**The Good Life Project**' with **Relationship Australia**. This session highlighted some of the challenges faced by men including, confusion, loss of identity, isolation, homesickness, family pressure, cultural adjustment, poor understanding of what DVF abuse includes, learned behaviours, Australian law, strategies for behaviour change, communication with women, and respect. This was a very valuable session to further open the discussion around both women and men's experienced and understanding of DVF within different cultural and family contexts.

POINT OF DIFFERENCE

AWFOSA created a safe space (three days weekend camp) for women and their children to join other women, shared their stories, and learnt about DVF. This was not a session where the women just received information and went home. They had time to relax and shared their experiences with other African women who were in similar situations and never had the opportunity to talk about their challenges in a non-judgemental setting. We were able to address many topics that affects the way people respond in DVF situations, such as cultures, traditions, beliefs, religion, stigmas within community etc. At the end women were supported with a lot of information on both DVF and selfcare.

CHALLENGES

- Not all the women interested, and in need felt able to attend the weekend camp, as some were not allowed, and some were too afraid.

OUTCOMES

We have empowered and continue to empower women by:

- Helping many of our members getting into the work force and creating their own businesses.
- Running multiple programs where women can meet and network with others to break the cycle of isolation, build self-esteem finding meaning and purpose in their personal lives.
- We have strengthened our partnership with other service providers to address the issues relating to DVF, and this has helped in reaching out to more women than we would have been able to, given AWFSA's limited funds.
- We are now running volunteer programs to provide opportunities for women to gain work experience, which provides them with more options for the future.

SUCCESS STORIES

- One woman reported that the program provided her with was an environment for the first time where she did not feel judged. She said her parents thought that she complains too much but that she felt better knowing that she is not the one with these problems. She said she learned a lot from the program, and this motivated her to seek help from a counsellor. ARA and AWFOSA confirmed that they were there to help whenever she needed support or just to listen. She was given the contact details for safety services and informed her that AWFOSA will also provide a referral if required.
- Due to the positive impact the Women's Safety Project, one client felt empowered to leave her current situation of DFV. She was confident enough to report it to AWFOSA and confirmed that she was ready to leave the husband. She was referred to the DV Gateway who immediately organised a motel far away from her husband's house for her to move into that evening with her 10-month-old son. They continue to be supported by ARA and Red Cross and AWFOSA continues to ensure their welfare and support services. The woman reported that the first night at the motel was the best she had ever been, as she felt safe.

KEY LEARNINGS

- AWFOSA is resolved to continue its work around Promoting Women's safety into the future, understanding that DFV has a lasting impact on women and all family members.
- Women are often afraid or too ashamed to disclose they are experiencing DFV, and/or have pressures from their community here in Australia and in their home countries to remain in relationships where abuse is taking place.
- It is important to provide a safe space for women to share their stories and for them to be nurtured by experts in the field when they are going through the process of disclosing personal information relating to DFV. AWFOSA partnered with ARA and Relationships Australia to undertake this important work.

For more information visit-

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***Due to the sensitive nature pf the subject matter, all images used are from a different AWFOSA project.**