

Zonta Club of Noosa - Activities which fight violence against women

1. Support for the Cooroy Family Support Centre

The Zonta Club of Noosa has been involved in supporting the Cooroy Family Support Centre (CFSC) since its establishment in 1991 when the service was opened in a house donated by a local hospital which was relocated to land provided by the State Government of Queensland for a peppercorn rent.

Assistance with moving and setting up the house was provided by local service clubs, including the Zonta Noosa. In addition to fund raising, in the early days Zonta's support included repainting and repairing the house, working in the garden, building fences and driveways, donating furniture and computers and other office equipment, and regular 'working bees' over the years.

The Centre is a not for profit organisation providing affordable (and sometimes free) counselling to families on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. The Centre provides counselling for women and children affected by domestic and family violence. In addition the Centre offers counselling for other issues such as depression, grief, trauma, anger management, relationship and parenting issues.

There are a number of factors specific to our local regional area which contribute to these problems - such as high levels of families in low income brackets; a large proportion of one-parent families; new families transitioning to the area without wider family support; and so on.

The option to access affordable, professional counselling is severely limited in our region and there is currently a waiting period of 2-3 weeks for new clients to access the Service. A unique benefit of the Centre's service to the community is that it benefits people who could not afford access to a fully priced service.

It is clearly acknowledged by health professionals that counselling can help break the cycle of violence seen in domestic and family violence cases. The Centre currently provides over 350 counselling sessions per year to around 150 local residents and works closely with other community organisations to provide coordinated services to clients. For example, CFSC is a member of the Domestic Violence Stakeholders group, consisting of representatives from Salvation Army, SCOPE, SHINE, United Synergies, the police and court services, and Department of Communities Child Safety.

CFSC also partners with SCOPE to deliver group programs, such as 'Women on the Move' assisting women who have been involved in unhealthy relationships to improve their self-esteem, and 'Love Choices' delivered in local secondary schools to help young people identify what is a healthy relationship, and the 'Day of Hope' at Tewantin run annually to raise public awareness of domestic violence.

While the Centre receives some government funding, the amount provided will never be enough to meet the increasing needs of the community, and the Noosa Club has provided over \$8,000 in the past two years to allow it to continue to offer its services to women and families in need.

2. SHINE Project

In May 2004 the Zonta Club of Noosa hosted a Forum on Domestic and Family Violence in conjunction with the Noosa Shire Council. The outcome of that forum was the establishment of the

SHINE Project (S.H.I.N.E meaning “Safe Homes in Noosa Everyday”) a project to build three safe houses providing short-term emergency accommodation for women escaping domestic and family violence.

The Project Team consisted of members of the Noosa Christian Outreach Centre, Noosa Shire Council and the Zonta Club of Noosa and local businesses, trades people and others generously volunteered goods and services, labour and time and in just over two weeks the houses were completed.

Until the houses were built victims of domestic violence had nowhere to go in Noosa and were forced to relocate to other shires, having to leave jobs and support bases of neighbours and friends. For children it meant a change of school and major disruption in an already confusing and emotional time.

Tenders for supervision of the houses were offered to specialised interest groups in the area of domestic violence to oversee the running of the accommodation, so that support would be available to place those affected in more secure long term arrangements.

The Club has remained intrinsically involved in the project and continues to have representation on the SHINE Coordinating Committee and Working Group.

3. DISCOVERIES Program

From the late 1990's the Zonta Club of Noosa has funded several programs to support domestic violence victims. The latest of these is the Discoveries Program, a supportive program for women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. In 2012 and 2011 we have provided funds to Focus, a support and community liaison and education service, which aims to achieve community inclusion for individuals with a psychiatric disability and promote community development and education in relation to mental health issues. The Program run by Focus included the following topics:

- The influence of the effects of incest
- Challenging secrecy
- Escaping the clutches of guilt and self blame
- Resisting the sense of powerlessness
- Noticing and celebrating positive changes

With reference to changes to the women's overall mental health status and levels of trauma, data collected from the participants via pre and post testing suggested significant change was apparent. Participants reported changes to their levels of depression/anxiety and stress and felt more able to express their emotions in an assertive and helpful way and this had impacted upon their physical/behavioural/emotional/cognitive/spiritual and relational wellbeing.

From written feedback received from participants and from anecdotal conversations it would seem that the whole picture of the women's lives has been changed from the Discoveries Program experience. The following is a sample of feedback received:

- *I feel lighter – the tape is not constantly on replay*
- *I have ... more strength to face my problems and to do something about it*
- *My outlook Of who I am as a person has changed*
- *I feel more confident and more accepting of myself and more clear thinking*

- *I have become more secure in myself and in my living situation which is more secure now for myself and my son.*

In addition to providing the funding for the program, Zonta members took hands-on responsibility for advertising the program to the wider public in the greater Noosa area, dropping leaflets to many doctors' surgeries and health clinics. As a result Focus received many phone and internet inquiries about the program.

Zonta was very happy with the reported outcomes of the program and invited two participants to speak about their experiences at a Zonta dinner meeting. This proved to be a very powerful and moving experience for the members and the participants.

4. White Ribbon Day activities

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." – Martin Luther King.

The White Ribbon Foundation works to prevent male violence against women. It runs a male-led campaign which is based on the belief that most men are good and that good men abhor such violence. White Ribbon also works on the premise of the capacity of the individual to change and to encourage change in others.

Through primary prevention initiatives and an annual campaign, White Ribbon aims to change the attitudes and behaviours that lead to and perpetuate violence against women.

The Zonta Club of Noosa provides ongoing support to the White Ribbon campaign by organising a different awareness raising event each year at which we sell white ribbons and wrist bands and distribute information about the campaign. We have organised varied activities over the years, the most recent being self defence classes for women and girls in 2010; a promotion at the local Guns and Hoses AFL match between the police and the fire brigade in 2011; and an awareness raising event at the Noosa Hospital with the assistance of doctors and staff in 2012.