

What the Law Says about Sex – a brochure produced by Centrecare Goldfields and Kalgoorlie Detectives

The *What the Law Says about Sex* brochure was added to the ACSSA Good Practice Database in February 2006. The brochure was a joint project between Centrecare Goldfields and the Kalgoorlie Detectives Office in Western Australia, and is considered an important component of a proactive, whole of government strategy aimed at educating and preventing child abuse in the remote Aboriginal communities.

The project was initiated by Detective Senior Sergeant Bernie Hett of Kalgoorlie Detectives Office in March 2003 in response to the 2002 findings of the *Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities* (referred to as the “Gordon inquiry”), and involved the West Australian Health Department, Sexual Assault Resource Centre, and the Department of Community Development, as well as Centrecare.

From the Gordon inquiry’s findings, it was clear that there were endemic problems in the communities, relating to sexual assault, sexually transmitted disease, lack of reporting and the lack of a specialised police

presence dedicated to combating these problems and other associated issues. The inquiry report made strong recommendations for “strengthening responses to child abuse and family violence”, and “strengthening responses to vulnerable children and adults at risk” and also called for police services to adopt a proactive approach to addressing these issues in remote Aboriginal communities. On closer consultation with the communities and service providers, there appeared to be a need for raising awareness through sex education in these communities, particularly in relation to the age of consent, safe sex and the current status of sexual offence laws in Western Australia.

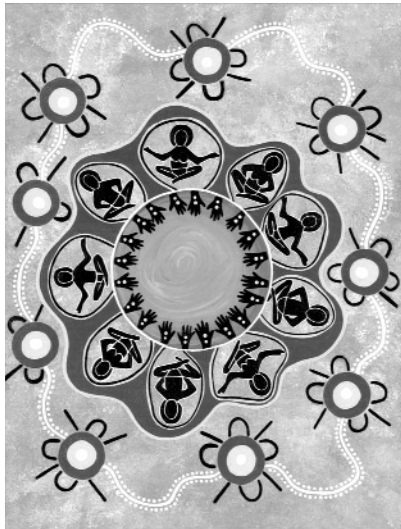
The brochure’s content covers legal considerations of inappropriate sexual behaviour and encourages reporting of offences and awareness of the law without using an authoritarian voice.

Detective Senior Sergeant Bernie Hett worked closely with Dr Howard Sercombe, a consultant at Centrecare, to ensure that the brochure was presented in appropriate language for delivery to the remote communities in the district. Input from Aboriginal agencies and Magistrate Sue Gordon (the principle author of the inquiry report) was also sought to ensure the information was culturally appropriate for distribution within the communities.

ACSSA is keen to build on our national collection of Good Practice Programs and Responses for Sexual Assault. This online collection of programs provides an important resource for national information-sharing across the work of service providers and policy makers in developing or refining models for responding to sexual assault. See details below for how to submit an entry to the database.

The brochure's content covers legal considerations of inappropriate sexual behaviour and encourages reporting of offences and awareness of the law without using an authoritarian voice. It was suggested that having this information readily available to the community would increase the confidence of communities in reporting sexual offences to the police as well as increase the likelihood of offenders being apprehended and prosecuted.

The brochure was further enhanced using artwork by Aboriginal artist Joanne Honeysett, from Taungurung, Victoria. The result was a brochure that uses colloquial and straight-forward language to communicate easily to a broad audience.



Artwork used in the brochure, by Joanne Honeysett of Taungurung, Victoria. Joanne says, "This painting depicts child abuse and speaking up. The middle of the circle is hands ... children's hands. The Elders sit outside the circle protecting the children and talking among themselves, encouraging community members to speak up. Each Elder then carries this information back to their communities encouraging others to do the same".

Since the project has been implemented, some women who were previously too frightened to speak out have already come forward and reported offences.

To support this project, a detective "presence" in the Lands has demonstrated that police are willing to support the community in the long term. Where reports of sexual offences are made, detectives from Kalgoorlie provide support to victims, witnesses and the community. The Kalgoorlie detective's office also maintains a partnership with Ngaanyatjarra Health Services who provide counselling and education sessions at remote Aboriginal communities. Since the project has been implemented, some women who were previously too frightened to speak out have already come forward and reported offences. As a result of their courage a serial sex offender was apprehended and charged with serious sexual offences.

The sex education project has been implemented across the Goldfields-Esperance District and disseminated to other Regions. The Health Department of WA has reprinted 20,000 copies for distribution across the state.

The brochure can be downloaded at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/gpdb/docs/sexandthelaw.pdf>

The Gordon Report is available online at <http://www.gordonresponse.dpc.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=questions.faq>

For more information on our database of Good Practice Programs and Responses for Sexual Assault, please contact ACSSA at acssa@aifs.gov.au, or on (03) 9214 7888. We invite submissions of examples of good practice from service providers, policy and program developers, educators and trainers, researchers and others working to address sexual violence. These can be programs, approaches or initiatives currently or recently conducted. Good Practice programs can also be submitted online at <http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/gpdb/goodpractice.html>

NOTICE

Relocating Melbourne's CASA House

After 18 years, CASA House have left their beloved and sometimes bemoaned (as they describe it) terrace on Cardigan Street in Carlton, and have relocated to the 3rd floor, Queen Victoria Women's Centre, 210 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne CBD. Their phone numbers remain the same.