

***“Until we talk about everything,
everything we talk about is just whistling into the wind”:
An Interview with Pam Greer and Sigrid (‘Sig’) Herring***

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The idea for this interview emerged as a result of conversations during guest editing this special edition of SAANZ. It became apparent that Pam holds a great deal of knowledge and history of efforts to address sexual safety for Aboriginal women and children. Sig Herring was willingly recruited to support the process with the result being several extended discussions between myself, Pam and Sig; the significant conversations were in fact between Pam and Sig and recorded in the interview format set out here.

Before going to the interview let me introduce Pam and Sig. Pam and Sig both work for NSW Health's Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV).

Pam Greer is a Barkindji Ngiyampaa woman who is Educational Consultant and Lead for Strong Aboriginal Women and Weaving the Net Community Programs through ECAV. She is also an educational consultant and advisor on Aboriginal issues and brokerage for communities. Pam has over 30 years' experience delivering services and training to Aboriginal workers and community members with a particular focus on domestic and family violence and the abuse of older people. In 2008, Pam was inducted into the NSW Aboriginal Health Hall of Fame. This is the highest accolade of this group of awards, which was in recognition of her lifetime commitment to violence prevention and response. Pam is widely recognised as integral to ECAV's Strong Aboriginal Women and Weaving the Net Programs and is a member of Aboriginal Communities Matter Advisory Group (ACMAG).

Sigrid Herring is a Gomeroi woman and ECAV's Senior Statewide Educator who has over 20 years' experience working with Aboriginal families and communities in a community-based setting and has skills in community management, case management and group work. Sig has extensive training experience in Aboriginal cultural competency, community development, governance and family violence and is a member of the Aboriginal Communities Matter Advisory Group at ECAV.

Interview

Dale: When you look back on developments in sexual assault recognition and response for Aboriginal communities, are there significant events or incidents you recall?

Pam: My interest began in a way when I first worked in Aboriginal Health in the eighties and I was invited onto the Child Protection Council and I realised that we didn't acknowledge or look at child sexual assault or domestic violence in our communities. We steered away from it, not wanting to be seen as being critical of or bring a negative focus onto community because we were already fighting for, and had been fighting for, so long to be recognised in a positive way. We tried to keep a perception that nothing was wrong.

Sig: After so long of making out that Aboriginal people were either invisible or in need of 'saving', the seventies and eighties came along and we had to do this quick turnaround to try and viably take up the self-determination reins but were, and are, faced with endemic issues - the consequences of oppression - in our own communities.

DT: *Are there some particular moments that stand out for you?*

PG: In 1987, Eadie Carter, through Adelaide Rape Crisis, did a household survey on sexual assault in Aboriginal communities. Her report was an inspiration for us all. In the mid-eighties this focus on child protection opened my eyes. I was worried about our silence and denial. When I ran some workshops with Donna Bevan in the community to my surprise people were dying to talk. People were just – “hear my story” about child abuse and neglect and child sexual assault. At that time, it was enough to just have someone to hear them – no more, just listen.

In 1983, Pat O'Shea, the first Aboriginal female head of a government department had a fierce interest in violence against women and children. Neville Wran, the NSW Premier at the

time asked her to prepare a report for the NSW Child Sexual Assault Taskforce about what was happening in Aboriginal communities. Pat O'Shea was one of those women who chose to do most of the consultation herself. She invited Aboriginal services and community to come and meet her – she personalised everything – impressive and empowering – our first Aboriginal lawyer and barrister and now department head.

In 1990 the Women's Coordination Unit was privy to what Pat was doing. Her work was feeding into the taskforce on violence bringing the true picture from community. There were reports of ten-year-old boys aspiring to rape women and reports of children with STIs [sexually transmitted infections]. She opened the door – she was the one who said no one believed that child sexual assault was taking place in their communities but when nine children in one community presented to health services with STI's no one could deny it. Pat had the experience, the knowledge, and the position – she could say the things that persuaded us to tell the truth – along with the courageous victims who were prepared to tell their story.

We were like people split in half – needing to give voice to Aboriginal women's and children's experiences but not wanting to attack anyone in our communities because there were enough people and media doing that already.

In this same year, June 1990, the NSW Women's Coordination Unit funded \$60,000 for the Aboriginal Women United Conference in Dubbo. It wasn't enough money to have a statewide conference so we got a working party together of representative women from all over the state. We asked women who were 'on the ground' workers who could bring information to and from community. There was so much energy around this conference. Helen McLaughlin from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Women's Issues Office matched the funding dollar for dollar and we were able to write to every land council to say - if we will sponsor one woman from each community to attend the conference, would they do the same? TAFE at the time were preparing a satellite broadcasting system to rural NSW and they agreed for us to be the pilot to broadcast the conference proceedings to 33 communities in towns across NSW twice a day. That was 33 extra voices having input every day and adding to the recommendations. It was a hopeful time.

DT: What was it like being there "on the ground"?

PG: Of course there were blocks and barriers. We had prominent Aboriginal women saying we had no right to be talking about the issues of child and adult sexual assault and domestic violence, but victims and survivors were able to overrule these and block their objections on the spot and this became a part of their healing.

We heard women talking about their own experiences of abuse. We heard them say they were the second and third generation of women to have been abused by the same man. Their stories of their experiences evoked so much interest in Aboriginal women, support and resources. A decade later, in 2003, these identical yarns were echoed in the voices of women from 29 communities who came forward at roundtables that preceded the 2006 Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce.

SH: We still struggle in 2015 to be able to say the good and hide the bad – it's still not safe to air our laundry against an ever present backdrop of belief in the stereotypes about Aboriginal people that persist in Australia.

PG: What could have been! It's not always just non-Aboriginal people – we are people too. Bobby (Roberta) Sykes wrote her great poem 'Fallin' – this poem says it all and speaks with a voice of authority of the experience of being raped by Aboriginal men.

The Sister had been raped they said....
I squeezed my eyes, shut tight – in horror
In shock, but not in disbelief, I heard
By five Brothers

SH: In 2014, Marlene Cummins and Rachel Perkins made the film, *Black Panther Woman*, about the women who in the 1970s marched for power and equality, and at the same time kept a code of silence that said "stand by your man for the sake of the movement", despite 'constant' physical and sexual violence. The film is a speak-out to stop today's violence against Aboriginal women and for men to take responsibility and accountability for their behaviour towards women and many men are doing just that.

PG: In 1993 the Women's Coordination Unit conducted the Sexual Assault Phone-in. The first thing of this kind had been a questionnaire put out through the Sunday Telegraph, to which 193 people had responded and the phone-in was to update this information. The committee had the foresight to understand the barriers to Aboriginal women phoning in, so Carol Thomas (Women's Coordination Unit) and I were employed to take the questions to communities

across NSW– face-to-face. Women lined up to talk – the time was right because we’d had the 1990 Women’s Conference that spread the word that women could talk about these things.

Things were starting to happen for Aboriginal women and children at the NSW Health Unit – the Education Centre Against Violence. At that time ECAV had read all the reports and recommendations which all said that community education was the answer, and it was ECAV’s answer. Although ECAV was a government department, it had grown an identity that looked less like a government department and more like a community-based service. When reports and recommendations go to government departments they often take a long time to go far, but ECAV was able to put people on the ground immediately to meet those recommendations.

DT: *What happened in those early community programs?*

PG: One of the first community programs I ran in Wilcannia in the eighties, nobody from community came. We had some workers willing to talk so we door-knocked community and gathered women around us. We met and talked and decided if they were not going to come to us, we would go to them. Someone said we should check with the police and in the end two policewomen joined us on the march. We wanted to paint banners and you couldn’t buy cans of spray paint in Wilcannia so the boys at the Shire Council supplied us – all colours. We painted, ‘We don’t want child sexual assault in Wilcannia’ and hung the banners off the bus. As we walked up the street beside the bus we called to women to join us. It was so exciting – and scary! We had spelt child sexual assault wrong – left off an ‘s’ in assault I think, but nobody noticed.

Women Out West was formed in a celebration of International Women’s Day in Dubbo in 1995 and grew into a project coordinated by the Women’s Legal Resources Centre – now Women’s Legal Services. This project immediately focused on service responses to women in remote towns in the far west of the state. They raised the issue that services were delivered from places that Aboriginal women were uncomfortable attending. Instead of money going to Aboriginal services it went to mainstream services, who did their best, but didn’t do what Aboriginal women expected – provide a place that was accessible or a place of safety.

The Women’s Coordination Unit working under their strategic plan started the Aboriginal

Women and the Law Project to make sure Aboriginal women had access to legal services in response to the issues Aboriginal women raised – access, community education - so that women could make informed decisions about whether they wanted to use the law as one of their solutions.

DT: *So almost immediately issues in the legal system were highlighted?*

SH: The legal system has not always supported the needs of Aboriginal women. Some of the comments that were made in court at those times were things like “rape is not as significant in Aboriginal as in white society” and “standards of sexual conduct in Aboriginal communities are different from standards accepted by the general public”. Aboriginal women feared that a system that endeared itself to these stereotypical beliefs would be used against them.

PG: Some of the things women said were “they were not informed of their rights”, “they were rushed through”, “they think we deserve the violence”, “they don’t understand Aboriginal culture”, and “they don’t understand how different communities are to each other”. There was one account of the Clerk of the Court in one community keeping all the information pamphlets for Aboriginal women locked in a filing cabinet because if he put them out “everyone would take them”!

The 1996, the *Heroines of Fortitude Report* had a whole section on how it was for Aboriginal women and the sorts of prejudice they faced in court. Some women in court were asked up 70 times about whether they were lying or making it all up, almost all Aboriginal women were asked if they had alleged sexual assault in order to get victim’s compensation, women were hours under cross examination, their credibility attacked and undermined, and they were consistently asked about their drinking and drug use – one women 173 times.

Aboriginal men were the offenders in 61% of cases and Aboriginal women were still being raped in police cells. There was no safe place.

DT: *It is hard to hear and comprehend this even now. What followed after this?*

SH: In 1998 the NSW Department of Health released the *Aboriginal Family Health Strategy* - the first step in working in partnership with Aboriginal communities to address family violence and sexual assault at a regional and local level. Aboriginal Family Health Workers were employed to support individual families and focus on prevention and early intervention through community engagement and partnership

with other government and non-government agencies and projects.

The next big report to come out was from the 2002 *Gordon Inquiry* resulting from complaints about services not acting on child abuse and family violence in Aboriginal communities after the death of a 15-year-old girl. Thirteen agencies were working with this young woman, none was aware of the other and no one knew who was the lead agency. The *Strong Families Model* initiated from this inquiry was the development of unified case plans with each agency's roles and responsibilities and a designated lead agency overseeing.

PG: That fitted in so well with the Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, established in 2003, to examine child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities, review how government and non-government agencies in NSW responded, and make recommendations on improving responses. They did a literature review, took written submissions and other information, from government and non-government and consulted individuals and communities across NSW.

Their work was reported in the 2006 *Breaking the Silence* report and then there was the 2007 Interagency Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal communities which involved consulting with more than 300 workers and community members in 14 different communities, along with 32 written submissions from government, non-government and community. The consultations revealed consistencies across communities – the extent of the problem, the harm it was causing and the overwhelming need to do something to put a stop to the assaults. Also consistent were communities' experiences and perceptions of service providers and suggestions for ways service provision could be improved.

SH: The Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce came about as a result of the 2002 Roundtables on sexual violence in Aboriginal communities conducted by DAA [NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs] and Rowena Lawrie's 2002 report, *Speak Out Speak Strong*, which revealed 70% of imprisoned Aboriginal women had been sexually assaulted as children.

In 2004 and again in 2007, both Pam and I and a great many more Aboriginal women from both community and workplaces across NSW, met together at Lake Burrendong near Wellington for the Partnerships, Prevention and Rural Action conferences to share ideas and strategies about what we were using and what we could do about child sexual assault. In 2007, Women's Legal

Services and Dympna House co-produced a book called, *Our Silence is Abusing Our Kids* – a book of interviews and stories from Aboriginal women in communities and workers about what they were doing to protect children and young people from child sexual assault.

In 2008 the *Wood Inquiry into Child Protection* found that Aboriginal communities were over-represented in the child protection system but that culturally appropriate interventions were not widespread in any of the agencies working with them. Wood identified that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations did not have the capacity to deliver the services community needed. In 2011 the Ombudsman in its report addressing the responses to child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities said much the same.

Service responses in Aboriginal communities were audited by the NSW Ombudsman when they reviewed the 2007 *NSW Interagency Plan to Tackle Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities*. The Ombudsman released three reports; *Addressing Aboriginal Disadvantage – The Need to Do Things Differently* (October, 2011), *Responding to Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities* (December, 2012) and a third confidential report focusing on two Aboriginal communities. In both of the public reports ECAV programs were applauded. It was recommended that ECAV play a greater role in developing the cultural competency of the non-Aboriginal workforce and in Aboriginal workforce development.

DT: So, it seems like a growing number of reports and investigations throwing a light on these issues. What kind of service responses followed?

PG: The NSW Health ECAV Aboriginal Programs Unit runs a suite of training, development and mentoring programs that contribute to workforce and community development; Weaving the Net, Strong Aboriginal Women, Strong Aboriginal Men, Rural Responses to Aboriginal Family Violence, Skills in Child Protection for Aboriginal Workers, Child Sexual Assault for Aboriginal Workers, Responding to the Abuse of Older Aboriginal People, Defining Healthy Boundaries, Journey of Survival, Supporting Aboriginal Young People, NSW DV Aboriginal Core Training, the Sexual Assault of Aboriginal Men and Boys, Working with Aboriginal Parents who have experienced Child Abuse and Neglect, Certificate IV in Aboriginal Family Health and Advanced Diploma in Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling. The last two substantially

funded under the NSW Health *Aboriginal Family Health Strategy 2011-2016*.

Both the Ombudsman reports and the Aboriginal Family Health Strategy reinforce the principles that underpin ECAV Aboriginal training – that family and sexual violence can't be tackled in isolation of the broader issues of Aboriginal disadvantage in the areas of health, education, employment and justice, and that family and sexual violence must be seen in the context of the historical, political and social environment it occurs in and that a major principle of working with communities to develop is self-determination. For self-determination to be realised people need choice, participation in decision-making and have a sense of control in their own lives. For these to be realised people need capacity. For capacity to be realised people need trauma-informed, culturally safe, sensitive and competent community education, healing, knowledge, information, skill building ...

DT: *Secrecy, fear and shame are now recognised as being barriers and effects of sexual abuse. In relation to Aboriginal family violence, which are most significant and do you think this is well understood? What do you see as the most effective ways to recognise and address this?*

PG: Secrecy, shame and fear are the weapons that hold people silent – people's own experiences are reinforced from the response they get, from their family and their community and the services that intervene. Women and children see that it is too hard and unsafe.

In the *Heroines of Fortitude Report (1996)* the number of black deaths in custody, has increased fears that if sexual violence by Aboriginal men is reported, then the alleged offender will suffer the next death in custody. Many communities are torn apart by the secrecy that is so much part of this attitude, which protects offenders and allows sexual violence to continue.

SH: We make a fierce point in our ECAV training programs - that the numbers of women who are harmed and who die either directly or from the impact of sexual and family violence far outweighs the numbers of men who die in custody. It's Pam Greer who pioneered this fierce point – having the courage to speak 'out loud' in communities at the time when secrecy, fear and shame held everyone in such silence.

PG: Women and children are being protective and not just of men. While services are only able to offer an option of leaving, women are faced with the danger of losing everything they are connected to – their homes and families,

Country, friends, local services and supports – paying the price as if they are responsible.

Aboriginal women's interests took a backward step when one Chair of ATSIIC was appointed despite serving two terms in prison for a string of criminal charges against him, including rape. He was convicted in civil proceedings and when he asked if this was the "lowest point his life" he said it was "the lowest point in the history of the country" - hiding his own culpability under a guise of aspersions of vilification of him as an Aboriginal man. It's a terrible bind for Aboriginal women, whose experiences of sexual violence and their right to a human rights response is undermined by the fact that Aboriginal men will be vilified. It's an offender's paradise.

DT: *Is culture ever used as a smoke screen?*

SH: One of the greatest shame factors and barriers to disclosure is that myth that sexual and family violence is 'cultural' in Aboriginal communities, but the dynamics of sexual assault and sexual violence in Aboriginal communities are the same as everywhere – it's secretive, it's coerced by threats that are terrifying and that can bring about even more shame, not everyone knows what it is, not everyone knows what to do about it, and there is no guarantee that the service or statutory response will be culturally or physically, or psychologically or socially or politically safe – there's not even a guarantee that it will stop the abuse.

The perpetration of child sexual assault will change the landscape of the life of the growing child and the disclosure of it will change the landscape of the life of the entire family. Responsibility for these changes is worn by the victim/survivor instead of the offender. These things are the same in both our societies. Offenders do not discriminate.

What can be different for Aboriginal people is that family and community connections are bigger and even more complex, and the loss of these connections can catapult women and children into a world of greater isolation, marginalisation, disadvantage, oppression and loneliness.

PG: ECAV's Strong Aboriginal Women program helps this – it involves three days of community education for community where we can stand alongside community, we are able to inform and support, hear, and stand by people who have experienced sexual and family violence as they tell about these experiences and talk through their fears of telling or reporting.

Often a great fear for families is their pets and what will or is happening to them. Virginia Elliot (ECAV trainer and consultant) and I are animal rights activists. We often say a barometer of how women and children are being treated is reflected in the health of pets in the community. We have years caring for and feeding them and sharing with women and children the pride of how healthy they were when they returned to community.

Even so these are small steps and we always need to be around for longer than three days, to keep returning, to witness the impact a three-day workshop can have on a community. This is the strategy of ECAV's Community education Programs – to keep returning, to keep listening. This has helped me in the work I do. I return wearing a different hat at various times – always keeping my memory open for what I have heard before, open to what new things I can learn and how I can connect the bits of their story to the bits of other stories. I keep a scrapbook of the community. Everyone wonders why I read newspapers front to back – I collect it all and the 'over time' story is there in newspaper cuttings.

Every time I visit a community I search what I've got and I search other places for what I can take into that community that belongs to them – what have they done that they can connect with in 2015. We made a video in Murrin Bridge and showed it on a later visit. We asked them "what do you see?" – the kids looked healthier and the place looked cleaner. Some of those women in the room who were kids then are workers in the community now – it's their own story.

SH: At ECAV whenever someone says there is no Aboriginal voice in a literature review we say that's because they needed to have done their literature review in Pam Greer's shed. The journeys and achievements of many Aboriginal communities are right there.

DT: *Are there lessons to take notice of? What works? And is there clarity about things that don't work, as I know many non-Aboriginal workers have fears about doing the 'wrong thing'?*

PG: We know spot-fire service delivery does not work. Here and gone visits, short term funding that doesn't take care of relationships, continuity of service, and the body of knowledge that leaves the building every time a worker leaves at the end of the visit or the project. Even in bigger organisations this picking up and starting over again and again, with each change of government, wears everyone out. Communities lose trust and workers never get their long service leave.

What does work, is being yourself. Lessons are always to listen to the people and to trust our own gut feelings about what we know and don't know. As Aboriginal people, we do want to lead the conversations – we don't want to talk about land rights when we need to talk about child sexual assault. Why don't we want to only talk about land rights? Because we have to talk about the whole picture from dog health to the minerals to the gas to the child sexual assault.

SH: Pam has helped non-Aboriginal workers to learn about 'talking in code' – listening to the things that are said is important but learning to listen for the things that aren't spoken is often even more significant.

In training, each time we ask non-Aboriginal workers or students to list the common beliefs non-Aboriginal people have about Aboriginal people - they are too shy to talk, fearing they will say or do the 'wrong thing'. When we talk about common beliefs and family and sexual violence we are talking about things that are outrageous. We fear they think those things about us and, as Lorna McNamara (ECAV Director) says – "they fear, that we fear, that they think those things about us".

Trouble is, sometimes they do. Aboriginal people have to hope for and rely on the goodwill and capacity of non-Aboriginal people to understand an Aboriginal worldview. Culturally safe engagement is not yet in the legislation and in the workforce it's not in the position description or the performance criteria. Racism and vilification is legislated against but the mechanisms for redress are unclear and in the last year it's become a 'George Brandis joke fest'. Non-Aboriginal people are free to have opinions and to make judgements about Aboriginal people in an as bigoted way as they like, and as Marlene Lauw (ECAV Aboriginal Trainer) always tells us, "behaviour follows attitude" - and their interventions and responses often reflect this.

PG: But family and sexual violence is not about race or culture. It's about gender and power and control and privilege. Until we talk about everything, everything we talk about is just whistling into the wind.

DT: *There has been an increasing literature and a lot of research of Aboriginal communities. I notice in the sexual abuse space it is almost exclusively by non-Aboriginal researchers and experts. You have made points about this not necessarily being the story of the community.*

PG: Our early stuff is anecdotal but it was the most concrete – it came out of the mouths of

Aboriginal people. While women were talking, men should also have been. Women were talking more but men had the microphone. They looked like they were speaking the truth but they didn't speak all our truths. They betrayed Aboriginal women. Those are the truths Marlene Cummins was talking about. Women's or men's truths are influenced by what women or men have to hide or protect – you can see the pain in women and in community by what they have to protect. Communities are researched and consulted, they feel hope, they betray and are betrayed by what they hide or protect, the literature doesn't tell the whole story and if they do get feedback through the paper or the report, they are not heard – the story of the community is not reflected in the words. There are communities in NSW 30 kilometres apart and they have entirely different ways of communicating – we have to hear it all.

SH: There have been so many reports and papers and so many recommendations and they all talk about the impacts of colonisation – the horror of massacre times (1790 – 1928), the exclusion of Aboriginal people from Australia's developing social, economic and political fabric (1788 – 1967+), the children stolen (at least four generations of children born into and socialised into this terrorism), the families fractured, the land and sacred sites lost to settlement and economic growth, the invasion (1788), the intervention (2007), the removal from homelands (2015), the generations of grief and loss and oppression - people just persistently hammered down until the inevitable lateral explosion of oppression in violence, drug and alcohol use, and the self-harm and suicide we see in communities today. These are not the kinds of experiences that laterally explode into research and literature writing.

Two hundred plus years on the repercussions of invasion are reflected in the NT Intervention. After five years of the Intervention, the *Closing the Gap Monitoring Report* (Australian Government, 2011) showed there was a 69% increase in children getting taken into out-of-home-care since 2007, mostly for neglect with more than 80% of those children being placed with non-Aboriginal carers; increases in children being admitted to hospital for malnutrition, underweight and wasting; reported incidents of self-harm and suicide have increased by 500%; a drop in school attendance in preschool, primary and secondary schools and a 40% rise in incarcerations rates, and an increase in police incidents involving domestic violence and alcohol use has also increased. While

Australians have been growing the lucky country Aboriginal families and communities have been struggling just to survive.

PG: Others have other stories about the Intervention. Bess Price, a long-time advocate for ending violence in Aboriginal communities, has seen some progress – women with voices speaking for themselves, children eating and young people more able to manage their lives. If there are half a million Aboriginal people in Australia that's half a million ways to experience things, half a million experts and if we could, half a million papers.

SH: When we do hear an Aboriginal voice none of the protocol of our old ways is observed. We hear Aboriginal voices in a western way – without the chorus of their community behind them, without their wisdom and censorship and guidance.

PG: If there are 30 different communities there are 30 different ways of doing things and defining a solution, if there are half a million Aboriginal people there are half a million ways of being an Aboriginal person. When this is written up by non-Aboriginal researchers and experts this diversity is not represented.

SH: The literature says we need Aboriginal services and workers for Aboriginal people, long term/recurrent funding, local services that are resourced to assist the community to build capacity, community engagement that is relationship focused, that allows Aboriginal people the time to build trust and rapport, that recognises the differences between communities.

Aboriginal voices say; partners not patronage, self-determination not assimilation, participation in decision-making, land rights not native title, justice not reconciliation, an end to tokenism, equitable access to education and employment, the need for acknowledgement and opportunity for healing and access to culturally safe, racism-free, trauma-informed service provision. All of these strategies and principles have been highlighted and confirmed in the NSW Ombudsman report, *Addressing Aboriginal Disadvantage* (Author, 2011).

PG: The positive thing about white peoples' literature, like the Bureau of Crime Statistics and research statistics, presented to communities – when we read them we gasped but were so grateful that we could take some solid information out to community, to back-up the things we needed to say, and be able to say this is just the tip of the iceberg because the statistics only represent the people who had outcomes. It's

not the whole story though and no healing is possible if we haven't got the whole story.

Sitting around, talking and hearing the whole story is useful – we are still practicing saying the words - we've had to reclaim some of the words to do the work – wife bashing, rape, child abuse – racism – to be clear about that whole story we've had to talk about it and understand it because anything we heard from white people about it, that we didn't like, had to be racism.

DT: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented as victims of violent and sexual crime. Disadvantage, racism and intergenerational trauma contribute to underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in recognised roles in prevention and response. In New South Wales you have both been involved in community education and the development of training programs for Aboriginal people. How significant is this as a strategy? And are there indicators of if this has been successful?*

PG: ECAV's Strong Aboriginal Women (SAW) and Strong Aboriginal Men (SAM) and Weaving the Net (WTN), Certificate IV Aboriginal Family Health (Family Violence, Sexual Assault, Child Protection) and the Advanced Diploma in Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling are just some of the training and community development programs run through the ECAV Aboriginal Programs. Under the umbrella of the Aboriginal Communities Matter Advisory Group we are a strong team. In the period 2014-2015 we ran 52 workshops across NSW with more than 760 Aboriginal workers and community members participating.

SH: ECAV is committed to 'making up' for the opportunities lost to our mob due to their experiences of racism and trauma over the generations. This is why we have put so much energy into developing a culturally safe educational pathway where learning reflects Aboriginal worldviews and is not our stuff, stuffed into western frameworks. We have negotiated and developed a culturally safe study pathway from the Certificate IV into the Advanced Diploma that created eligibility for participants to apply to do a Graduate Certificate in Human and Community Services at Sydney University. From here participants can apply to do a Masters of Social Work.

Since 2001, the Certificate IV has been delivered 15 times regionally and locally – communities include Parkes, Mount Druitt, Newcastle, Bourke, Dubbo, Lismore and Taree. During this period 169 Aboriginal workers have

completed the course and of this number 151 graduated with the Certificate IV qualification. Since 2011, 25 of these workers have gone on to graduate from the Advanced Diploma, 10 of these workers have graduated from Sydney University with their Graduate Certificate and one, Mary Eatts (ECAV Star Student), is enrolled in the Masters course.

PG: Our team at ECAV is largely an Aboriginal team. What's good about ECAV is there is no assumption that just because we are Aboriginal we will all work well together or will be experts in all things Aboriginal.

DT: *There has been a lot of focus on developing and supporting a culturally competent workforce. It seems to me this is a logical and significant strategy. How effective is it?*

PG: It's significant when the space is safe enough to say to a non-Aboriginal person that when I feel offended or hurt it means someone lacks information or understanding, and it's significant when they respond with respect like – "I didn't know" or "'ve learned something today". This is a rewarding experience for Aboriginal people – when someone chooses to take something from what they hear. In fact, it's a profound thing.

SH: In cultural competency, Aboriginal people are asking for a culturally safe experience. Mareese Terare tells us that a culturally safe experience is using a service where an Aboriginal worldview matters and is part of the response. From an Aboriginal perspective it's a service response that is willing to work alongside Aboriginal women and men and children to achieve their safety and put an end to violence that doesn't end up feeling like a punishment for being Aboriginal.

PG: Lorna McNamara (ECAV Director) will tell you she thought she was culturally aware but came to realise she still only saw things from a non-Aboriginal perspective. One time there was an Aboriginal worker at a sexual assault service who'd been recruited and for a while went really well but then began to arrive at work later, leave earlier, then not turn up at all and which her manager saw as a lack of professionalism and unethical behaviour in the worker. I was able to point out, and Lorna was able to hear, that actually the situation in that service reflected the 'racism' of the manager – if that had been a non-Aboriginal worker the manager would not have allowed that to happen. It was the manager's role to provide a structure for the Aboriginal worker that was safe for her – so the worker felt safe to come to work and stay there and be able to be

- open about issues in the workplace that impacted on her.
- DT: *Is it possible for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers to effectively deliver services together?*
- PG: We do this already. After 30 years of working with Aboriginal people, Virginia Elliot (ECAV FDV Trainer) can say, "I'm not Aboriginal but I can say this ...", she doesn't say "I've worked with Aboriginal people for 30 years and now I am Aboriginal".
- I know of a team where nurses worked with Aboriginal health workers and in that situation nurses will hold the balance of power and use it. One Aboriginal worker did say to her "I can go and train to be a nurse but you can't become Aboriginal". That woman did go on to train as nurse and went back to work in the community.
- When non-Aboriginal people come into work with Aboriginal people they go away with their story about what it is to work with Aboriginal people – what works for them. Not what could work for Aboriginal people – through an Aboriginal lens.
- SH: Working with non-Aboriginal people, with a view to working together with other Aboriginal people is about facilitating that self-determination. We have to be 'able' to, and to be able to, we have to be able to see where we want to get to – more than just moment to moment survival or safety seeking. It's not us being some sort of tool, which non-Aboriginal people use, as a conduit for communication where we help interpret a non-Aboriginal perspective and prime a community to have things done to or for them.
- DT: *Most workers in sexual assault services are women. In responding to sexual abuse, particularly to men and boys sometimes reference is made to men and women's business. The suggestion at times is that women should not work with men as an example. Do you have any comments regarding this?*
- PG: We have learned the hard way that good men should be working with men. We don't have to wait for men to realise they can be role models – there are good Aboriginal men. As women without men we have been fighting a losing battle trying to change some men's behaviour.
- SH: As women, we can only see out of our eyes. It's their job, their role, their men's business.
- PG: It goes without saying that if there is a man and a woman and if that man requires a service response then that woman will respond as one human being to another.
- SH: In our communities and culture we recognise the difference between the energy of men and women but unlike mainstream Australian societies, our societies were structured on the basis of age rather than gender. Eldership, growing knowledge, wisdom holds the balance of power. Aboriginal men might want to work with other men but are as likely to seek the counsel of older Aboriginal women. In some ways age, as in youth, might be more of a barrier to working with either men or women than gender.
- DT: *Is there advice you can give to workers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal who work in this space?*
- PG: Don't try and be someone you are not, don't try and be a 'wannabe'. If you are a good worker, be that good worker for whoever comes to your door.
- SH: Have a good handle on what it means to be 'privileged' - including the privilege of the assets and opportunities that have been built on the back of Aboriginal losses, the privilege of not living in an environment where survival is front and centre every day, the privilege of working just nine-to-five, of having a job even, the privilege of having eaten already that day...
- DT: *What do you see as important in relation to responding to those who have harmed?*
- PG: The biggest thing for victims and survivors is believing, listening - until it's all said - listening through the silences, hearing the silence. Then asking, "what would you like me to do", instead of "now, this is what we have to do" or "this is what I will do". We all have to know that when we spill something we have to clean it up.
- It's important to hear from those who have harmed too, making sure we don't take away from the victim's story by hearing an offender's story. We have to work together to hold both.
- And support the families of young people or adults who do harm, remembering their shame and their pain.
- SH: In Pam's work in community we watch her go out of her way to connect with and yarn with parents and Elders of people who have caused harm to others. No matter how bad this was she makes sure to give them respect and a chance to talk about their pain.
- Knowing that being harmed and doing harm can exist in the same space at the same time, and being clear that while being harmed might create a context for doing harm, a context can also be established where other choices can be made.
- DT: *What are your observations of the process of bringing 'offenders' (inverted commas as including children in this) into the picture for understanding and responding at both family and community levels?*

- PG: Well and good, but there is a patchy response because if you don't live in the radius you don't get the services. These gaps are then filled by the victim – their family and community – no response is probably the only response – a whole lot of services – we can't just say it's the goodies and baddies – we need to understand what drives bad things – we need to hold this up alongside but not tangled up with the response victims need and deserve. Having only a black and white perspective – either victim or perpetrator – has brought us to a lazy way of responding – when we don't know enough and we don't have the resources to do more, it's easy to just choose to respond to the victim.
- SH: People need other people to stand with them and help them manage their life experiences and the choices they make. That western notion that a punishment will ameliorate a crime does nothing to address the context of that crime. Punishment without rehabilitation – without doing something to either change the person or the environment or preferably both, is silly and wasteful.
- PG: The chickens have come home to roost anyway – since the nineties the perpetrator-less service response has helped to enable another generation of adult harmers.
- Communities are juggling offenders and victims all the time. In Weaving the Net we listen to communities when they ask for more information or support to help their family members who have offended so they can stop. We bring in people who know about this and can talk about it from a victim's perspective – people like you, Dale Tolliday (New Street Director), Cathy Want (ECAV Trainer and Rosie's Place Manager) and Mary Jo McVeigh (ECAV trainer and consultant).
- DT: *What would it take to do better?*
- PG: Age/development appropriate accountability. You (Dale Tolliday) and Cathy Want (Manager Rosie's Place/ECAV Trainer) come along to talk to us about the context in which children harm, as part of Weaving the Net – good questions are asked of them about children and young people who do this – the chance and the space to talk about it and ask questions and try to understand enables less judgement and more open minds than they had before – it means more education to explore, to understand – more new streets to go down to thinking about solutions.
- SH: More people with knowledge and understanding is more people to divide our time and skills and resources to adequately or properly meet the needs of both victims of harm and those who harm.
- DT: *If you could influence or change responses to Aboriginal family violence what would be your priorities?*
- PG/SH: Just stop it!
- PG: We need to continue to keep talking about it. For everyone to take it as seriously as it is. If the police just see it for what it is – rape and murder. If community workers and health workers just see it as it is – the impacts of rape and murder. People have to understand what it is.
- We need to focus as well on Aboriginal families and men who don't do violence. We find it all too easy to highlight the bad and keep the myths alive around it. We don't value our culture or each other enough.
- SH: We – our services sector – allow the myths, stereotypes and prejudices to prevail – we let it be 'business as usual' in Aboriginal communities. We keep talking about colonisation as if it's in the past. Australia is being colonised every day. We – our services sector - keep asking and researching and then ignoring recommendations because we didn't get the answer we wanted.
- PG: We keep not funding or funding inadequately the things that community says will work for them – cultural safety, healing, relationships, respect. As time goes on while we wait to be heard we get older ourselves and we realise things are changing for younger people – we can see they don't have the benefits we have – the feelings of being part of a bigger extended family - many beds, many dinner tables, many aunties – the joy of things that don't cost money.
- Being together, remembering people who have passed and who were all part of this mob and that we all knew and we are all part of that person. We do things like let the grieving go on for two months and then as soon as we bury her its business as usual. Once people are dead and gone we speak our highest praise and cry our hardest tears but we don't value them living.
- Lorna McNamara (ECAV Director) and Letty Funston (ECAV Consultant & PHD Student) put this picture of Robyn's story together to help us remember that trauma sits underneath so many problems and if this is not taken care of the problems won't go away. As non-Aboriginal people they have really listened to what we have been saying about an Aboriginal worldview. The picture is quite clear – if we don't do this Robyn is going to end up the early death.

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