

Vanuatu Women's Center



Departments:
IN ACTION

by Marilyn Tahi, Coordinator

In 1992 three women came back from the first workshop on violence and women. The workshop was organized by the Fiji Women's Crisis Center for Pacific women -- the first of its kind. The three women delegation were from the police and the women's groups. These women began organizing and planning how their future work will be. The first activity in 1992 was the first observance in Vanuatu of the 16 days of activism. There was a two-week workshop on violence and women, ten-day media program and two-week exhibition. This is the first time Vanuatu women spoke out on this issue of violence against women.

The three women began seeing clients. Between September and December 1992 there were 26 women. The three women were not qualified, graduate counselors, they were activists and community workers. During the workshop two days were focused on counseling skills. Now, in Vanuatu there is a Center offering counseling for abused women and children and men also use it. In 1993 180 women came to the Center, in 1994 there were 158 new clients. This meant that the women in 1993 were seen again in 1994.

The Ministry of Women allocated a small office space for the Center, but on 8th March 1994, the Prime Minister wrote and asked the Center to vacate this office in 7 days. Since then, the office is based in rented premises. There are 5 staff, with 3 counselors. There are also 3 volunteer counselors. These women

were all volunteers from 1992 to June 1994 when Australian government through the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) approved a three-year funding program.

Activities we do or carry out in relation to combatting violence in Vanuatu are: Awareness workshops on violence in town as well as outer islands; the Awareness Programs, we have an all-female theater group performing plays on rape, domestic violence, child maintenance, nutrition and family planning; we visit female prisoners in prison weekly; we go to courts with our clients to give support; we have Radio programs; a survivors' group which have monthly meetings; we run basic counseling skills training undertake community/public talks; and, in 1994/1995 we have introduced a legal literacy program.

Our story shows that if one is committed and has good communication skills, one can do activities to help women and communities. In Asia and Pacific I'm sure we have a lot of skills we can utilize, but we are waiting for someone to come and do it for us. When one knows what they want the path is clear. This is our story. It has not been easy, but we have learned throughout the journey, and gained respect.▲

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