

MEDIA RELEASE

A new domestic violence program for men and their families

The ACT Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) has teamed up with Connections ACT to initiate a new program to help men address their violence and controlling behaviours while their families are supported to stay in their own home.

Room4Change: a breathing space to improve family safety will fill an important gap in the services provided in the ACT and help reduce the likelihood of men using domestic and family violence against women and children, DVCS Executive Director Mirjana Wilson said today.

“DVCS found that over 58% of women and children became homeless within 12 months of leaving a controlling relationship. Domestic and family violence has a long-term impact on families and creates a huge social and financial cost to the community – it is directly linked to homelessness, trauma, substance abuse, poor health and a range of adverse outcomes for children,” she said.

“So far this financial year DVCS provided almost 1,200 nights of emergency accommodation to families – mainly women and children - experiencing domestic and family violence. This desperately needed new program offers new supports and will work with all family members to prevent ongoing harm, while at the same time ensuring women and children are safe and have the option of staying at home.”

With funding announced in the ACT Government Budget, **Room4Change** will work with men who use family violence through a three-month intensive residential program, while supporting women and their children as they stay at home. Following the residential program families will be offered up to nine months of outreach support.

Managed by DVCS, the program brings together the resources and many years of expertise of DVCS and Connections ACT.

“Both DVCS and Connections ACT have extensive experience in assisting families at times of crisis, providing support programs for women, men and their children who have been affected by domestic and family violence, and working with fathers to strengthen relationships,” Ms. Wilson said.

“This work aims to improve outcomes for all – men, women and children. It will hold men accountable for their violence and support them to move beyond it. It will be coordinated with existing services, culturally respectful, comprehensively evaluated and adequately resourced. The long term credibility of this work is too important to do at half measure,” Mr Anthony Rochester, Executive Officer of Connections ACT stressed.

The **Room4Change** program will work closely with other services and sectors in the ACT, including police, courts, and services that already work with men.

The program represents an important milestone for the ACT community. Having a residential therapeutic program for men means that the ACT will now have a comprehensive Safe at Home initiative for the first time. The focus accords with priorities articulated in the national plan to reduce violence against women and their children and recent reports on responses to domestic and family violence in the ACT.

Funding of three years will ensure the program has time to grow and become fully established in the ACT. It will be monitored and reviewed carefully, with an evaluation framework built in from the start.

The program is scheduled to become operational by October 2016.

For further information please contact:

Mirjana Wilson, Executive Director, Domestic Violence Crisis Service

Phone: 02 6228 1794 and 0400 307 062