

WESNET

AMALGAMATION UPDATE - 2

NOTIFICATION OF NEW WESNET NATIONAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR 1997 -1999

November 1997

Women's services will be aware from the first conference bulletin, the September issue of *Accommodating Women*, and the Amalgamation Update sent to all services in October 1997 that the Federal Government has indicated that there is no funding for WESNET after June 30th 1998.

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services has told us that there are insufficient departmental monies to fund separate peaks for youth, general and women's homelessness. They also want those speaking on behalf of homelessness to speak with one united voice

WESNET strongly disputes the government's implication that the issues facing women, young people, single adult men, and families who are homeless, are so similar that the three organizations currently speaking on their behalf duplicate each other's work. The issues covered by WESNET advocating for women and children escaping violence or who are homeless for other reasons, are very different from those raised on behalf of other SAAP users. WESNET also advocates on behalf of our constituency on issues much broader than SAAP, e.g. the criminal justice system, legal aid, income support and housing, as well as on behalf of women who do not use our services.

Women's services also work very differently from other SAAP services. This is because women's services are strongly committed to running services by women for women, and to promoting social justice. They believe that these strategies promote their ultimate objective of achieving the social change necessary to end violence against women. Though this objective is shared by many, a women specific peak is needed to provide a national voice for women's services, whose experience in these issues is unrivalled. Their voice is essential if government is to develop coherent and effective policies and programs on violence against women and children and women's homelessness. This voice will not be heard through a generalist peak; women's services will not give their time and energy to participating in an organization which does not have women and children's interests as its sole purpose.

WESNET has therefore strongly argued that women's services will only be represented by women's service workers. The response to the first Amalgamation Update indicated clear hostility to the proposed amalgamation.

Therefore we have proposed a flat coalition organization ensuring WESNET's autonomy, as is clear from the proposal set out below. We will continue to investigate whether WESNET can continue as a separate organization but seek your agreement or otherwise to the proposal as a fall back position. It was prepared by delegates from WESNET, the National Youth Coalition for Housing and the Council

for Homeless Persons Australia at a Forum to discuss the amalgamation proposal in Canberra on the 13th and 14th November.

Proposal under consideration: WESNET, NYCH and CHP Joint Forum

“1. The forum rejects the government proposal to amalgamate NYCH, WESNET and CHPA in order to establish one homelessness peak.

2. The NYCH, WESNET and CHPA Forum does not accept that there is a duplication of purpose or activities between our organizations.

3. In recognition of the government’s requirement for a coordinated response to issues of homelessness and the needs of our constituents, NYCH, WESNET and CHPA Forum participants agree to present the following proposal to their governing bodies. This is a proposal only and will be discussed at each organization’s respective meetings of their representative bodies:

“ That a joint submission for funding from the Community Sector Support Scheme within the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services be developed which includes:

- the development of one incorporated body to receive and distribute government funding;
- maintenance of the autonomy of each organization;
- exploration of areas of joint work and common interest where appropriate.”

WESNET’s future as a women’s peak organization will be discussed at conference.

If you are not attending, can you discuss this issue in your service and your women’s services network or State/Territory peak organization and let your your WESNET representative know your views before Christmas.

WESNET National Management Committee members

The only contested position on the committee was for the children's issues' representative. The result of the postal ballot held to elect this representative was the election of Sally Steele from Essie's Refuge in NSW who obtained 40 votes as compared with Louise Brittan from Dawn House in SA who received 18 votes.

Currently the positions for mental health issues' representative, Torres Strait Islanders representative and one of the Aboriginal representatives are vacant.

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