# Experts by Experience Advocacy Team

# Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program

## The Experts Team

The Experts Team is made up of 12 women with diverse experiences of disability. The team works together to support the work of WDV and other organisations by sharing their lived experience expertise. The Experts provide advice and feedback on WDV projects, resources and materials. Their expertise is paid for by organisations wanting to provide services and resources that are accessible and welcoming for women with disabilities.

The team actively defies disability stereotypes by representing strengths based and positive examples of women with disabilities in the violence prevention workforce. This employment opportunity enables women with disabilities to have a voice in resources, programs and policies, and engage in ongoing professional development opportunities. More specifically, this also increases WDV’s co-design capacity and ensures an intersectional approach with the diversity of women with disabilities in the advocacy team across ages, cultural backgrounds and professional experience.

The experts have opportunities to share and gain skills from their colleagues through regular group meetings and bi-annual training sessions with a significant focus on gender equity and violence prevention and response i.e. the Program recently added a disclosure component to its content. The experts works together to enhance skills and capacities of the members in providing expert advice, advocacy and guest speaking.

## The Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program

The Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program is based on a prevention strategy which aims to prevent violence against women with disabilities, improve gender and disability equitable service practice and ultimately improve the status and opportunities of women with disabilities.

This Program provides social services, disability organisations and PVAW sector organisations with training, consultation and resources in:

* Gender and disability intersectionality
* Prevention of violence against women with disabilities
* Gender and disability equitable practice
* Becoming a gender & disability equitable organisation

This Program is funded by the Office for Prevention of Family Violence and Coordination and aims to prevent violence against women with disabilities through a range of initiatives including:

* Strategically positioning women with disabilities’ experiences in the violence prevention sector
* Workforce development - training, consultation and resource provision to the social services, local government and prevention sectors
* Cross sector collaboration - communities of practice, partnerships and networking opportunities
* Lived experience workforce development - employment, leadership, professional development and consultation

## Who Would Benefit from Consulting with the Experts Team?

Holding an Experts consultation benefits key stakeholders, policy makers, planners, organisations and others to think about gender, disability and its intersection in preventing violence against women with disabilities. It encourages organisations and their staff to be change makers and trend setters in being gender and disability responsive. Being gender and disability responsive means that the governance, planning, programs, practices and policies are designed in such a way that the organisation or initiative equitably addresses the physical, behavioural, social and cultural differences between women, men, gender diverse and differently abled people in their workforce and their client base.

Being gender and disability responsive both as an organisation and/or a professional is actively contributing to preventing violence against women with disabilities and ensuring that women with disabilities have real social and economic opportunities that are equitable and inclusive.

## Case Study

One project that was particularly successful focused on building the financial capacity of women with disabilities. The organisation will remain anonymous.

**Aim of Consultation: Financial Issues for Women with Disabilities**

The Experts discussed how they learnt about money and their financial knowledge and skills were workshopped. The discussion about life transitions such as raising a family, marriage, divorce, a new job, a job loss or retirement and the financial impacts on the lives of women with disabilities were also discussed at length.

The experts provided key consultation based on their lived experience – this ensured the organisation’s products and services coming from the consultation had increased applicability to women with disabilities and accessibility for all. This ensured that the organisation built its capacity to recognise gaps, challenges, discrimination and inequity and address that in their policy products and services.

Consultations enable working with and not just for women with disabilities. While the experts had an opportunity to increase their voice and advocate for systemic change through understanding new ways to think about money, the organisation gained strategies on how to make financial pathways more accessible like banks, financial planners, brokers and investors. Systemically, the organisation now has the tools to change their policies, procedures and practises to make the organisation accessible before women with disabilities use their services, rather than rushing to make the services accessible and not knowing how to.

A call to action – nothing about us without us – is a slogan adopted by the disability community to communicate that women with disabilities are experts in their own lives. Therefore, we should be involved in all systemic, organisational and individual decisions that affect their lives.

**Session Outcomes**

The women present were confident in managing their own money, budgeting, paying bills, their financial rights and where to go for financial assistance. However, they identified financial queries around superannuation and changing banks, as well as wanting to learn how to do their taxes and invest their money, as significant issues.

**Cultural Changes Outcomes**

The team members have embraced each other in a supportive environment which upholds the principles of intersectional feminism, equity, inclusion and disability pride. They continue to gain skills, knowledge and confidence in advocating for disability rights and violence prevention. The recent change from being on an honorarium system to being paid as casual staff saw a shift in the Experts professionalism, capacity to benefit from more professional development and employment opportunities. This resulted in a change in name from Experts by Experience Working Group to Experts by Experience Advocacy Team.

“You learn so much about other women with different disabilities and their culture and how they survive domestic violence” (Expert by Experience Advocate).

“Staying involved has built on the knowledge I'd gained from working at WDV, helped to maintain my commitment and energy for the fight!” (Expert by Experience Advocate).

“The group provides a richness and depth of information from a diverse range of women - not the 'usual suspects' who are routinely consulted. It has contributed to the quality of resources and project outcomes - so much better when these are informed by the experience of women whose lives are impacted by these issues every day. Great model for other organisations about how to genuinely involve people whose lives are affected by issues. The group has built the knowledge and skills of the group members and of organisations (WDV & organisations that have consulted with us). Individual group members and the group as a whole have grown in knowledge and confidence over time, members have used it as a springboard to other things. Ongoing nurturing and support from a dedicated worker has been a critical factor in that growth. This support needs to be funded adequately” (Expert by Experience Advocate).

“I have been supported to grow and develop my advocacy skills while advocating for positive change for others at the same time” (Expert by Experience Advocate).

## Experts by Experience Fee for Service

At WDV, it is extremely important to us that we ensure the Experts are paid for their time and expertise during consultations. We aim to ensure that we provide a cost-effective service and can discuss costs further based on your project needs. As a guide please see the table below for approximate costing of consultation.

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| **Organisation** |
| 45-60 minute session  | 9-12 Experts + a coordinator | $800 |
| 90-120 minute session  | 9-12 Experts + a coordinator | $1,600 |
| 150-180 minutes session | 9-12 Experts + a coordinator | $2,400 |

Costing of consultation covers sitting fees, disability access costs and persona support costs if counselling is offered.

WDV, in collaboration with the Experts, has developed a set of guidelines for preparation and delivery of external consultations. These guidelines, which model best practice in accessibility, and allow external organisations to get the greatest value out of working with the group, will be shared with external organisations prior to the consultation.

## Scope of Topics

The Experts provide consultation on violence prevention and gender inequality.

**What is Violence Prevention?**

Violence prevention is a public health initiative and a whole of population approach that aims to stop violence from occurring in the first place by unpacking the underlying drivers or causes of violence. Unlike early intervention and response work, preventing violence is everybody’s responsibility.

**What is Gender Inequality?**

Gender inequality is the main cause of violence against women in Australia. Gender inequality is when power is not evenly dispersed and resources and opportunities are prioritised for men over women and gender diverse people.

**Meetings Form**

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that the meetings are currenting held online via Zoom. However, we plan to reconvene face-to-face meetings as directed by the Victorian Government upon public health advise. Once face-to-face meetings are possible, the meetings will be a blended form of face-to-face and online delivery.

**Length of Consultation**

The Experts meetings run for 3 and a half hours with two breaks. These meetings are usually divided into two forty-five-minute consultations with a half hour break in between. The meeting length and break times are negotiable.

**How Much Notice is Recommended?**

The Experts are in high demand. As such, we suggest organisations pre-book at least 8 weeks prior to the consultation date.

**Contact Person for Inquiries**

If you or your organisation is interested in consulting our Experts, please feel free to contact Tess Karambelas our Gender and Disability Project Officer on (03) 9286 7812 or tess.karambelas@wdv.org.au

If your consultation is about policy or research, please Cc jen.hargrave@wdv.org.au