Finding safety: provision of specialised domestic violence and refuge services for women who currently find it difficult to access mainstream services: disabled women, older women, sex workers and women with mental illness and/or drug and alcohol problems as a result of domestic violence

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Abstract:
Executive summary Violence against women occurs in every sector of New Zealand society, however not all women are able to access appropriate services and find a safe place to go when they require refuge. In 2010 I was privileged to receive funding from the Winston Churchill Trust, New Horizon’s for Women Trust and the Minister’s Discretionary Fund to investigate the provision of refuge and other domestic violence services to older women, disabled women, sex workers and women with mental health and substance abuse problems. I visited twelve specialised refuge services in Australia, England and Scotland and met with seven women who are engaged in policy development and research. The research identified three ways of providing services for women with specialised needs. One is employing specialised staff with dual expertise – for example substance abuse and domestic violence - to support women to live in mainstream refuges. The second is to expand the understanding of violence to incorporate a wider client group for existing services and thirdly, the provision of specialised services to support women who are unable to be housed in mainstream refuges.

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It finds that there is no one solution to domestic and family violence related homelessness. There is also no easy to roll out solution. This is because there is no one pathway into homelessness for all women affected by domestic and family violence and many women cycle in and out of homelessness and crisis accommodation. Provision of a continuum of individualised and open-ended support, including outreach services, that wraps around women and their children in a range of areas (therapy, health, life skills, housing assistance et cetera) for as long as they need it. Strategies are needed that raise community awareness around the issue, extent and impact of domestic and family violence on women and families.