

*Implementation of the Domestic Violence Act Over the Past 10 Years: Analysis and Reflection – Service Provision for Women Survivors of Domestic Violence: Shelters. What Part do they Play?*

Author: LINDA FUGARD

Organisation: SISTERS INCORPORATED

Email: [sistersinc@telkomsa.net](mailto:sistersinc@telkomsa.net)

A shelter is not only a safe place but provides the opportunity for a domestic violence victim to start life again. Domestic violence is a major problem in our society and we need to work together with government in order to eradicate it.

We empower women to know their rights and the law. We inform them that all forms of abuse are a crime. They are able to report the abuser to the police and apply for a protection order. We have social workers to provide counselling.

Women can learn new skills like making jewellery and earn money from what they make, sewing, computer literacy etc. skills that build up self-esteem as well as life skills eg. anger management, parenting skills, self-defence, budgeting, aids awareness etc. They can take control of their lives and be built up physically, emotionally and spiritually. Many find employment and are then able to provide for themselves and their children. Shelter staff are involved in setting minimum standards for shelters as well as a Special Needs Housing policy. Most shelters have second stage housing for semi-independent living and a crèche for the children. Shelters provide much more than a roof over their head...we provide a hand up not a hand out.

We work together as shelters and network and learn from each other. Information and knowledge are powerful and one woman being empowered and able to be independent has a ripple effect as it impacts on her, her family, her friends and her community lessening the need for government to support her financially.

Women no longer need to sit around at shelters and do nothing. Shelter staff have experience and knowledge that can be used to make our service as effective as possible.