

Women seeking safety in wake of intervention

Sasha Petrova

THE Alice Springs Women's Shelter has seen a spike in women seeking safety since the Federal Government launched its intervention into the Territory.

The Shelter's Coordinator Dale Wakefield said that women were referring themselves at an increase of 1000 per cent.

The latest Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory report showed Women's Safe Houses in remote communities provided respite to 312 women with 394 accompanying children in the period January to June 2013; an in-

crease from 209 women in the six months period before.

Ms Wakefield said that they were also seeing a similar pattern in town.

From January to May this year, 317 individual women and 223 children sought support from the crisis accommodation service at the shelter, she said, while the outreach service to communities received 228 referrals during the same period.

"Since the intervention, we've had a massive increase in the number of women seeking assistance," Ms Wakefield said.

But she added the spike wasn't relative to higher levels

of domestic violence. "We don't believe there's been a massive increase in domestic in family violence in that period but women are seeking out the services now that they are being provided.

"We're not the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff anymore. We're significantly better funded so we are able to provide more services and more flexible services."

She also said the police were being more responsive to domestic violence which led to women being comfortable in reaching out for help.

Managing Principal Solicitor at the Central Australian Women's Legal Service Janet

Taylor said that the broader community needed more empowerment through education and holistic support around the issue of domestic and family violence.

"While these figures are promising, there are still significant barriers to seeking assistance regarding domestic and family violence, and it is vital that the broader community rallies around women who take steps to protect themselves and their children," she said in a statement.

"Sadly in Central Australia there is a degree of desensitisation towards violence."

CAWLS referred to the "silence" surrounding an alleged

domestic homicide in Wauchope in late April compared to the "overwhelming public outrage" following incidents of family violence in Melbourne over the Easter period.

"While on an individual level the figures in the Report could suggest that women are being proactive, the responsibility to end family violence does not rest with those being subjected to it – it is an issue the whole community must own," she said.

Stronger Futures indicated that women were starting to use safe houses more often but staying for a shorter length of time "to prevent violence as opposed to escaping violence".