

## CAROL WILLIS

Women's Refuge crisis support worker

# Domestic terrorism

DV is killing Australians

Australian police deal with an estimated 657 domestic violence matters on average every day of the year. That's one every two minutes.

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So far this year  
63 women have been  
killed as a result of  
domestic violence.

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The funding for refuges in NSW was cut by 40% last year, when 'reforms' were bought in. For the refuge in Queanbeyan it meant programs for women and kids that had been running for years were unable to continue.

Staff numbers were reduced and the refuge is no longer staffed at nights and weekends. The days are often too busy with court, medical, Centrelink, housing or numerous other appointments for the women to sit and talk to the workers. It's the extra face-to-face time, now cut, that provided the chance to do that.

The role of a refuge is first and foremost to provide a safe and secure environment for women and their children escaping domestic violence.

Most refuges have a time limit for crisis and accommodation of about

eight weeks, but as public housing has become harder, we often have women at the refuge for many months.

A typical day at the refuge would go something like this: Staff would arrive at work and have to settle in a family that a night worker had brought in — through the police, hospital, family member or a concerned friend.

The first priority is to make sure they have enough food. A crisis payment is available through Centrelink — that can be applied for by anyone who has had to leave their home. So if you are helping someone in that situation, that is a good first step.

The culture at Centrelink has improved greatly over the years. They are very helpful and have social workers available. Often a benefit also needs to be applied for at Centrelink, so you would do that.

Is English their second language? If so, an interpreter will be needed for all communications, ranging from hearing their story to helping explain Australian bureaucracy — courts, Centrelink, what happens in a refuge. It's a hard enough job for those who speak English, let alone if you don't.

If the women don't already have a domestic violence order, a refuge worker will take them to court, either in Queanbeyan or Canberra. As part of Molonglo Support Services we run the Women's Domestic Violence Court

Advocacy Service (funded by legal aid) which helps women at court in Queanbeyan, Yass, Goulburn and Cooma.

All the courts have a safe room for women attending court. In Canberra they can go to the legal aid office at the Magistrates Court. In both cases it means they don't have to sit in the open area and wait, usually feeling vulnerable and exposed, because after an interim DV order is served, they have to return to court for the final order where the other party can contest the order.

Very few women arrive without medical problems either physical or psychological, so appointments would be made, or a worker would organise to take the woman to her next appointment.

Housing needs to be assessed. Are they leaving public or private rentals? How is the rent to be paid? Is the partner still there? Are they able to return with a police escort to get their belongings? If not, what documentation needs to be replaced?

Are they permanent residents in Australia? A lot of women have come from other countries and aren't entitled to benefits and have no income whatsoever. Appointments are made with Immigration. Immigration have an allowance for domestic violence to help women in this situation and Centrelink will usually grant them a special benefit.

Kids need to be enrolled in school — it helps them to settle in and have a routine. Fortunately the nearest school in Queanbeyan is great with our clients and they go out of their way to make sure the kids are OK.

If there's a need to talk to someone, the refuge offers a 24-hr on-call, outreach program that is also an important part of their community work.

And sometime during the day you would hear the story, heartbreaking and often without hope and you will hope that it can be turned around.

Rosie Batty calls it domestic terrorism; and maybe with a name change might come the necessary funding to keep helping the women who need it. The power of imagery is such that many countries' attitudes changed towards Syrian refugees after a photo of a drowned child was published.

Yet our domestic violence crisis has been happening for a long time. What images do women need to change the attitude of the politicians in power in this country to stop the deaths from domestic violence?

## ALISON ALDER

Artist



ALISON IN HER STUDIO WITH TRENT WALTER.

# Prints on paper

Emily Kiddell interviewed Alison for *IMPPRINT* magazine and kindly allowed *BWD* to reprint it

Alison Alder spent her childhood in north-western Sydney and later moved to Canberra with her family, where she studied printmaking under Mandy Martin and Jörg Schmeisser at the Canberra School of Art.

She was a founding member of the now legendary print studio and gallery Megalo, in Canberra, and a key figure in the iconic poster collective Redback Graphix, based in Wollongong and later Sydney. After a brief stint in Melbourne, she also spent more than a decade living in the Northern Territory, mainly in Tennant Creek, where she worked with Aboriginal organisations such as Julalikari Council to research and develop community art and cultural programs. Alison returned to NSW in 2004, and

to Megalo in 2008, where she was director of the studio and gallery until mid-last year when she left to take up a position as Head of Printmedia and Drawing at ANU.

*[EK] In your recent body of work, Death of a Broadsheet, you've manipulated and re-contextualised images of politicians sourced from online and print news media. In bringing process to the surface in this way it seems you are asking us to consider what decisions have informed their original presentation, that publically presented information is rarely neutral. Can you talk about your process in developing this body of work?*

*[AA]* I keep scrapbooks filled with pictures of political figures cut from

the newspaper. Not all political figures, but most political figures. I was thinking about how we relate to politics or political figures through the media and how that's changing with the opportunity for more images to be presented that are not managed by the subject. I'd been copying pictures from my scrapbook and blowing them up and increasing or changing the colour, asking myself: 'what if this person was presented like this?' I printed on a continuous length of tissue paper, which sort of rolls down a table and then pile on to the floor as the news cycle endlessly rolls on. I wanted to give the audience an opportunity to develop their own opinion about the characters depicted in the news feed. I've realised how much I love screen-printing. I love the mark on the paper, the ink and the surface combined with the intensity of the colour. I've got to the point now where I feel liberated, able to just do what I want to do. I don't care what happens to anything, I don't care about selling the work, or about it going anywhere, I just love printing.

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I love that thing of:  
you lift up the screen and  
you see it on the paper  
and sometimes you're  
not quite sure what's  
going to happen.

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It has been an ongoing engagement that hasn't diminished. In fact, I feel even more excited by printing now than I ever have, which is a bit funny. *Death of a Broadsheet* enabled me to think about the work more as an object — as a news feed, a process, a cycle — rather than a static 2D image.

*In your thesis Out There and Outback you write: 'The images printed in daily broadsheets of the living conditions in the outback are artful. Life in the bush can be so bizarre that it can be difficult to recognise what is art directed and what is genuine documentation.' How did the time you spent living in Tennant Creek change you as an artist?*

Well, it had a huge impact on numerous fronts. One would be that prior to moving to the Northern Territory, I'd worked at Redback Graphix and I always felt like the junior. I worked with some fantastically amazing artists there who were just so tops, but I

