



WESNET Inc

Women's Services Network

Australia's peak women's organisation working to eliminate domestic and family violence

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Thwarting tech-savvy abusers and empowering survivors of violence through technology

National peak body launches innovative program harnessing technology to end domestic violence

Monday, September 8th 2014 (Sydney). Today national experts on technology and violence against women from Australia and the United States announced the launch of the *Safety Net Australia* project: helping survivors safely use technology to search for help and decrease isolation, while using technology evidence to hold abusers and stalkers accountable for misusing life-saving technology resources.

This morning, the Australian and United States national peak bodies of domestic violence organisations spoke with community members and media from a Sydney meeting room that Google generously donated for this announcement.

Women's Services Network (WESNET), the Australian national women's peak advocacy body with almost 400 members across Australia, represents a range of organisations and individuals including women's refuges, shelters, safe houses and information/ referral services. The United States National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) is the network (peak body) of 56 state and territory NGO coalitions representing over 2,000 local shelter and advocacy programs. Since 2002, the U.S. Safety Project at NNEDV has trained over 60,000 police, advocates, judges, and technologists. WESNET, with the support of the U.S. NNEDV, has established the *Safety Net Australia* project to:

- **Work with communities, police, technologists, and agencies** to address how technology impacts the safety, privacy and accessibility rights of victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking.
- **Educate** a wide range of community agencies who work with women experiencing all forms of violence on ways to use technology strategically to help find safety and escape domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, stalking and abuse.
- **Advocate** for strong local, state, national and international policies that ensure the safety, privacy and rights of all victims and survivors of gender-based violence.

"We are proud to launch this project in partnership with the U.S. trailblazing Safety Net Project since technology helps women and their children successfully flee abusers, stalkers and rapists", said Julie Oberin, National Chair of WESNET. "Survivors map roads to new lives on the web by reaching out to specialist women's domestic violence services and hotlines, researching intervention orders, and finding housing, employment opportunities, new schools and online support."

"Technology is the new form of domestic violence abuse which enables the perpetrator to exert round-the-clock control over their victims", said Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Women. "I look forward to seeing WESNET's Safety Net Australia project commence. This will provide an important tool for support workers and police and will ensure that survivors of domestic violence know how to safely use technology in this digital age."

Technology is a powerful tool for practitioners and, unfortunately, also misused by offenders. A 2012 U.S. Surveyⁱ showed that 89% of local domestic violence programs report that victims are experiencing intimidation and threats by their abusers via technology, including through mobile phones, texts, and

email. On the flip side, 60% of local programs reported that they are creatively using social media to reach out to victims. Australian studies reflect this same trendⁱⁱ.

“Since 2002, we have been training police and victim advocates in the United States and occasionally, overseas,” said Cindy Southworth, NNEDV Vice President and founder of the Safety Net Technology Project. “We know this training can change how communities respond to survivors and hold perpetrators accountable when they wield technology as a weapon. We’re proud to partner with WESNET, an organisation highly respected here in Australia and around the world. *Safety Net Australia* couldn’t be in better hands with WESNET’s leadership”.

Cindy Southworth is in Australia to keynote and provide technology trainings at the 8th National Homelessness Conference on the Gold Coast. Hosted by Homelessness Australia homelessnessaustralia.org.au, several hundred delegates from Australia, New Zealand and Asia Pacific will come together for three days, between 10–12 September 2014. It is still not too late to register and participate in Ms Southworth’s training sessions:

- September 10: Pre-conference workshop: *Technology abuse & safety: working with survivors*
- September 11: *Ensuring organisation technology use helps survivors and does not harm victims or people from diverse backgrounds*
- September 12: *Complexities and ethics of sheltering survivors of violence against women in a digital age*

For more information and to register for the 8th National Homelessness Conference: nhca.net.au

For additional information about *Safety Net Australia*: wesnet.org.au/safetynet/

For stories of tech misuse within Australia or more information contact:

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*Established in 1992, the Women’s Services Network (WESNET) is the Australian national women’s peak advocacy body which works on behalf of women and children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic or family violence. With almost 400 members across Australia, WESNET represents a range of organisations and individuals including women’s refuges, shelters, safe houses and information/ referral services. Since 2010, WESNET has been the contract manager and lead agency for the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (www.awava.org.au). To learn more about WESNET’s **Safety Net Australia Project**, please visit: wesnet.org.au/safetynet*



*The U.S. National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV), a nonprofit charitable organization, is the leading voice for domestic violence victims and their advocates. NNEDV members include all 56 of the state and territorial coalitions against domestic violence, which have over 2,000 local programs. NNEDV has been a premiere national organization advancing the movement against domestic violence for over 20 years, having led efforts to pass the landmark Violence Against Women Act of 1994 and to reauthorize and strengthen countless laws and regulations to increase safety and end violence. To learn more about NNEDV, please visit www.nnedv.org. To learn more about NNEDV, please visit www.nnedv.org. To learn more about NNEDV’s **Safety Net Project**, please visit nnedv.org/safetynet*



*WESNET acknowledges and is very appreciative of the contributions of Homelessness Australia to initial *Safety Net Australia* founding documents and training materials.*

ⁱ <http://techsafety.org/blog/2014/4/29/new-survey-technology-abuse-experiences-of-survivors-and-victim-services>

ⁱⁱ <http://smartsafe.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/SmartSafe-Findings-Summary.pdf>