

From Harm to Healing: The Role of The Miranda Project in Supporting Women at the Intersection of Violence and Criminalisation



Methodology

The study used semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Miranda Project clients (n=17) and Miranda staff (n=8) which were coded using Nvivo and thematically analysed. The evaluation was guided by an Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG) and received ethics approval by the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) and Corrective Services NSW Ethics Committees.

Research Overview

The Community Restorative Centre's (CRC) Advocacy, Research and Policy Unit (ARPU) conducted a qualitative evaluation of the Miranda Project. The Miranda Project works with women in contact with, or at risk of contact with, the criminal justice system who have also been impacted by domestic and family violence. Miranda is delivered in the Penrith and Blacktown Local Areas of Sydney. Miranda works with women attending court, on community orders, and exiting prison, offering specialist, holistic, trauma-informed casework and case management, based on a long-term relational and outreach model of support. A core part of the service is the Miranda Hub, which is the co-located office of the Miranda Project providing drop in and scheduled access to groups, psycho-educational, and recreational activities supported by specialist criminal justice and domestic and family violence workers.

The study aimed to answer the question:

'Does the Miranda Project work to reduce women's contact with the criminal justice system and support them to live safely in the community? If so, in what ways?'

Key Findings

The key thematic findings from the qualitative interviews with Miranda clients and staff highlight the importance of clients' life stories in understanding the profound impact of their histories and the complexity of their support needs. These findings are organised into three themes that centre the clients' stories, followed by six themes that explore how the Miranda Project provides support.

Centring Client Stories

1 Miranda clients have survived violence and criminalisation:

Experiences of violence, survival and resistance are central to the stories of Miranda clients and their involvement in the criminal legal system. The Miranda Project has specialist knowledge and skills to support women at this intersection.

2 Miranda clients have been frequently failed and harmed by systems:

Clients of the Miranda project have been failed and harmed by institutions, policies, and systems over the course of their lives. As a result of these cumulative experiences, clients frequently have trauma from systems that are ostensibly there to help them.

3 The fabric of family and motherhood is destabilised by violence and criminalisation:

Almost all Miranda clients are mothers but have frequently had their children removed from their care. The removal of children is traumatising and has long-lasting implications for the wellbeing of criminalised women and their children.

How Miranda Project provides support

4 Miranda's program design enhances client engagement and positive outcomes:

The Miranda Project works well to support clients due to a number of central features of the 'mechanics' of the program model including a client-centred approach to support, offering service delivery which is flexible and responsive to client needs, having a physical location including the Miranda Hub and 'drop-in' services which provide additional opportunities for engagement, and a considered and hands-on approach to client referrals to other services in the community.

5 Clients are assisted with addressing multiple practical needs:

The Miranda Project support clients to meet their basic human needs as a fundamental starting point. Clients who have been in prison and those escaping violent relationships, typically have little to no economic resources, and are usually facing homelessness. Miranda works with clients to address multiple practical needs such as housing, accessing brokerage and basic living necessities, financial security, addressing mental and physical health, legal and court needs, gaining identification, and supporting with the development of independent living skills.

6 Supporting clients with rich and complex histories is underpinned by staff skill and a relational approach:

Working with clients who have complex histories and associated support needs requires a very sensitive relational approach which is underpinned by a high level of skill, understanding and emotional intelligence. It was found that this is demonstrated through practical support being delivered by staff with a high level of care and empathy, as well as more overt relational/emotional support.

7 The Miranda Project has specialist skills to support women experiencing violence:

The Miranda Project has specialist skills in working with women who have experienced violence. The team draws on practices and frameworks which support client agency, choice, and control in the decisions they make about their own lives, while also taking seriously concerns regarding individual safety.

8 The Miranda Project works sensitively and effectively with clients who have complex family relationships:

The family relationships of Miranda clients are complex, but often incredibly important to women. Relationships with children are particularly important to women but have often been fractured through government systems including child 'protection'. The Miranda Project works with women to support positive family relationships with broader family members and undertakes important work in reunifying mothers with their children.

9 The Miranda Project is a culturally safe service:

In recognition of the over-criminalisation and imprisonment of First Nations women, in addition to the intersections with experiences of violence, services supporting First Nations women must be culturally safe. Having a culturally safe service is key to ensuring First Nations staff and clients engage with and feel supported by the service. The Program model aligns with culturally safe service provision principles and across interview cohorts, both Miranda Project clients and staff describe it as a culturally safe service. The Miranda Project is committed to continuous enhancement of cultural safety practice principles.