

WOMEN'S INFORMATION SERVICE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript of Interview with Dr. Caroline Pascoe

Interviewee: Dr. Caroline Pascoe

Interviewer: Liz Ahern

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[00:00:06]

AHERN: This is a recording of an interview with Dr. Caroline Pascoe on the 23rd of January 2018 in the State Library of South Australia. This recording and interview is part of the Women's History Project. Thank you. Thank you Caroline for coming. This is Liz Ahern interviewing Caroline Pascoe. Now Caroline, tell me a little bit about when and where you were born and grew up.

PASCOE: I was born in Melbourne, but when I was seven we moved to Sydney, where I lived until I was married. We lived in a seaside suburb and then I was married at twenty-two and lived in Sydney for some time thereafter until I went overseas with my husband.

AHERN: Lovely. So when did you first hear about the Women's Information Service or Switchboard, whichever it was when you first heard about it?

PASCOE: After we'd been married for nearly twenty years we moved up to the north coast, up to Lismore near Byron Bay, where we lived there for nearly twenty years, was it. Yes. We decided then, having lived in the country, that we'd like to live in the city and my daughter was living in Adelaide and she had a new baby, so we thought we'd move to Adelaide. So we did in 2001 and then I tried to get a job over here and couldn't manage it. So I thought maybe I'll do some volunteering and because we lived on the train line, near the train line, I caught the train into the city and

coming up into Station Arcade I'd seen this appealing sign on the door of a quite nice shopfront and it said "Women's Information Service". And being a staunch feminist, you might say, I thought that would be a wonderful place to work, so I went in and found out that they had a volunteer service, so that's what started it.

AHERN: So how long have you volunteered at the Women's Information Service?

PASCOE: It's just coming up to fifteen years in April, or March really.

AHERN: That's very impressive. And that's continuously?

PASCOE: Continuous, yes, except for trips overseas and other holidays. Yes, that's all.

AHERN: Wonderful. You said that's, was it called the Women's Information Service when you went there.

PASCOE: Yes.

AHERN: OK. You were located in the Station Arcade and what was your role really as a volunteer at that time?

PASCOE: As a volunteer, we were requested to do at least one shift a week. Everyone did one, one woman did two, but the general thing was one shift per week of four hours, nine to one, or one to five and during that shift of four hours you worked two hours in the shopfront talking to people, clients coming in, and two hours in the phone room. There was a swap over, so it was that way every week. It was quite well organised.

[00:03:22]

AHERN: What training did you have?

PASCOE: It was quite a long training session in those days, longer than it is today, actually. They've cut it down a bit. I think it went for four or five

weeks and it was two, or three sessions a week, so there were about, at the time, I think probably about ten or twelve people in the group and we got to know each other very well.

AHERN: So are any of those other people from your original group still volunteering at the Women's Information Service?

PASCOE: No, I don't think so. They've all gone.

AHERN: So you're the only one.

PASCOE: I'm the only one left. Yes.

AHERN: Yes. It's amazing isn't it, how you get involved. What was the thing that you enjoyed most about being a volunteer? What's the bit that keeps you there?

PASCOE: Several things, I suppose. Firstly and mainly, working among women and women who are feminists. I think that's the most engaging thing for me to end my career, and it is the end of my career, in that situation where there's no sort of hierarchical thing. It seems that it's a terrific atmosphere if we share a common goal, I think, to empower women and because we are all feminists. The second thing that I really liked about it, having volunteered at other places over my life, was that the volunteers were not an adjunct to the way it worked. We weren't asked to go and make the coffee or tea or we weren't asked to go and get someone's lunch or fill in or whatever. We were the first line of defence, so if someone came in, if a client came in we spoke to the client before anybody else, before the paid staff. If we were in the phone room and the phone rang, then the volunteer picks up the phone first and that gives a sort of a hierarchy in a way, but that's a good one when its volunteers because so often volunteers are at the low part of any business. So I like that, I like that way of looking at things. I appreciated that.

[00:05:36]

AHERN: The volunteers have always been front and centre at the Service as it's called now. Tell me about the culture and the aims and objectives. You said, empowering women ---.

PASCOE: Empowering women, yes.

AHERN: And a feminist environment.

PASCOE: Certainly.

AHERN: Do you think all volunteers these days are feminists?

PASCOE: Yes, it's a pretty rigorous selection process for the volunteers. So if there were women who wanted to be a volunteer and had their interview and it was clear that they didn't feel like that, that they weren't feminists or they felt very much against feminism, I don't think they'd go to the training period because I think they would feel uncomfortable like that. I mean, really feminism at its base means equality, being equal, everyone equal, so if you didn't agree with that you probably wouldn't be interested in doing it anyway. So I think that everyone would be at her heart a feminist whether they would be as strong minded as, there's degrees I expect.

AHERN: There are many feminisms, I've discovered over the years. There isn't just one set of criteria. There's an individual ---.

PASCOE: But at its base I would hope there would be, equality would come somewhere into that.

AHERN: Oh, yes. Very important, and the empowering women has always been the ethos as far as my recollection of the very beginnings. Tell me the names of some of the other workers and volunteers who have been important in your time over the years.

PASCOE: Important over the years?

AHERN: Well, important to you. As people you've worked with or enjoyed working with or have learnt from or ---.

[00:07:45]

PASCOE: There have been a lot. Sophie was very good to me. Sophie Allouache. She was the Manager of WIS. When I first came there, she was a worker and then she became the Manager after a while. She was very good for me, for giving me confidence and praise without seeming to. She just gave me a lot of confidence. I knew Lies Zuidland very well, and still see her today. There was a woman called Alicia [Elliott], I don't remember her last name, but she was very good at the beginning. Now, Pat Ellis, who is the only one who has worked there longer than I. She's a wonderful --- she is as good a feminist as I am I think, probably better and I love talking to her. She's just so straight down the middle. She's just such a good woman. Maddy [Patingale], who is now our Acting Manager, she's a wonderful person. I don't know that I could be there without Maddy. There have been so many over the years.

AHERN: It's a big question, that, because over fifteen years you'll have many people who have made an impact on you. What memories do you have of times you've shared with other workers and volunteers at WIS?

PASCOE: The memories I have, I suppose, centre on the tough phone calls and there have been a few, as you might imagine over the fifteen years. The ones that have reduced me to tears, real tears and I've had to take a break. And there have been a few of those with people, people seem to have such terrible things happen to them and the stoicism, that gets me a lot, and particularly if there are any children involved. And there have been some stories over the years of women, when they were remembering things and being affected by childhood abuse or poverty or things like that and that's been a hard sort of a thing. And sometimes it's hard, you need

to debrief because it's sometimes hard to let that go. Mostly I can but sometimes it's hard to let it go.

[00:10:02]

AHERN: That environment of being able to share and debrief and not feel that you've failed is really important to volunteers isn't it?

PASCOE: Exceptionally important. And every time I've had a tough call, people, while not particularly listening in, there are always women aware and so when you get off a call like that, even if you are showing no signs of a problem, there will be someone there who will be saying, "How was that? That sounded like a bit of a hard thing. What was it all about?" And so you talk about it. You can take some time off and walk around the block, go and make a cup of tea, or just talking about it and then having someone say, "Well, you did as well as you could have done." That's a good thing. We need that too. I mean all of the workers need that but volunteers especially.

AHERN: And that idea of being able to put someone on hold and talking to somebody else just to get some other opinions is really important, isn't it?

PASCOE: Oh, yes. I do that all the time. Perhaps I didn't at first because I thought maybe I shouldn't do that. I didn't want to put the client on hold and if they are stressed sometimes it can be a bit of a worry that they might go, but now I do it all the time. I have no problem about saying, I have my colleagues here and the wealth of information of course with all those women over the years. And they are all opinionated (laugh) so it's good to say, "Do you mind if I speak to some of my colleagues here? I think they might have a good idea." If you can't think of something, but often, I suppose after fifteen years I think I can, I'm most often able to bring something up that I can help in some way.

AHERN: That's good. You've talked about who the coordinator was, so you've had several coordinators in your time, I imagine, over fifteen years. There must have been quite a range.

PASCOE: Quite a lot, yes.

AHERN: So Sophie and Maddy are the two that stand out for you, are they?

PASCOE: Yes, I expect so. And Wendy Thompson was there in the early days. There have been many, many. Some were only for a few weeks, some a bit longer. Georgia Heath was there for a while. Yes, so quite a lot.

AHERN: Who was the Women's Adviser back in the day? Was there still a Women's Adviser when you started?

PASCOE: Women's Adviser to the Premier?

AHERN: Yes.

PASCOE: I don't know. I have no idea who it was.

AHERN: Did WIS have a lot to do with the Women's Unit at that time?

PASCOE: No. We had very little to do, even with the Office for Women.

AHERN: That's what I mean by the Women's Adviser. I guess it's called the Office for Women these days. I'm using the old ---.

PASCOE: Oh, OK. So when you talk about the Women's Adviser as being the Manager of the Office for Women.

AHERN: Well, there used to be a Women's Adviser ---

PASCOE: I know there was a Women's Adviser but I had no thought that ---.

AHERN: And I don't know when that, I don't remember when that changed ---.

PASCOE: No.

AHERN: Definitely up until, I reckon around the nineties, maybe around the nineties they changed to the Office for Women rather than the Women's Advisers Unit.

[00:13:17]

PASCOE: Is that where it came from? See, I was unaware of that.

AHERN: There used to be a Women's Advisers Unit and my understanding of WIS, when I started, was that the person working with the first Women's Adviser, Deborah McCulloch, was a woman called Andi Sebastian and she was the Information cum Policy Officer and she kept being asked all these questions. And the questions she was asked led her to think we need to have a service that will answer all these women's questions, because women in the community thought the Women's Adviser was there to advise them. The Government thought that the Women's Adviser was there to advise the Government about policies and so there was, from the very beginning of the first Women's Advisers role, there was this demand from ordinary women to get information.

Andi Sebastian had worked at the Haight-Ashbury Switchboard, or had visited the Haight-Ashbury Switchboard in San Francisco and she had this idea that we could set up a Women's Information Switchboard, it was back in those days, forty years ago, and that's where it began. And the Haight-Ashbury Switchboard I believe, had both paid staff and volunteers, or they knew that to deal with the demands of this role they couldn't do it all with just their paid staff. Anyway, so that's the history of it. And I'm just not sure when the Women's Advisers Unit closed officially and the Office for Women started up and that there was then a Director or a Manager of the Office for Women. I can't remember the details. Can you?

PASCOE: No. So in 2001, when I came ---.

AHERN: Oh, that's when you started. OK.

[00:15:03]

PASCOE: Which was quite late I suppose. Then, no it wasn't 2001, sorry, in 2003 when I started there was the Office for Women and the Women's Information Service working as the shopfront and phone room for that organisation. Now the Office for Women was upstairs away from the Women's Information Service, so coming into that as a volunteer, or volunteer anyway, all of the volunteers would come into the Women's Information Service and would have very, very little to do with the Office for Women, who were across the hallway, across the Station Arcade and up to the sixth floor or wherever they were. So we would never go up there. They would never come down. So we had very little at all to do with them. We knew who the Office for Women Manager was, maybe, but it had no relevance.

AHERN: So who was that at the time, do you remember. You can't remember.

PASCOE: It was Carmel O'Loughlin, when I first started, but it had no relevance. I didn't meet her, I didn't know her. I didn't know anything about her. So now we've moved from the Station Arcade, when we were quite separate. We moved to Grenfell Street, where we were at least on the same floor, and now we've moved next door and we are all connected by a door which we walk through all the time and see them all the time, and the Office for Women Manager walks past us when we are sitting at the desk in the shopfront. She walks past and talks to us, Fiona Mort. So I'm very well aware of what she is and she knows who I am, but not in the past.

AHERN: Oh, isn't that interesting, because right at the very beginning, we had a lot to do with Deborah McCulloch and Andi Sebastian, who was still in the Women's Unit, but because they were in part of our training, they were part of the whole setup. They used to come to meetings. We had

volunteer coordination meetings and we had paid staff meetings, and we had volunteer reps. on the paid staff meetings, and we had all this complicated, we had a lot of committees, collectives I suppose that they were back in those days and there was a lot of to and fro even though we were physically totally removed.

And then later on people like me, I worked, had a half time in the late eighties, early nineties. I had a half time role in the Women's Unit and at WIS, so I sort of juggled and that was quite useful because the information I got from my practical experience at WIS influenced what I was able to see were the needs of women when I was writing policy and procedures and things, so it worked really well. So I'm glad to hear that it's back tightly together again. That's very good, because I think having it separate probably wasn't such a good thing. So what changes have you observed over the years?

[00:18:06]

PASCOE: In the sort of clients?

AHERN: In the Service

PASCOE: Oh, in the Service.

AHERN: Well in the clients and in the Service. You've seen the location change and you've seen the role of the relationships between the two units change, but what other changes are important to you?

PASCOE: I think that having the computer well and truly entrenched in society now. When I first came, we had computers. We had half a dozen there and the women could come in and practice on it. They could learn, we had a program, the WIAP [Women's Internet Access Program], which was a program for them to learn how to use the computer and a lot of women came in, middle aged women who hadn't a computer at home, couldn't afford it, too expensive in those days to run it, to have it linked up

and have your modem and so on. So they came in and we taught them how to use it. They were very grateful for that. It got them started, many of them. That was a big part of it. You'd come in and you might have a few clients coming in with problems, but the bulk of it was actually teaching women. Since then it's become much more universal. Libraries have them. I think they even have teachers there. The Seniors Information Service, Catalyst Foundation now, they have computers. A lot of places do. And mostly people have them in their own home. They have them on their phone, for goodness sake. So that's been a huge change.

We are not asked for as many things as we were then. Then it was, I had a woman one day who came in and she was extremely sick. She was a very ill woman and she came in and she said could I get her the number for the euthanasia place, because her children wouldn't even allow her to look it up or talk about it or do anything. That's a very tricky call for a volunteer to have to put in. But it was that sort of, that's really indicative of how disempowered women were. She was a woman, very sick, she wanted to do something about her life. She was in pain, she had patches and she could hardly stand up and she didn't have access to a computer. She had no power there, but she had to come into someone else that she had never met before in her life and ask her such a personal question. I don't think that would happen today. It may do, it may do, but then women didn't have the computer. So that's been the biggest thing, really. We still get the calls for accommodation, legal, for domestic violence, domestic abuse from children, I've had recently.

[00:20:55]

AHERN: Elder abuse. So you think the topics, are the topics changing?

PASCOE: I think they're probably, well I don't know what they were particularly when it first started, but it seems to me that they are probably just the same. Though I think that a lot of women would be able to look up

those sorts of things for themselves, perhaps, as I said, because of the computers.

AHERN: Yes, it's interesting isn't it? So do you think there is still a need for an Information Service for Women?

PASCOE: I do. We are still getting calls. We are still getting people coming in. We are still getting very distressed people and I've often been asked over the years, "How do you deal with it?" It must be terrible when someone wants accommodation, they are living in their car with three kids, and they want accommodation and I can't drum it up. I can give them some leads. I can give them five numbers or so for them to call hopefully and get something. But lots of times it's people, they think they want to leave home because of domestic violence. They are very disturbing calls, because I can't really do much about that, except give them the numbers that they can call for help. But at the end of the day, at the end of the time talking to them, I've done something. I've helped in some way. So that's the only thing I can tell myself. It's a bit better. I haven't made the situation worse. I've given them some information. I've given them some numbers.

AHERN: You've given them some options. Options and choices, yes.

PASCOE: And I've listened.

AHERN: And supported them to make their own decisions.

PASCOE: And we always believe them, so a believing, sympathetic person on the phone, who will understand, because we've heard it before and give them some sort of options, some sort of thing that they can do and invite them to call back if that's not working out for them, to get some more feedback.

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AHERN: And what about warm transfers? Do you do the warm transfers these days, where you take their call and then put them through physically?

PASCOE: Yes, often, often.

AHERN: Because that's a good thing isn't it?

PASCOE: Oh, it's an excellent thing. We can transfer someone who wants a doctor, you know, they need a doctor. Or they want some department, legal, you know they need some legal advice. We can put them through to the Women's Legal Service or the Legal Services Commission or anywhere really. Anywhere they want to go we can put it through. And often if I'm talking to someone I glean that money might be a problem. I say, "Would you like me to call you back? Is this costing you money, this phone?" They often say, "Oh, would you mind?" "Not at all." So we can get the name, just the first name. It is a very confidential service. We can get the first name and the phone number and ring back and save them that. And I think, country calls, they all know the number and they can ring on an 1800 number.

AHERN: Yes, that's very important.

PASCOE: Very important.

AHERN: That started right back at the beginning too. We had that 1800 number. And being able to ring people back to relieve them of the cost of the calls is really important isn't it? Very important. What about the, in the time I was there we had a whole diversity of people working there. What about now? Do you have older women, younger women, women from diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal women? Do you have those women working both as volunteers and workers, or as clients? Tell me about how that works.

PASCOE: Sadly, I've often thought about the gap of Aboriginal women. We don't have many. Perhaps people may be coming in and using the computers, because we still have six computers sitting there for women to come in and use whenever they want to, to do whatever they like. And some Aboriginal women will come in there. But apart from that we have a multiplicity of women coming in from all different nations and that's good. And we also have workers there. We have young ones that are still at University and probably won't stay very long because they'll get a job and go on to important things. We have older women who are retired who stay a bit longer usually. We have the Family Court Support Service, so that's a big thing too. So, yes there are a lot of varied women there at the moment. Which of course is good. Good for the mix.

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AHERN: In my experience when I was there, as soon as we had an Aboriginal worker, Aboriginal women would come in.

PASCOE: That's what you need.

AHERN: Every time we didn't have an Aboriginal worker they would disappear. We didn't see them in between. As soon as there was an Aboriginal worker, in would come the Aboriginal women.

PASCOE: That's what we need now. I must go and put that at the next team meeting. I shall put that.

AHERN: Yes, it's interesting. I mean that was my experience in the eighties. You know, the seventies, eighties, into early ninety. Every time someone left and there was a gap, we wouldn't see any Aboriginal women. As soon as we had some Aboriginal women working in the organisation, in would come the clients.

PASCOE: There's always some Aboriginal women usually, some Aboriginal women working in the Office for Women. So that's good, but they don't bring clients to us.

AHERN: Yes, well they are too busy doing the rest, I guess. That's the dilemma. But that's an interesting thing. So you don't think there are very different enquiries now, you think over your fifteen years. You've talked about the computer related enquiries and I was told the other day about teaching women how to use ATMs. It was a big deal when ATMs first started, because women were quite anxious about using an ATM and a plastic card to access their bank accounts. And there was actually a machine at one stage at WIS apparently, where women could come in and be trained how to use an ATM. Which I heard the other day, that I had no idea about. Which was a really good idea. So forward thinking.

[00:27:09]

PASCOE: Look I think they are still the same thing. The big five: accommodation, legal, health and domestic violence and education.

AHERN: Education is important. Yes.

PASCOE: Still the same thing. It's funny. Things go in waves. Just thinking about that, because I'm only doing one shift a week, so I might be skewed, because often I say we haven't had a call about so and so for a while. And then someone will say, "I had two the other day." So that makes a difference, because I am only there four hours a week. And also you seem to get them in groups, as with anything. You'll get half a dozen calls along the same sort of a line, but generally ---.

AHERN: They are the main topics.

PASCOE: I think they are the main ones and then you'll get the others that come in.

AHERN: Have there been times that you haven't been able to help?

PASCOE: Oh, yes. Of course.

AHERN: And what sort of things couldn't you help with?

PASCOE: Well, I've mentioned or referred to some time ago, the women who have three children and sleeping in their car. Accommodation has always been difficult. Always. That some places will take women, but they won't take children. Some will take men as well and some women won't have that. You know, there are all sorts of problems. The children are too little, the people are too old, the women are too young. All those sorts of things. So accommodation is always difficult. And mostly, look I never, I don't think I've ever thrown up my hands and said, "No, I can't give you one phone number or I can't give you some sort of assistance." There's nothing that comes to mind.

AHERN: It's funny isn't it? Because sometimes you think, "How helpful was that?" You think to yourself after you've hung up the call and then, it happened to me a couple of times that years later someone would say, "You changed my life."

PASCOE: Oh, OK.

AHERN: And I'd say, "I'm sorry, I don't remember." And they said, "Oh well, you told me I had to choose this. These were my options and I had to make a decision." And then one particular woman said to me, "What helped me was you said to me, these were the options." And she was reflecting back to me what her options were. And I just said to her simply, "What you just said, you sounded more enthusiastic about that option than you did about continuing to do what you are already doing." I said, "That's just an observation." And she said that changed her life. Usually you never hear that, but I was just in a rare, fortunate circumstance that sometime later this woman said to me, "You changed my life." And I had no idea. So I think you don't know the impact.

[00:30:12]

PASCOE: No that's always the problem.

AHERN: As a worker in a service like that you never hear the end of the story. You very rarely ever find out what happened, do you?

PASCOE: No, that's always been the problem because you just cross your fingers, you say, but sometimes you hear back, oh I've already rung them and they didn't help me at all. And you think, "Oh, no." You don't know but I have done, because I've had the time to do it and the thought to do it over the years, I have actually rung some of the places and said, "I'm looking for accommodation. How would you be able to help me?" And found out how they answered the phone, if they answered the phone, if there was accommodation how long the person would have to wait. So getting a little bit of background. But not by no means everyone. You can't do that. There are not enough hours in the day for us to do that. You just don't know. You just hope. But I think always I say, "Look, I've given you several numbers. If you've come to a brick wall on them, please ring back and we'll try something else." So presumably they will do that.

AHERN: Yes, that's right. Giving them options. I think that's really important. OK. So how do you now get information that you give to people? What is your resource? It used to be, we used to have pink cards and rolodex and then we had the CISSA yellow book and then we had the CISSA info search program on a computer and now it's much more sophisticated, I'm sure, the information sources. The Internet would have revolutionized it.

PASCOE: Well, we have the computer. The computer is in front of us when we answer the phone, or in the shopfront really, and we have SA Community database there, so that's comprehensive, but not enough for some situations. So we use Google, or a search engine, I use Google, and I'll be looking up something while I'm talking to someone, so I can get that

sort of information. Apart from that personally, I am very alert when I read the newspapers or even, especially I think, the local newspaper with meetings that are on and various things that are on and people writing in about something or the other. So I'm always collecting that sort of information in my head about, I'm aware of what I might be asked next week about something so I'll be ---.

{00:32:39}

I'll tell you what we used to get. We used to get a lot of callers about women wanting to know various groups that they could join. They were lonely and could I put them in touch with a group that did, I don't know, bush-walking, a group of women who they could talk to because their husband had died, they'd lost a child or something or the other. I had a lot of calls like that, which has just occurred to me at the moment that I haven't had one like that for a long time. I must ask if other people have.

AHERN: That's interesting, isn't it? So the demand for support groups.

PASCOE: Yes, not so much.

AHERN: That's interesting isn't it?

PASCOE: I must say also, Liz, I am talking to you as though I'm just a shopfront and phone room volunteer, but I also am a Family Court Supporter.

AHERN: Yes, tell me about the Family Court Support Program and how it works now. I have a bit of an idea, but it would be useful to have it explained.

PASCOE: Well you should have a very good idea really, seeing you know so much about the Courts. We had a training session in 2006. I'd been there three years at that stage and the idea was that we would go to Court with women. We hadn't up until then, but we would go to Court with women

who had no other support and we would try and make them feel a bit more comfortable. So we'd be there as a companion, tell them where they needed to go to register, find them a safe room, tell them where the toilets were, if they needed that. Things like that can be quite frightening to a woman who is terrified she is going to lose her children today. She doesn't have time to be thinking about things like that.

So we could settle it down and listen to them and most of them, I've been over forty times with women to Court, and most of them want to talk. I think it's someone, I am almost an anonymous person. They know I will treat things confidentially. I am on their side. I'm supportive, I'm sympathetic, I'm there to listen to them and they will talk and they apparently need to do that. So that's what we do. We make sure they get into Court, we make sure we sit between them and their ex-partner, ex-husband, whoever it is. They are terrified mostly. I can't think of a case that wasn't to do with domestic violence, the ones that ring us and we have. So we go there, we meet them at the Court, we sit with them, we listen to what's going on, we try and find the Barrister if that's what they need. Whatever they need we will do and then we say goodbye to them when we go and they seem to be very grateful and we get a lot of repeat business from that. So that's the Family Court Support.

[00:35:30]

AHERN: So what training do the Court Support workers get?

PASCOE: Quite a good training session. A lot of training about domestic violence, about the court procedure. We'll go to the Court and sit in on a case and listen to what goes on. We'll know the formalities of nodding to the Magistrate as you go in and out. Those sorts of things that you need to know and a little bit about the law. And in fact, while I was doing it I think, I did the para-legal program with you at TAFE for a year, which was excellent, and those sorts of things that help you have a bit more

knowledge. And that Court Support Program is growing. We get a lot of calls for that.

AHERN: Oh, that's good. That's really good, because I was involved with a Family Court phone-in in the late eighties. Was it late eighties? No it might have been, yes late eighties it would have been. The Family Court Head of Counselling at that time was really surprised when we mentioned domestic violence. He said, "We don't have any clients with problems with domestic violence." And it was hilarious, because a group of us who were working in domestic violence and me from the Women's Service, we all went to explain to him about domestic violence and how it was a real factor in Family Court processes that wasn't being taken into account. And we had all these phone-in results, all this information from women talking about their experiences, and so we had so much evidence and it was hilarious, because he was so intimidated by the six of us that his chair kept backing back, so in the end he was in the corner. He's gone so far backwards on his roller chair. [Laugh]

PASCOE: You'd pushed him into the corner. I see.

AHERN: And we were just sitting there talking to him, but he was really intimidated by all these women telling him that Family Court had an issue about domestic violence and it has continued to have an issue about domestic violence. It is still a live issue now and the amount of training that some of us have done over the years with lawyers and judges and magistrates. It is still a huge issue and it's fascinating that we don't seem to have hit the tip of the iceberg still.

[00:37:56]

PASCOE: No, no it is a very safe environment now, with an excellent security system at the Courts. I am very impressed with the last time I went how good it was, how caring they are.

AHERN: That's good. It's good to know that they've finally got their act together because it took them a long time to accept that there was a problem. What about doing outreach things. Have you been involved with talks to community groups? Has that been part of your role?

PASCOE: I have over the time. I went with Sophie to a Probus Club once. That was good. That was out at Henley Beach, somewhere like that. I've done a number of Field days up at Edinburgh. Whenever there is a Field, what would you call it, a show or a country show or places where people would gather where there will be a lot of women, we do try and have a presence there, Women's Information Service. If we do, I'm a volunteer representative now, so that position, I think that might have lapsed while you mentioned it just a while ago, but I think that probably lapsed for a while and I think in probably about 2005, it was a while ago, a bit more than ten years ago, I was asked would I be the volunteer representative. If those things are coming up, if there's going to be an Education Day at the Universities or whatever is going on, we would like a presence, try and get a volunteer to go. So over the years I have been to many of them and you stand there and have our brochures and also the brochures of other companies that we are often giving the numbers for, for domestic violence, or the legal services, health services and a few little things that are of interest to women and they come past and we talk about that. So yes, as a volunteer I've done that over the years and other volunteers have too.

AHERN: What about the Support Group? Have you been very involved with the Support Group?

PASCOE: No

AHERN: Because that's one of the things about the Women's Information Service, that it's always had this umbrella support group behind it. Have you personally been very involved?

PASCOE: No. I know Fliss [Lord] from coming in. I know that when they had their meetings, I think they were probably monthly meetings, I know we fielded calls of people who were attending or not, and so we'd have to write it up on the board and that's how I came to learn about them. I think that I learnt about them, more what they did later on, probably just in the last few years and I've always thought that they had our backs, that if there was ever a move to remove Women's Information Service or stop funding it or change it, that that's who we would see to stand behind us, to stand beside us and try and do something about it. I also think I have in mind that they, if there was a particular case, a particular woman who was at the end of her tether and really needed some help, that they might be able to give individual help that we can't, that Women's Information Service can't specifically do anything like that. I thought that they do and I know they have over the past. So yes, in that way I have, but apart from Fliss, who is the, I don't know what her title would be, but I don't know any of the other women on that Board at all.

[00:41:18]

AHERN: Who is doing the Support Group stuff now, do you know?

PASCOE: No.

AHERN: Is Fliss still involved, or you are not sure?

PASCOE: I haven't seen her for a long time, so I don't know.

AHERN: No I haven't seen or heard of her for a while either.

PASCOE: We don't field calls, or I don't, for their meetings anymore, so something has changed. I must find out about it.

AHERN: Yes. It would be interesting to know, because I was there at the very beginning and Betty Fisher, who was a feminist activist back when Switchboard was first set up, she declared at the very beginning, that the only way this organisation was going to survive is if we had every women's

organisation in South Australia supporting it. And that's why we set up the Support Group and we had the Catholic Women's League and we had the CWA and we had every single women's organisation, the Zontas, Soroptimists, Women's Liberation activists, everybody was part of that group and my understanding is that it saved WIS a couple of times when the Governments thought about defunding. And all it took was a phone call to the Women's Support Group or an email or whatever it is these days and that changed. Apparently the Government was considering, I think it was Georgia, Georgia was telling me I think, that there was a move, it seemed like there was going to be some Government changes. They didn't want to fund WIS anymore and she was, she heard about this and the Support Group was told about these proposals and they just rang everybody, the whole Minister's Office was flooded with phone calls from all these women's organisations across the state and they changed their mind.

PASCOE: Excellent.

AHERN: So if it has dissipated a little bit, it might be interesting to find out whether there is some mechanism set up to ensure that kind of ---.

PASCOE: Yes.

AHERN: I would be interested. I must ask next time I'm there at some stage, because I'd be interested to know what happens these days. So have you done any phone-ins or those kind of things?

[00:43:50]

PASCOE: No.

AHERN: They were sort of in the eighties I think. We did a lot of phone-ins in the eighties. I don't think they happen anymore.

PASCOE: No, well there were a few after I started and that was 2003, so there were a few after that. But no, they were always on the weekend and

I had other things to do and there were plenty of people who said that they wanted to do it.

AHERN: So they were still doing the occasional one?

PASCOE: Yes.

AHERN: Now are there any other things that you want to raise about your experience of working at WIS? And things that you think should be noted for the future, because this is your opportunity.

PASCOE: Well, we've talked about a few, so I've got a mental list of things that I must enquire about when I go back in there, but I think that it's going extremely well at the moment. I think Maddy is an extremely good Manager, Coordinator. The volunteers are very well looked after and we have more volunteers now that we have had in the fifteen years that I've been there. There are over fifty volunteers.

AHERN: Wow!

PASCOE: All the other times, or since I have been the Volunteer Representative, I've been concerned with it, remembering birthdays and doing other things from bringing up, as I've told you, at the Team meetings, I go to the Team meetings whereas other volunteers don't, so I hear more about what's going on with the place. I'm really alert to talking about volunteers and what their needs are.

AHERN: Do you report back to the volunteers?

PASCOE: Yes, I do. Yes.

AHERN: So is there a mechanism for doing that?

PASCOE: There is a mechanism. I have their emails so I, when we have a Team meeting I send them the details of it. It's difficult now because we have the shopfront and phone room volunteers, the Family Court volunteers, we have started a new, there is a new lot of volunteers at

Aldinga, at the Children's Centre there. So that's another group. These disparate groups. There are History Project volunteers.

AHERN: Yes, that's me.

PASCOE: And me too. I'm a History Project volunteer, doing interviews. So there are various, these various groups, so you tend to be talking mostly to the Shopfront volunteers because that's where most of the different things come about. I also try and have a lunch three or four times a year, so this is completely separate from WIS, and the volunteers have to pay for it themselves. We don't get a great deal coming in for that. There are some and that's the problem with being a volunteer in a way, that you grow very close to these women when you are having your training sessions and then you leave them and you go and do your shift, and I might do a Wednesday one, and someone might do a Friday one and I never see them, so that a volunteer lunch, or those sorts of times. Sometimes when WIS also organises a Christmas lunch and things like that. That's the only time for women to come together. So that's a good thing that happens.

[00:47:02]

AHERN: Yes, it's funny isn't it? Because I remember when I was a worker, the Tuesday group were a really tight-knit group, the Tuesday morning group. They were just reliable and they loved working together and they knew each other strengths and weaknesses and it was just a delight to work with that particular group of women, because as a volunteer, and later as a paid staff, I really learnt a lot from those women. I really found that very educational.

PASCOE: Yes, it possibly would be the same thing. We do have casual staff now, maybe a lot more. I don't know.

AHERN: And sometimes the volunteers get those jobs as casual staff, don't they?

PASCOE: Yes, I did for several years. I worked as a paid worker and once you are a paid worker you can't be a volunteer, so I expect I wasn't a volunteer for a couple of years. Or maybe we got around that. But yes, I was paid for a while and then I thought, "Oh, no. I think I will just go back to being a volunteer." At least I know that Thursday morning is my shift, whereas, as a casual you are asked the day before. You were just going to go to the beach or have a nice read or talk to your grandchildren and they say can you come in tomorrow? Well really I can. So you do. My life was being directed in ways that I didn't particularly want it, so I went back to being a volunteer, happily.

AHERN: That sounds very nice. OK. Well I think we've talked about the main issues. There are no other comments you want to make?

PASCOE: No, I think as I told you, I think it's going extremely well at the moment. A very happy organisation and I'm very happy to be there. If I hadn't been I wouldn't be there for fifteen years. It's a volunteer job. I can say I'm not coming in tomorrow, but I'm very happy to go there.

AHERN: That's right. That's the delight isn't it? OK, well thank you very much for your time, Caroline and it's been a pleasure to speak with you and I will now conclude this interview.

PASCOE: Thank you very much, Liz. It's been a pleasure to speak to you too.

AHERN: Thank you.

[00:49:16]

END OF INTERVIEW