WOMEN'S INFORMATION SERVICE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript of Interview with Lies Zuidland.

Interviewee: Lies Zuidland

Interviewer: Janice Bassett

Date: March 20, 2017

[00:00:05]

BASSETT: This interview is part of the Women's Information Service (WIS)

History Project. This interview is being conducted at WIS (Women's

Information Service) offices located at 101 Grenfell Street Adelaide on

Monday the 20th March 2017. Lies Zuidland a former employee and now

volunteer at WIS (Women's Information Service) is being interviewed by

Janice Bassett. Also present at the interview is Margaret Evans.

BASSETT: Welcome Lies.

ZUIDLAND: Thank you.

BASSETT: Lies could you tell me a bit about yourself. Your full name, where

and in what year you were born and where you grew up?

ZUIDLAND: Okay, you don't really want my full name. I have got four (4)

first names, Elisabeth, Catharina, Benvenuta, Maria. My maiden name is

Henning. So that ---

When I was born in the Netherlands, I was the first in a very catholic

family.

I was born in 1946 and I've got four (4) younger brothers and I went to

catholic school, to boarding school, I was sent off to because there was no

catholic secondary education on the island where we lived in the south

west of the Netherlands. And then I was allowed to go to high school

because I was too young to train to be a Pharmacist. Which is what my

parents wanted for then I could stay just in the street and they could keep

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an eye on me. But he help me and I well went to high school and before I had to start working afterwards to help support my brothers' education.

When I was twenty one (21) I left home very idealistic and I wanted to go into community aid abroad and those sort of things. So I started Nurses' education. Did that for a few years.

Then I became an Au Pair in Sweden and did several office jobs.

Moved to Amsterdam and through my contacts with the Medical Community Against the Vietnam War I came into community medicine to work into community medicine and then later on into community health centres and that was all before I met my husband. I met Fons on that same suburb where I lived and with amongst the protest we were very protesting in those days in the early 70s (1970s).

In 81 (1981) we emigrated to Australia.

BASSETT: What was your reason for coming to Australia?

ZUIDLAND: It was a selection that we in the first instance we wanted to go to New Zealand but the government didn't want to support us because they said there was too much of unemployment there at the time. They gave us the options Canada, Brazil or Australia. Canada is very cold and Brazil, we'd just seen documentaries about how they were burning down the forest and things like that and we didn't want to be part of that either, so then it became Australia.

BASSETT: That's great. So, when you came to Australia did you immediately start employment with WIS (Women's Information Service) or did you do something before that?

ZUIDLAND: Yeah I did several jobs before that. I arrived on a Friday and in that Saturday's Advertiser there was a job advertised here at community medicine based at the Royal Adelaide Hospital and there was a similar job as I'd done in Amsterdam. I got that job. I did that for a couple of years and then I --- one of my colleagues became the Women's Adviser Health in

the Health Commission at the time, but not the Health Department yet,

and she asked me if want to come along as her Assistant, which I did.

Worked there for a few years and then went to Southern Women's

Community Health Centre. Worked there for twelve (12) years while our

daughter went through her education and then I got a job in 1999, got a

job at WIS (Women's Information Service) as Community Information

Worker.

BASSETT: Okay and how long have you worked, did you work with WIS

(Women's Information Service)?

ZUIDLAND: From 1999 to my retirement in 2011.

[00:05:00]

BASSETT: And what sort of work did you do, or can you tell me a little the

work you did with the work you under took with WIS (Women's

Information Service)?

ZUIDLAND: Yes in the first instance, I did a fair bit with the technical side

of things. Where we started up the computer training and all those sort of

things and we always had to wait very long for technical assistance. So I

did some TAFE (Technical and Further Education South Australia) education

to at least know where to start trouble shooting when something

happened.

Through my background, I was very involved with women's health so I

became part of the Female Genital Mutilation Project based at the

Women's Health Statewide. I worked with the Domestic Violence Action

Group, recorded their annual meetings and things like that and I was also

the Secretary of the Women's Health Network of South Australia when that

was established.

I'm not sure of the year but it was I think it might have been around 2007.

Well the need was felt very much for support in the Family Court. In the

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first instance, the Women's Legal Service had had a worker who provided that and who was very active at that and then she left the whole thing collapse a bit. So Women's Health and Domestic Violence Services and Victim Support Service all came together because we still kept getting lots of requests from women to get some help when they had to go to the Court. So we --- well I was asked to set up that program we had a project worker writing the program and then I started my first training. Caroline was one of the was part to the first training and I think Margaret (Evans) was part of the second training. I think yes second or third. Yeah.

BASSETT: So what's Caroline's last name?

ZUIDLAND: Caroline Pascoe.

BASSETT: Caroline Pascoe. So she was part of very much involved with setting it up with you?

ZUIDLAND: She was a volunteer at the Women's Information Service and expressed an interest to be involved with the Court Support as well. So she was one of the volunteers training in the first program.

BASSETT: So with the Court Support your initial involvement there did you continue that involvement over from 2007 through to when you retired.

ZUIDLAND: Yes, yes, yes I became the Volunteer Coordinator, ran training for new volunteers and yeah had the regular contact with the Courts and the Domestic Violence Services and yep.

BASSETT: And have you over that period from 2007 to say when you left in 2011 or even now, as you're sort of volunteering has the um --- has this been a very successful program?

ZUIDLAND: It definitely is. A lot of women have expressed that they're really thankful for our support and we get lots of goodwill from the Court

as well and we have noticed also over the years that in the beginning we

are --- said we would support women from different cultural backgrounds

who have been involved in an abusive situation and then later on we

started getting requests from women who haven't been necessarily in a

very very abusive situation but still asked for help. But I found the

tendency being that it's more and more very severe abusive situations that

women ask us for our help.

[00:09:28]

BASSETT: And has the number of volunteers that that you initially ---.

ZUIDLAND: Has grown ---.

BASSETT: Has that grown as well?

ZUIDLAND: Yeah yeah.

BASSETT: To --- what's the extent of growth has there been?

ZUIDLAND: Don't ask me I don't know how many volunteers there are for I

know quite a group of women have been trained again.

BASSETT: Okay, all right.

ZUIDLAND: Yeah. So you have to ask Maddy (Pattingale) or Shannon

(Peake). Yeah.

BASSETT: What the current status is? Okay. So just in terms of the people

that you worked with at WIS (Women's Information Service), can you tell

me a bit about those people?

Particularly what your memories might be of the times that you

shared, over the period of time that you were working as an employee?

ZUIDLAND: So you mean the colleagues or the Managers?

BASSETT: No. Well both

ZUIDLAND: Yeah.

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BASSETT: But the colleagues, the colleagues you worked with?

ZUIDLAND: We worked very well together. It was quite a happy team until there were many changes of Management and Government and the tensions build up and it, it was more difficult to work there. Not that we didn't support one another. I didn't, I don't mean that at all for yeah I'm still friendly with most of my ex-colleagues. It's just that it's very hard to guarantee and maintain some continuancy if you don't know from one year to the next whether you still be in existence whether ---- or who the next Manager will be. I made a quick, I did a quick look at I had at least six (6) Managers in the time I was here and some of them only lasted a year. Yeah

BASSETT: So that's in a period of twelve years (12) there abouts?

ZUIDLAND: Yeah.

BASSETT: So who were the six (6) Managers that you worked?

ZUIDLAND: Well I started with Linda Forrest.

BASSETT: Yes.

ZUIDLAND: And in those days, there were difficulties with some staff as well. Like some staff, well quite a few staff had resigned. That's why I managed to come in, for it was very hard to find a job in the Women's Information Service normally.

And then after a while Linda worked for the Red Cross in Fiji after a calamity there and Sandra Dann the Manager of currently or still the Manager of the Working Women's Centre was our Manager for eighteen (18) months and that was a great time. She's great to work with. Ah I'm not quite sure whether it was first Wendy Thompson or Sophie Allouache, who became Manager then. I think it was first Wendy and then Sophie. Then we had a woman called Caroline and I've forgotten her surname and a woman called Georgia, yeah and yeah so.

BASSETT: So quite a, quite a bit of a turn over during that period?

ZUIDLAND: Quite a bit of a turn over during that period. Yeah and women with different visions, different interests, yeah depending on their backgrounds what they thought would be very good thing for the Women's Information Service to do.

BASSETT: Okay so that's great. I just want to move on a bit to particularly around the Internet. When you started in 99 (1999) was the Internet available for use by women. It came into use as a service.

ZUIDLAND: No, we had the CISSA system the Community Information Service Database on our computers

BASSETT: Yes

ZUIDLAND: And sometimes we looked together with women to look up for resources for referral. But, yeah most of the time we did it. It was not until a bit later that we began the Internet Access Programs.

BASSETT: And did that change the way you worked yourself, the way you worked and also did that change in terms of being able to provide a greater range of information for women who came in?

ZUIDLAND: Well the --- I thought one of the major changes was that women could look things up for themselves and not necessarily be dependent on the information we provided. I always think that's a good thing. It's very empowering when you do it yourself. Yes so ---

BASSETT: So where at that time when the Internet came in, where there other changes that were introduced that impacted on, or not so much impacted but improved the way women could access information? Or was it ----

[00:14:56]

ZUIDLAND: I'm not quite sure what you mean.

BASSETT: Well with the Internet the Internet coming in meant that women

could come in and utilize the --- well find information for themselves?

ZUIDLAND: Yeah.

BASSETT: And I'm just wondering whether there were any other changes

that occurred around about that time that also improved the access for

women coming in and using information?

ZUIDLAND: Well we started the Internet Training Program for women to

learn how to use the internet and a lot of women were interested in that at

the time, yes.

BASSETT: And I would imagine that a lot of those women wouldn't have

had access to the Internet at home. So ...

ZUIDLAND: Most of them didn't have access to the Internet at home. A lot

of them would have children who had move away from home to other

places in Australia or overseas. Yeah it was just a very good thing for

especially for a lot of older women to stay in touch with their relatives that

way and well be able to see pictures of their grandkids and whatever. Yeah.

BASSETT: Now you mentioned earlier a lot of the programs that you were

involved in or a lot of the numerous government initiatives like with Legal

Service and with -----

ZUIDLAND: Domestic Violence Services

BASSETT: Domestic violence and I know that I understand that WIS

(Women's Information Service) collaborated with the Government on a

number of initiatives. Were you involved in or organising any other

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programs when you at your time with WIS (Women's information Service). I know you mentioned the, we have talked about the Court Support, were there any other significant programs where you can tell me a little about the work that you did with them?

ZUIDLAND: That was the majority of my work for it was quite a full time job to be Volunteer Coordinator and do training programs and well also supervise volunteers with the normal phone services and in the Shopfront. Yeah, yeah.

BASSETT: With the shopfront when you started with WIS (Women's Information Service) where abouts was WIS (Women's Information Service) located?

ZUIDLAND: They had just moved from Kintore Avenue to the Station Arcade. We were there for quite some time. There were several changes of Government and Departments that were responsible for us, and then we were going to move to another place on North Terrace and there were big plans, thousands, tens thousands of dollars was spent on setting it all up, and we were going there to have a look and yeah it looked quite inviting and then there was a change of Government again. So then, in the end we ended up in Grenfell Street here, next door at 99 Grenfell Street.

BASSETT: So when did you move to 101 Grenfell Street was that a recent move?

ZUIDLAND: I haven't been part of that for that was after my retirement.

BASSETT: Ah right okay. Just want to touch on now ask you a little bit about the clients the people who used the WIS (Women's Information Service) services. What involvement did you have with the women who use the WIS (Women's Information Service) services over the years that you've worked here?

ZUIDLAND: Well, quite a bit of involvement and in the beginning a lot of

older women and also quite well to do women used the Women's

Information Service and depending on who the workers were quite a few

women from a non-English speaking backgrounds or CALD (Culturally and

Linguistically Diverse) women, or whatever you want to call them used the

service. I found over the years, or when we had some changes of

Information Staff we got more involvement from younger women for that

lacked very much in the beginning it was --- yeah, yeah.

BASSETT: Mainly older women who use the service to being with. So the

age profile has changed over the years?

[00:20:02]

ZUIDLAND: The age profile has changed but also I think the economic

profile. For it's --- over the years it became more and more women asking

for financial assistance, housing assistance, domestic violence assistance.

Yeah.

In a similar way as when I worked at in Southern Womens in Noarlunga in

Christies Beach --- did the amount from women in domestic violence

situations and in financial hard circumstances was very normal there and

when I first moved to Women's Information Service I found their perils

quite [laugh] quite futile compared to the sort of the ----

BASSETT: The issues that were being face from other women down south.

ZUIDLAND: Yeah. Yes. So but that changed over the years to. And then

there were the things you dread the calls you dread like help to find

housing and help to find that for there wasn't much for women to fall back

on and yeah.

BASSETT: Has that changed over years in terms of availability?

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ZUIDLAND: I don't know ---. For now you have the gateways and

information lines that WIS (Women's Information Services) can refer to but

in those days we had to do to it with it ourselves. You had an outside

woman on the phone who was going to loose her housing and often they

knew it for quite a while but didn't ring until the very last moment and

then it was very hard to find some accommodation.

BASSETT: So just touching on some of the issues of the day. During the

time you worked at WIS (Women's Information Service) what do you what

were some of the important women's issues of the day and ---?

ZUIDLAND: Well that's what I tried to explain before.

BASSETT: Yeah

ZUIDLAND: At first it was a different sort of problems that I found on a day

to day basis but gradually it became more women in abusive situations,

women in housing crisis, a lot of health issues to. It had always been good

to be able to refer to Womens' Services but then the Womens' Services

gradually disappeared and that made it harder for ... I should rephrase that

I think --- it was very good in the beginning to be able to refer to women's

Doctors in Women's Health Services.

BASSETT: Yes

ZUIDLAND: But because it was very hard for the Women's Health Services

to find Doctors because they didn't get paid, get paid ah --- well a huge

amount of money, they could earn more in private enterprise, and also

they got problems with their registration because it was judged that they

needed to deal with a wider issue of health issues than just women's

health issues.

Yeah so because it was so difficult for the Health Centres to find women

Doctors we couldn't refer to them any longer to. So we actually worked a

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fair bit on making lists of women Doctors who were available and yeah CISSA (Community Information Service Database) was a very good base for that sort of information. So we could adopt it to the specific needs of the Women's Information Service. Yep.

BASSETT: Okay. So with your current volunteering experience and reflecting on when you started work with WIS (Women's Information Service) do you think that the services that WIS (Women's Information Service) provides now has changed much over the years and if they have changed in what ways do you think they may have changed?

ZUIDLAND: Well I'm far more distanced from --- I don't have first-hand experience of the day to day goings of WIS (Women's Information Service). I've noticed that the Information Service is going to be opened again from nine (9) to five (5). We use to be open every weekday from eight (8) to six (6) and on Saturdays all day from nine (9) to five (5) as well. So yeah it was ---

[00:25:12]

BASSETT: So back when you ---- well from 99 (1999) through that period 99 (1999) through to 2011 you were open five (5) and a half well the ---- the service was open five (5) and a half days to provide the service ----

ZUIDLAND: We were open from eight (8) to six (6) for four (4) days on Tuesdays we were open till nine (9) o'clock, no eight (8) o'clock sorry and on Saturdays we were open all day as well.

BASSETT: Those opening hours that you worked, in terms of providing a service was that driven by the clients. Like there was a demand out there from ---

ZUIDLAND: Well it came both ways. The women expected us and the Government of the day thought it was a good thing to for the Information Page **12** of **20**

Service to be available to women at those times. The Tuesday evening

service was --- and the Saturday afternoon were link-ups with Lawyers at

Women's Legal Service for the Women's Legal advice and those times were

allocated because they wanted to serve working women as well who would

be difficult for to contact a lawyer a women lawyer in the day time.

BASSETT: And that worked really quite well?

ZUIDLAND: Yes, but in the end the service was not used that extensively on

Saturdays anymore. It was just quite busy with the legal link-up but that

was about it. We had some women using the shopfront but we had quite a

few drunk guys walking in and abusing [laugh] staff as well. So yeah so it ---

in the end it was decided to cut back the service.

BASSETT: And that people walking in and being abusive did that happen on

the Saturday did you say or was it ----

ZUIDLAND: Mostly on the Saturday. Yes, Yes.

BASSETT: So how did you deal with that?

ZUIDLAND: Oh I was actually quite good at it. I quite enjoyed it actually

[laugh]. I thought it was really nice to physically just walk them back

towards the door. Yes, just not engage in the abuse they were saying and

say well thank you I've heard that before. I wish you would, I want you to

go now and they usually went. For they, often the other worker would get

me if someone came in. Oh yeah I enjoyed doing that.

BASSETT: Ah yeah would have been an interesting experience wouldn't it.

ZUIDLAND: Or another thing I hadn't mention when I worked here was the

Tax Help.

BASSETT: Yes

ZUIDLAND: Yeah I was the first contact person for Tax Help and organised

that from year to year.

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BASSETT: And did that come out of --- how did that come about was that a

request that came --- a decision that was made or a request that came

from the women who were using the ---

ZUIDLAND: It was a request from women to have some assistance with

their taxation yep. For normally you have to pay when you go to an

Accountant but with the Tax Help Service if you're on a certain amount of

income you get the service for free.

BASSETT: So around about what year was that introduced as a service

because I understand it still continues now.

ZUIDLAND: Yeah, I'm not quite sure.

BASSETT: Obviously ---

ZUIDLAND: Quite a few years before I left.

BASSETT: Before 2011.

ZUIDLAND: Yes.

BASSETT: Do you --- with the changes that have happened over the years

and with the Women's Information Service as it was known as the

Women's Information Switchboard, introduced in the late1970s, we are

now coming up for our Fortieth (40th) year, do you think there is still a need

for an information service for women?

ZUIDLAND: I think so.

BASSETT: So why do you think that we should continue with it? What are

the really good reasons that you think that it adds?

[00:30:02]

ZUIDLAND: One of the good things about the Women's Information

Service was the safety of the service for women and the place where they

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were accepted and believed for what they were and quite often it's very difficult when you go to a place for information to find that you're taken seriously and that someone is actually not just trying to help you out and give you the information but also to be supportive of the issues you are confronted with and I think that's something of all ages.

BASSETT: Yeah. So in 2011 you retired. Did you continue your involvement with WIS (Women's Information Service) following your retirement?

ZUIDLAND: Not for a year and after a year I became a Family Court Support volunteer.

BASSETT: So and, why did you decided to come back and volunteer?

ZUIDLAND: I heard that they were needing more volunteers and well after I settled down [laugh] after a year of things I started volunteering in the Dutch Nursing Home I needed something else in my life with a bit more involvement and yes that's what Court Support does for me.

BASSETT: So what is about volunteering that you enjoy doing?

ZUIDLAND: Why you haven't known me when I first came to Australia for I was very much against volunteering for I think if women do a proper job they should be properly paid and now I find that I actually got quite a bit of satisfaction of my working life and I want to give something back to the community.

Yeah it's --- I mean the contact with the women in the Nursing Home is very different sort of contact. It's more like gratitude that you take them out and have a chat and but I find that in the Family Court you can actually be there do something for someone who needs it very badly at the time.

BASSETT: So have a --- the connect between volunteering in the Nursing Home and volunteering as you're doing at the Court Support. There would be to ----

ZUIDLAND: It is far more involved and it goes deeper than well I think it's a good thing. I hope when I get very old there will be volunteers coming in and entertaining me. But it's a different sort of situation. Yeah completely different and I find the training actually is [cough] is very much different to.

BASSETT: The training?

ZUIDLAND: To be a volunteer with older people compared to supporting a woman in the Family Court and your background knowledge about the situation. Yeah.

BASSETT: Okay, I just want to go back to when you were working. I just have one or two more questions that I would like to ask and one is around your involvement at WIS (Women's Information Service) and the community. They --- WIS (Women's Information Service) had outreach services like the Rural Outreach Attendance of Field Days and talks with Community Groups. Were you involved in any of those at the time?

ZUIDAND: No I don't quite --- we called them WIS (Women's Information Service) talks and I've done a fair few. We used to go out to community groups to Women's Education Groups and I think with the Women's Education it was a good thing that more and more groups started coming to the Women's Information Service so women could find out the service --- experience the service first hand. There's always that two split because you want to give an outreach and you want to go to the women but on the other hand, it's a good thing to for women to experience the service first hand when they come to your service.

[00:35:14]

BASSETT: Earlier we touched on domestic violence and I understand that during the 1980s that WIS (Women's Information Service) held a phone in on a couple of women's issues but particularly around domestic violence

round housing, parental distress and women and disability. Did you participate at all in any of those phone-ins, were they held during your ---

ZUIDLAND: I didn't work at WIS at the 80s (1980s).

BASSETT: Oh that's right

ZUIDLAND: I started working in 99 (1999) we still had several phone-ins in those days. Quite often on a Tuesday evening, if we were just had the phone room open to answer the legal phone calls so the telephones were open. But then it was quite often workers from the services that had requested a phone-in that staffed the phones. Yeah so we did a few sometimes but most of the time it was the workers themselves that did it.

BASSETT: Okay I --- just having a look,--- I think I've covered a lot of the questions I wanted to ask.

ZUIDLAND: Oh yeah the WIS (Women's Information Service) Support Group you haven't asked about.

BASSETT: Yes that's right the WIS (Women's Information Service) Support Group was the other.

ZUIDLAND: Yeah, see I've notes [Laughs]

BASSETT: I'm glad you've got your notes. I was just flicking through and thinking yeah ---Okay the WIS (Women's Information Service) Support Group, what can you tell me about the WIS (Women's Information Service) Support Group?

ZUIDLAND: The WIS (Women's Information Service) Support Group was a very supportive group of very feisty a lot of them older women and they worked so hard making sure the Service got the esteem and the continuance that it desperately needed at some stages and yeah it was a really very helpful sort of thing. So the [cough] Manager of the day would go to the WIS (Women's information Service) Support Group and provide a

report on what we'd been doing. For they only met every few months.

They were very interested and made sure that certain programs got

implemented and yeah.

BASSETT: And the WIS (Women's Information Service) Support Group were

they separate to the Women's Information Service, they weren't part of

the ----

ZUIDLAND: The Women's Information Support Group was actually an

inheritance from before the Women's Information Service became part of

a Government Department. First there was Women's Information

Switchboard was more of a community group that's why they had the

support group to make sure that it happened. But gradually over the year

we became got encapsulated more and more as part of a Government

Services, part of the Office for Women.

BASSETT: Who was involved in the Women's Support Group during that

time, were there any key players?

ZUIDLAND: Fliss, Fliss I think

BASSETT: Fliss Lord?

ZUIDLAND: Yes, Fliss Lord but by her previous name she was very involved

and made sure that it kept going but there were or I'm trying to think of

their names. I'm not very good at names I'm afraid.

BASSETT: Ah that fine ---

ZUIDLAND: But from those days I know Molly Brannigan and yeah women

like that.

BASSETT: And they were very involved and ---

ZUIDLAND: Yes yes

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BASSETT: In the Women's Movement as well. So okay is there, anything else that we haven't covered that you think is important that we should

cover. Anything else you want to add to what we have been ---?

ZUIDLAND: No, No I think I'm quite happy. Yes I hope you have notice that I'm trying to be very diplomatic and not as outspoken as most of the staff here have known me over the years for I'm a real 'Dutchie' very direct and I find Australian people have a lot of problem with to dealing with that.

[00:40:02]

BASSETT: The directness?

ZUIDLAND: And I know someone like Margaret (Evans) for instance would know how feisty I used to run the Family Court Support training. So I have mellowed a fair bit I must say.

BASSETT: Thank you. On the training, that you --- just to wind up on --the training that you did for the Family Court was it a very intensive program. What was the content of the program that you ran?

ZUIDLAND: A lot of it involved and it still involved I think nowadays was we spent two (2) lengthy sessions in the Family Court finding out first-hand what the set-up of the Court was, how they worked, and several of the higher echelon workers used to ... well tell more about how the Family Court worked.

We had women from the Women's Legal Service, from Domestic Violence Service run sessions on domestic violence, and the 'why doesn't she leave' and the issues involved with domestic violence and Women's Legal Services where legal support could be given and we also had sessions on child sexual abuse, child abuse in general and several of the sessions were also about how to deal with the staff and how to get support when you needed it and yeah how to make sure you were safe yourself and those sort of things.

BASSETT: Okay. Well Lies thank you very much for your time. It's been a really informative little interview. So look thanks and thank you very much.

ZUIDLAND: Okay thank you. I hope you have managed to do it within the forty six (46) minutes Margaret {laugh}!

BASSETT: I think we have.

[00:42:30]

END OF INTERVIEW