CHAPTER THREE: Domestic violence reaches the policy arena

In at the deep end and on the run.

The first of the 'in at the deep end' leaps that initiated a dramatically new Australian policy response to domestic violence was the occupation of the house named Elsie, and its neighbour, in the Sydney suburb of Glebe on 20 March 1974. That action, and the 'on the run' strategies which followed, were shaped by the feminist 'discovery' experience which I identified in the Introduction as one of the fundamental and defining aspects of the domestic violence policy process. That experience of a new recognition and construction of domestic violence continued to determine the 'in at the deep end and on the run' nature of the process in the months studied in this chapter. Here, in the first stages of the policy activist process, action was obliged to rush ahead of analysis, and feminist framing and strategy unfolded in and around the pragmatic consequences of the Elsie impulse.

My emphasis in this chapter is on the primary theme of the thesis, the narrative analysis of this stage of the Australian domestic violence policy process, and, in particular, on the processes involved in reaching the first policy achievement, the securing of ongoing funding for women's refuges. At the same time, the other major themes of the thesis also continue to unfold. The relationship between the domestic violence process and the broader women's policy enterprise, which is the second thesis theme, was initiated by the arrival of domestic violence as a feminist policy issue in the very early stages of that broader enterprise. Exploration of the theme pursuing the contextual implications of policy processes continues through consideration of the contexts of both opportunity and representation involved in the progress of the domestic violence policy process. In particular, the first steps in the building of a feminist analysis of domestic violence provides a vivid demonstration of the living process by which a particular social circumstance, in this case domestic violence, evolved from an activist impulse into a named and framed policy issue. Finally, the strategies undertaken at this early stage of policy engagement, for all their spontaneity, had implications for the further policy directions that would eventually be taken in response to domestic violence, and so contribute to the thesis theme pursuing connections between strategic processes and policy outcomes.

The primary sources for this chapter include policy documents relating to the first steps in domestic violence policy and to the broader policy context in which it occurred, together with the written recollections of key participants and interviews with some of them. Such accounts include a program on the opening of Elsie Women's Refuge, incorporating interviews with participants, broadcast on ABC television as part of the *Timeframe* series (*Timeframe* 13 February 1997). Some of this primary material is analysed for the first time in the context of the domestic violence policy activist narrative; other sections, for example the compelling accounts of the early Elsie events provided by participants, are refocused here on interrogation of the policy strategies involved. The secondary accounts of these events and of their political and policy contexts are also, as with the secondary historical accounts used in the previous chapters, repositioned in the light of the emphasis of the thesis on analysis of the domestic violence policy activist process. For example, whereas Marian Sawer has included domestic violence policy in her comprehensive account of the development of a women's policy machinery and agenda between 1972 and 1989 (Sawer 1990), the study made here differs from that account not only by focusing primarily on domestic violence policy, but also through its specific focus on the policy activist processes involved in building that body of policy.

This chapter begins by returning to what happened after the squat at Elsie began in March 1974. It continues with the first approaches to the policy arena in search of refuge funding, and the strategies and struggles which followed, some of them in the context of the United Nations International Women's Year (IWY) in 1975. The chapter ends with the securing of ongoing refuge funding just before the dismissal of the Whitlam ALP Commonwealth government in November 1975. The political and policy contexts for the events of this chapter are those of the Whitlam government, the beginning of the Commonwealth policy machinery for women and the feminist strategies and debates which gave it strategic shape, and the international arena offered by the UN strategies.

IN AT THE DEEP END: ANALYSIS AND ISSUE FRAMING BEGINS AT ELSIE

The story of the feminist activist project which began with the claiming of the Elsie houses continued with a burst of hard work. The women set to work to scrub, weed, move in borrowed furniture and distribute leaflets to reassure the neighbours. Then they contacted the media, exploiting the public notoriety of 'Women's Lib', to let women know that a new resource was available, and to campaign for support. Three anxious days and nights followed as the refuge founders started to wonder: 'Maybe we were wrong. Maybe we didn't need this'. Then a Scottish woman whose husband had beaten her regularly arrived. Anne Summers recalled: 'Elsie was never empty for a moment after that time. Things got serious very quickly' (*Timeframe* 13 February 1997; Summers 1999: 325-7). Forty eight women and thirty five children were taken into the refuge in the first six weeks (Summers 1999: 328).

In those first weeks, as the founders listened to the women who walked through Elsie's doors, and those women listened to each other, another stage of the process began. Two of the first residents spoke on the *Timeframe* program (quotations from *Timeframe* 13 February 1997; see also Summers 1999: 329-30). Dorrie arrived with her four children after hearing about Elsie on her little battery radio while doing the breakfast dishes. She had been living with her husband's violence for fourteen years. 'I had nowhere else to go', she recalled, 'No-one wanted me with four kids. It was like a wonderful miracle - warmth, security, safety, talking and incredibly strong friendships.' Bobbie came with her five boys and their belongings in green garbage bags. 'You can't go easily if you've got kids. ... I just knew that this was the place.' As the survivors talked to each other, sometimes late into the night, the isolation they had suffered on their quarter acre blocks, and the doubt and shame which went with it, disappeared. As the stories were told, Bobbie learned that some men treated 'their' women and children even more cruelly than she had experienced. But she also learned that: 'There can't be something wrong with all of us!' Later, after they had become part of the group working at Elsie, Bobbie was to say, 'It gave me a whole new life', while Dorrie said, 'I am grateful to this day that I went there'.

These deeply moving memories record the two fundamentally important things that happened in the first days at Elsie. One was very old and very familiar: women suffering violence continued their centuries-old tradition of primary survival activism as they took a desperate gamble on the new feminist resource. Their actions were the drivers that decided whether Elsie was to be more than an excited impulse. The other was the start of the process of framing that would determine the core issue for Elsie and the other women's refuges that soon followed, and which would be taken into the policy arena. Once again, the surviving women were the drivers, as they talked to each other and transformed their understanding of what had happened to them. This was probably the single most significant difference between what happened at the early feminist refuges and the generations of well-intentioned responses to family difficulties which preceded them. Here, in the context of a feminist movement built on listening to each other, it was taken for granted that the women would talk, and that the founders would listen.

Several levels of learning and framing were taking place in the long nights of mutual consciousness-raising at Elsie. One was the transformation of the primary issue driving the Elsie project from homelessness, as announced in the calls for the first meeting, to violence. The first thing that the refuge founders learnt was that the violence which drove women from their homes was real, horrific and so widespread as to be 'ordinary' for a large proportion of women. They also learnt, as they watched the escaping women healing as they compared stories, that the damage wrought by the violence was not only physical. These women, each in the isolation of her family home, had suffered damage to their spirits, self-confidence and capacity for autonomous identity as well as to their bodies. This would become a building block for the analysis beginning to take shape (see, for example, Hopkins and McGregor 1991: 23, based on the Annual Reports of Beryl, the Canberra Women's Refuge). Soon afterwards, as work began to try to help the escaping women build new lives, the refuge founders also learned about the limits of the social and legal resources available to them, and the hard economic realities restricting their options (Johnson 1981: ix; 2, 7-11; Hopkins and McGregor 1991: 15-19, again based on the Beryl Annual Reports). The Elsie feminists were experiencing the stark demonstration provided by domestic violence of the limits, even in their own optimistic generation, to women's access, especially if they had children, to the possibility of an autonomous

household. This would be the route by which domestic violence, as it moved to the feminist foreground, brought the issue of women's homelessness back onto the activist agenda.

The refuge-encounter process, with its elements of shock, anger and the working out of implications, forged the bonds of loyalty and conviction which bound feminists with refuge experience, in Australia and the other countries in which feminists were founding refuges, into an activist community (for an account of this process in the USA and the UK, see Dobash and Dobash 1992: 25-39). The same experiences were also the seedbed for the feminist analysis of domestic violence which would be taken, guarded fiercely by refuge feminists, into the policy arena. In that context, the Elsie experience might be described, in policy cycle terms, as a process of issue identification and framing (Bridgman and Davis 2004: 26-8; 169-70); but these are inadequate concepts for the capture of such a raw, living process. Janet Flammang's proposal of the building of an 'epistemic community', in which the women involved, in this case those escaping violence, reveal themselves to be 'authoritative pattern makers', is a more useful descriptor (Flammang 1997: 60-1). But the strategic concepts of 'vigilant readings' and 'strategic retelling' proposed by Cate Poynton and her co-authors in their contribution from discourse analysis to the exploration of policy activism come much closer to this highly contextual but also transformative process (Jones et al 1998: 166-8). Their observations also place the refuge feminist process with Carol Bacchi's claims that: 'If we accept that our world is socially constructed, then it can be changed by challenging – deconstructing – constructions which have effects we wish to reduce or eliminate', and that, in this sense, 'constructionism [is] … a natural home for feminists' (Bacchi 1999a:62-3).

Meanwhile, the Elsie women, once again whether as founders or residents, were also working out how to live together, how to keep everyone fed, how to tolerate each other's children, and how to run a refuge (Summers 1999: 327-331; *Timeframe* 13 February 1997). In the first year there were sometimes twelve women and thirty children in the house on a single night (Summers 1999: 330). This situation required two strategic responses, both of which, while arrived at 'on the run', became further building blocks in the tradition and ethics of the emerging feminist refuge movement.

The first of these urgent essentials was a way of administering the refuge. Working this out involved a merging of practical need and spontaneity with the politics of the feminist founders. That anti-hierarchical politics of self determination meant that at Elsie there could be 'no boss, no chain of command', 'just talk' and management on a 'day to day basis', as Kris Melmouth, one of the founders, remembered (*Timeframe* 13 February 1997). But there had to be some way to achieve order and continuity. Gradually the *ad hoc* processes settled into principles of participative collective management, involving equally founders, helpers and residents (Johnson 1981: 3, 11-14).

The second essential was the search for funds to keep the doors open and everyone fed. The first Elsie funding strategies were a hand-to-mouth process relying on volunteer workers and what amounted to appeals for charitable support. The first of these 'strategic retellings' of what the founders had learned were dramatic revelations to the media about the violence the women had suffered. Anne Summers refers to articles and interviews in the *Daily Mirror*; in January 1975 she published an article on Elsie and the women she had met there in the *National Times*, which in turn stimulated more personal stories in published letters (Summers 1999: 331-2; National Times 20-25 January 1975: 21-2, 3-8 February 1975: 34-8). Questions would later be asked about the consequences of these media tactics, and their possible encouragement of inappropriate stereotypes of the 'innocent victim wife' and the 'beast of suburbia' (McFerren 1990: 193; Johnson 1981: 10-1). On the other hand, Summers, in her *National Times* article, simply related the unquestionably shocking facts of the women's stories, and placed them firmly inside an analysis of the economic dependency of women: 'the violence occurs for many reasons but a primary one is women's complete and utter dependence on man, a dependence which is the corner stone of our family structure and which law, religion, economics and culture continually reinforces' (National Times 20-25 January 1975: 22).

In the short term, such tactics secured donations in cash and kind from local Glebe businesses, service organisations and other women's movement members. But an appeal for broader financial support failed and the Church of England, Elsie's legal landlord, remained obdurate (Summers 1999: 331-332; 354). In those desperate first months, Anne Summers relates that she did her bit to by raising funds as a small-time

dealer in marijuana, thus 'redistributing money the inner-city crowd would have spent anyway, to a service that was in dire need' (Summers 1999: 332-333). None of these solutions could last for long.

Meanwhile, women all over Australia were being drawn to the refuge idea. Other early refuges were the Women's Liberation Halfway House in Melbourne, the Brisbane Women's Centre, Adelaide Women's Shelter and Nardine in Perth (McFerren 1990:193,197; Sawer 1990: 12; Weekes 1994: 18-19; Orr 1994: 210; Caine 1998: 377); by June 1975 eleven refuges had either been opened or were ready to open, nation wide (Sawer 1990: 13). But the dilemma of on-going funding remained. This was the point at which the provision of refuge for women escaping violent partners became a policy issue. It was to Canberra and the Commonwealth government that the Elsie founders turned.

THE FIRST POLICY APPROACH

When Anne Summers and the other Elsie women set off for Canberra, they were providing the clearest possible demonstration of how the world of policy had changed since late nineteenth century Australian feminists engaged in policy activism. The 1970s feminists took it for granted that governments would provide money for demonstrated social needs, and that voluntarily established community based organisations would be recognised as accepted mechanisms for state funded service delivery. They also took it for granted that they were part of a policy related community with direct access to government. They were doing what Sara Dowse, reflecting on her experience at the head of the Women's Affairs Branch (WAB) in the Commonwealth Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet expressed in the memorable statement already referred to in the Introduction: 'throughout my life as a feminist activist …, when I want something done I look to just that [government] arena. … And despite all claims to the contrary so do most of my feminist sisters, even the most radical among them (Ryan 1990: 75; Dowse 1984: 139). Anne Summers later marvelled over 'how brash we were, how unshakeable our sense of entitlement'. But the Elsie women knew they were making a policy approach within accepted parameters, and when they 'sought ... meetings with ministers and their senior staff', they usually got them (1999: 350-1).

While one of the reasons for this dramatic change in feminist expectations was the development of an Australian welfare state, another was the concurrent acceptance that some of the government funded service provision involved would be administered and delivered by non-government organisations. Whether that expectation was shaped by conservative Liberal-Country Party governments seeking to limit direct public sector intervention or by the Whitlam ALP principles of participative democracy, this model opened the way for the 'new social movements' of the 1960s and 1970s, for example the environmental, civil rights, consumer protection, gay rights, Aboriginal and feminist movements, to use the community funding model as a way of stretching the reach of policy (Roe 1976: 314; Jennett and Stewart 1989: 1-10; Yeatman 1990: 49-50; Baldock 1988a: 280-3; Baldock 1990:14-26; 104-117). Women's health centres, community based child care services, rape crisis services and women's refuges are all examples of feminist initiatives built on this kind of activist opportunity and opportunism (Dowse 1988: 213-4; Weekes 1994: 118-9; Broom 1991: 1-10, 65-73).

Beyond such policy structural opportunities, and the expectations fed by the promise of the Whitlam government, the refuge feminists on their way to Canberra were encouraged by another new opportunity for feminist policy influence. It completed the three streams which Paula McClain, summarising the earlier work on agenda setting by John Kingdon (1984), claims 'must converge', '[given] the mercurial nature of the political climate', 'in order for issues to squeeze their way onto the decision agenda.' These are 'the policy (the realm of identification and emergence of issue), the politics (the appearance of a favourable political climate), and the participants (policy entrepreneurs, lobbyists, and legislative and agency specialists)' (McClain1993b: 6-7). The fresh opening for feminist entrepreneurial policy participation was the newly initiated women's policy machinery. The Elsie approach was about to test a new context for Australian feminist policy activism.

The re-invigorated Australian women's movement made its move to the adoption of a policy related strategy with the formation of the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) before the 1972 federal election (Sawer 1990: 1-4; Summers 1979: 190; Summers 1999: 275-7; Brennan 1998a: 74-75; Ryan, L. 1990: 72-3). Initiated by the Melbourne

feminist and abortion rights activist Beatrice Faust, WEL fought a campaign built on the twin strategies of well researched and targeted policy submissions and publication of a candidate 'form guide' based on a questionnaire addressed to members of both major political parties. The policy issues addressed were family planning, abortion, child care, social welfare, equal pay, women's equal access to education and equal employment opportunities. Marian Sawer records that: 'No other non-party organisation was to be [as] successful [as WEL] in pushing its issues in a federal election campaign until the Tasmanian Wilderness society in 1983' (Sawer1990: 4).

The effective intervention of WEL brought women's issues firmly into the reformist policy arena of the Whitlam ALP team, which Reid reports had gone into the 1972 election without 'a program for women, either in its platform or in the policy speech' (1986: 145). Moves began on the second day after the ALP government took office to re-open the equal pay case before the Commonwealth Arbitration Commission, resulting in a decision for equal pay for work of equal value on 13 December 1972; the luxury tax on oral contraceptives was removed on the third day (Sawer 1990: 4). Two months later, an advertisement appeared, seeking a Women's Adviser for appointment to the Prime Minister's personal staff. This initiative was the result of intervention by Gail Radford, convenor of ACT WEL, through her then husband Peter Wilenski, a Principal Private Secretary to Whitlam; it also took advantage of Whitlam's administrative innovation of a strong ministerial staff system as a bulwark against any persisting conservative tendency in the bureaucracy and as a means of ensuring the Westminster ideal of ministerial responsibility (Summers 1979: 191, 1999: 339; Reid 1987: 14; Sawer 1990: 8-9; Thompson 1976: 75). Elizabeth Reid, at the time a Senior Tutor in Philosophy at the ANU, was appointed to the position on 8 April 1973 (Sawer 1990: 10). Her appointment initiated the building of a specific 'women's machinery' within Australian policy structures, and meant that, for the first time, feminists had the opportunity to place themselves, not just in political positions, but right inside the professional structures of policy making and advice, at the most 'hands-on' level of the continuum of potential policy activism.

Some, particularly Women's Liberation, feminists were ambivalent about these moves, although Sue Wills reports a range of Women's Liberationist views, including some qualified support (Reid 1987: 12; Sawer 1990: 21; Wills1981: 137-8).

Nevertheless, as Sara Dowse's statement, quoted above, suggests, the move into direct feminist policy engagement did not mean either a rigid or a tidy set of divisions within the women's movement. Although many feminists came from political backgrounds as varied and distinct as Marxism, liberalism, anarchism and the particular feminist radicalism of Women's Liberation, in practice most lived and worked across the boundaries. Women's Liberationists also joined WEL and actively sought reformist policy initiatives; members of the Australian Communist Party also became Women's Liberationists, and supported WEL, but did not stop being Marxists; most joined and campaigned for industrial rights through their relevant trade unions; some moved out of the cities to so-called separatist women's communities, but would nevertheless take part in demonstrations and other strategies on crucial policy related issues; many carried their feminist credentials and activism through several professional locations, representing a variety of political and policy related opportunities (personal experience and acquaintance).

It was in this context of fluid feminist attitudes to involvement with the state that the representatives of Elsie left for Canberra to seek funding. They had no ambivalence about the strategy they were following; Anne Summers, for example, had been one of the applicants for the Women's Adviser position (Summers 1999: 339-40). The Elsie women were entering the policy arena with an urgent and well defined issue which they believed to be comfortably within the political and policy philosophy of the Whitlam government, and with a policy proposal which fitted established funding practice. They made their approach to the Commonwealth rather than a state government because they saw it as the most effective source of funding at the time, since most state and territory governments were held by the conservative parties. Summers records: 'I had expected the Labor government in Canberra would instantly see the need for a refuge and provide immediate funds' (Summers1999: 327).

In fact it would take nine months of policy tactics before Elsie, and the ten other refuges which followed, reached funding safety.

TESTING THE INSIDER/OUTSIDER ALLIANCE: THE EXPLORATION OF FEMINIST POLICY ACTIVISM

At one level, what had happened was that the Elsie women had reached the limit of their initial policy activist strategies. They were discovering that the tactics of political influence, like media savvy, knowing the right people, targeting an apparently sympathetic government, even coming from a political movement which had already had an impact on policy, the tactics, that is, which had been applied by Australian feminists since the late nineteenth century, were not enough. It was time for activists reaching into the policy arena from outside to decide how they would engage with the opportunity offered by appointment of the Women's Adviser.

But that opportunity presented its own challenges. One of these was that Summers and the others believed that they could not rely on their natural insider ally, the Women's Adviser, to field their issue. The nature of their difficulties is instructive about the first stage of feminist negotiation with the new policy activist opportunities; those difficulties were also decisive in determining some of the key ongoing positioning of the players in the domestic violence policy activist process.

Summers later recorded that the Elsie women learned of what they believed to be their problem with Elizabeth Reid in an article by Reid in the June 1974 issue of the feminist journal, *Refactory Girl* (Summers 1999: 351; Reid 1974). The article was an obituary for Muriel Heagney, who had died in Melbourne at the age of 90, 'alone, almost forgotten and in poverty' after a lifetime of feminist work for equal pay and other industrial issues (Reid 1974: 9). One of the things Reid was doing in her valedictory piece was the retrieval of continuity with the work and policy activist knowledge of earlier Australian feminists. But the part of Reid's article which disturbed the refuge women was her statement: 'The restructuring of the Australian society in a revolutionary way will not come about through the setting up of women's shelters, or writing articles for women's journals, or creating jobs for the girls. These and similar activities are **not** political acts which undermine the existing society' (Reid 1974: 11, bold in original).

Reid was to repeat these views in another personal piece which appeared, somewhat remarkably, among the papers prepared for the Australian delegates to the World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City (Reid 1975: 14–32). Here she makes it clear that she does not question the need for 'shelters, health centres, abortion on request, contraceptive counselling, rape crisis centres, and so on … [which] are essential to creating a more humane world for all women to live in' (Reid 1975: 29; see also Reid 1986: 148). Nevertheless, she continued: '… these demands [are not] revolutionary, nor do these activities help change the nature of society (Reid 1975: 29).

The two articles by Elizabeth Reid referred to here are remarkable, and hitherto largely neglected, documents in the history of Australian feminist policy activism. They are the first statements, by the first Australian feminist to work inside the formal policy arena, about the philosophy and strategies with which she approached her work. In this sense they are the first documents in the rich, so-called 'femocrat', literature in which Australian feminists have explored their policy activism in this period. Moreover, in addition to their significance for the whole feminist policy activist project, Reid's statements had particular implications for the new domestic violence enterprise. The message Reid was conveying in the statements which so alienated refuge feminists, and the women involved with a range of other new women's services including women's health and rape crisis centres, worked on more than one level.

To begin with, Reid was expressing a deep concern felt by many feminists about the service delivery direction taken by some of their colleagues. Her statements signal that Summers and the other Elsie women had not just leapt in at the deep end in terms of legal and funding risk, but that they had spontaneously committed their movement to a major new activist direction. The widespread debate which followed included claims that service delivery agencies perpetuated a 'lady bountiful' type of philanthropy and were 'a capitulation to the demands of the feminine nurturant role' (personal recollection, 1975; Johnson 1981: viii, 12). Refuge founders rejected this in terms of their principles of collectivity, survivor self-determination and anti-voluntarism; but it was nevertheless a passionate division of feminist strategic opinion.

Reid's objections went in another direction, expressing her fundamental conviction about the most necessary directions for feminist activism. The core of her argument, as she expressed it in 1975, was that: 'Discrimination arises out of not so much discriminatory legislation and practices as the psychological and cultural climate of societies. … It arises out of social attitudes, out of society's prejudices, myths and beliefs' (1975: 29-30). This was a statement of the feminist de-constructionism which was centrally and characteristically expressed in Women's Liberation feminism through the analysis of social conditioning and the politics of 'the personal is political'. Reid's warning about feminist service delivery agencies was both that they were a diversion of feminist energy and that they 'are essentially band-aid activities; the stresses and changing perceptions and expectations which gave rise to the need remain untouched' (Reid 1975: 29). Such worries would be repeated in assessment of the policy outcomes of the domestic violence initiative which began in the refuges (for example McFerren 1990: 202). From this early point, such concerns influenced the place that domestic violence policy would take among the strategies of the broader women's policy project.

At the same time, and on another level, Reid's 1974 and 1975 articles provide passionate and explicit statements of her own policy activist philosophy. This includes, through the arguments already indicated, a demonstration that she saw no distinction between her identity as a feminist activist and thinker and her role as a policy operator. This, in turn, indicates a significant difference between the situation of the early Australian feminist policy operatives and those in most other Western bureaucracies. Jo Freeman coined her memorable term 'woodwork feminists' to describe feminists with established jobs in the US bureaucracy, who were encouraged and enabled by the groundswell of the women's movement in the 1970s to 'come out of the woodwork' and have a policy related influence on behalf of women. In Australia, on the other hand, it was a condition of appointment for Reid and her colleagues that they should have feminist credentials; they were, as it were, inlaid into the polished rosewood of the policy arena, with the opportunity to make what they could of their situation (Freeman 1975: 222, 228, 234; Flammang 1997: 260-1).

By the time she wrote her Heagney piece, Reid had already proved herself as an effective policy operator in a position weighed down by unreasonable demands. Within weeks of her appointment Reid was 'receiving more letters than any one else in government other than the Prime Minister' (Reid 1987: 15). In July 1974 the Women's Affairs Section (WAS), headed by Sara Dowse, was set up inside the Prime Minister's Department to provide Reid with bureaucratic support with correspondence, briefings and speech notes and with the monitoring of Cabinet submissions (Reid 1987:17; Ryan 1990: 75). She was also constantly tested by sensationalising and trivialising media attention, and the immense expectations of Australian women, made more difficult by the perennial dilemma that insider policy activists are constrained by their positions and strategic relationships of trust from revealing either their difficulties or their triumphs to outsiders (see for example Dowse 1984: 154). Reid's *Refactory Girl* piece, written while she was embroiled in her first major policy struggle over a fundamental feminist issue, the establishment and funding of community based child care, is shaped by just this kind of frustration (for the details of the child care policy struggles, see Brennan 1998a: 77-95; Summers 1976: 194-96; Sawer 1990: 14-15). Reid responds to her frustration by providing her contemporaries with a lesson in policy activism, based on the achievements of Heagney and other past Australian feminists. She urges Australian feminists to stop simply making demands and expecting results, and 'to have a good hard look at Australian facts ... and in light of them to work out … through what institutions Australian power operates, within what bodies decisions are taken and by what means these decisions are implemented and the power exercised' (Reid 1974: 11).

In the immediate situation of the struggle for refuge funding, Reid's *Refactory Girl* article puts into context the hostility felt towards her by Sydney service delivery feminists (Summers 1999: 351). While the Elsie women were stung by what they read as a rejection of their important feminist work, Reid was expressing the feminist philosophy directing her life, and recording much broader frustrations about her work, her isolation and the policy inexperience of the women she had hoped would be her 'outsider' colleagues. She was later to make that frustration explicit as she acknowledged of herself and her colleagues: '… the task we set ourselves was well nigh impossible. We faltered and ultimately foundered as we realised that to determine the realm of the possible required a very detailed knowledge of political

and governmental machinery, knowledge that most outsiders neither have nor want to have' (Reid 1987: 16).

FINDING A POLICY/FUNDING HOME

As the Elsie lobbyists, equally disappointed, and believing (wrongly as it turned out) they had to proceed without the assistance of the Women's Adviser or her staff, proceeded to make a direct approach to ministers, another range of problems emerged, and their education in the world of policy continued. A key dilemma, and one which lies right at the heart of agenda setting success, was 'trying to find a funding home', and behind that lay issues of definition (Summers 1999: 358). In policy cycle terms, the first policy instrument the refuge founders sought was submission based funding for community organisation service delivery. Then, as the number of those seeking refuge funding grew, by June 1975, to eleven groups, Australia-wide, the campaign to fund one women's refuge became a campaign to fund a national program (Dowse 1984: 148). Meanwhile, in the course of 1975 the Elsie group broadened the function of their refuge, and so the definition of the policy proposal, by initiating a community education role. An Elsie woman, a police officer, a health educator and a social worker produced a training module adopted by the NSW Minister of Police for incorporation into cadet training courses (Summers 1999: 335). It was a logical development for the refuge feminists from learning from survivors to believing they were responsible for the spread of understanding about domestic violence. But these developments made the refuges an increasingly intractable dilemma for a bureaucracy rigidly shaped by traditionally separate policy elements.

The way through the funding dilemma became a melange of contacts, cheek and good luck, during which the refuge women extended their policy activist skills from the seats of their pants. The initial drama at Elsie was to secure the houses. Tom Uren, left-wing and Sydney based federal Minister for Urban and Regional Development, was a friend of Elsie. He solved the eviction threats from the Church of England in the first weeks by bringing forward his Department's plans to purchase the Glebe houses as part of an estate of affordable inner-city housing, and waived Elsie's rent until funding was secured (Summers 1999: 354-5). The Attorney General, Lionel Murphy, was also sympathetic and invited an application; but his department had no suitable

funding categories for homeless women, and domestic violence was not yet being pursued as an issue of legal policy (Summers 1999: 358). The Elsie women redefined their priority as homelessness to suit the Homeless Persons Assistance Program being prepared by the renamed Department of Social Security; but Elsie did not fit a program envisaged for overnight shelter for homeless men and providing capital but not operational funds (Sawer 1990: 12). The Elsie women knew by now that Minister for Social Security Bill Hayden was suspicious of what they were doing. There ensued the splendid oft-told story of how Elsie founder Diane Beaton (then Kenrick) used a social occasion during the ALP Conference in February 1975 to persuade Hayden to visit Elsie, and the following near disaster when he arrived alone and unrecognised, to be told that men were not allowed in. Having been apologetically retrieved, Hayden was both shocked and impressed by what he learned at Elsie and became a staunch supporter. But this did not change the opposition of his department (Summers 1976:308; 1999: 334-5; Sawer 1990:254). In the end, the first relief for Elsie came in September 1974 from the Federal Health Commission, whose sympathetic minister, Doug Everingham, allocated funds from the Community Health Program to give Elsie a one-off grant of $24,250, payable in January 1975, to be used over six months and for salaries only (Summers 1979: 196; 1999: 359). Significantly, both Tom Uren's department and the Community Health Program were creations of the Whitlam government and not yet embedded in the resistance of long established bureaucratic practice and attitude, the effects of which on the Whitlam reform program have been analysed by Peter Wilenski (Ryan, L. 1990: 75; Wilenski 1986: 117-138).

At the end of 1974, with Elsie funded for six months but needing ongoing security, another apparent opportunity led to a further bitter dispute between refuge activists and feminists inside the Commonwealth women's machinery. Once again the issues were matters of both feminist political, and feminist policy activist, strategy.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF NATIONAL REFUGE FUNDING

In 1972 the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 1975 as International Women's Year (IWY) (United Nations General Assembly 3010 (XXVII) 18

December 1972, quoted in ANAC 1974: 2-4; ANAC 1976: 183-4). This was a move of brilliant international feminist strategy made in the context of the Second United Nations Development Decade and the freshly stirring international women's movement; it provided women with a strategy of international moral pressure and/or the promise of kudos to apply to their own governments, and a venue for the sharing of issues and policy tactics. Part of the plan for the Year was a major conference, the World Conference of International Women's Year, to be held in Mexico City between 19 June and 2 July 1975 (Galey 1995: 20-2; Allan et al 1995: 29-42).

These international developments offered a particular opportunity in the Australian policy setting, given the importance Prime Minister Whitlam placed on the United Nations (UN), and the corresponding respect in which he was held in the multilateral arena (Reid 1986: 149). This encouraged Elizabeth Reid to anticipate Whitlam's support over Australian participation in IWY; it also provided her with a strong role in preparations for the World Conference, including appointment as Chair of the Committee of the Whole, which had the crucial task of drafting the Conference Plan of Action. She carried at this point an international feminist policy activist leadership role as significant as the one she held in Australia (Reid 1986: 150; ANAC 1976: 186).

The Australian program for IWY was Reid's opportunity to add a broad ranging initiative to the consultative and policy response activities which had thus far dominated her position. It was also an opportunity to extend the bureaucratic framework for women's policy initiated in the WAS, through establishment in September 1974 of the Australian National Advisory Committee for IWY (ANAC). The ANAC was supported by a secretariat staff of about 20, who were located in the Department of the Special Minister of State (Ryan, L. 1990: 77; ANAC 1974: 4-5; ANAC 1976: 2; Sawer 1990: 16-7). The objectives for IWY, which expressed Reid's driving feminist concerns, were to achieve a change of attitudes, to address areas of discrimination and suffering and to express, encourage and celebrate 'the creative aspects of women in their uniqueness within the human race' (ANAC 1974: 12). The means by which they would be carried out included a program of submission based grants (ANAC 1976: 3; 76; 78; 103-4; 144-5).

Understandably, the grants were seized upon as a last desperate hope by the Elsie founders and other service delivery groups across Australia. When the recipients of the first batch of grants were announced in December 1974, the Elsie women, and those running the new Sydney Rape Crisis service, were furious to discover that they had received nothing. Reid's far sighted objectives and her insistence that mainstream departments should be responsible for ongoing funding meant little to the Sydney feminists as they faced the end of their first one-off allocation (ANAC 1974: 15; ANAC 1976: 3-4). On 23 December, 81 Sydney women publicly summoned Reid to a meeting at Balmain Town Hall on 4 January 1975 to account for herself and the ANAC (Summers 1979: 197; 1999: 359-60).

Reid was represented at the meeting by Shirley Castley, a member of the ANAC also working full time in the ANAC Secretariat, who faced 500 angry women. Later that month, Reid herself faced the WEL National Conference and similar accusations. It is recorded that she successfully turned around the mood of the meeting, although this was by no means the end of the bitterness stirred by the funding imbroglio resulting from this first occasion on which feminist policy activists competed with each other for scarce resources in an agenda setting context (Summers 1979: 196-7; 1999: 359-363; Sawer 1990: 17; Dowse 1988: 212).

Nor was it the end of the refuge funding story. By now, refuges had been founded in all states and territories except the Northern Territory and were being supported in a number of ad hoc and un-coordinated ways (Dowse 1984: 149; ANAC 1975: 137-8). Feminists in the WAS and the ANAC Secretariat remained determined to win secure on-going funding for the increasing group of refuges. They included Lyndall Ryan in the WAS and Barbara Wertheim, who had helped to found the Brisbane Women's Centre, in the ANAC Secretariat (Sawer 1990: 12; Summers 1999: 364).

In mid-1975, in the context of a difficult by-election for the seat of Bass in Tasmania (following the death of Lance Barnard), an ANAC Secretariat member was sent on a rapid tour of the country to test women's concerns. 'She found overwhelming agreement across the political spectrum that women's refuges were considered the highest priority of need' (McFerren 1990: 192). This strengthened the arm of the women within the bureaucracy and earned the Prime Minister's support for the search

for funding. With the Department of Social Security still recalcitrant, Ryan and Wertheim learned that the Community Health Program (CHP) within the Health and Hospitals Commission (which had provided Elsie's temporary funding) had surplus funds, which would be lost if not spent by the end of the financial year. In the last days of June 1975 the cheques went out; $211,855 was allocated for the 11 refuges which now existed, to cover the next three months, and with assurance of ongoing support (Dowse 1984: 148-9; Sawer 1990: 12-13).

The apparent mystery of how a health program could turn out to be an appropriate location for the funding of refuges for women escaping domestic violence can be partly explained through the democratic participation and submission based funding nature of the CHP; but it was also facilitated by the expectations about community health which the program expressed. The concept of 'community health', as applied by health professionals, bureaucrats and lobbyists, is both loose and broad. It stretches from the 'primary' health support provided by general practitioners and pharmacies to preventative and health promotion measures, and is based in the right of individuals and communities to play a role in their own health care. Nancy Milio, a North American researcher who visited Australia twice during the 1980s, found all of these features in the Community Health Program established by the Whitlam government in 1973 and continued, with changes, by the subsequent Fraser government until 1981 (Milio 1988: 43). The significance of the program for refuge funding lay in the broad social perspective of the community health philosophy and its consistency with the self-directed life and health changing opportunities which the refuges offered to women in a variety of desperate situations. It was helpful, too, that the CHP could provide both capital and program funds, and that it had been established without legislation, which increased its funding flexibility, although leaving it vulnerable to ease of later policy change (Milio 1988: 47-8). In Milio's tables of CHS expenditure refuge funding appears grouped with 'rehabilitation', which is explained as 'supportive services for those with continuing disease and disability' (Milio 1988: 76-7). It is interesting that Milio does not comment on the presence of women's refuges in the Program, apart from reporting the different decisions about refuge funding made by the state governments in response to the reductions in CHP funds under Fraser, and noting that women's refuges were one of a small group of targeted

national projects within the CHP, along with the provision of ethnic health workers and interpreters (1988: 12, 86).

To this point, the refuge funding achievement could be read as a classic piece of successful policy activist agenda setting. But one further aspect of the funding negotiations underlines the fact, already evident in the IWY funding dispute, that this was not a comfortable example of a 'reciprocal' relationship between policy insiders and the women's movement of the kind which Janet Flammang identifies in her analysis of feminist policy agenda setting in the USA (Flammang 1997:255).

Sara Dowse, who was head of the WAS at the time of the funding negotiations, records an attempt by women's affairs and health bureaucrats to persuade the refuge feminists to form themselves into a national body at this time (Dowse 1984: 153-4). This was a strategy which might have made it possible to fund the refuges directly, and so more securely, as an independent and discrete national program. But, partly through communication problems due to time pressures, and partly as a result of the growing distrust of refuge activists for bureaucratic feminists, the women saw the proposal as a trick threatening both their self-determination and their protective ownership of the issue they had uncovered. They refused to contemplate the national body proposal, but moved instead towards a loose confederation (McFerren 1990:194). The refuge refusal is also an example of what Sue Wills identifies as the dilemma faced by Women's Liberation feminists over 'how to relate to a reformist government whilst retaining political autonomy' (Wills 1983: 316).

Dowse saw the refuge feminists' decision as the loss of an important strategic opportunity, which she believed could have forestalled the later 'proliferation of non-feminist, even anti-feminist refuges' (Dowse 1984: 159). Ironically, one of the objections raised by some refuge women to the idea of a national body was that already it '"would probably include organisations with conflicting aims and policies"' (Dowse 1984: 154; see also McFerren 1990: 194). Louise Chappell notes with hindsight that 'the refuge movement's decision', which she sees as a change of focus from Canberra to state governments, 'was a prescient one', given the devolution of 'primary responsibility for administering refuges to state level' by the subsequent Fraser government (Chappell 2002: 153; see further discussion in Chapter Four). If

read as a difference in policy activist strategy, and in terms of the analysis provided by Levi and Edwards, it could be said that Dowse and her colleagues saw the national association idea as a 'hedge' against the risks involved in the CHP strategy, and the refuge women believed the association involved 'discounts' they were not prepared to make and saw the CHP as a better 'bargain' (Levi and Edwards 1990: 146-153). The significance of this decision and of its consequences for the policy activist positioning of the refuge feminists will be the subject of ongoing consideration as the narrative of domestic violence policy making unfolds.

THE FIRST STATEMENT ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN A POLICY RELATED SETTING

In the meantime, and while the funding dilemma was being worked out, another significant step was taken in the insertion of domestic violence into the Australian policy arena. This was the appearance of the first feminist statement about domestic violence in a document produced in a policy related setting. This was also, as far as I have been able to determine, the first occasion on which the term 'domestic violence' was used in an Australian policy related document.

The location for this statement was the set of papers provided for the Australian delegation to the IWY UN World Conference in Mexico City. Reference to domestic violence appeared in two places in this document: in a paper headed 'Domestic Violence' in the section on 'Women as Victims of Crime', and in a separate paper on 'Women's Refuges' (ANAC 1975: 127, 136). In both pieces it is clear that the definitions and analysis provided are 'works in progress' in the 'on the run' sense. The 'Women's Refuges' paper makes no direct reference to violence; it is written in terms of women's homelessness and describes a refuge as 'a place for a woman, with or without children, to go when she has nowhere else', and which 'offers women living in an intolerable domestic situation a real alternative' (ANAC 1975: 136). The paper headed 'Domestic Violence' is brief, and includes an even briefer mention of child abuse. It takes early steps in placing the building blocks for a socially based analysis of domestic violence (see further development in Chapter Five) by arguing that 'society's indifference to offences by husband against wife', and the lack of services to assist her, 'reflect an unofficial acceptance of these acts and an implicit

approval of them by society.' It concludes: 'Such assaults reflect the role definitions of men and women in society with some conflict being almost the social norm' (ANAC 1975:127).

It will also be recalled (as indicated in the Introduction) that domestic violence was not included in either the formal agenda for the 1975 World Conference or the World Plan of Action adopted there (ANAC 1976: 202-6). This was partly because domestic violence was only just emerging as a feminist issue, but also because of differences between the women of developed and developing nations over whether the most important issues determining women's rights were gender based, or the effects of broader economic factors including those resulting from colonialism (Jaquette 1995:48-9). This setting makes the inclusion in the Australian papers all the more remarkable. It is also significant that the Australian Statement delivered by Elizabeth Reid to the Plenary Session of the World Conference, when outlining the needs all women have in common, included 'the need for freedom from violence' (Australian Statement, ANAC 1976: 188).

THE END OF IWY AND OF THE WHITLAM ERA: OUTCOMES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

In terms of policy initiatives achieved, the securing of Commonwealth government funding for women's refuges and the first appearance of women's refuges and (feminist identified) domestic violence in a policy related document, were substantially significant events in the initiation of domestic violence policy in Australia. Other pieces of policy introduced by the Whitlam government also contributed to improving opportunities for women escaping from violent male partners, in the broader sense of the opening of women's access to a viable autonomous household. One of these was the introduction of the Supporting Mothers benefit, which was discussed in Chapter Two; another was a revised Family Law Act based on no-fault principles and making divorce in Australia more accessible than ever before (Graycar 1990: 155-7). Another important development was the Royal Commission on Human Relationships (RCHR), which was appointed in August 1974 as an outcome of an abortion rights strategy, gave women suffering violence a valuable site for expression of their stories and needs, and made an important

contribution to the development of domestic violence analysis ((HCRC 1977: Vol. IV; Summers 1979: 192-3; see Chapter Five). The steps taken towards equal pay and in establishment of the community based provision of quality child care also had deeply significant implications for women striving to establish economic independence (Ryan and Conlon 1975: 159-175; Baldock 1988b: 41-5; Brennan 1998a: 77-95). Nevertheless, it was the provision of national refuge funding through the CHP, for all its last-ditch, 'skin of the teeth' and 'pro tem' nature, which achieved the establishment of domestic violence as a policy issue in Australia.

Beyond these important steps, the events of 1974 and 1975 also resulted in a number of outcomes with considerable significance for the ongoing domestic violence policy activist process. The first of these was a direct result of the means by which Commonwealth, and by implication national, government funding for feminist women's refuges was achieved in June 1975. The significance of these circumstances can be demonstrated by indicating the contrasts between them and the early stages of the domestic violence policy process in comparable Western countries, in particular the USA, the UK and Canada.

It was established in Chapter Two that part of the context for the feminist experience of a 'discovery' of domestic violence in the early 1970s was the adoption in preceding decades of an individual and pathological representation of male partner violence, framed by and located in a range of professions, including psychology, social work and criminology. This framing was also demonstrated to be the representational context within which the feminist response to domestic violence would have to be framed and contested. In each of the USA, the UK and Canada, established practitioners within those professions played a prominent, at times controlling, role in the policy processes through which feminists sought to initiate their new framing of and response to domestic violence, including the securing of government funding for refuges. In each case those negotiations began in formal government initiated committee and enquiry procedures which played a decisive role in determining the terms under which refuge funding and other policy responses to domestic violence would proceed. In each case those procedures, and the role within them of the established professionals, effectively limited feminist influence on the eventual policy framing of domestic violence.

In the USA, a legislated federal policy response, including federal refuge funding, was delayed and eventually forestalled by the complexities of the US legislative system, the intervention of family conservatives and the election of the conservative Reagan Republican government. A limited federal measure was eventually passed in 1984 as an amendment to a Child Abuse Act, and legislative and funding negotiations proceeded at state government level. Professional influence continued at both legislative levels, and refuge funding, whether government or private, often depended on the inclusion of established professionals in both management and service delivery (Wexler 1983: 254-6; Pleck 1987: 195-8; Dobash and Dobash 1992: 128-42). Feminist response to these constraints can be found in an angry literature claiming the cooption of feminist originated services (for example, Ahrens 1980; Thompson 1981: 24-5; 36-7; Johnson, J. M. 1981; Schechter 1982: 242-50; Tierney 1982: 215-7).

Meanwhile, in the UK, the landmark Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Violence in Marriage in 1974-5 recommended refuge funding and a legislative response, but endorsed in its findings, and consequently in public discourse, the individual pathological representation advocated by Erin Pizzey and her Chiswick colleagues, including psychologist John Gayford, in opposition to the feminist social construction analysis adopted by the National Women's Aid Federation (Dobash and Dobash 1992: 112-28; Gayford 1975a; 1975b). In Canada, as reported by Gillian Walker, a participant in the process, feminists had to negotiate their understanding of domestic violence with the established professional view at every level, from the local foundation of what they called Transition Houses, through provincial and then federal government committee and enquiry procedures. As in the USA, the expectation of a professional presence and methodology impacted on the public discourse, on funding requirements and on refuge procedures (Walker 1990).

In the light of these events, the early, uncontested, and in international terms even easy, achievement of national government funding for feminist refuges in Australia can be recognised as quite remarkable. The Australian feminist analysis of domestic violence was still at an early stage, as has been noted; but the robustly social constructionist framing of the feminism within which that analysis was being made guaranteed a representation built on social structures. In a sense, the fortunate

circumstances of the Whitlam government period, together with the skilful insider/outsider policy activist strategies which took advantage of those opportunities, meant that, whether the feminist activists knew it or not, the feminist identification of domestic violence, had, as it were, 'stolen a march' on the established professions and their pathological representation. It also meant that when broader ranging analytical discussions about domestic violence and appropriate policy responses, some of which will be explored in Chapter Five, began, feminist refuges had already been funded and feminist identification and ownership of the issue of domestic violence already had an established presence in the policy arena. These were both decisive circumstances for the ongoing domestic violence policy process.

Another of the consequences of the way in which refuge funding was achieved in Australia lay in its implications for refuge feminism and the emerging feminist refuge movement. This, in turn, would also have continuing significance for the domestic violence policy activist process. That significance was twofold. To begin with, the provision of funding gave the emerging feminist analysis of domestic violence, and its expression in refuge practice, the imprimatur of achieved policy. Secondly, these circumstances also gave the refuge feminists a position as policy players. Whether the refuge feminists intended it or not, the acceptance of government funding placed feminist women's refuges as an accepted policy instrument, and made those who ran them participants in the policy system. To this extent, refuge feminists had become at least partial 'insiders' in the domestic violence policy process.

This situation makes the refuge movement refusal to cooperate with Sara Dowse's proposal for a national refuge association all the more interesting. The refuge feminists 'got away with' their refusal because they were dealing with 'insider' feminists who really cared about securing ongoing refuge funding. The result was that the refuge women had placed themselves in a kind of hybrid insider/outsider position in relation to the policy arena, that is, as policy players on their own terms. This positioning would be as significant as the early and uncontested achievement of refuge funding in the ongoing policy activist process.

The refuge rejection of Dowse's proposal was partly, of course, an expression of the breakdown in trust between refuge feminists and those in the bureaucracy in the

aftermath of IWY. That painful legacy was also part of the ongoing outcomes of the Whitlam years. Anne Summers records that she was 'too disillusioned to attend the biggest event of [IWY]', the Women in Politics Conference, which brought together 800 women of vastly varying backgrounds and political allegiance, and sent the groundswell of feminism surging home with many of them (Summers 1999: 363; ANAC 1976: 146-152). Sara Dowse, having experienced IWY as an 'insider', wrote in 1983: 'With hindsight it is clear that the movement was fobbed off with a poorly funded public relations exercise (Dowse 1988: 213-4). Yet Dowse recorded in the same article that: 'Through IWY feminist ideas reached and awakened many women in the community who might otherwise have been untouched. The ripple effect of IWY has yet to be determined, but it would be unwise - and unrealistic - to underestimate it' (Dowse 1988: 225, note 11). She also recorded that refuge funding represented one of the occasions when the IWY strategy of referring funding applications to mainstream departments was successful (Dowse 1988: 225, note 8). A full account of all that happened during IWY, and where the money went, is given in the Report of the ANAC (ANAC 1976).

By the end of 1975 the decision had been taken to extend the international effort for women from a Year to an International Decade for Women continuing to the end of 1985, with further World Conferences to be held at the mid-point and end of the Decade (ANAC 1976: 13; Caine 1998: 439). This meant that the international arena would continue to be a fruitful strategic field for Australian feminist policy activism. But Elizabeth Reid would play a different part in them.

The Australian media had a field day of trivialising sensationalism in reporting the funding for IWY, the Mexico World Conference and the Women and Politics Conference (ANAC 1976: 41-57; Sawer 1990: 19-20). As the Whitlam government struggled with economic difficulties and personal attacks, the new Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department, John Menadue, decided that the feminist phenomenon had become a political hazard. A move was made to shift Reid from the Prime Minister's Office to a more controllable position in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, where she would head the former WAS, now promoted to the Women's Affairs Branch (WAB) (Sawer 1990: 20-21; Summers 1979: 197-8; Summers 1999: 364). Reid recorded:

> I had often publicly stated that I would continue in the position of adviser only for as long as I felt that the government had a genuine commitment to women. … As this commitment waned and political expediency waxed, I resigned' (Reid 1987: 20)

Reid's subsequent career included founding and directing the Asian and Pacific Centre for Women and Development (1977-9) and holding the position of principal officer of the UN Secretariat for the 1980 World Conference of the Decade for Women (Caine 1998: 481).

Soon after Reid's resignation, Whitlam was gone, too. On 11 November 1975 Governor General John Kerr dismissed him and his government. Malcolm Fraser became Prime Minister of a caretaker conservative Coalition government, which was overwhelmingly confirmed in office at a general election on 13 December 1975 (Patience and Head 1979: iv).

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have followed the narrative of the Australian domestic violence policy process through a crucially formative stage, from a spontaneous activist impulse to an achieved policy presence and the first acknowledgement of the feminist framing of domestic violence in a policy related document. My investigation of this process has also demonstrated one of the routes of achievement by which Australian feminists developed strategic policy activist skills in the context of the new women's policy machinery made possible by the Whitlam ALP Commonwealth government.

In tracing this stage of the domestic violence policy narrative, three of its distinguishing features have become evident. The first of these involves identification of the main players. Through the 1973 and 1974 Sydney Women's Liberation Women's Commissions, in the awareness raising sessions of story telling at Elsie and the other new refuges, and beyond, the drivers and shapers of the process of feminist recognition of domestic violence were the women striving to escape from violent partners. Their primary survival activism, operating here in a new feminist context of opportunity, drove and underpinned the process. The other main players were the

refuge feminists, their conceptual ears opened by commitment to a feminism framed by listening to the experiences of individual women, and all the other members of the reinvigorated women's movement who listened with or through the refuge workers. Individual feminists moved between both contexts, and those working in the Commonwealth women's policy machinery included women sharing both kinds of feminist learning experience about domestic violence. For example, Barbara Wertheim carried first hand refuge experience from Brisbane to Canberra, and Elizabeth Reid learned about domestic violence and its implications from her own sisters, who worked in the ACT women's refuge (interview material). The feminist players were at times divided by professional location and strategic conviction; the painful irony of their differences was that they all shared the same vision of a world transformed for women.

The second of the distinguishing characteristics of the policy narrative in this period was the early and uncontested achievement of refuge funding. This was a result of the combined effects of the opportunities of the Whitlam government context and the complementary policy activist skills, even when in disagreement, of feminist players inside and outside the policy arena. I have demonstrated that these circumstances meant that the decisive first stage in the arrival of domestic violence policy in the Australian policy context escaped the contest with practitioners of the individual pathology framing of family violence which intervened at this point in other related countries. The early and uncontested achievement of refuge funding also resulted in the third distinguishing feature of the policy process at this stage. This was the establishment of feminist women's refuges as an acknowledged policy instrument, and the consequent positioning of refuge feminists as participants in the policy arena, and so as policy players. When coupled with the outcome of the struggle between feminists in the bureaucracy and the refuge movement over the rejected proposal for a national refuge association, the outcome was that, by the end of the period covered in this chapter, refuge feminists had taken up a significantly individual role as part-insiders and part-outsiders with regard to the policy process.

Alongside the policy activist narrative, the other major themes of the thesis have also proceeded in this period. The implications of context, as pursued in another of the main themes, have been evident in the processes and outcomes of this early stage of

the domestic violence process in terms both of circumstances of opportunity and of representational discourse. The nature of a process of representational development has been particularly demonstrated by the gradual, uncertain, incomplete stages by which an analytical expression of the powerful feminist recognition of domestic violence was emerging.

At the same time, and in terms of a further thesis theme, the strategic differences, in expression of essentially the same feminist vision, which were observed in the difficulties between the Elsie founders and Elizabeth Reid over an appropriate route to refuge funding has provided a first demonstration of the complexities of the relationship between the domestic violence initiative and the broad women's policy project. The failures of communication and understanding through which that disagreement unfolded, and the consequent levels of hurt and distrust experienced by all concerned, would play a shaping role in the ongoing process. Further, and in relation to the thesis theme of the relationship between policy activist strategies and policy outcomes, a determining pattern was set in this period by the key role played by the refuge strategy as the initiating policy instrument of the feminist response to domestic violence.

The shape of the policy process emerging around the feminist identification of domestic violence in the period of this chapter was determined, in its opportunities and expectations, by the particular circumstances and reform philosophies of the Whitlam ALP Commonwealth government. As the refuge funding solution settled into place, those circumstances were coming to an end. The following chapter continues the investigation of the policy presence of domestic violence in the new and changed environment of the Coalition government headed by Malcolm Fraser.