

Domestic violence support services overrun CRISIS POINT

THE Gold Coast's leading government service for domestic violence prevention is so stretched there is now a five to six-week waiting list to get an appointment.

It comes as the number of abused women reporting incidents explodes.

DENIS DOHERTY reports, page 3

DV cases stretch services

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DESPITE Southport's specialist domestic violence court being branded a success, Gold Coast's domestic violence services are at risk of being overrun with the number of abused women coming forward in the past year.

According to sources within the domestic violence counselling community, the number of women who are coming forward has reached the point that the Coast's leading government service, Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast, now has a five to six-week waiting list for appointments.

Repeated efforts by the *Gold Coast Sun* to contact the centre went through to an answering service.

Di Mangan, of DV Connect, said since the murders of Tara Brown and Karina Lock last year, domestic violence counselling services had seen a 50 to 100 per cent increase in the number of women coming forward.

She said DV Connect had funded 922 motel nights in April for women who felt they were in danger, an increase of 700 from the previous year.

"Outside of Brisbane, the Gold Coast is the biggest region we service so

naturally we are getting a higher number of women from the Coast," she said.

"What we're looking at now is an increase in demand right across the board and now we're all trampling to respond to it."

Ms Mangan said the spike in demand had taken the sector by surprise.

"All services across the state are finding an increase in demand and I don't think we were prepared," she said.

Ms Mangan said the State Government had increased funding and resources for the sector but couldn't have predicted the increase in demand.

"Since September the Government has implemented two refuges for women which are great," she said.

Gold Coast Community Legal Centre principal solicitor Victoria Shiel said despite the specialist domestic violence

court speeding up the legal process, the centre was finding a greater proportion of its time was taken up by family violence and domestic violence matters.

"A lot more of our resources are being poured into it," she said. "We have a solicitor dedicated to the court and another almost full time at court.

We are finding matters are being resolved much more quickly and we find our role is now more geared towards extensive negotiations with our parties."

Di Macleod, of the Gold Coast Centre against Sexual Violence, said the single most important factor in domestic violence was that when women made a phone call they get immediate help.