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Opening speech presented by Adam Graycar,
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conference:

Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP)
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VAWIP

CANBERRA

MAY 24 1996

Welcome to VAWIP - and welcome to a collaborative process by which we hope to pull together many threads to advance the commitment to justice out of which VAWIP was born

This is a very special project for the Australian Institute of Criminology, for it blends data collection, research, and policy analysis against a background of a strong commitment to justice.

The **mission** of the Australian Institute of Criminology is

to provide quality information and conduct objective policy-oriented research, so as to inform government decisions that contribute to the promotion of justice and the prevention of crime.

The Institute's key stakeholders are:

- the Commonwealth Attorney-General and Minister for Justice;
- other Ministers of the Commonwealth Government;
- Members of the House of Representatives and Senators; and

- Commonwealth departments and agencies with law enforcement and criminal justice responsibilities.

Other stakeholders include state governments, academics, criminal justice practitioners, and the community at large.

VAWIP is a sub-program of the National Women's Justice Strategy, whose aim is to improve women's access to justice through initiatives that focus on addressing barriers faced by women, especially women with special needs.

We think we're onto a real winner when our research work is able to feed into policy, and that policy manifests itself as better (if not best) practice, and that good practice improves the life and life chances of people in our society.

I'm not going to talk about VAWIP - my colleagues will outline the process - and you'll be at it all day.

I want to make a couple of observations about research and policy, and policy and practice.

There is often a gulf between researchers and policymakers. Researchers can provide policymakers with theories about people and society, they can provide data, and they can propose solutions to problems.

Policymakers are under no obligation to accept any of this, and whether they do depends on their values, their theories about cause and effect, and the facts available to them, and how they want to interpret them.

Researchers and decision makers have different resources. While researchers have a certain range of expertise and methodological skills, decision makers have a political knowledge of daily events, a time frame, political orientation and constituency, and an ability to turn the funding tap on or off.

Policy and practice

The next point to note is that policy is that policy does not flow smoothly into practice, and that policy and practice often evolve from different sources. The result is a less than optimum style of service delivery, frustration by policy people at practice methods, burnout by practitioners, and confusion by clients, victims, or recipients of professional services.

Pulling the threads together involves us in finding some consensus about what we know, what we need to know, how we find it out, how we assemble and store our knowledge and ideas, how we package them for communication, how we adapt them to changing times, and most importantly of all, how we make it all work for the women who are confronted by violence in their lives.

To build a solid bridge between research and policy, and policy and practice we have to be clear on our objectives, the strategies for achieving these objectives, and on the expected outcomes. Much as we

think we might be problem solvers, we are, at this stage, problem seekers, and seeking the problems so that they can be packaged up for solution, is no easy feat.

I hope you remember the old saying - *if a piece of string has one end, then it has another end!* Whenever I think of our work I think of the string. We often focus only on one end. Too often those with whom we interact focus on the other end. Sometimes the bit in the middle gets a bit frayed, sometimes there are impossible knots, sometimes its tied up in a lovely bow, sometimes there are loops, sometimes its straight and at other times virtually impossible to unravel. That is the process of this project - disentangling the string and reworking it into a meaningful tapestry.