

Submission for the South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

Opening Remarks:

I am making this submission as a concerned citizen and a member of Zonta International, an organisation committed to building a better world for women and girls. Over the last decade much work has been done, money has been spent and much has been contributed to bring the scourge of domestic violence to the attention of the community in South Australia. Zonta has worked on raising awareness through its initiatives during the UN's *16 Days of Activism*, identifying the issue with direct activities and lighting up the city and key suburban centres with orange.

However, despite all the work, effort and money, some things are obvious. One is that the strategy of raising awareness and sensitivity in the community only goes so far. I reference the article in *The Saturday Paper* 27th July -2nd August, entitled "*Health department suppressed violence research*" in which the work of *Our Watch* was undermined. This article states that vital evidence on domestic violence was suppressed with the result that and *Our Watch's* activities were watered down or rendered ineffective. The article goes on to identify that, "the strong focus on education, awareness raising and then behaviour change is a dated approach". By the end of the article there is a strong message, the existing approach is not working and "our eye has to be on solving the problem". I hope this will be the result of this Royal Commission. We need to change what we are doing in order to implement immediate solutions to what has become an epidemic of violence.

Despite all contributions there is plenty of evidence that the amount of domestic violence is rising and not reducing, that what we are doing to stop it is not working or is inadequate and that new avenues of social interaction, such as social media, are having a huge and deleterious impact on women in general and on domestic violence in particular. Another article in *The Saturday Paper* July 20th- July 26th entitled "*Domestic Abuse is Terror*" opens with the statement, "Australia's sex discrimination commissioner says domestic and family violence needs to be regarded the same way as terrorism to get the appropriate response." This is a valuable article in which the message is that domestic violence is now a national crisis and we need to refocus in order to drive some real change.

This Royal Commission provides the opportunity to rethink our approach and take this matter even more seriously, to find some immediate and workable solutions to help save lives now and to avoid the long term damage done across our society by domestic violence.

On the following pages I have listed recommendations, grouped loosely in the issues as identified by the Terms of Reference, which I believe should be considered to meet the on-going challenge to reduce domestic violence.

[REDACTED]

Terms of Reference Issues

Prevention and Early Intervention

We need to have a proactive approach to early identification of domestic violence. This could take many forms but will be vital if we are to lower the number of women and children being killed by an intimate partner.

Recommendations:

1. Coercive control legislation needs to be passed as soon as possible.
I believe this legislation is close to being presented to the SA Parliament. This needs to be expedited. Coercive control is now better understood and its value has been tested elsewhere. It is an excellent starting point in early identification of destructive behaviour which lead to violence.
2. Police Training.
The training of police in conjunction with coercive control legislation is essential. The better the training the better the outcomes (Reference: Jess Hill's book "See What You Made Me Do") in terms of early identification of perpetrators and protection of potential victims.
3. Educate our children.
Through well-developed curricula and setting standards of behaviour throughout our school system we create the environment that we want in the wider society. The Zonta Club of Adelaide Hills and the Zonta Club of Mount Barker have run programs called "Expect Respect" using professionals from the local community to address the issue of respect via a primary school art project. It is has proved to be a highly effective way of introducing this topic and addressing key issues behind domestic violence.
4. Social Media regulation.
Social Media is provoking all forms of poor behaviour in our community by spreading lies and misogyny. This must be addressed in the context of domestic violence. While I commend steps already taken there is still much to be done via good legislation and the work of the E-Safety Commissioner in order to reduce risks for women and lower the levels of violence generally in the community.
5. Use Technology.
I would encourage South Australia to develop something along the lines of the LAAHA Project created by UNICEF. This project creates virtual safe spaces for women and girls which can be readily accessed with complete privacy and a lack of traceability.

UNICEF states about LAAHA "Safe spaces for women and girls have been established as a key approach for reaching and providing them with key information, links to services, skills-building, peer connection, and support."

This could well be a model that we could adapt to help protect women and children from domestic violence.

6. Improve the financial services response to domestic violence.
Banks have made progress in relation to dealing with domestic violence cases but more needs to be done. Working toward a banking system that stops the financial abuse that happens “through the basic functions of a bank account” would be a good next step. *The Saturday Paper* article, July 13th entitled “*Women call for action as reports of financial abuse surge*” details the range of ways in which financial abuse is perpetrated from messaging in bank transfers and raiding a partner’s super to making a partner liable for a joint debt. A great deal more needs to be done to protect against these forms of domestic violence.

Response and Recovery and Healing

More resources dedicated to the immediate assistance for women and children experiencing domestic violence are required. These need to be creative and be regularly reviewed for effectiveness.

Recommendations:-

7. All-female police stations.
All female police stations dedicated to working with domestic violence cases is an option that should be considered. Jess Hill who wrote “See What You Made Me Do”, recommends this and it has a positive track record elsewhere in the world. To have a one place where a women can find an experienced and empathetic professional could reduce the stress for women, increase their protection and provide a safe transition to a new life when violence does occur and women and children are fleeing a violent environment and are at their most vulnerable.
8. Domestic Violence Agents
We have migration agents to assist migrants and I think we need DV Agents to assist women navigate the complex world they are faced with when coping with domestic violence. We need a one-stop shop for homeless women (estimates are that 41% of homelessness among women and children is the result of domestic violence), coping with the array of legalities and practicalities which have to be navigated in a domestic violence situation. Recently I found a woman, literally in the gutter, near my home. She was homeless and had experienced the full array of indignities and risks that come with domestic violence and homelessness. Who helps her navigate the system? What options are there? Finding her a place to sleep temporarily took all afternoon and was not available in any of the shelters. How does she, with little money and few capacities, go from there? I know a young woman dealing with on-going harassment, an ex-partner of many years who is still harassing her and her children despite legal action and appropriate court orders. How do we stop this? Who knows all that can be done? Is the only recourse to go back to expensive lawyers?

9. Review the laws

We need a constant review of how the laws are working for families experiencing domestic violence. There is a great need to deal with issues in a timely manner. Do we need more courts dealing with these issues or mediators to speed things up and settle things as quickly as possible?

10. More social housing. This issue is constantly raised in the media and work has started. Nevertheless more quality social housing, perhaps modelled on the original *Housing Trust of South Australia* is going to be a necessary component of solutions for traumatised families.

11. Use the media

From the mainstream media, TV, radio and newspapers to on-line alternatives, we need to think about how to generate positive stories and support for women and families facing domestic violence. Let's find "influencers" who spread information and positive support for those who need it in the community.

12. KPI's

Whatever actions result from the Royal Commission we need monitoring and evaluation of their success. All actions should have time frames and Key Performance Indicators on them to assess their value and viability. If they are working then enhance them, if they are not working change them or stop pursuing a strategy that clearly does not fulfil its function and move on to something else.

It is going to take a whole of community approach and great determination to reduce the death and violence in our community which is manifest in domestic violence. The effort and investment will be worth it, with more families functioning and children who can grow to their full potential.

I commend the work of the Royal Commission and look forward to its findings.

