

██████████ response to the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

September 2024

I am ██████████ within the community sector of SA, a mother of three grown children and the nanna of three grandsons.

I am writing to you as the mother of ██████████, I have ██████████ permission to share her story.

We had known for a long time things had been difficult in ██████████ life, her partner was controlling and made it very difficult for my husband and I to spend time with her and the children, we suspected drug use, and knew that her partner was defrauding Centrelink. We knew things were bad, but not this bad.

The best way to explain what happened is to share her Statement to SAPOL.

*I provided this statement to ██████████, at about 6.20 pm on ██████████ 2023 at ELIZABETH VALE.*

*I have been in a relationship with ██████████ on and off for almost 20 years. We have two children together, ██████████ and ██████████. In 2015, ██████████ and I separated after he strangled me and I got an intervention order however the order was revoked. ██████████ and I got back together after 18 months and we have been back together ever since. .*

*██████████ and I currently live together at ██████████ ██████████ with our ██████████ and we are both on the lease.*

*Just before midnight on ██████████, I returned home from work. I had a few drinks after work before I came home and I remember taking the last train home. When I walked in the door, ██████████ was sitting in the lounge room and the boys were asleep on the lounge. ██████████ said words to the effect of, "What time do you call this?" and was holding up his phone to show me the time. I took his phone from his hand and threw it on the ground before I went to my bedroom and shut the door. The bedroom door cannot lock because it is missing the door handle so I sat on the ground with my back against the door with my feet against the side of the bed. I reached up with my right hand to turn off the light when I heard the sound of the jet lighter going off. ██████████ had put the jet lighter through the door handle hole in the door and burnt my arm. I felt like my whole arm was on fire and I screamed.*

*I got up and ran out of the room and stomped on ██████████'s phone which was still on the ground a couple of times because I was so angry. I shoved ██████████ into a wall and I remember that I started to punch and slap ██████████ in the face because I knew that he recently had some teeth removed and knew that he was sore. I also tried to kick ██████████ and I remember him blocking my kick with his elbow. I have a bruise on my right ankle from him blocking me. I then said, "This is why I want to go jump in front of a train." I've been saying this to ██████████ lately because of the way he has been treating me and talking to me. He is constantly putting me down and is emotionally abusive towards me.*

*I tried to leave the house through the back door but realised it was locked. I went to the front door but ██████████ had dead bolted it and stood in front of the door so that I could not leave. ██████████ grabbed me by the front of my neck with his right hand and pushed me up against the wall by the front door. I looked at ██████████ and said, "Why don't you just do it." I felt ██████████ tighten his grip on the front of my neck and also grab onto my neck with his left hand. He held me by the neck with both of his hands and I could not breathe. I tried to gasp for air but I could not get*

any air in. I could not speak to tell him to stop and I tried to rip his hands away from my neck but I could not because he was too strong I could only put my hand up in a stopping motion and pointing to the kids who were in the room nearby. ■ was looking straight through me and it reminded of the time he strangled me in ■. He had the same look on his face and it was like he did not know me for a moment. I felt dizzy but I did not black out. I think the whole incident occurred for at most 30 seconds.

■ let go and went to the back somewhere and I ran out of the house. I was walking around for hours and felt very scared and helpless. I ended up going back home and slept in the car for a few hours because ■ left it unlocked before I went back inside to sleep.

Between 7.30 am and 8.00 am on Saturday, ■, I woke up, got ready for work and left the house. ■ and the kids were all still asleep. I felt sore everywhere and my arm was stinging from the burn but I wanted to go to work because it is my happy place. I was frightened to go home so after work I went to see a friend named ■. I did not want any more violence at home and did not want the kids to feel the tension between me and ■. I hung out with my friend and caught the last train home again.

I got home just before midnight and told ■ that I was just going to go to bed because I was knackered and did not want to talk to him. My bed is positioned in the middle of the

room with the left side of the bed closest to the door. I flopped on the bed and was laying horizontally across the bed with my feet over the edge, pointing towards the door. ■ followed me into the room and said, "Come on, spend some fucking time with me," trying to get me out of bed. I remember ■ trying to mock me and put his hands up and quivering pretending to be me saying, "Oh my god, I'm so scared," and asking if I took a photo of the injuries this time.

I told ■ to get away from me and that I did not want to look or talk to him. He told me to get the fuck out but I refused to leave. ■ knelt on the edge of the bed with one leg, with the other leg still on the ground and leaned over and held me by the neck with one hand. I can't remember which hand he used. He was holding me down on the bed but I could still breathe and he was not gripping my neck as tightly as the night before. I think he was trying to pin me down rather than strangle me on this occasion. I told ■ to leave me alone and he walked out the room.

On Sunday, ■, I woke up and said to ■ that it was better if we did not talk to each other for the day so that we would not argue. At about 1.30 pm, ■ and I walked to the Foodland at ■ to do some shopping. ■ walked off from me at about 2.30 pm after we had a minor disagreement about him crossing the road unsafely. I told ■ that he was not allowed to walk to school on his own as a result, until he was 'double digits.' I thought that ■ was hiding in the bushes trying to play a trick on me. I spent about half an hour trying to look for him before I contacted Police at about 3.00 pm.

Police met me at ■ and told me they located ■ back at home. I think ■ walked off from me to prove a point that he could walk home on his own. The Police offered me a lift back home. I did not tell Police what had happened over the weekend because I was scared of repercussions from ■ if I got him in trouble and I still had a small amount of hope that things would get better. When I got home, ■'s mother ■ was over and everything was fine for the rest of the evening.

On [REDACTED], [REDACTED] was lying in bed all day and I was trying to get him up to help me with errands around the house. [REDACTED] continued to lay in bed so I started cleaning the house by myself. At some point during the day, he took my phone and said that he was taking it because I broke his phone the other night.

At about 2.30 pm, [REDACTED] finally got up and walked up to me while I was in the kitchen. He was standing behind me and kept tapping me all over my back with his fingers saying, "I'm up now, I'm up." His tone sounded really agitated and annoyed. I told [REDACTED] to leave me alone and lifted my right arm up to wave him away.

[REDACTED] walked past me, very closely, and I felt pain on the burn on my arm. I looked down and saw my scab on the burn was partially hanging off my arm and there was blood dripping down my arm. I said to [REDACTED], "Look what you did." [REDACTED] said that it was not him. I could not tell if it was deliberate or an accident but I think [REDACTED]'s watch might have gotten caught on the scab as he walked past. [REDACTED] wanted to help me clean up the

blood but I told him not to touch me and told him that I wanted to leave. [REDACTED] told me to stay and look after [REDACTED] so that he could pick up [REDACTED] from school.

I grabbed my bag and tried to leave but realised that the front door was locked. I went out through the back door and used a chair to jump the back fence. [REDACTED] kept trying to take the chair out from underneath me but I managed to get over the fence and I walked to [REDACTED]

I felt alone and scared. I wanted to take my boys with me but in the past [REDACTED] has said that if I tried to take the kids from him again he would slit my throat. [REDACTED] has not said this to me recently but it is always in the back of my mind.

I met up with my friend, [REDACTED], and she told me that I should call my mum, [REDACTED]. I walked to a phone box and contacted mum. I stayed with [REDACTED] overnight and mum came to pick me up in the morning of [REDACTED].

I told mum about what happened and she took me to the [REDACTED] Hospital to get my injuries assessed.

I sustained a burn mark on the outside of my right forearm and bruising on the tops of both my arms. I had yellow bruising on my neck from [REDACTED] strangling me on Friday night but they have since faded. I did not take any photos of my injuries.

[REDACTED] and I have had a very tumultuous and toxic relationship and I want to seek help to leave the relationship. I am afraid of [REDACTED] and what he would do if he knew that I was

planning to leave him. I am seeking an intervention order for my protection and do not want any contact with [REDACTED].

Ever since we had children, [REDACTED] has strangled me over ten times but I have not reported these incidents to Police. There have also been other occasions where he has assaulted me that I have not reported.

I am willing to go to court regarding this matter.

There is also a document that [REDACTED] pulled together to apply for support from the Legal Commission

I work fulltime at the [REDACTED], formally I pay child support to [REDACTED] whilst living with him fulltime, which is worked out 28% children in my care and 72% in [REDACTED]'s care. [REDACTED] receives a parenting payment for both children. I have commenced an application for Legal Aide

I left [REDACTED] in 2014 after the birth of our first son due to violence, in addition to the violence we were both using drugs, an Intervention Order was in place and charges were laid, I was separated from him for approximately 18 months, he approached me, while my parents were on overseas holiday [REDACTED], promising me he had cleaned up and was there to support me. I moved into his brother's house with [REDACTED] and our son.

I was restricted access to my family, for the [REDACTED] years since my return he has threatened if I left with the children, he would slit my throat and my families throat.

We stayed with his brother until 2 months before our second child was born in January 2020. We moved to [REDACTED], this is still a tenancy agreement in both our names and the residency I left on the [REDACTED].

I have experienced financial abuse, I believe I am in approximately [REDACTED] debt, which stretches back before I left him in [REDACTED]. He has pressured me into taking out loans, credit cards, fines (which has resulted in me losing my license). An example of current debts; rent \$7000, \$10,000 electricity bill, fines \$4500

As per the last violent episode he strangles me regularly, he also burnt me with a jet lighter, he punches me through a pillow to ensure I do not have bruises, the violence escalates approximately four times a year, and is more like to happen if my parents are away.

The violence happens in front of the children, our eldest child has learnt to protect the younger child, taking him to another room, the younger child has recently tried to stop us arguing.

[REDACTED] regularly locks me in the house refusing to let me leave.

[REDACTED] is known to hit me when we are in the car.

[REDACTED] has convinced me I am a bad mother, unable to look after the children. That I am stupid and useless, that I can't do anything for myself. He has also told me for many years I am unstable mentally, I have bipolar and regularly have psychotic episodes, when the violence escalates and it was highly possible the neighbours would have heard, he would make me go to the neighbours and apologies for my Bipolar and psychosis, he made me do this at least 4 times, I was truly believing I was crazy.

We regularly told the children they could not tell anyone about the violence.

[REDACTED] is using crack and juice (heavy drugs) on a regular basis, and I believe doing crime to pay for the drug habit, he brought home a motor bike which I believe was stolen. His mates would come around and I believe do drugs in the shed at [REDACTED]

On several occasions, he talked me into have crack, telling me that if I loved him I would do it with him. fortunately, I resisted and have not become addicted to heavier drugs like previous years.

*I have been a weed smoker for 20 years, as of the [REDACTED] I have not had any drugs, and have no intention of doing so.*

*When I left on the [REDACTED] he withheld my phone, having access to all my accounts ;bank, mygov, facebook, my workplace platform.*

*When I was picked up by my mum on the [REDACTED] and taken to the [REDACTED] Hospital to have my injuries assessed, I was interviewed by a social worker, she performed a DV Risk Assessment, my score was 79. I stayed overnight for my safety, I had suicidal thoughts over the weekend, which are no longer present. I also gave a statement to SAPOL while in hospital.*

*He has kept the children from me. I managed through [REDACTED]'s mum to organise to see [REDACTED] at school during his swimming lessons.*

*[REDACTED] it is planned to see both boys at [REDACTED] for Easter.*

*He has taunted and verbally abused me for very long time, calling me a victim, want to know if I have taken photos of my bruises, because I am a DV Victim.*

What happened for [REDACTED] world to spiral into such a bad place, [REDACTED] and I have spoken about this a lot, we both have worked through our guilt in not "doing something", but the coercive control of both her and the children was extreme, [REDACTED] has shared with me the physical violence was not the most damaging, she has clearly articulated that the most damaging was

- He truly convinced her she was a terrible mother, she sites this as why she left the children she truly believed she was a terrible mother, this also impacted her decisions around the Family Court Order and agreeing to the 50% care, she thought she could not parent them fulltime
- That she had serious Mental Health Issues, he had convinced her she had Bipolar (I wish she had told me that), he would make her go apologies to the neighbours when there was a violent episode, she had to tell them she was having a psychotic episode connected to her Bi Polar. We now laugh that she is a medical miracle, Bipolar disappeared overnight with no contact with him. The children would even mention she is "crazy" when she reconnected with them.
- The insistence that she join him and his friends to use methamphetamine.
- She never had money, she would transfer her income to him every week (I have bank statements that show that) therefore her debt was/is huge. She would request money from me to purchase food, I would not give her money I would take her shopping. By this stage I knew things were getting dire, I would have conversations with her about keeping herself and the children safe, that I was there for her when she chose to leave. She never opened up to me, I now know he convinced her I and my husband wanted to have custody of the children. She lost her license, she openly told me she had taken the points for [REDACTED] as he would go to jail if he lost his licence. She therefore travelled on public transport for 1.5 hours to get to work. While he stayed at home, with a license and a car my parents purchased. I could see the house deteriorating, the days [REDACTED] worked he did nothing, the little one was starting to look neglected. On the rare occasion we were allowed to have the children for the day I would purchase new clothes and shoes for them.

- The isolation from her family and friends, her only connection was with her workplace, for many months she struggled to attend shops, sating the strangeness of having freedom and the fear of running into him or one of his associates that partake in criminal activity.

What has happened since she ran for her life? So much. Who helped the most? The Lawyers have been the most helpful in relation to the DV, SAPOL where supportive, though there was one point when I felt she was being blamed due to her alcohol and drug use. The Child Care Centre we accessed have been amazing. Who was the least helpful? The DV support services, the Commonwealth Government (ATO and Centrelink), one on one supports for the oldest [REDACTED] and the prosecutor.

The Family Lawyer supported us to get access to the children, we have never interacted with the Family Law system, we knew nothing, and maybe should have pushed harder, but at the time [REDACTED] agreed, she has 50% care of the children, at the time she did not think she could care for them at more capacity. But we did manage a court order that for the first 12 months that required both parents to remain living with their parents (I pushed for this due to the drug use) and most importantly pick ups and drop offs happen between family members not the parents, this condition has supported [REDACTED] to feel safe. I see regularly the fear she still experiences he may try to manipulate her, and quite frankly he does try through the children and the parenting application the court requested them to communicate through.

The other Lawyer has managed to get [REDACTED] out of her Lease with the Landlord with the only cost her bond (so she has a debt with SA Housing Trust) but she negotiated that he would not pursue the \$7,000 rent that was owed, she was also able to negotiate that the energy bill (\$10,000) was waived. She also supported [REDACTED] to get the photos of the speeding offences, which clearly showed [REDACTED] driving, they waived the fines (\$4,500), returning her drivers license

The Child Care centre we enrolled [REDACTED] in (he has never gone to any playgroups or Child Care, [REDACTED] has been isolated) suggested we look at getting support to access early intervention services through NDIS, [REDACTED] was successful in that and now has access to a Speech Therapist, a Play Therapist and an Occupational Therapist, we are unsure of his future, is his delay due to a disability or through trauma, all I know is his behaviours has changed significantly, we now have conversations with him and he has improved regulation, though toileting still does not happen and his diet is terrible, all therapies happen while he is in his mums care at the Child Care Centre.

4 of the 5 SAPOL officers where supportive and caring, there was only one that had a judgemental approach. My other question for SAPOL would be; was there no indicators when they went to [REDACTED] at Mawson Lakes OTR that she had faced a weekend of violence, [REDACTED] feels they blamed her, her older boy still blames her for leaving him at the OTR, which his father also stated at the time.

So who do I think did not pull their weight.

[REDACTED] rang the DV service to request support, she was informed because she was not homeless or staying in a motel they could not support her. I was furious, because she had a supportive family she could not receive support, the service did not know her family, maybe we were not supportive, maybe we thought she should go back, they did not know or ask deeply what was going on for [REDACTED]. I was furious. I rang the executive of DV, she confirmed they did not have resources to support

The Escaping Violence Payment was delayed significantly, something went wrong, I needed to call an executive to intervene and make that happen, the thing [REDACTED] really needed was a car, she was informed she could not spend the EVP to purchase a car, her work was now a 2 hour public transport ride, this meant she was now spending money on share rides or spending a long time on busses, or we were picking her up, and I needed to transport the children to school and childcare. We could not convince them to be flexible, I and her father lent her the money for a car, she is paying us back every week. She could not purchase a car but she was allowed to pay ATO.

It took 9 months for us to secure a counselling service for the primary school aged [REDACTED] this is not good enough, he still blames mum for the violence and the family splitting up, he has now had 6 sessions (I have bribed him with Pokémon cards to engage, the first 2 sessions he cried the whole time because he did not want to be there) he has not opened up, he has had a life time of keeping secrets.

We are so fear full for these boys that they do not grow up to be abusers, we work real hard in our house, but the disrespect for women creeps in all the time. We keep giving the same messages, “we don’t keep secrets” “we love you no matter what happens or what you do” “we take responsibility for our actions and behaviour” “we say sorry when we hurt someone” my husband and sons are working hard at spending quality time with both boys to role model respectful behaviour.

The only debts [REDACTED] now has is with the Commonwealth Government; ATO and Centrelink, we have tried to have them waived to no avail, both debts are related in [REDACTED] being forced to make false claims with both agencies, she has accepted that they are her debts, I disagree, he made her do that through his coercive control, she was working, she has always worked to earn money, he is the one that manipulated and falsely made claims, when this worked for him he made her also make false claims (I have reported his fraud to Centrelink), she is unable to afford to live, she pays board and purchases items for the Children, but is unable to pay for childcare/OSHC or swimming lessons, I do that. If the Commonwealth Governments was understanding around the financial abuse she was subjected to she would be able to pay those cots associated with the children, the payments equate \$150 a fortnight.

And lets now talk about prosecution, there was very little communication, I had supported and coached her that she would press charges, for her it was about letting her children know that his violent behaviours was not okay.

The day before he went to court, the prosecutor called [REDACTED] that they were not going to go ahead with the court case, that as she was intoxicated the weekend of the assaults they felt the case was not strong enough, apparently photos of bruisers and burns, statements that was the same every time she told the story was not enough. Apparently if you are a drunk you deserve to be assaulted and burnt, told you are useless, told you are crazy and have bipolar, told if you take the children they will hurt you and your parents, keep the children from their mother for [REDACTED] weeks, it is okay to be a terrible, abusive, violent, manipulative human if the person you are abusing is intoxicated.

The sector I work in, the sector I fight for is under resourced, we are not supporting women and their children, the federal government needs to make real changes, the system need to work in the best interest of families.

My daughter is doing great, we still have a long journey ahead of us but I hope the worst is behind us, we doubt she will move on from our house (she can not afford it) she also struggles to think of

bringing the children up on her own (his voice still echoes in her mind), her family and her workplace continue to support her and the children

I have had enough of hearing our community has had enough of violence against women, it must be a lie it continues, it took me a while to openly talk about my beautiful first borns violent experience, I felt extreme shame and guilt, but one day I opened up, what I have experience since then when I speak about the violence and the retched system women and children must try and navigate I see people getting uncomfortable, they don't want to explore it or even discuss it, I assume it is scary, and who knows, do they think it can happen to my family it can happen to any family.

I ask that we truly put system change and resources in to support women and children to not just survive but to thrive.