

My name is [REDACTED] and I live and work on [REDACTED]. I have been a registered nurse for [REDACTED] years and have [REDACTED] beautiful children. Back on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I walked into my local police station and reported my husband for physically assaulting me. It was not the first time that it happened, but on this occasion he did it in front of my [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who were [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] at the time. My [REDACTED] [REDACTED] stepped in to protect me from their father and I knew in that moment that I could not absorb this one like the previous times as this would demonstrate to my [REDACTED] that physical violence was an acceptable method to get your wife to do what you told her to do.

On the [REDACTED] my local police station just happened to have a lovely young officer relieving at the station from the city, who took my statement seriously, reassured me that I was doing the right thing, affirmed that the behaviour was unacceptable and also ran through a 'risk' checklist to gauge how at risk I was in my marriage. The result was high risk and the police went and arrested my husband that day on aggravated assault charges and put an immediate interim intervention order in place, which meant that he was not permitted back to the family home.

Unfortunately almost [REDACTED] months later it remains only an interim intervention order, as my ex-husband has continued to manage to get the process delayed and the order watered down, in the context of a system that seems to be fragmented and under-resourced and which mystifyingly does not seem to have a process in place to ensure that the protected person is kept up to date with proceedings and understands them.

Late last year I made the difficult decision to move out of the family home, as the interim intervention order only prevented him from entering the house, but he was still freely able to come and go as he pleased from our farm, which meant that I felt like a prisoner in the home, as he would often choose to work just outside the house yard on the days that I was at home. I worked with SAPOL to put in a new affidavit to outline why I moved and request that a new boundary of protection be put in place for my new house, but for some reason this document was never presented to the magistrate and because my husband yet again did not obey the order of the magistrate to bring legal representation the hearing was adjourned to [REDACTED]. I spent three anxious months worried that at any time he would waltz into my new house as there was no order in place to prevent him from 'visiting'.

At the [REDACTED] hearing he again did not bring a lawyer with him and yet successfully got the magistrate to remove the restriction on the family home so he could move back in there BUT still no restriction was put in place on my current location.

Finally in [REDACTED] the information that had been provided before the [REDACTED] hearing made it to court and a new boundary was put in place - but only for the house yard here at my new rental, as my ex-husband successfully managed to argue that he needed continuous access to my new property. A property that he doesn't own and is not an employee of.

I then worked with SAPOL again to write a third affidavit explaining that he had only been associated with this farm on two formal occasions - to deliver hay before [REDACTED]

this year, and he worked for 9 hours for the farmer of this farm back in [REDACTED]. We also listed our opposition to him getting his guns back. And yet again at this hearing it was adjourned to [REDACTED] to enable him more time...

At the [REDACTED] hearing he again contested the intervention order as SAPOL and I had requested it to be written, so it was further adjourned, this time to 'pre-trial' in [REDACTED]. Today I have been rang to suggest that I should accept the conditions of the current order, which only prevent him from entering the garden here at my current rental, as 'prosecution is not convinced that the intervention order requested would be upheld in court'. I have also been informed that because he is a farmer there is a clause in the common law that will enable him to have his guns back – despite my concerns for my safety if he has them and the fact that for the past almost two years his employment has been unhindered by not having access to the firearms.

Throughout this whole process I have not been kept updated. Every time he has attended court I have had to ring around to try and find out the outcome. When he was given permission to move back into the family home the only reason I knew this had happened was because the children told me they had had tea with Dad at home on a night when he had them - on this occasion it took 9 phone calls to find out the outcome and when I asked about whether there had at least been a new boundary put in place I was told by the police prosecutor 'well you haven't had one for these past few months either', and at that point only did it come to light that the affidavit written before the [REDACTED] hearing had not made it into the court room.

I am tired of living in fear. When I am fearful, I am a stand and fight, rather than flight type of personality and I am very concerned that waiting patiently and quietly is not actually making me more safe.

As a [REDACTED] employee I understand totally the time and resource constraints that SAPOL and courts staff must be working under. However, there has to be things that can be done to assist women such as myself, together with those who may not find it easy to make phone calls and speak up and seek out information and support.

As a victim-survivor, who also has [REDACTED] years working in health care settings caring for victim-survivors, I feel that I am well placed to provide a submission to the commission. I am choosing at this time to concentrate on the 'Response' and 'Recovery and Healing' sections, but would be willing at a later date to also comment on prevention strategies.

7. What are the barriers to reporting DV to police or seeking support from services?

I live and work, and my children live and attend school, in a very small community. There is no locally based domestic violence specific police officer at our local police station, and the police officers who do work at the station [REDACTED]. This meant that for many years I did not feel comfortable to go and report episodes of physical violence among people that I knew professionally, and in a small community where my husband is perceived publicly to be a good and decent man.

8. *What are the elements of a best-practice crisis response that will meet the needs of a) victim-survivor?*

Firstly, for rural and remote areas there needs to be an option for reporting that enables safety for the person reporting the abuse. This would ideally mean that you could ring in to a service where your report would be believed, and then someone previously unknown to you and the perpetrator could then travel to you to take your statement. This would then ideally lead to an interim intervention order that was based on the needs of the victim, regardless of the perceived 'rights' of the perpetrator to continue to have full access to his former life, if this continued access would continue to contribute to control and distress for the victim. (When writing the intervention order to 'protect' me, I was continually told that we needed to ensure that my ex-husband was able to attend his [REDACTED] and sporting club etc, so I was never able to have him excluded from where I was as 'there will be no-where for him to go'. At one point I was even told that if his presence was a problem to me, I could choose not to attend...when I pointed out that there was no alternative church that I could go to this was then used to reinforce the need to enable my husband to continue to attend and when I asked how this protected my rights to attend un-harassed I was told I could always choose just not to attend at all. But this was never seen as an option for the perpetrator...who is this system protecting?!?)

9. *What are the elements of a best practice health response?*

Health services being linked in with crisis housing in rural and remote areas, to enable a safe place of discharge once any health needs had been addressed. Visiting female GP services to rural and remote areas without resident female GPs, to enable victims to discuss concerns with a female practitioner. Formal processes to support health services 'move' a victim to a safer community from a rural/remote hospital if that is what the victim would like support with (eg, maybe having a link with angel-flight or similar organisation)

10. *What are the elements of a best practice police response?*

SAPOL need to have a system to link a DV trained team member with victims in rural and remote areas, to ensure ongoing support from someone trained in this area, so as to be able to keep the victim informed of the process and explain anything that needs explaining. If that team member takes leave then the victim needs to be officially linked with a different team member to ensure ongoing support. Whenever there is a court process the SAPOL prosecutor should be contacting the victim ON THE DAY of court to inform them of the outcome of that day's proceedings and answer any questions.

11. *What are the elements of a best practice justice system response?*

There needs to be a reasonable timeline for the process to go through court and not be continually delayed by the perpetrator. It is almost [REDACTED] years since my ex-husband was first arrested for aggravated assault and the process continues to drag on in court 'because he has a right to a fair trial'. What about the rights of the victim to a safe life? There needs to be consequences for a perpetrator not following the direction of the magistrate. My ex-husband was told three times to bring a lawyer with him, each time delaying the process again [REDACTED] but there was never any consequence for not obeying this order from the magistrate.

9b, 10b, 11b

All of these elements of the DV 'support' system need an independent service, so that if the victim feels like the system is not keeping them safe there is somewhere neutral to go and raise these concerns and request further support. When I found out about the affidavit not being provided to court at the [REDACTED] hearing I wanted to provide feedback about this. I was told that I would need to register a complaint...at my local police station.

12. None of these elements are currently in place.

RECOVERY AND HEALING

13. *Are there universal needs for victim-survivors?*

All support services require further training to enable them to best support victims. And there needs to be a public education campaign about all the elements of domestic violence. One of the biggest issues I have faced is having mutual 'friends' not believe my story as they don't believe that the behaviour was abusive. Access to support groups would also potentially be helpful.

14. I lost a [REDACTED] deposit on a caravan because domestic violence was not considered a justification to break the contract. There is no service available to advocate for victims in financial matters. Recovery would be greatly assisted if there were.

15. The domestic violence support worker available in my community through Junction Australia has been a life-line for supporting my emotional and mental health through this process. After two years I am not in the recovery phase yet because the process drags on for so long, and is a massive strain on my mental health. I doubt that I would have made it this far without the support of [REDACTED] and my local GP.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission. If you wish to publish it on the website please remove the name and location details to protect my children.