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120+ years of Advocacy for Women's Rights

Friday September 27th 2024

To Royal Commissioner Natasha Stott Despoja AO,
Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

On behalf of the National Council of Women of South Australia Inc and our 25 member organisations and 45+ individual members we write to you in response to the Issues Paper Consultation.

Our passion is for the community and advancing women's rights. For more than 120 years, NCWSA has been working hard to engage with our network and advocate enthusiastically to our local, State and Federal representatives and to further steel our resolve and make our voices heard to policy and law makers and raise the status of women. Our mission is to ensure the continued rights of women locally and internationally.

Twelve decades ago, South Australia saw many of our founding members, including Inaugural Vice President Catherine Helen Spence, at the forefront of the suffrage movement. As a non-sectarian organisation, we are non-political but will always promote the rights of women to vote and stand for Parliament and to advocate for policy and legislative change.

NCWSA believes that all women have the right to human rights; where rights are inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

We represent a diverse range of voices: our membership extends to women in metro, rural and remote locations and women of diversity, colour and faith and from advocacy and service club backgrounds. And together, we are determined to continue our role in building the capacity of all women in our network and beyond.

Position Statements developed by NCWSA members, state clearly our values and beliefs - NCWSA believes:

- That all women have the right to equal status;
- That all women have the right to be safe from domestic and family violence;
- That all women have the right to be free of sexual harassment in community and workplace settings;
- That all women have the right to be depicted fairly and without discrimination within the media industry and by the media; that fair, non-discriminatory and appropriate standard of language, imagery, perception and portrayal be adhered to;
- That all women have the right to feel safe; physically, mentally and economically;

- That all women are entitled to autonomy over their bodies and that bodily integrity is central to human rights;
- That all women have a personal sense of agency (i.e. control over actions and their consequences); and
- That all women have the right to legal security and equality before the law.

With these at the heart of our work, we provide the following comments to this Consultation for your consideration.

More information about our organisation can be found by visiting us at:
www.facebook.com/NCWSouthAustralia and www.ncwsa.org.au

Kind regards,



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National Council of Women South Australia Inc (NCWSA) Submission

PREVENTION

1. What causes domestic, family and sexual violence?

We recognise that there are many drivers of violence (such as condoning of violence, men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence, rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity, cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control) beyond our input here but highlight the drivers that are apparent in the work that we do as a community organisation.

- **Gender Inequality:** We believe that gender inequality is a fundamental cause of family, domestic and sexual violence. We understand that not all violence is perpetrated by men, although the statistics show men to be the majority of perpetrators.
- **De-Valuation of Women and Girls:** Ensuring women and girls in all our diversity are valued and can equally and actively participate in the economy and all aspects of work and community life and that challenging both hidden or overt but deeply held gender stereotypes will work towards reducing and preventing family violence, domestic and sexual violence.
- **Negative role models:** The rise of social media influencers is driving popular and celebrated views that women have no value and are provoking a sense of accepted disrespect for women to a point that women are promoted as men's property. This fosters notions of power at the expense of women's value and rights.
- **Domestic Violence Terminology and Media Coverage:** Concerns have been raised by NCWSA members that the continued use of the term 'domestic violence' in the media may diminish the impact of the severity of this type of violence e.g. "the incident was domestic in nature. There is no risk to the public".
- **Men Leading Change:** We believe that persons who use violence and aggression need support to change these behaviours. The statistics show that escalating types of violence such as strangulation has a strong correlation to future homicide. We believe that men need strong and positive role models leading discussions and programs that support men.

2. What works, or will work, to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence?

- **Men Leading Change:** Where the violence is perpetrated by men, including men in development of programs, policies and services is essential.
- **Men Leading Change:** Ensuring safe spaces for men to support men to break stereotypes and to build and foster healthy relationships is one key to developing a strong and inclusive community.
- **Promotion of Status of Women** – breaking rigid stereotypes of what women (and men) should be, will remove behaviours that drive inequality.

3. What existing initiatives are directed at addressing the attitudes and systems that drive domestic, family and sexual violence? Are they effective?

- The National Council of Women SA and our 25 member organisations represent grass-roots and community organisations ["civil society"]. We would like to highlight the importance of community level activities, actions and voices in driving change in attitudes and systems. Civil society organisations are made up of representatives from every walk of life including business and sport, to industry to non-government sectors, to special interest groups to individual members. We are non-political and represent our own members. We uniquely and directly connect with persons and interact in a way that government systems can't. We

work with the expert knowledge of expert and public agencies to educate specifically on topics and concerns to make community level change.

- Examples of effective campaigns at the community level include from our member organisations i.e.
 - National Council of Women South Australia – United Nations 16 Days of Activism “Lighting Up the Icons” – lighting iconic Adelaide venues (Adelaide Oval, Convention Centre, Entertainment Centre, Adelaide Town Hall and SA Power Networks banner at 1 ANZAC Highway) in orange (anti-violence colour) lights during the 16 days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (25th November to 10th December, annually) as a visual conversation starter about gender-based violence.
 - Zonta International Mt Barker – “Expect Respect” Program – teaching about domestic and gender-based violence in local high schools
 - Zonta International – “Zonta Says No” campaign against violence
 - Soroptimist International Torrens – RoZSIs Voice (Rotary, Zonta International and Soroptimist International) – a grass roots collaboration of northern suburbs branches to spread the message about gender-based violence
 - Rotary 9510 – Walk for Respect – the second annual walk (14th September) builds further connection in the community for us to walk together for support and to normalise attitudes of equality.
 - The late Helen Oxenham’s “Spirit of Woman” – Ripples statues as places of reflection and places to safely discuss and understand the impact of domestic, family and sexual violence.

EARLY INTERVENTION

National Council of Women SA Inc would like to highlight our support for the strengthening data sets to identify and support persons both at risk of being a victim of violence and also of perpetrating violence.

- NCWSA believes that early intervention education is important in breaking the cycle of violence and that educating us all on the importance of “calling out” sexist, misogynistic and discriminatory behaviours is one key to improving gender equality and thus addressing drivers of domestic, family and sexual violence.

4. What systems, including systems outside of government, receive information which may allow for the identification of individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence?

- Mandatory reporting systems such as the Department for Child Protection Child Abuse Report Line capture information related to child safety and is thus integral to protection.
- Many well-known support services exist that capture information which allow for identification of individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence. For example: 1800RESPECT, Don’t Become That Man phonenumber, Yarrow Place, Men's Referral Service, South Australian Domestic Violence Crisis Line.
- Also, we highlight the South Australian Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme that provides a person who may be at risk of domestic violence to receive information about their partner or former partner, to help make decisions about their safety and the future of the relationship.
- New and emerging technologies such as the free “I’m Safe” App are connecting to women across the world who are experiencing situations of violence. When the emergency feature is activated, the app sends information about your location to your trusted circle while capturing vital information in the background.

- In relation to the receiving information which may allow for identification of individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence, the app’s “Help Line” is confidential and staffed by trained professionals and allows individuals to confidentially share details and ask for help. This Help Line allows the individual to receive advice and resources to help connect with information and services in their location and is becoming another avenue for understanding the broad impact of domestic violence.

6. What interventions should be considered to manage the risk of a person who is identified as being at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence?

- Expansion of Offenders Aid Rehabilitation Services Community Transition programs (OARS). From our discussions with Leigh Garret of OARS, we understand that the intensive intervention programs result in significant reduction in re-offending through modifying participant’s thoughts, beliefs and behaviours and also encompasses support that focuses on relapse prevention strategies.

7. What are the barriers to reporting domestic, family and sexual violence to police or seeking support from domestic, family and sexual violence services?

National Council of Women SA would like to note that barriers to reporting certainly do exist. Barriers that include, but are not limited to:

- Language barriers
- Shame and embarrassment
- Being unsure where to go
- Prior experience with reporting
- A feeling of not wanting to be a burden or bother others
- Norms whereby “taboo” and “personal” issues are not discussed.

Relating to Questions 8, 9 and 10:

- We highlight the need for trauma-informed responses that are local (where the need is) and specific to a person’s individual needs.

RECOVERY AND HEALING

13. Acknowledging that every victim-survivor will have different needs depending on their personal circumstances, are there universal needs that will arise for all victim-survivors?

- We highlight the need for follow-up procedures beyond a specific incident and their related legal proceedings. The journey for victim-survivors may continue for individuals months, years and decades beyond formal proceedings.

14. What are the best practice approaches to supporting a victim-survivor to recover from trauma and the mental, physical, emotional and economic impacts of violence?

- We highlight the need for trauma-informed responses that are local (where the need is) and specific to a person’s individual needs.

===== END SUBMISSION=====