



## Witness statement of Susan Jones

I, Susan Jones,<sup>1</sup> say as follows:

1. I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.

### Background

2. In 2000 while living overseas, I eloped to marry a man who did not have the approval of my family or community. As such, I was cut off from all family and community support. My father is Australian.
3. The sexual, physical and verbal assault began almost immediately. In the first week of our marriage, after having intercourse, my husband threw me on the concrete floor, which is where he made me sleep on nights he was not pleased with me. He said that he should have married a whore instead of me because a whore would 'know how to pleasure her man.'
4. Over the first few weeks of marriage, he repeatedly had sexual intercourse with me and made me sleep on the floor if I could not keep up with his sexual needs. He told me 'the floor is where sluts sleep.' He made me feel insecure by telling me I couldn't do anything right.
5. It was during these early weeks of marriage that I learnt the hard way that I was not allowed to say 'no' to my husband. Physical and sexually demeaning behaviour would occur towards me, which made me fearful and anxious around my husband. His wishes and needs were met at every request and I was not allowed to express my opinion or preference for anything, whether it be what we ate, where we went or anything that is otherwise normal in a relationship, companionship or marriage.
6. I became pregnant within the first month of marriage, which made him angry as he implied I had broken an agreement that 'we are supposed to have fun for a while, and not get pregnant straight away.' No such agreement was ever discussed, but he did put the blame on me for becoming pregnant. One night, he kicked me in the stomach while I was sleeping. I had to prove that my becoming pregnant would not make me less obedient. Examples of this behaviour was when he made me carry all the grocery bags, push start his car while he sat in it and have sex any time he demanded it. He had no concern for my state of pregnancy.
7. During the pregnancy, I suffered morning sickness and I could only eat oranges. My husband wouldn't let me leave the house, even to get oranges to ease my morning sickness. When I asked his relatives who visited if they could buy me some oranges and gave them money to do so, he took the money and said he would purchase the oranges. When his relatives had left, he became furious that I had asked his family to run errands for me, and didn't buy the oranges.

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<sup>1</sup> The name and other details of the witness (and others) referred to in this statement have been changed to protect her identity and to comply with the Royal Commission into Family Violence Restricted Publication Order dated 10 July 2015.

8. In October 2000, when I was eight months pregnant with our first child, I flew, with my father's assistance, to Australia, with the intention of leaving my husband due to his abusive behaviour. My siblings were all living in Australia at that time.
9. He followed me to Australia one week later to my surprise, and the abuse continued. I had nowhere to go as my family didn't realise the extent of the abuse, and I didn't have any further support networks. Any connections I had in Australia didn't know what had been happening behind closed doors so they therefore continued to encourage me to stay with him.
10. At some point in our marriage I went to speak to our religious leader and ask advice about my husband's abusive behaviour. The religious leader advised me that perhaps if the house was cleaner when my husband got home, or if I cooked better, he might not be so angry. As a result of confiding to my religious leader, I was referred to a counselling service that advised me on how to be a more obliging and obedient wife.
11. The abuse intensified every time I became pregnant. During our marriage, I became pregnant four times and I now have four sons.

### **Initial contact with the health system**

12. In 2001 I had attended a medical clinic due to injuries sustained from rape. The female GP did discuss the severity of my injuries and had asked if it was rape. I told her 'no, it was my husband.' She told me she would keep this incident on record, but these records were lost by the time I went to the police in 2011. She gave me a pamphlet for a women's helpline, I thanked her for it, but disposed of the pamphlet in case my husband found me in possession of it. At the time, I did not know the significance of this helpline.
13. Again in 2004 while pregnant with my third child, I sustained such significant injuries from my husband's sexual assault that I had to attend a hospital. I was bleeding and thought I might be losing the baby. The doctor that treated my injuries identified that the cause must have been sexual assault. The doctor asked if I wanted to press charges for rape. I was confused by the suggestion as my understanding of 'rape' was that the rapist had to be a stranger or an intruder, not a husband.
14. I thought that the role of wife meant that when you sign the marriage contract, you sign over the rights to your body. Any time your husband wants your body, it belongs to him. The doctor informed me that this information was not correct, that when your husband signs the marriage contract, he agrees to love and protect. This doctor's statement had a huge impact on my understanding of what rape and consent meant. The doctor told me that my body belonged to me and explained that any form of non-consensual sex was rape, regardless of whether you were married to the perpetrator or not.
15. This doctor referred me to a counsellor and enlightened me to the opportunity of learning more about my rights through discussion. I did attend these counselling sessions. I walked to my counselling sessions, children in tow, while my husband was at work. Although learning about my rights was insightful, putting that learning into practice was not so easy.
16. On a separate occasion, a GP had asked me if I was being 'abused'. My understanding of the word 'abuse' was being beaten with a closed fist. My husband had told me that through his job, he had learned that if you hit someone with an open

palm, it's not considered 'abuse'. As my husband would hit me with an open palm, I told the doctor that I was not being abused.

17. Throughout the 10 years of marriage, I had no idea that financial control, social control, manipulation, fear tactics, threats of hurting me or the children were all forms of abuse. I even laughed when someone told me about emotional abuse—how can anyone cause pain to feelings? I now know this to be true and very possible.

## **Police response**

18. The doctor at the hospital referred me to a counsellor, who told me that I could call the police when my husband's behaviour was making me feel unsafe, scared, or resulted in the injuries that I had when I attended the hospital. Before this time, I thought the police only dealt with car accidents or other emergencies. I didn't realise that they could come to our house for the behaviour my husband was displaying to me. At the time I did not understand domestic violence to be an emergency.
19. The first time I phoned the police, I felt the threat of violence as I could tell he was angry. He was exhibiting erratic and frightening behaviour such as slamming doors and cupboards and flicking the lights on and off in the children's bedroom while they were sleeping. This frightened me and I did not know what he was going to do. The police attended and separated us to different sides of the house. As my husband worked as a [REMOVED], he later told me that he had had interactions with these specific officers through his work. He told me all he had to say was that I was taking anti-depressants and hadn't been taking my medication, and that there was no threat of violence. I heard him tell the officers 'women, they over exaggerate you know.' The police officers laughed with him and no further action was taken.
20. The second time I phoned the police, they attended again and again no action was taken. As soon as the police arrived, my husband pretended to be calm and friendly. One of the officers asked me what I wanted them to do, but I didn't know what my options were. They didn't tell me that I could take out an intervention order against him, which would mean he couldn't continue hurting me. If that had been explained to me, I would have asked them to make him leave.

## **Isolating and controlling behaviours**

21. My husband locked the phone and computer in a padlocked room every time he left the house. I was only able to use them when he was home and with his permission. He would sit next to me when I made any phone calls to family. This was both intimidating and frightening. I could not speak freely while he monitored my phone calls. He controlled which friends and family members I was allowed to speak to. For example, he learnt that one of my friends was divorced. He told me I wasn't allowed to associate with divorced women as they would corrupt a God-sanctioned marriage.
22. He didn't allow me my own mobile phone. In 2001, my sister had provided me with my own mobile, as she was concerned about me. He threw it against the wall and smashed it.
23. My husband held my bankcard so I couldn't spend any money without approval. He allocated me \$20 a week to provide for me and our four children. If I needed more money for nappies or any extras for the kids I had to beg him for extra money. If he approved of the extras that I requested he would ask exactly how much I needed, and count out that precise amount in coins. He used my card freely to buy expensive

gym equipment, clothes and overseas holidays. I was never allowed to question his spending.

24. In order to have control over my whereabouts, he would often take me to work with him. Sometimes he worked night shift. He would demand I come with him so he knew where I was at all times. I had to sleep in the car all night without access to a toilet. The children were small at the time. My anxiety rose dramatically; I had to ensure they were warm and comfortable as we all slept in a small car.
25. I was restricted to the house. When my father gave me access to a car, my husband took the keys with him to work and wouldn't let me drive it. If I needed the car for any reason I had to beg and promise exactly where I was going and what time I would be back.
26. He was very controlling about being on time. If he had to pick me up from somewhere (for example, picking me up from an ultrasound appointment) he was often late to pick me up. On one occasion I waited up to three hours and I was not permitted to ask what delayed him. I was only allowed to say 'thank you' when he arrived. But if he needed to be picked up from somewhere (a train station) I would cop it if I was three minutes late.

### **Role of the education system in identifying the abuse**

27. When I was pregnant with my fourth child, a teacher from my children's school made contact with me to ask about my five year old who was in prep. He had stopped talking during class and the teacher wasn't sure if he was learning the material being taught. The teacher asked my permission for him to see a counsellor, which I of course approved. Once the counselling session had been completed, the teacher phoned again and asked if they could interview his older brother. After this session, the school asked me to come to speak to them. At this point, I assumed it was in relation to strategies within both of the boys' education to assist my younger child to speak and learn in the classroom. When I attended the school, the counsellor started asking me questions based on answers the children had given during counselling and some pictures my children had drawn which depicted family violence. The counsellor asked me if my children had witnessed family violence in our house, such as my husband pulling me by the hair, or throwing food at me.
28. The children had given detailed descriptions of what they had witnessed and as it was being relayed to me I felt my sad secret was now not only about me. I then realised that they had been witnessing the violent behaviour that my husband was perpetrating and it was affecting them. I broke down in tears as I felt I had let the children down, as it was my role as a mother to provide for and protect these children. I felt I had let them down, that I had failed to some degree. I realised that whilst my husband only occasionally hit our children, they were also affected emotionally by the abuse that was occurring to me.
29. The school counsellor referred me to a refuge, and told me that it was likely that if we went to a refuge, we would stay there for two weeks before moving into more permanent housing. I didn't have an understanding of what a refuge was as no one had ever explained it to me. I had an expectation that it would be a facility as depicted

in the news, surrounded by barbed wire like an internment camp. I didn't want to take my children to a facility like that.

30. The school counsellor also referred me to a women's information service helpline, which I was unable to use as I didn't have access to a phone.
31. At that time, I was attending counselling as referred by the doctor at the hospital. I found it emotionally exhausting to bring up the issues I'd been facing and felt embarrassed to talk about the abuse. How can talking about a horrible past help the future? I still had to go home to this man. Talking about it felt silly and futile.

### **Access to a women's refuge**

32. Between 2000 and 2009, I tried to leave my husband on five occasions with the children and stayed with family or friends. When I was at my sister's house with the boys, my husband would call incessantly, including to my sister's mobile or home phone, or would simply come around and demand that he have access to his children. Using the children as a need for reuniting his family, he would ask, 'who else would love you and the children more than me?' I felt my presence at my sister's house was an inconvenience to her and her family. When I fled to a friend's home, I felt that I was equally inconvenient to them.
33. In October 2009, I planned to attend a woman's refuge by telling my husband I was babysitting my sister's children for two weeks, when the reality was that we only needed to babysit for one week. I planned to leave for the refuge after the first week. Through advice of the women's helpline I packed my children's things, including their passports and birth certificates, a few articles of clothing and a small toy without my husband becoming suspicious.
34. The refuge organised for a taxi to transport me and the children back to the refuge at the start of the second week. As we were leaving, my sister was confused about my husband not collecting us from her driveway and asked where we were going. I told her we were going to a refuge which upset her because she had the same understanding of what a refuge was that I did, which is similar to a prison or internment camp. My sister tried to stop us from going to the refuge. I phoned the refuge and told them that we were reconsidering coming to stay there, based on both mine and my sister's understanding of what sort of facility it was.
35. The refuge made it clear that if we didn't come, that we would not receive counselling or housing support.

### **Homelessness and access to housing**

36. The incident with the refuge began the next 12 months of homelessness for myself and my children. From time to time, we were able to stay with my sister and various friends and family. All four of my children would sleep in one bed and I would sleep on the floor next to them, or on lounge room floors.
37. We also spent periods of time in a tent in local parks when the weather was warm enough. We started sleeping in the car when it was too cold.
38. When we slept in the car, it had to be near enough to the children's school that they could walk, as I didn't have enough money for petrol to drive them to school every day. The car couldn't be too close to school as there was a chance that their school

friends might see our living conditions. We selected a park that had a toilet facility that we could wash up in before the kids went to school.

39. During this time, whilst my children attended school, I began looking for permanent accommodation for myself and my children.

### **Housing Service (Department of Human Services)**

40. I filled out an application with a housing service. They informed me there that I should expect a long wait for housing (up to two years for emergency housing, and 20 years for non-emergency housing). They asked me if I had an address to put on the form. I said that I didn't have an address as we were living in a car. They then informed me that if I didn't have an address to put on the form, they couldn't process my application. I asked them if I should put my sister's address on the form, to which they said I wouldn't qualify for emergency housing as I already had accommodation at my sister's house. I told them that we didn't have accommodation and that I would provide my sister's address to be eligible to apply for housing. After the conundrum of this issue was settled they finally agreed to process the application and told me that I would be contacted within two months.
41. After two months, I hadn't heard from the housing service. After three months, the housing service still hadn't contacted me, so I phoned them to check on the progress of my application. The service informed me that there was no application in my name and that I would need to fill out another form. I told them I had already filled out a form and they said 'sorry, we don't have a record of your application'. I attended the service and filled out another application form. This time, I requested that the housing service photocopy the dated and stamped application so I could have proof, which they did under protest. The service then told me I would be contacted within another two months.
42. After another two months, I still hadn't heard from the service. After three months, or six months in total from the first time I filled out an application, I phoned them again. They informed me again that they didn't have an application in my name. I attended the housing service office and showed them the stamped dated copy of my second application. It wasn't until I produced this copy of my application that they acknowledged that they did in fact have my application. I was always very polite and patient in dealing with services as it is my nature to be so, but to me I couldn't help but feel that this service had a system of losing forms, or making it difficult to complete forms as a deliberate strategy to deter people.
43. It was also at this point, they referred me to crisis accommodation housing. It was six months after initially walking into the housing service office that they referred me to a private crisis accommodation.

### **Salvation Army**

44. During the 12 months of homelessness I attempted multiple avenues of looking for stable accommodation. One of these avenues was reaching out to the Salvation Army and asking if they had any accommodation options for myself and my four sons. They informed me that they didn't have housing for more than one mother and two children together, and asked if there was somewhere else my 'other' two children could go. There was a moment's desperation of contemplating which of my two children would benefit from separating from me for a bit while I got on my feet. That moment did not last long as I could not bear the thought of splitting the brothers up during this difficult time. We didn't have much, but we had each other and I felt it would be horrible to choose which children to send elsewhere. I didn't want to separate my children, or be

faced with the choice of which two to take with me, and which other two to put in another form of accommodation or care.

45. I asked if they could refer me to another service where a mother could stay with all four of her children. The Salvation Army said that they only knew about the housing in their own area and didn't know about what housing was available in other areas. They didn't know where to refer me.
46. I kept cold calling various housing options I found using the internet on the local library computer. I ran out of phone credit before I could get hold of anyone who could offer any other housing options.

### **Crisis Accommodation Centre**

47. The centre offered short-term crisis accommodation to single women, as well as women with children, with a restriction on boys over 12 years of age. My eldest son was 11 at the time, so there was a finite amount of time we would be able to stay. In the end, we were there for about four months.
48. They charged a lot. For \$400 per week, we had one room with two sets of bunks for myself and all four boys. It had a communal bathroom in a dismal state, tiny communal kitchen, communal dining and TV room to share with the other people at the centre. There was only one key for the room so if one needed to use the toilet or shower we all moved about in a group together. We felt unsafe there and my children were anxious and unhappy. It was the only time my eldest son cried. It was worse than camping or sleeping in the car for him.
49. I recall reiterating to my children at the time we were staying at the centre of the importance of their education. I couldn't promise that they would never be homeless again, but if they concentrated on their studies, and worked hard, and made the most of opportunities that come their way, there would be less likelihood that they would ever have to be homeless again. I also took the time to teach my boys that it is better to live like this than to live in fear from my husband and how very important it was to me that they never harm their wives/partners. I told them when they find a companion to share their life with that they should cherish them, and never harm them, ever. I felt it was important, as they will be men one day to teach them what kind of men I expected them to be and why it was we were living like this. The children didn't miss any school (still attending their original school) during the 12 months of homelessness.

### **Rental accommodation**

50. I attended numerous rental properties to find somewhere safer and more permanent for us to live. At one inspection, I was told by a local real estate agent that as a single unemployed mother with four children, my application would be at the bottom of the pile. She implied that I was wasting her time. I felt it was unfair for my hopes to be dismissed so carelessly. I was hurt but not deterred and kept politely attending open days. I was never offered anything, despite an impeccable rental history.
51. I attended open for inspections on Saturdays, as each weekday, I needed to drive my children 45 minutes each way to school. I didn't have enough petrol money to drive back to the crisis accommodation centre while the boys were at school. Having very limited funds I had to be conscious of fuel use and limit my driving. I spent my

time while the kids were in school volunteering around the school, reading with the children, helping with weeding and other odd jobs.

52. The Chaplain at the school noticed me and asked what I was doing at the school every day. I explained that our current accommodation was too far away for me to drive the car back and forth, so I stayed at the school to pass the time until I could pick the boys up again.
53. The Chaplain made enquiries on our behalf and found a rental property, which was made available to those needing temporary housing after the bushfires. As those affected by the fires were moving back to their homes, the Chaplain knew of some houses that were becoming available and was able to refer me to some home owners that were willing to rent to us. It was much closer to the school and we moved into one as soon as it was available to us. We have since secured a more permanent rental option.

## **Intervention Order**

54. My husband was still in contact with our children and would spend time with them every Saturday. I gave him \$200 per week to take the children to the cinema, go bowling, or swimming. It was important for me that they build better memories of their father than the ones surrounding our departure. It was also important that they build a positive relationship with him, as I knew this would reflect on what kind of men they would grow to become.
55. The money also went towards a loan for the seven seater car that my husband was driving, but I did not have access to.
56. I didn't want my husband to find out where our rental property was for safety reasons, so I would take the children to the local McDonalds for my husband to collect them from there. I knew McDonalds has security cameras so I felt safe in making the change over there. He asked our children to show him where we were living and they did.
57. He began attending our rental property and asking for money and sex, threatening to take our children away if I didn't provide him with either. If I didn't come out to see him, he would sit in the car and lean on the car horn until I did.
58. I asked my friend, whose husband is a police officer, if there was anything I could do to stop him from coming to the house. She told me about Intervention Orders. I was able to ask her in detail what an Intervention Order meant. How can a piece of paper stop him from actually coming to my house? If I got an Intervention Order does that mean he'll lose his job and the children would suffer? I had so many questions on what an Intervention Order meant.

## **Financial abuse**

59. When my husband became angry, he would drive the car erratically and speed through red lights. The car was in my name and so the red light and speeding fines would also be in my name, and I would have to pay the fine. Although I knew about nominating another driver at that time, the circumstances of a violent relationship meant it was not possible for me to nominate him as the other driver.
60. After I had left my husband, I was still forced to pay half of the loan for a car that he continued to drive and in which he continued to incur fines in my name. Even though I had attempted to live free from his violence, I was not free from his control and the



financial strain of meeting the needs of four children, paying rent, and the occasional fine incurred by him having the family car.

### **Further family violence**

61. In 2010, my husband asked if the family could spend Christmas together at his new house. The children were excited about the idea. I said we could all go, provided that I could pitch a tent in the back yard of the property for myself and the children. I didn't want myself and my husband to sleep under the same roof.
62. He didn't have any clothes, food or furniture for our children at his house, even though when I'd moved out in 2009, we left with only backpacks. He had access to all the furniture and clothes from the house we had shared. I was not aware that when the kids had weekends with their father, that they had no beds. As a result of learning the living conditions I later purchased some bunk beds from Savers to give the boys somewhere to sleep and brought some clothes from our home.
63. The night before Christmas 2010, he came into the tent I had pitched in the backyard and raped me while the children were asleep in front of the television inside the house. I did not consent in any way.
64. On New Year's Eve a week later, I entered the house to install the bunk beds for the children, as there was nowhere for them to sleep. This was the only time the children weren't with me when I went to his house. I had to fit the bunk beds in the back of the car and so I had left the children with a friend. I was there to provide for the children while they were in his care. I had no reason to suspect he would attack me at this time. My husband approached from behind while I was assembling bunk beds with [REMOVED] handcuffs. After a brief scuffle he secured the handcuff to my right hand and the other link to the furniture and proceeded to brutally rape me. I tried to break my wrist to get out of the handcuffs but could not. After the sexual assault, he left me locked there for a further 45 minutes before releasing me.
65. I was extremely hurt, physically and emotionally, as I had only agreed to be at the house over the holiday period for the sake of the children, and my husband violently and repeatedly abused me.

### **Criminal Justice System**

66. As a direct result of these attacks, I applied (with the advice of the friend mentioned above) for the Intervention Order against my husband in April 2011. The form required that I provide information on what the most recent incident of family violence was, and whether there had been other incidents of family violence in the past. I looked at the small area on the form that asked to list harm caused and realised that I would require significantly more space than was allocated. I started writing out more and more pages to attach to the form, which made me reflect on the extent of the abuse.
67. The friend that had answered my questions about what an Intervention Order meant accompanied me to the Court to apply for an Order. There was a moment during the proceedings that the Magistrate was going to dismiss my application as 'historical' since all I was showing him was hospital records from prior to 2009 and the children's school counsellor report also prior to 2009. As it was already 2011 when I was applying for this Intervention Order, he didn't see the need for one. I pleaded with the Magistrate that I don't want there to be another violent event and begged his assistance to keep us safe. I told him that 'I don't have any records of any recent events as I haven't told any professionals' his reply is significant when he said, 'you

are their mother, what more qualifications do you need to speak on their behalf?' This was very empowering for me, as I felt the only records that could be seen in court are documents written by doctors, teachers, or other professionals. To stand there and speak for myself of my own experiences was very liberating. I did not know I was allowed to do that. He granted an Interim Order.

68. Although I did have the Order, I still did not feel safe. I knew my ex-husband was furious with me and that the threat against me could escalate. I also knew that he was dating a young lady and felt responsible for her not knowing his manipulative ways. There were many reasons to go to the police to press charges for the harm caused but mainly so that he would not do it to me or anyone else again.
69. I initially (and for a long time later) thought that I could not report the father of my children to the police. The granting of the Intervention Order gave me real courage, as did the assistance of the friend. I am very conscious that many women in my position have no access to such knowledge and support. I finally walked into the police station and by appointment was interviewed by the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team officer there. It took three days in total to get a record of 10 years of abuse towards me. As I was raising boys, I felt it was important that they know the behaviour they had witnessed their father harm their mother was not ok, and that he take responsibility for his actions.
70. After my report to the police, it took four months until his house was searched and further investigations began. He now had notice that I was serious about talking.
71. This was an extremely high-risk time for me and I felt an imminent threat.
72. It took so long to finalise the police brief that he left the country and married another woman whom he had met and with whom he had built a relationship on the Internet. He has had another child.
73. When he returned to Australia, he was apprehended at the airport, arrested and charged. He had his passport confiscated by police and was placed on remand. He was released on bail and I was not notified. I later learnt that he was back in the country and immediately called the investigating officer who told me that he was apprehended and released two weeks after I had learned that he was back in the country. I felt this was an extremely scary time for me to learn that he had been living close by without me knowing, that he knew where the kids went to school and I wasn't alerted. I had no idea why he was back in the country and if I allowed my thoughts to wander, my fears would never end. I was afraid that he wanted to take at least one of the kids. I was also afraid that for the sake of his pride, it was better for him to say his wife was dead rather than divorced.
74. He was finally tried on seven counts of aggravated rape in June this year. The trial was extraordinarily difficult for me, as court proceedings are very intimidating in all ways. Thankfully, he was convicted. To give you some idea of the seriousness of what he had done, he was sentenced to 13 years imprisonment, with a 10 year non-parole period.

## **Integrating services and structural impediments**

### **Access to drug and alcohol services**

75. While living at the crisis accommodation centre, I met and heard the story of a mother who had substance abuse issues. She said that her mother had the same substance abuse issues and felt, fatalistically, that her daughter would grow up to inherit the

same abuse issues. She said she wanted to be a better mum to her daughter. I spoke with her about seeking treatment so she could be a better mum to her daughter and she was open to the idea of getting help. I offered to look after her children while she attended rehab.

76. We attended the local Council who told us that there were no free drug and alcohol treatment services available for her in the area. We were then referred to a GP who told us that drug and alcohol treatment of this kind has the starting price of \$2000. The GP said that the only place he knew that provided longer term treatment for drug and alcohol addiction was prison.
77. Neither the Council nor the GP could refer us to any further appropriate support services.

### **Centrelink**

78. When I had decided to leave my husband, I attended Centrelink to try to find someone to assist me in understanding my entitlement to payments for myself and my children. The Centrelink representative I spoke to was unhelpful and confusing when asking me what payments I was entitled to. I did not know the answers and was worried I was applying for the wrong one. I became anxious and distressed. I was referred to a Centrelink social worker who identified that I required assistance and helpfully talked me through the appropriate payments.
79. Prior to this time, I didn't know that Centrelink offered the service of a social worker to people in distress and who didn't know the system. I would have found it helpful if a Centrelink representative had told me about this service earlier.

### **Child Support Payments**

80. When I considered the option of child support payments for the four children, I thought I would have to have contact with my husband again for him to hand over the money. Child support services did not make it clear that I could receive these payments electronically, so I chose to forego the payments rather than risk seeing my husband again.
81. It would have been helpful if any of the services, whether it be Centrelink, a GP, a housing service, a counsellor or police, were able to provide me with this information.

### **Recommendations**

82. Changing the name of Women's Refuges to Safe Houses would greatly ease the confusion as to what sort of facility it is. A distressed woman in fear and confusion would be more likely to run towards a Safe House purely because of its name.
83. Women who are isolated have very limited windows of opportunities to reach out. It is crucial when that first brave step is made that they are supported to keep going for themselves, and especially if there are children involved. The anxiety about whether or not she is making the right choice can be greatly alleviated if clear information is offered about the options a person has when they are subject to family violence. Many of the entry points that I tried to connect with on my journey didn't advise about the full scope of options available for victims of abuse.
84. There should be a fully funded community engagement program which can educate all people about avenues to services that are able to provide help. I think there should be other services, such as a GP, police, Salvation Army, Centrelink, teacher, or counsellor that can refer women to a service that can answer what an Intervention

Order means, and can offer support when filling out legal forms or attend court with her. A service that knows what options are available, from the big issues (legal rights and medical help, housing) to all the little hurdles along the way (child support, changing schools, and the basics, food and clothing for women on the run). This one service would be responsible for both support and follow up so that police, GPs, counsellors and courts can be freed up to allow the one service to attend to these details.

85. There should be education in schools about healthy relationships so that children can understand concepts of abuse and healthy homes from a young age. Teenagers can learn more complex intricacies of relationships such as coercion, consent and companionship. This will assist in an understanding of how all people in all relationships should be treated, and how you should allow yourself to be treated.
86. The support services need to talk to each other as there needs to be a reliable referral system in place to assist victims/survivors with multiple needs. For example, I attended a White Ribbon day event in 2014 where the mainstream services had set up information booths. I asked each of the services if they knew where a single mother with four young children could find accommodation after experiencing family violence. It had taken me six months to find this form of housing myself three years earlier and I was interested to see if the system had changed. None of the services knew the answer, or knew where to refer me.
87. I think there is a place in the criminal justice system for restorative justice, where, in some cases, a victim can face their perpetrator and the perpetrator can apologise for their destructive and damaging behaviour. The perpetrator could make it clear that they will never repeat the actions which have led to the offence. They could be forced, in a closely monitored way, to do courses, programs, practical active things that could help to change their thinking for good. The victim could explain the effect that the family violence has had on them so that the perpetrator can have some understanding of the consequences of their actions. This might even take the place of a lengthy prison term, providing no further abuse occurs. Of course, if the abuse occurred again, none of this could apply. In a case like mine, there was never so much as a hint of contrition, so it would probably not be possible.

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