

Submission to the Royal Commission on Family Violence

Having been through family violence as a victim I have noticed the inadequacy in two areas in regard to support for the victim, the offender and the family as a whole.

It was brought to my attention on the immediate action of mandatory reporting there was no immediate mandatory counselling support available. It would have been of great value to our family if on the reporting of the offence the reporter or the police on arresting and charging the accused had some mandate to contact a counsellor or counselling service to support the whole family from the very beginning.

If the State had in place this arrangement with a counselling service to be made available immediately it would have been of tremendous advantage for us as individuals and as a family. This is why I believe mandatory reporting should go hand-in-hand with mandatory counselling.

The other issue is in regard to the use of counselling services and the counsellor's responsibility to the law whereby they or their notes can be subpoenaed as evidence against their clients in a court of law. Who in their right mind is going to speak in confidence to someone if they know what they say can be written down and used in evidence against them. If we wish to heal members of our community who offend against anyone there must be some way they can speak openly in confidence for the express purpose of gaining them the support they need to be healed. This healing journey will not only support the offender but will give great comfort and assistance to the victim who may still love the person who offended against them and to the whole family who can through adequate support function as a family once more.

There are many cases where offenders have been allowed back into the family circle and have never reoffended. We need to give these families the best opportunity to regroup and work together through their issues towards wholeness.

Confidential Counselling should start from the very beginning and be ongoing until there is some form of closure. Evidence gathered should not include counselling support.

Thank you for this opportunity to present my thoughts.