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A Community Legal Centre

1 June 2015

Royal Commission into Family Violence
 PO Box 535
 Flinders Lane VIC 8009

Dear Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners,

Submission of the Homeless Persons Union Inc. into the Royal Commission into Family Violence

We enclose the submissions that have been recorded by the Homeless Person's Union of Victoria Inc. ("HPUV") to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Fitzroy Legal Service ('FLS') has provided support to the HPUV in this process.

The mission statement of the HPUV is "to build an effective and self-sustaining organisation whose goal is to ensure the human rights of the homeless and powerless are not ignored but are taken seriously by government, service providers and society. It seeks to do this by bringing together those who have a lived experience of homelessness and those who are passionate about the rights of the homeless."

FLS provides varied community legal education initiatives, as well as legal services to people impacted by family violence. In relation to the latter, this is specifically through intervention order duty lawyering, support in tenancy matters, victims of crime, criminal defence and through holistic service delivery models to support people to respond to underlying causes of engagement in the criminal justice system. As a result of the varied nature of FLS services provided to the community, we have elected to engage in a community development approach in supporting the HPUV to respond to the terms of reference by providing a voice to those who may not have otherwise had an avenue for engagement.

In order to make this submission, members of HPUV have recorded interviews with people currently homeless and/or with lived experience of homelessness in relation to the terms of reference of the Inquiry.

The development of this submission has required a great deal of courage and endurance for the HPUV. The process has also provided some opportunity for sharing and understanding that has been of significance for members and participants involved. As such, we are extremely grateful to the Commission for receiving these perspectives and for facilitating this process.

BY APPOINTMENT MONDAY TO FRIDAY 9AM-5PM
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We confirm that those persons interviewed do not object to their submissions being made public by transcript, or otherwise. Some participants have chosen to identify themselves by name, whilst others have not done so. The HPUV has made a collective undertaking to preserve confidentiality in relation to the identities of persons that have put forward their perspectives.

Please feel free to contact me on [REDACTED] should you have any queries whatsoever in relation to these matters. Again we thank you for your support.

Yours faithfully
Fitzroy Legal Service

[REDACTED]
Meghan Fitzgerald
Acting Principal/ Manager Social Action, Law Reform & Policy

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Submission of the Homeless Persons Union, into the Royal Commission into Family Violence

Below are transcripts of audio interviews with people currently experiencing homelessness or with lived experience of homelessness, save for interviews 4# and 5#, which were conducted with a young mother and mental health worker, respectively. The interviews have been conducted by members of Homeless Person's Union, also currently experiencing homelessness or with lived experience of homelessness.

Interview One

Interviewer: We are looking at the relationship between violence and safe housing and I wondered what your observations were just from your experiences on what the government could do better and what the problems you see around are?

Interviewee: Yeah I see a lot of domestic violence you know, and I see the need for some safe, supportive accommodation and there has got to be some government buildings that would be easy to convert you know, for women and their kids you know. And have a laundry and that set up where they can go without bloody husbands trying to barge in and bash them. I think too many men think it's alright to hit women you know, and it's not alright, you know they might have a lot of faults but they don't deserve back handers. The government can do more about education and money for funding to stop this sort of shit from happening, like they did with AIDS and that and making people aware of safe sex as well as clean IVs, clean needles and that. It's almost like the government doesn't care, they don't consider them taxpayers and that sort of thing, and they are just a burden on the State and they just get swept under the mat. Unfortunately there's just going to be women getting killed and kids getting abused, you know violent spouses and that. Hockey got criticised in the government and the budget for not putting more toward domestic violence issues, you know, and they were saying virtually two women a week are getting murdered by their exes, de-factos, husbands or whatever. But I see a lot of kids on the street because it's probably safer for them being on the street than at home. I remember when I used to be in the country the old blokes considered you a man if you drank two gallons of beer a week and went home and beat the crap out of the mrs and kids but if you had a joint you were a dirty rotten hippy. So I don't know where they get off with that sort of attitude. It needs a whole range of people, both genders, from all walks of life, all nationalities, standing up and saying alright enough's enough. And keep bombarding the politician's offices with complaints and requests for them to do more. And as I said there's gotta be a heap of government buildings and old schools that could easily be converted to make a safe area for women and their kids to go to get away from a violent abusive relationship. But the government doesn't seem to care about homeless people because they just see them as a burden and as not being able to contribute to the economy and that. It takes a while for people to get out of that sort of situation with DV and that, it takes them a little while to heal and then a little while to get back into the work force. You can't just expect them to go from leaving an abusive relationship and then walking straight into a stable job, you know, it's just not going to happen. I think they've got their head in the sand over this issue and the people who are advising them have got their heads up their asses. The things they've been trying for the last three or four years just haven't been working and they've got to

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admit that, you know, “the stuff we’ve tried hasn’t been working so we’ve got to try other ways to get the message across”. Whoever’s setting the policy and that should be sacked, instead of being in a 200,000 dollar a year job, they should really be sacked.

Interviewer: Can I ask you a particular question? For kids who can’t find a safe space what would you think would help them? And also the streets are obviously not safe for kids, what would you suggest would be their basic right?

Interviewee: I would like to see a mentoring system, both males and females working together mentoring, the males working with the males, and the females working with the females. Mentors being a positive influence in their life, instead of the negative, destructiveness that surrounded them. Like their dad and his violence and that sort of thing. But there also, again, needs to be some sort of building set aside where the kids can go and there is supervision there and that. So they can be housed and they can be safe and somewhere they can have classrooms and that where they can get tutoring in the subjects they are not real strong at. You know, and give them a bit of confidence as they’re going forward in life. I heard one bloke say on, a trial psychologist on sunrise one morning; they were talking about Ritalin oversubscription. He reckons that “diagnose instead of ADHD it should be ADS, and of course she said to him “what’s that” and he said “absent dad syndrome”. He said that mum’s left to be both mum and dad and the kids take advantage of that. But yeah, they’ve got no positive male role model to show them that it’s not alright to hit women and that there are other ways to deal with anger, like you can be assertive without being aggressive. Like I moved over from Adelaide in January and I was couch surfing at a friend’s place for a little while and then I’d been homeless for a few months and then I’m in Flagstaff for the moment. But you know there’s not a whole range of crisis accommodation around. A couple times they’ve been like “We’ll put you up at the Gatwick,” and I’ve been like “Fuck off. I have a lesser chance of getting stabbed on the street than I have down there.” They can’t go placing people out of the frying pan and into the fire, you know, like sending them away from an abusive home and then sending them to a shelter like the Gatwick. It’s only going to make more problems, not solve them. I just don’t understand why they can’t allocate more taxes in a better way, to help solve the problem.

Interviewer: If you had to rate on a scale of one to ten the problem of family violence in our communities where would you put it?

Interviewee: You know it’d have to be a seven or eight. And different communities seem to be more susceptible, like the indigenous community, there are big problems there. But also the Anglo-Saxon community there is a slide of problems there. There’s a whole bunch of having kids that have you know, poor parenting skills. I wish they could get these blokes that have been done for repeatedly for domestic violence and make them have a vasectomy, so they can’t bloody reproduce anymore and then hopefully there is a banning order on them for going near any kids. You know, because they can’t control their temper and they can’t control their fists.

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Interview Two

Interviewer: If someone was to ask you if there's a connection between family violence and homelessness in Australia what would you say?

Interviewee: Yeah, there is a connection because when that violence happens, you can end up on the street, and then you got that violence out on the street as well, and we've got to put up with that. Either you can go home and put up with it, or you can come out here and put up with it, or there's places you could go to. But it's hard to speak about, people don't speak about it because it's family and because it's family you know. We have a lot to talk about.

Interviewer: Would you say it's one of the main reasons people become homeless?

Interviewee: Yep, violence, yep, domestic violence, family violence, sexual abuse, all of it. All of those backwards habits, all of it wrapped up in the one.

Interviewer: So when you do find yourself homeless what support is there from services that deal with these issues?

Interviewee: There is no support. I don't reckon there is any support. There's none for family violence because people think that you're bullshitting you know, you've gotta have scars and bruises to prove it. It doesn't have to be physical it can be mental abuse as well. Violence no matter how you put it.

Interviewer: How many people that you've known have had that experience where they've gone to a service and told them about it and they haven't been believed?

Interviewee: Yeah I've been through that. I have to have a police report or a doctor's report for that stuff you know. I don't like going to see the police or going to the doctors or those things you know.

Interviewer: Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Interviewee: It's hard to bring it out and talk about it because still to this day it's hard to bring it up you know.

Interviewer: How much of a difference do you think it would make if you could get safe housing? Sometimes you go into all these services and there are all these rules and the environment doesn't feel that safe anyway, but if you could get safe housing how much easier do you reckon it would be to start the journey getting better and being alright?

Interviewee: Safe housing goes a long way for the people that are in a domestic violence because it makes them feel safe and secure. To me that's a big thing to feel safe, that's the main thing.

Interviewer: What do you think about ladies that have experienced family violence and also have drug habits, do you think there is a difficulty there in accessing services?

Interviewee: Yeah there is because of the drugs. It's hard going in there looking forward to being safe and then on top of it you are an addict or whatever. And then they'll look down upon you and judge you.

Interviewer: If you could nominate your top three priorities for the government for change what would you say they were?

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Interviewee: Safe houses.

Interviewer: And what do you reckon the second most important thing would be?

Interviewee: Just housing really.

Interviewer: One thing I'm going to ask is with kids and young ones, do you reckon you see kids on the street as a result of family violence?

Interviewee: Yeah because they have problems at home, could be anything really.

Interviewer: What do you reckon would help them?

Interviewee: They need someone to talk to. The kids need someone to talk to so they can get it off their chest you know. It might not help, but it might help them inside and a little bit out. They need someone to talk to.

Interview Three

Interviewer: What are your views on damning the epidemic of family violence that we are seeing right now?

Interviewee: Yes, there is definitely an increase, a rise in family violence. Um, it's a problem for our community. I don't think we have the resources at the moment that's giving the opportunities for families to come for help. The Australian government, even the police force is not implementing enough with restraining orders, it all needs to change. I think we need to make sure that there's halfway houses maybe, that there is somewhere for women to go to, even men in some cases. That there is somewhere that they feel safe, maybe for a few days. Somewhere to go, even if they have children, I think that their educating needs to start maybe from the school. You know, we need to start educating our children about rights and wrongs. There needs to be somewhere that people can go for help, and they know they are going to get the help. And that maybe the Australian needs to start looking into and to start putting more resources into making sure that there is somewhere safe. And rehabilitation programs maybe for the abusive partners to learn and to help with.

Interviewer: Do you think we need to look at prevention, like do you think this needs to start in primary schools for example, like teaching respect for women and like a culture of non-violence. Do you think we need to start as early as then?

Interviewee: Yeah I do, I think a lot comes from the home and then from there I think a lot of it needs to be implemented in schools. You know maybe from high school, not so much primary schools. But you know the kids are becoming teenagers and young adolescents, there needs to be more education on respect for women, it's just as important as sex education. You know, we make sure that's all safe and we say the right things and everything, but hitting people and mental and physical abuse is not part of everyday living and it's not normal to treat somebody that way.

Interviewer: Do you think that when police rock up to a house because they've had a call that someone's in trouble - do you think that this whole notion to prove that they've been hurt - that we should just believe the victim?

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Interviewee: That's a tough call because there's always two sides of a story and there's always, and you know, it's hard to comment I suppose, you don't always know what really goes on. But you know, the jails are full now, we can't just go arresting people every day I suppose, and I guess that's where their hands are tied. They don't really get involved in family disputes as I've heard before but my personal opinion is yes, it's not on. People shouldn't be allowed in today's society, I feel like we are all smart enough to realise what's right and what's wrong, we are not in the caveman era anymore. It's just not how we treat people.

Interviewer: I'm just interested like - not everyone's experienced family violence in the home but I mean, stuff as in casual sort of sexism, as in the wolf whistle, a lot of our streets are plastered with billboards of women that are scantily clad - do you think that that send the wrong message to men in our community?

Interviewee: No I don't think so. I mean you can view it as art if you really need to. I mean we've been doing it for hundreds and thousands of years. I think it's just getting the right message across - on what is right and what is wrong, how we view things and you know, our bodies are our own entities and we need to treat them with respect and everybody needs to do that.

Interviewer: What would you like to tell politicians that are listening to this submission, how do you think we are letting people who are victims down right now?

Interviewee: I just don't think there's enough reinforcement for repeat offenders. I think definitely repeat offenders need to be - they need to have proper rehabilitation programs, they need jail time - if that's the answer - I'm not sure. But there needs to be proper places for women to be able to go to and feel safe and men need to be re-educated and you know, you can't just have people walk in on the streets and constantly think it's alright to rape women. Jill Meagher is a perfect example.

Interviewer: What would that re-education look like, would it be like counselling sessions?

Interviewee: Counselling, community work, you know they need to give back. There needs to be some sort of - I'm not sure what the word is - re-educating I guess, people need to realise. I know drugs are a big part of it and they take it to a whole new level. I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you think that the State and the Federal government work well enough - like for example every State has its own jurisdiction and each state has its own laws on apprehended violence orders, because of the way the Commonwealth is set up, do you think that we work well enough to impose these sorts of punishments - for want of a better way of putting it - on offenders?

Interviewee: No, I think it should be one law, one way, the whole, that's Australia, that's what we abide by that's what we say is right or wrong. Violence isn't any different in any other state, one thing isn't all right to do in one state compared to another so we should all have the same thing, same laws same punishments.

Interviewer: So it should be a federal law, rather than...?

Interviewee: Federal, definitely federal.

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Interview Four

- Interviewer:** Have you experienced family violence?
- Interviewee:** No, nothing that I can recall, no.
- Interviewer:** No arguments between your folks?
- Interviewee:** Arguments, yes, nothing physical. Nothing that's gotten out of control though.
- Interviewer:** How did that make you feel?
- Interviewee:** A bit upsetting but they always managed to work it out
- Interviewer:** Have you heard any of the recent statistics on family violence? Like, 35 women have died in the hands of their violent partners in the last year. What are your thoughts on that type of stuff?
- Interviewee:** Yeah I have heard that actually, and it is very concerning especially being a woman myself as well but I'm not quite sure what is the resolution to that?
- Interviewer:** As a young woman, do you feel safe in the community?
- Interviewee:** Well I go to Uni and I catch the train home in the dark quite often and no, I don't really feel safe to be honest.
- Interviewer:** So what examples would you present of feeling insecure?
- Interviewee:** Like when I'm walking in the dark by myself and there's no people, no one around really.
- Interviewer:** What would make you feel more safe?
- Interviewee:** Probably more security around or the public service officers on the train lines.
- Interviewer:** So you think more people in uniform and more visible?
- Interviewee:** Yep.
- Interviewer:** Do you think that there needs to be more of a community awareness or education around the safety of women in the community?
- Interviewee:** No I think there's already quite a bit and I think it's unfair to kind of say that women more education because they have a right to feel safe in their community so they shouldn't need to know how to protect themselves because that's just unfair. They should feel safe.
- Interviewer:** Do you think that men or the community in general needs to understand that it's not right for men to treat women in a way that they wouldn't treat another man for example?
- Interviewee:** Oh yeah, absolutely, definitely.
- Interviewer:** So you would support... do you think there's a need for education programs or awareness raising around the way men treat women?
- Interviewee:** Yeah, I do, yep.
- Interviewer:** Do you think that women who are victims of violence are believed, for example do you think there is an undue burden for them to prove that they've been a victim of violence? Or do you think that, from your own experience, do you think that people are believed?

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- Interviewee:** Yeah, I think that these days it's an issue that people take pretty seriously so if someone makes a claim like that people usually tend to take it seriously, they don't just brush it off or think they're lying or anything like that.
- Interviewer:** I don't know if you've heard of Rosy Batty? And her experience with her son, she lost her son?
- Interviewee:** Yep.
- Interviewer:** Do you think the States and Government could work better to prevent violence against women?
- Interviewee:** Maybe, yeah, but I really don't know what else can be done. I think it's more about just the person in general and more of a personal thing, I don't think it's an attitude in my generation and I don't know many boys that think it's okay to hit a woman. So, yeah, I'm not sure.
- Interviewer:** Do you think that younger people now understand that, I'm interested to hear what your thoughts are, that you think that younger people have a better understanding that it's not on to treat women in a violent manner?
- Interviewee:** Just speaking from personal experience, all the males that I know around my age, they would never treat a woman like that unless maybe some people might do it, but like out of anger, or if they're under the influence of drugs or alcohol, but I don't know any people, like, I don't have any friends who would treat women like that. But then I guess I wouldn't befriend someone who was like that as well. I'm not really sure, I haven't really been exposed to it.
- Interviewer:** Do you think that drugs and substance abuse are a big contributor to issues such as family violence?
- Interviewee:** Yeah definitely, and also mental health issues and anger issues, for sure, and family history of violence.
- Interviewer:** So if you were talking to a politician right now, what would you suggest to them would be one of the major things that they could do to ensure that a if woman's safety is in danger, what do you think decision makers, what differences could they make right now that could make their ability to access support easier?
- Interviewee:** I honestly don't know. I'm not sure of a resolution, I don't know. Sorry.
- Interviewer:** That's okay. Last one, do you think that because we live in a Commonwealth and every state has it's own laws on family violence and AVOs and all that kind of stuff, do you think there needs to be better coordination; do you think it needs to be a federal law, rather than each state having it's own law?
- Interviewee:** I don't really know the laws around family violence, but I think it would definitely be beneficial to have more of a universal understanding. So, yeah.

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Interview Five

Interviewer: You're aware of the huge spike in violence against women in the last... from 2009 to 2013 there was an increase of 83% in family violence. Were you aware of these figures?

Interviewee: Not of those specific figures, but I am starting to see more about it in the media, so yes and no. I think only in recent times since the have the media started to pick it up, was I aware. Previous to that it hasn't been in the media so much, so no I wasn't aware of those figures specifically.

Interviewer: So how big do you think the role of the media is in cases like this? Do you think that it plays a big enough role in educating the community about what happens on the ground?

Interviewee: No I don't think it plays a big enough role in educating just by itself. But I do think that, like it or not, the media has an important role to play in policy change in the government, so unfortunately when the only sort of way that issues get attention in the parliament is that they are in the media, so I think the media does have a responsibility in that sense, when there's a big issue out in the community to bring it to the attention to those in power to do something about it. But it's not enough, not by itself I don't think, no.

Interviewer: What are your views on, for example, women being forced, like if they've called a crisis number, now we know the crisis line got 60,000 calls in the last year - I don't know how many that works out to a day, like 50 odd a day, I'm not sure - do you think that there is enough, that the onus is placed too much on the women to prove that, you know, to be believed?

Interviewee: Absolutely. I work as a mental health worker so that's definitely been my experience with people that I work with. I think the police have changed, their response has changed in recent years and it's gotten much better I think. So, in respect to taking out violence orders on people's behalf, rather than the onus being on the woman to take them out themselves and to prove, but that onus is still there, the idea that a woman is responsible to do all of this by herself and she's the one who has to prove that that's what's happened and she has to go out and seek the help. I think it's not tenable, obviously it doesn't work because all these women are dying.

Interviewer: So what do you think would be one of the first steps to take to prevent this type of violence? What do you think would be a good first step?

Interviewee: I think - there's so many different ways - but I think that a big thing that isn't being done is education in schools. Because it's young teenagers that are going to be the next generation of people that are in these types of relationships and teaching them what a healthy relationship is and what it isn't. And I've been out of school for about ten years now and that definitely didn't happen when I was at school and I don't know if it does now, and that's really the key to long term change. And then of course, funding for services for women and men who need to escape because while we spend money on awareness campaigns, we cut funding to homelessness services and other types of support services and make it harder for people to access centrelink support if they need it, so if more people are aware of it then we need to have more support services because it would make sense that more people would be leaving those types of relationships and need support.

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Interviewer: Do you think there's enough understanding about family violence that it's not just physical violence, that it can be verbal, it can be psychological, the control of money, it can be abusive. Do you think people have that understanding? Or do you think they're really fixed on people getting beaten up?

Interviewee: I definitely think that that's an element. I think that in a way people who don't understand it are lucky because they haven't experienced it. But so many people do experience family violence as that psychological, it's not always just physical or always physical at all, but it can be just as damaging or just as frightening and it goes back to what we were saying before, you can't prove that, you can show a bruise but how can you prove that someone was speaking to you in a nasty way or manipulating you or demeaning you? And there's enough studies and there's enough information on what effect that kind of psychological abuse has on people and how the point of it is so that they don't leave, so that that focus needs to be on that, so no, I don't think that people do know a lot about it, because it is hidden.

Interviewer: Do you think that people that decision makers and the community in general understand why women don't leave? You know, you constantly hear the question 'Why didn't she leave after the first time?' Do you think people understand how difficult it is to leave a relationship with children, which could potentially make you homeless? Do you think people understand that?

Interviewee: Absolutely not. I don't think... the only way you could say 'Why didn't you leave?' is because you haven't had an experience or had an experience of someone you know or care about having this experience. If you don't understand. You would never say that if you had been through it yourself, because you know how difficult – it is so difficult, it's so difficult to leave and it's about your sense of self and it's about your psychological wellbeing, like who are you without this other person, and also the abuse is them telling you constantly that you are nothing without them, that you won't survive without them. There's that, and coupled with – especially with kids – the financial burden. If you haven't lived on benefits you don't understand that it's not living, it's surviving, and sometimes it's not even survival. You know the rental market. If you've never had a bill in your name, or never had a lease in your name, the government could give you a million dollars, you can't get a rental anywhere, it doesn't matter how much money you've got, so there's so many multifaceted elements and the community services sector do so well, they do really well, but more funding's needed for them to continue their good work.

Interviewer: So what do you see - you said that you worked in mental health - what are the types of situations that you see?

Interviewee: Well, every situation you could imagine really. It's all tied in together; homelessness and mental health issues and family violence are all so closely linked in together, so I personally have seen women who are in dangerous situations both for their physical and their mental health and they may have opportunity to leave – a physical opportunity to leave – but their emotional wellbeing is so tied up with this person who is abusing them. I've worked with

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people who have the threat of, 'You'll never see your kids again if you leave, I'll take them away,' and if you have kids or you know anyone who has kids, or if you have nieces or nephews, you know what kind of threat that is, that's more powerful than anything, more powerful than the police. So I see lots of different lives touched in totally different ways, I see people who have family violence in their growing up time, and how damaged they are now as adults because their parents weren't able to receive that help and they weren't able to get away, and now as adults they're trying to live their lives but they've got this massive

roadblock in them, with this violence affecting their mental health. So you see lots of different things.

Interviewer: So do you think that there is enough resources going into supporting victims?

Interviewee: No, I don't, and I think particularly with the budget and the federal government, they don't understand, they seem to not ask the services providing the support what they need, so they come out and they say oh they're going to do X amount of millions of dollars for this service and you've got all these services saying that that is not what we need, we need this instead. So the money seems to be there, but it's not being spent on the right things and they're not asking the right people what they should be spending it on. Of course there can always be more; homelessness support services and social workers for people, helping them get in touch with the right services is so important and it's chronically underfunded and then recently the money there is has been directed into things that aren't very helpful for the people working on the ground, I think the politicians in Canberra don't know, and they assume to know from the outside, from reading things or from advisors, but they're not actually talking to people who are living these experiences everyday and the people that help them, and asking them what they need.

Interviewer: Do you think that conceptually we've got it wrong in terms of breaking things up into family violence, homelessness, mental health, when a lot of these issues are interrelated?

Interviewee: Absolutely, and that's a struggle I find working within the services, it's difficult to refer someone to drug and alcohol services if they have unresolved mental health issues because the service will say 'we only do drug and alcohol' and vice versa if you're referring someone into a mental health service and they have a drug and alcohol issue, they have to resolve that first, so if a person has both they're kind of stuck in the middle. Same as with homelessness services tied in with drug and alcohol and mental health. It all – in my experience, it's all interrelated. If a person has been experiencing family violence for a sustained period of time, chances are they're going to have some type of mental health issue, because that's how it works, it breaks down your mind as well as your body. If a person's homeless, for whatever reason, chances are there is some kind of issue that's helped them get to that point, so I think definitely, there's a huge focus on categorising people and when people don't fit into those categories, which is most people ironically, then they miss out and they fall through the cracks, so I think a more holistic approach is definitely needed. I understand the need for guidelines but they are too rigid and these people don't get the help they need.

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Interviewer: So what are your thoughts on developing – in the terms of reference here they discuss developing a culture of non-violence – how do you think we can go about doing that?

Interviewee: That's where I definitely think that education again is really a key and starting in schools, I think that's really important. Like, for example, smoking; when my parents first started work, they smoked in offices, you would go into your office job and have your cigarette and your ashtray next to your computer, and now that's completely unacceptable because there's been a cultural change through lots of education. I think that that is key for future generations. For our current generation, I think that education campaigns are still important and community education, but it comes down to individuals, men particularly, not saying 'oh that's not my business' or 'that's not my problem' and turning the other way. I think it's pretty powerful when a man says to another man, 'hey that's not ok' that's what I think is – and community education is part of that, but the community education will shine a light onto the problems and then we need the support there to fix those problems as well. So to support people who need to get out of these situations.

Interviewer: So can you think of any other strategies that may be effective apart from just the developing a culture or community awareness? What other ways can we support victims while at the same time holding perpetrators accountable without just throwing the baby out with the bathwater and locking him up, because a lot of the time that isn't the answer, they probably come out worse, so have you got any thoughts on what we can do to make sure that things don't continue?

Interviewee: Yep, I think that funding for services that support victims is extremely important and with the increase in family violence that you were talking about before, there needs to be an equal amount in funding for services, appropriate services – that's for the victims, definitely, that needs to continue. I think the trend that we're seeing inside the police force in supporting victims and having different things open to them needs to continue, and continue to grow, so education inside the police force. When it comes to perpetrators, I suppose, and breaking that cycle, that's hard. That's a really hard one. I think, I don't know. I think that empowering victims is a massive thing and I think empowering them means that they have the ability to change their own life with a bit of help, but again, I agree with you that locking people away doesn't always fix the problem and I think we have a real focus in this country on pretending that prison is a deterrent, when it isn't. The purpose of prison is to protect the community, that's it, but both sides of the government like to say 'it's going to deter people' – it won't, it doesn't. Obviously. There's all these statistics that these types of crime are growing so I would say that community education programs for offenders. Having said that, there are situations where victims do need to be protected, and that prison might be appropriate in certain circumstances but if people are being locked away and not being taught why what they did was wrong and how they can change that then you're right, they just come out worse than when they went in.

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Interviewer: Just a final one, do you think that states, you know how we have a commonwealth and each state has a different law around – you know they're not exact laws, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, around family violence and perpetrators can move between states and basically start new lives. Do you think we do that well enough in this country, do you think we are effective and we work collaboratively enough?

Interviewee: No I don't think so. Right from driving offences through to the very top offences, if you're charged in one state often that information isn't shared between the states, so you can be pulled over by the police car and they don't know that you've been charged with drink driving in another state, and that's right through the whole gamut, so I think this focus on keeping the states separate really does disadvantage people that need to be protected. I think we don't work together well enough in the states and people fall through the gaps again and because we're so focused on categorising people and having everyone into their neat little box, that when people move around, that stuff gets missed. So I think that that's something that definitely can be focused on.

Interviewer: One more, and look, I don't know if you've experienced family violence or any type of family violence whether it be physical, but how do you think, I think you touched on it briefly earlier, but how do you think it would impact someone short-term, medium-term, long-term – how does it impact on the individual?

Interviewee: I've definitely seen in my experience that it affects people in the long-term very significantly. Particularly children, when they become adults, they may turn to perpetrators themselves, or they also have lots of very significant mental health issues, because really it's a significant trauma and it's terrorising and that changes a person's personality, it changes their mental health and so it's not just the person that is in that situation, it's everybody around them that also is affected. If you've ever seen someone who has post-traumatic stress or severe anxiety, particularly post-traumatic stress, the terror and the fear constantly, constantly checking, every time you go out for a coffee, checking that you know you can get away if you need to and things like that, it really affects a person's ability to feel safe and that impacts on every aspect of their life. This government and previous governments are very focused on people being bludgers and getting them off Centrelink benefits but they're not looking at the causes of why people need to be on these benefits, like can you imagine trying to go to work if you're afraid to leave your house? It just doesn't make sense. And it affects every single part of someone's life. And again, we're compartmentalising, so we're looking at Centrelink as a separate issue from family violence, when actually it's all tied together, it's all one thing and it's all just facets of the same type of problem.

Interviewer: What would you like to tell the Commissioners on this family violence – the people who are going to be standing and listening to this – what do you want to tell them and where do you think that we're letting people down?

Interviewee: I think the main way we're letting people down is funding wise, I think that there are people out there, men, women, children who want to escape situations who aren't able to because they're not financially able and they're not psychologically able and the services they need to support them aren't available to them. My experience is working in Melbourne and we're quite lucky really, they're still gaps, but people living in rural areas there's no hope, there's no chance because the services just don't exist out there, or they're very minimal, or they're

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very overstretched. So people don't just experience mental health issues and family violence issues in the cities, they experience it everywhere and I think we're letting them down in inappropriate funding and underfunding. And inappropriate funding is really a slap in the face; ask the services providing the support what they need, ask the people who are experiencing the violence what they need, rather than assuming that you know better. If you've never experienced it how will you know what these people need without asking them? That's what I would want to say.

Interview Six

Interviewee:

Okay, so family violence – I think something that isn't really spoken about in the dominant narrative about family violence is the effect that systemic violence, the causal role that it plays in family violence, so when you think about Jeff Kennett giving out licences so that casinos could start up here in Melbourne and the effect that gambling addiction has had on the family unit, that's not really spoken about. It's generally a hetero-normative dialect that blames men for beating up women, and then again, when you think about family violence, men are also victims of violence, and children, so I'd like to sort of see a shift. I appreciate that our sisters are experiencing family violence but so are our brothers and so are our children and so are our aunts and uncles and our grandparents. It's a whole, you know, when you think about family violence – family violence encompasses us all, we're all being really affected by this. The way I sort of see family violence, family is the basic ground level unit of society, and the state and corporations, and the role that they play in violence when companies are hiring private armies like Monsanto with Blackwater to decimate our food security and make us totally reliant on them for our food, or Hilfinger (or whatever their name is) that sell me undies to make me feel like a man or perfumes to women that they need to feel beautiful, the way that corporations invade and impact on us as people and disconnect us from each other and from reality, that plays a role in family violence. With all of these factors at play, you've got it coming at you from all angles external to family, and then within the family unit you've got it coming down at us, and you've got it coming up from the family, and eventually those two elements are going to meet in the middle somewhere, and I think that's going to be catastrophic, a lot more catastrophic than what's occurring at the moment on our social cohesiveness and our social fabric. So there's people in the Royal Commission that want to look outside the box and want to consider all aspects of causal factors and effects about what's happening in the broader society and the role it plays in family violence then you really need to sort of address the causal factors outside of the family unit, you really need to reign in the elitist position that the government's taken because I can come out here on the streets as a person with my enshrined rights to exercise my freedom of speech and the police will come out and ride horses over me, what are you saying? That I haven't got a human right to exercise freedom of speech? What message are you trying to send to the people? And taking that position against the people, what's your problem? What are you saying, that the state is allowed to use violence against people exercising their rights? Are you trying to make us scared of you? Why are you trying to make us scared of you? Are you worried that we will hold you accountable? Well guess what? At some point it's going to reach a tipping point and the role that you're playing in it is leading to violence begetting violence and no one wins out of that but it's the reality.

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Interviewer: What impact does this have on the individual? You're talking earlier how the police running over you when you're trying to speak your piece, that it closes opinion, it closes discussion or any dialogue. Isn't that sort of what the perpetrator is doing to the victim in the home, in terms of family violence?

Interviewee: I think that's a perfect example; when the truth isn't allowed to be spoken, when you're silencing the truth, basically you're living in delusion land, there will be no progressive outcomes to it, there will be no change, all you've got is people really psychologically damaged and going off into consumer land where they think that perfume will make them a whole person and ending up debt wage slaves just trying to block out the effects of what's going on, that's decimating us as people, as a community. Having real enriched relationships with each other that engage us with our humanity and dignity, when we can't do that, there's something in our brains that says, 'Well I need to block this out,' because at the moment I think we're really like battery hens who can't stand up on our legs, and we can't conceive free land because we're stuck inside this cage, we don't know what it is like to fly, we don't know what it is like to stand up, and that becomes our norm, but really it's a really dysfunctional norm.

Interviewer: So how do we best support people who are going through this? How do we get people back on their feet?

Interviewee: I think encouraging people to speak their truth and to be supported with the fear that comes out of that, and not just there and then – you've got people that were abused as children by priests, who carry those scars for the rest of their lives and we can re-traumatise them and get them to make a case against the priest and then he goes to court and then he ends up in jail for two years and there's really no justice. I guess the point I'm trying to make is that support can't be right there and then in the moment, it needs to be long term and we need to be mindful that the damage done is going to take generations to really see any healing.

Interviewer: So, it's a trauma yeah? Would you agree that it's a trauma inflicted on the victim?

Interviewee: It's a trauma, not just on a person, but then it limits their capacity to interact with other people in meaningful ways, to have trust, to have empathy, to have love in their heart with other people, and that ripples through the social fabric, it doesn't just affect the individual, it affects us all, and that is sort of a generational scar on our social fabric.

Interview Seven:

Interviewee: Family violence was something that was always part of our family because I had an alcoholic mother, so she would become pretty violent and she would become suicidal and she had a mental illness, she was a person with bi-polar. So as far as I can remember in the family it was standard procedure that we would have things like the Sunday roast would end up on the ceiling, and when mum was good she was our mum and we all loved her and it was a really happy joyful family, but when mum was drinking that's when she became pretty offline and pretty violent. So dad got frequently stabbed with the carving knife and my sister and I, we got stabbed a few times and we always had an exit route, which was the little window through the laundry, that was our escape route when mum was completely offline.

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So it was regular feature of our family that we had an ongoing session of visitations of police and psychiatrists and GPs and mental health workers. I remember when I was quite young coming home from school, I was probably in year [REDACTED], I remember coming home and I found mum had attempted to strangle herself on the hills hoist clothes line using the garden hose, so that was a pretty devastating experience to go through. And I remember clearly another

time when dad and I went out searching for mum - she'd gone off at 3AM in the morning and we found her lying across the railway tracks at [REDACTED] railway station, she was waiting for the train to come and we eventually found her there. So, that was sort of an ongoing ... it was difficult because we sort of oscillated wildly between a lot of happy times and family cohesion and a lot of love and joyful family spirit, but when mum was drinking she was offline, it became really violent, so there was that weird sort of dichotomy and the effect that it had on me was that I became really insular. As I got older it meant that it was impossible to invite friends to come around, so I kind of bypassed my adolescence in a way, so I was never able to have friends over, I was never able to go through the normal adolescent boyfriend- girlfriend kind of stage because the whole violence thing permeated everything and I think it effected me. I became insular, I became bookish, I became pretty much a bit of a loner and it's a miracle really that I managed to get through school in one piece and go to college and end up working. But I think it was only perhaps as I got older I realised the impact that had on me, and I often wonder whether my significant mental health issues, whether that was connected to the dramas that we had ongoing like thirty years or so, and whether that was related, and whether that's still being expressed today. And I'm really still dealing with that. And it was only in recent months a psychologist said to me that in his view he felt that I was having some sort of ongoing post-traumatic stress thing and it never occurred to me, because I got through it seemingly relatively unscathed, but on reflection I realised that a lot of what makes up me today, a lot of that was filtered and permeated by all the dramas that we had with mum when she was offline and the violence. That's the other thing too, I think that if you're talking about family violence, even though it's a really small percentage, you've gotta be aware that it's not always a hundred percent directed from the male to the female, it could be the other way around. My dad was very cool and very calm and very placid, and as my sisters and I were, but we copped the full brunt of pretty savage violence directed from the woman, i.e. my mum. That was an ongoing nightmare and it's a difficult one.

Interviewer: Can I ask you, a) how did you survive it? and b) what could have been in place to have supported you through that and supported your mum so that she would have got some help?

Interviewee: Probably nowadays there would have been more support, I mean she's passed away now, but probably today there would have been more targeted support for someone like mum. But in those days, particularly in the 60s and 70s there didn't appear to be a lot. Mum was in and out of mental health facilities like [REDACTED] and like [REDACTED] and I remember it was always with a pretty heavy heart and a lot of sadness where the kids and dad, you know we'd drop mum off and she'd go into these facilities for three or four weeks to try and get her act together and get medication. I have really powerful memories of us walking through the

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door and mum sort of saying to us 'You are taking us home now, aren't you? Like I'm coming home with you now aren't I?' and we sort of, I remember dad having to say 'Look we're going to have to leave you here because you need help and look we can't take you with us yet.' And I remember a wistful forlorn image of us waving goodbye almost through the back window of the car and me looking at a place like [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] and sort of waving goodbye but with a tear in my eye, and also the experience of being in a place like that where there were big dudes and white jackets – it sounds like a bit of a cliché but it was actually pretty accurate, this is the 70s - and lock and key. It's funny how the music that they were playing often resonates because of that event, when I was saying goodbye to mum. I remember there were a couple of rock songs, one in particular they were playing "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" by Elton John and now whenever I hear that song it kind of sends a shiver because it just floods back a whole lot of memories. So I don't know what could have been done then but I know that its left me...if the question is what could have been done, probably more earlier intervention could have been one thing and maybe less purely drug therapy for mum, you know if she had been in some kind of group therapy or some sort of counselling that could have assisted. But in the 60s and 70s mental health wasn't necessarily the best and even today it's pretty heavily flawed but it's probably better today than it was in those days, but I mean I'm still struggling with a lot of – you gotta be careful that you don't blame the circumstances on where I am today, though it does make you wonder that mum did have bipolar and I have bipolar and the theory is that there might be a genetic predisposition so it makes you wonder about that, but for me, every day is a real drama. I've got really high suicidal ideation problems and I've got full on bipolar and I've been through the griller, in and out of psych wards, here at [REDACTED] and so everyday I wake up and It's a real battle for me cos I have to find a reason as to why I should live today, so I've got all the ropes and I've got the freight train timetable and I've got a huge bowie knife and the razor blades and it's just a question of why don't I do it today, and here we are in 2015 and I've been through the mental health system ad nauseum and had multiple overdoses last year and one earlier this year and I've been in triage at [REDACTED] and I've been in the acute psych wards a couple of weeks at a time and the system hasn't really hasn't done me that much, you know, the system's kind of failed me. So everyday it's a real battle to think why should I live today? I'm just going to leave because I just don't want to live anymore, so it's a real personal struggle for me everyday to find a really good reason when I get up why I shouldn't just cut the corata artery with my knife and just let it go. And so it's a big issue but it's a difficult question to answer [REDACTED] because it's hard to unravel how you unscramble the egg in terms of all that family violence and how that sort of affected me and to what extent and whether it's really my lack of strength and lack of will, my lack of resilience, cause I tend to just go with the flow, I don't feel very strong at all, I'm like super fragile and I've got this incredible anxiety disorder which means it's incredibly difficult to get out of the flat, so if actually can get out and access food and go to a group and go to a meeting whether it's HPU or whatever, that's a monumental achievement for me.

Interviewer: So what you're suggesting is that community people having other people that will treat you as an equal, treat you with respect, is helpful and I'm wondering whether that would have been helpful to you as someone who lived through it and also for your mum?

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- Interviewee:** It might have been helpful for my mum, that's a difficult one cos we'll never know, that's a hard one to know whether it would have been helpful. My guess is that it might have been helpful if she'd had more resources and more support, that probably would have been helpful particularly with mental illness support, and support for her alcoholism, but for me, I suppose the main point is that I've been through residential care, I've been through the acute psych wards, I've had a huge range of support networks and mental health staff assisting me out, of personal care workers and all that and it hasn't helped me much at all, so I'm still back at square one. The system's failed me.
- Interviewer:** Why do you think you – did you ever attempt to runaway from home while this was going on? Why do you think you stayed?
- Interviewee:** Probably because I was pretty young and naïve and there was really nowhere else to go. I mean the idea of homelessness probably never crossed my mind, at that time I was pretty young. And you gotta remember that the family wasn't constantly being torn apart, it came in waves, so there'd be periods of time we'd go for months and months where she wouldn't touch a drink, it'd all be okay, but then it would flare up and it would be a nightmare for a couple of months and then it would settle, so it went in sort of cyclic periods almost. But I suppose I'm a – I guess one of the points I'd make is that it's really difficult to get a handle on exactly how and why and what is the extent and what is the process that family violence impacts on you. Sometimes you don't understand yourself fully how it's permeated, it's like it gets you at the cellular level, and it's very hard to sort of unravel that, and distance yourself and be clinical and outside, and look inside yourself to try and work out, but it definitely shaped me, and for the worst by a mile.
- Interviewer:** I mean the Royal Commission needs to hear these sorts of things, as much as they would like to find solutions to these problems, they also need to hear what people have been through, what their thoughts are. What do you think about this idea of developing a culture of non-violence, you know, to counter our current culture where we resolve issues through conflict? Do you believe there is merit in trying to develop this culture of non-violence?
- Interviewee:** Yeah, I think that there's always merit in trying to develop a culture of non-violence, but I suppose in a broader – if I was to try and be a bit of a smarty-pants – in a broader sociological societal viewpoint, violence is very much part of our cultural DNA, and violence in many forms on many different levels is promoted and almost rewarded. I mean, we have massive extreme violence and that's honourable and we call that war, but when we engage in private violence from one individual to another we incarcerate and punish, but there's all that institutional violence, there's corporate violence, and that's all condoned. It's almost like we have a very superficial violence-free veneer, but the hard-core reality of the way that society is structured and the way society functions, it's almost like it's a requirement of society functioning to have violence. It's almost like at a societal level we need a high level of violence in order to justify all the forces of oppression and all the legalities of it all and all the social control stuff.
- Interviewer:** So perhaps we're not being honest with ourselves when we're looking at violence and when we're looking at family violence there's too narrow a focus and we need to be looking at violence as a whole throughout the community – is that what you're suggesting?

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Interviewee: Yeah, I think family violence is just one tip of the iceberg, it's just one reflector of the much deeper malaise of broad societal and social violence on a huge scale in many different forms and many different ways, and I think just one expression of that is through family violence. So family violence maybe is almost like a meter or an indicator level of the kind of violence that we really have in terms of society as a whole. You know, it makes you wonder of the devastating personal cost of family violence, but also there's the economic devastating cost of family violence in terms of drug and alcohol requirement and mental health issues, and just the personal devastation and the loss of personal potential and personal creativity, and lives lost and what lives could have been, but what was lost because of family violence. But look, I consider myself lucky, very much I consider myself lucky because there are issues out there where the violence is way more extreme and way more devastating than what I experienced, so my heart goes out for those people and for those families, so I consider myself one of the incredible lucky ones that I've kind of survived to some extent.

Interviewer: What would you like to leave? If you had a chance to speak to one of those Commissioners right now what would be three things that you think might need to happen so that people aren't going through this by themselves, whether they be victims or perpetrators or members of family? What are three things that should be in place?

Interviewee: I don't know, I don't have answers; that's a hard one, but probably just in general terms I'd say – it sounds like a bit of a cliché – but there needs to be ongoing continual awareness raising of the issue of domestic violence, there needs to be a lot more funding towards domestic violence and there needs to be recognition that perhaps family violence is an indicator of a much more deep rooted and deep seated idea about violence in general in terms of society at large, like corporate and institutional violence. But also, I think that domestic violence in the normal setting goes to the heart of the general relationship between men and women, so I think it's almost like a core central DNA component of patriarchy, and all that that means and all that flows from that. I think that patriarchy has a lot to answer for, and I think we've come a long way, but there's a long way to go. But certainly, in terms of the reality of helping and assisting, there needs to be constantly more funding, I think, to try and provide more resources for victims of domestic violence or survivors of domestic violence, primarily I guess it's mainly for women, but it really goes to the heart of the nature of the relationship between men and women in our society, and why it is that domestic violence cuts across all different societies at all different levels. There's something about patriarchy that's pretty rotten at the core.

Interviewer: Do you think we need to have a look at the family structure as well? Like the nuclear family, they call it the bedrock, some other people I've spoken to today have said that it's the founding institution of our society, now do you think that we need to examine that whole institution?

Interviewee: Yeah I think that we do, I think we need to acknowledge that there are all sorts of valuable and viable alternatives to the so-called family structure and we see a bit of that now in society, but I think we do need to call into question whether the so-called idea of mum, dad and 2.4 kids, whether that's really a healthy, viable structure in the long run. And the other thing is, it's a bit of a cliché but you'd have to say that a lot of other family structures and

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other family systems are pretty shocking, but the way that the system we've got now – the sort of nuclear family - it's sort of the best of the horrific bunch, so it's deeply flawed, but it's less deeply flawed than the alternatives, but in terms of yes, I would agree that we really need to examine and promote alternative ways and alternative structures for the family; have an educative process that families don't have to be that power thing between a man and a woman and 2.4 kids, that there are viable options that can work.

Interviewer: Thanks very much, man.

Interview Seven

Interviewee: I've been homeless now for about 25 years off on and on. I've been in and out of refuges, hostels, boarding homes, on the street, motels, tents, laneways.

Interviewer: And do you think there's a strong connection to family violence, domestic violence and homelessness?

Interviewee: Yeah, I do. I know lots of people that have been in violent situations where they have been either bashed or have been molested by their family members or partners or whatever.

Interviewer: What would have needed to be in place to stop them entering the streets from those situations?

Interviewee: I reckon there should be more police patrolling around and basically more support out there. These days there are just too many young children you know, on the streets and that, and there's so much crime and deaths and everything, it's just terrible these days.

Interview Eight

Interviewee: I've been homeless for five years and I've been getting off and on with a house and I've been staying in hotels. I just walk around everywhere, sometimes I get in cars with men and sometimes I don't. I start cursing trams and I make money, people give me money and then I calm down. I look for a drink, I'm a bad alcoholic and that's about it. It's alright being on the street but you have to keep up with food and people give you food.

Interviewer: How's your day been today?

Interviewee: I trooped down the [REDACTED], sometimes if I'm not down at the [REDACTED] I'm over at [REDACTED]. I go out to my foster mum out in [REDACTED]. I'd go see her but she's not home, she's with her boyfriend. I try to make mum support me but she won't support me. Me and my mum, we don't get along because we argue all the time. So I go to my sister's place and me and her argue. So I don't have much luck with my family, so they worry about me and they come look for me. I go and they have a drink with me, talk. They come and stay with me for a while. We walk around ... I go to my nephew's place he's alright with me, he has too much smoke, then I go back to the street.

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Interview Nine

Interviewer: Would you say that there is a big connection between family violence and homelessness?

Interviewee: We are seeing a lot more of it, a lot more women on the street particularly, that have had to flee their situations and they are left with no options. Refuges particularly, if they've got drug and alcohol problems aren't keen to take them in.

Interviewer: If you could make two or three recommendations to the government what would they be?

Interviewee: Well, mental health issues are a big thing - people with mental health issues. Women with kids it seems, in that situation the women come to the attention of children's services because they are putting children at risk, but they never look at the male partner in the relationship that may be committing the violence. So it seems that the fault lies with the women for not leaving the home. Particularly if she's going out trying to access services, she's between a rock and a hard place because she has got to take the children with her. And some of the services may not be the best place for children, if they are trying to access a lot of services like community health services, where there may be other people attending that have mental illnesses or drug and alcohol issues, they don't want children there. And if they leave the kids at home they are criticised for leaving the kids at home. There needs to be more support I think for women with children definitely. I guess my main advice to the government is pull your finger out, you've made lots of promises and Robert Doyle is continuously in the press saying he's going to do this that and the other for homeless, but I am yet to see any of it come to.

Interviewer: And what do you reckon are the main barriers with people accessing housing who have experienced family violence?

Interviewee: The places that they want to send people, if you go into crisis accommodation services they want to send people to boarding houses that aren't necessarily safe for women and children. Like they are trying to leave non violent situation and they are forced into another. We see clients all the time who are kind of saying I'd rather be on the street than be in a boarding house.

Interview Ten

Interviewee: The way I think about it is that it's an opportunity and that it's quite a painful time for a lot of people, because a lot of stuff that we haven't spoken about as a community for a long time, that was happening, we are speaking about. It's quite painful for a lot of people who have been touched in different ways, but I think also that it's a time for some optimism in a way, because we are talking about it and it's an opportunity for us a community to think, and think really deeply, about problems of violence and the way that impacts different people. And try and address it in some way. And I don't think it's a simple issue at all. And I think for anybody who has been involved in those situations as a primary or secondary, I don't like the word victim, but as a person who has experienced this stuff, it's never particularly straightforward. But I think it's an opportunity, a painful opportunity. I think it's really important for us to be courageous about actually facing some of that complexity and the different causes and also the breadth we have as a community and how that impacts people. And how we need to not only call it out, but also we need to support people, and

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understand the way that that can produce trauma and traumatic responses, and aggression and isolation, and a whole lot of avoidance type stuff. I think it's a very, very complicated thing and I think it's an opportunity for us to heal ourselves and heal other people and engage in – it sounds hippie-ish, but I don't mean it in that way because it is a complicated problem, and it's causes are to do with, of course, gender stereotyping, patriarchy, law. You know, it's only so recently that women even had rights, I think sometimes people talk about domestic violence as if it's a moral thing everybody should know, but the reality is that it's a changing culture that we're in as well, and it's not so long ago that women didn't have the vote, were earning half wages, all that type of thing. We're in a transition and I think it represents a big opportunity for change and evolution potentially. I think a lot of the big institutions have been greatly discredited through the Royal Commissions into Sexual Abuse and also this Royal Commission into Family Violence is another opportunity to look at the way our society is structured and the way it supports violence, it punishes victims, it criminalises victims and really, I guess, one of my big hopes is that we try to think about building community as a response, you know really building a community that doesn't marginalise people who have had traumatic experiences but actually helps them to heal and gives them opportunities and gives them a leg-up, instead of saying 'you're a hopeless loser'. You know, there's all these labels that people ...

Interviewer: You mention something, just in that answer, that I find interesting in that you're optimistic that this is happening, that the Royal Commission is happening. But what do you think the impact is on people that are survivors when they hear politicians say, "we recognise that there is an epidemic," but at the same time they bring down a budget and there's no money for family violence? How do you think that impacts – that issue of a mixed message – do you think it impacts someone who has been a survivor?

Interviewee: I think it definitely does, I tend to err on optimism, just as a person, it's been part of my survival, always seeing opportunities and always being hopeful, of course it's not particularly meaningful, but I think that this commission has an opportunity to look at – I mean I think one of the big issues has been around where are we prepared to put money? How much does something matter to us? Does it matter enough to talk about it, or does it matter enough to house people? Does it matter enough to put money into programs, does it matter enough to – I mean one of the issues I feel is that a lot of people who've experienced – well one of the reasons I really felt that I wanted to make a submission is because a number of very close friends and family of mine have died. And I feel that through this Royal Commission it really made me reflect on the fact that family violence had put them at such a huge struggle, disadvantage from such a young age, like 14 or so, on the streets, and there were programs that were trying to engage, maybe, some of them, I'm not saying that nothing was available, but nothing that could understand where they were at, and their anger and their frustration and hurt, and trying to figure out what came into that as always tends to, you know there was drug use and those sorts of things. And I really feel like society was constantly saying to them 'You're a loser, you're not really someone that's worthy of dignity,' and was not supporting them in any way to recover. And they were homeless, and I was homeless myself, and I feel that that struggle of getting back your dignity as a person when you've experienced violence is such a struggle, and I think the question is what do we as a community feel is our collective responsibility to do for people who've been treated that way,

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or who have had those experiences. And I think one of the issues that comes up a lot is how do we stop - say for me, I've had a number of experiences that have given me some sort of PTSD and I've got a strong commitment inside to being a non-violent person and to trying to do what I can for other people in that way, because violence replicates, and I think for me one of the things that is really important to understand is that the concept of victims and perpetrators is very complicated and sometimes people say things like 'Well why did she stay?' and all of that nonsense which is just really irritating, but the reality is that there's many reasons and some of the reasons are that your mind gets affected heavily, your self-esteem gets affected heavily, your functionality gets affected heavily, you might become substance dependent which makes you a criminal in the normal community, you don't have money because you're criminalised cos of your drug dependence, you have to spend money to feel okay. But the other thing is I think that a lot of people who are perpetrating violence are various sorts of very weak people who are very, very broken, and I guess that part of it is not necessarily understood very well. Like a lot of times people are worried, they're worried, like "If I leave, he'll die for sure," and that sort of thing, and it does happen you know. And I think a lot of times that's not recognised that sometimes people are trying to care by themselves for people who probably need a whole community to care for them. And also, there's - I mean it's a very complicated issue - but also a lot of women are conditioned to care and to try to meet people's needs and to look after them a bit; I don't know it's very complicated, but I think that breaking down, learning again what it means to be a person as opposed to being a woman or a man, what it means to relate respectfully and lovingly and non-violently to other people, they're very important things that young people need to be learning and I think also as a society. If we're serious about it, then we need to reflect that through what we do with people, the way we treat them, the way we support them or don't support them. You can't expect a grassroots movement that's not reflected in what - the government also has a strong responsibility to fund services, to fund housing, I mean the whole idea that you've got young people who've been victims of violence wandering around the streets in unsafe conditions in a wealthy country, it's just really pretty offensive, you know it offends me greatly. And the idea that there's something wrong with them because they might be using drugs to survive that particular lifestyle is pretty offensive too. I really challenge anyone to try it for three months and see how they go - it makes me angry. And you have this layering of trauma that happens to people, and it's just astonishing that people survive it, really. What I'd really love the Commission to think about is the role that - for example you know that we put a lot of money into prisons and a lot of people are dealt with through that particular system which is extremely expensive and I wonder how many people, if they had a safe space, and weren't - if their mental health issues and their drug dependence was actually dealt with as health issues instead of criminal issues, which I really think - it shouldn't be controversial, and I think you would be surprised at how uncontroversial that is in the community because most people know someone or they understand that situation. You know if you had a safe space, if you weren't criminalised and broke, and you also didn't have this really strong message that you weren't worth anything and you weren't worthy, you might see a lot faster changes in the way people evolve, the opportunities they're able to take up, the way they're able to heal and build self esteem. I actually think the entire system militates against it, I really do. And I think the other thing is that if you're vulnerable as a woman, and weak and vulnerable - there's so many people

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wandering around searching for that, and I have to say another thing that's been very significant for me is that through this Commission, and through, even say for example the Herald Sun reporting on this type of stuff, it's actually made me have to accept that some things that I thought were okay weren't, cos I've had that survivor mindset, of like "I'm alright, nah, I've always been fine, everything's been fine," and you shut a lot of things out because you want to be strong, because you want to survive, you have to decondition yourself to all the things that society's telling you all the time about yourself, but yeah I think that that's a good thing, even though it's painful of saying 'Yeah well that was actually a really violent situation where I was being exploited and I would never do that to another person.' But that's helped me think of the kind of person I do want to be and the kind of thing I think is acceptable and not acceptable in human behaviour. So when I see that kind of process happening in me I think that maybe that process is happening in other people as well and that's really a good thing. So that's one of the things that I'm feeling optimistic of breaking down, and that's difficult, but sometimes it's a chance for change.

Interviewer: So how does that happen systemically?

Interviewee: I think my view is that you can have resources. That's one thing. But I think you have to change the thinking, you know when the thinking changes, like we still live in a democracy of sorts, and when you build an understanding and a discourse and it becomes common knowledge for example that a lot of women are homeless because of family violence. I mean one of the big issues that comes up often is deserving and undeserving victims, and I think it's a really sad situation that there's a lot of women who have experienced terrible, terrible harms – and men – who aren't really recognised as legitimate victims because of mainly drug dependence or because of they just don't fit a particular stereotype or whatever. And I don't like the word 'victims' of course, but I think just that respect of, 'So you've been through some heavy shit, you might need a bit of understanding, a bit of compassion, a bit of acceptance, someone to really focus on your positive attributes and capabilities.' To me that's pretty basic stuff, and I think if we can build a bit more understanding of how people end up where they are, and the fact that they probably – and I feel this very strongly – because I feel like there should be a big mural, or a big statue in the city to people who died because of a lack of compassion, a lack of understanding, a lack of recognition that they were harmed and fucking brutalised by other human beings who had no concept, and you know a lot of it was, if I look back, a lot of the stuff I've seen was patriarchal violence, it's violence that is born of a particular system of gender relations, that we've been conditioned into and the whole thing - I think the whole construct of madness and then you look at for example the Royal commission into Sexual Violence and you know a lot of what people were talking about was always true, and of course they were messed up, of course they couldn't adapt, so it's this thing of trying to really start to be accountable for what we're responsible for, what we can lend a hand with, how we can educate ourselves and each other in the community, and then demanding of the government to reflect those values that we decide as a community actually matter. And I think there's not many people in the community who would see a sixteen year old kid and say 'I don't think they deserve housing.' I don't understand that, I don't believe it. I think if you gave people the complexity of that person's situation they'd say, 'They need care, they need acceptance, they don't need arbitrary kind of - they need to be understood, that they're traumatised, they're going to act out, they're going to probably not want to be completely sober all the time because

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probably it's a bit painful.' And I think our society is quite happy for – I mean a lot of people are on community treatment orders and that sort of thing – I think we need to break down some of those ideas, people are often self medicating and I guess one of the things I've noticed as well is there are bad people out there who are criminals, there are very bad people, and I have no problem with people like that being put in prison and all of that; I'm quite heartless about it in fact, but there's a whole of people who are wrapped up in the criminal justice system and in poverty, and they're just victims of circumstances and they're really nice people you know, they're really kind, compassionate, and it would be good if they were able to do something better with their lives.

Interviewer: Do you think that we need to re-examine the whole notion of the family? You know, a lot of Tory politicians say that the family's the cornerstone of society, do you think that – as you talked about earlier, patriarchy, sex role stereotyping is something that's really damaging and we need to see each other as human beings first – do you think we need to re-examine the family and the family structure?

Interviewee: Well I do think that the more, even across a few generations, not many generations, it's become a lot more one unit, and if that unit is not working it's all secret, you know what I mean? The reality is that even in my own community, I'm a mother, I have other friends who are mothers who are sometimes not coping, and the fact that we can be honest and help each other and say, 'I've got this issue, and I'm not the perfect mother at the moment, I'm kind of freaking out,' or whatever. You know that thing about how a child needs a village? I really believe that, you know? And also that it takes – and I'm not saying that there aren't bad people, because there is and I know that there's bad people and I don't really care about them, but I think that there's a lot of families that are just struggling, they've got their own trauma, and the more that our communities can become actual communities that take collective responsibility for each other and our children - children should always be sacred to everybody who knows them, not just to the parents. I feel that there's a lot of pressures that that puts that are also problematic and are also not helpful for the kids, it's not helpful if the kids are in a difficult situation and there's no where else for them to go. So yeah, I do think that's a problem. And then also, it's a funny thing, but I also think that a lot of that stuff is falling apart at the moment in my opinion, and it's a difficult time for women and men, because it's becoming very fluid and I think it's also very confusing, the certainties are gone. Like me for example, I raised my child by myself, I was widowed at a very young age and I've never been in a nuclear family, but I don't, I'm really glad about that - I really feel that that's given me a whole community, I was able to reach out to so many more people, and my brothers and extended family to raise my child, and I was able to acknowledge that I don't have everything she needs - I don't have it - and in a way that gave me the opportunity to see that there's a better way to do it.

Interviewer: Are you talking physical things, emotionally?

Interviewee: I think a lot of it is emotionally, definitely I came up against – look I'm going to say this one thing, which is that single mother's pension is not much and if you live with a man at all there's an assumption that you're being supported, I want to say that's a joke. I've never had that situation of being supported. I've cared for people, but I haven't been supported. And the other thing is that caring for children is one of the worst paid jobs in this culture, and

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that says very clearly to me what we think about something that is classified as women's work.

Interviewer: We don't value it.

Interviewee: We don't value it at all, and one woman to four children, and if you work, if you're a poor person, you're paying most of your wages to pay for childcare. That put me in a very structurally disadvantaged situation, and I remember thinking very clearly, I've got two options: I can sell drugs or I can do sex work, and I think well if that's a progressive society, I don't know. And also, I was at university, I was going to school at the time and they said, 'Oh people have assumed that we want to make beds and that we want to do women's work,' there was that kind of feminist discussion and I was really offended and said so. For me that was sacred duty, you know, like looking after children is the most important thing that I do with my time and that's your trip, and that's a capitalist trip, and it's because you don't make money out of that work and I think that if the Commission's serious, it is very important that they think about the way we value work and value community because I think the State is becoming more discredited, the church is more discredited, and the thing that will end up taking its place is capitalism - and people will think that that sounds very fruity, but no, it's completely rational and completely true, and if we want to think about the way we want to structure communities so that they're safe, we actually need to add that into our analysis, the way in which we treat women's work and what value we give to it. I personally think that raising children is the most important thing that happens.

Interviewer: It seems that social media, TV, it seems to be bringing up kids and we're allowing that to happen, yeah? Is that the impression that you get, or is that what you're seeing?

Interviewee: I don't know what I'm seeing really, the main thing that I think is that if you're not of the upper class, so if you don't have a very big money earning job, working is not necessarily going to help you with money, because just the way the financial system works and I think that while your children need fulltime care, from 0-5, that's a major structural disadvantage for a woman who's not able to rely on a man to support her - and I think the reality is those certainties are changing, as we shift and try to be more, it's kind of like we've lost one expectation but haven't been able to replace it with anything else, so I've never had any expectation that someone will support me, but at the same time, the structural capacity to support myself has been limited if I wanted to care for my child appropriately. So I think as things change, we need to evolve with them.

Interviewer: So if men aren't going to step up to the plate and women are forced to deal with these issues of bringing up families by themselves, how do you see community stepping in to assist?

Interviewee: I think that there's still a lot of, I guess one of the issues is around - I'm going to go off topic cos I don't really have an answer to that - I think it's an organic thing, where if we actually begin to value those maternal, childrearing community-based values, then it happens. And it happens in some communities more than in others, where there's more of a collective responsibility for raising children, but I don't know, I guess we build it in our own communities and hope that that translates. For me, I've always insisted on it, if anyone wants to be involved with me, but you know just community wise, this person has the top

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seat at the table, so if you want to sit at the table you need to accept that that's the situation. But I do think that the consequences of violence and trauma, women are still – and men I'm sure, but I'm not a man so I can't talk to that – but the stigma remains. That somehow it was your fault, and why were you in that situation to begin with and it's very hard not to internalise that and I think also people end up in these patterns. For me, I've decided not to be in relationships, but I think that I also feel unhappy that that's the call I've had to make, but there's a stigma around – if a man needs my help and is feeling emotional, I can be supportive; if I need help and am feeling emotional I'm needy – and these sorts of thing affect our fundamental relationships; I'm clingy, I'm whatever, we have these kind of weird concepts about the way we interpret -

Interviewer: How do we change those cultural – what would you call them -?

Interviewee: Conditioning, for me it's conditioning. I think we have to have a – for me I have a zero-tolerance and I try to speak to it every time it happens, but I think we're in a difficult painful time because the other thing that is very clear to me is how many men have been impacted by the same sorts of things, the classic scenario is a step family, a man comes in and wants to own the wife and is excluding or harsh on the children because he's playing out that masculine role and I know many men who have left home at twelve because of that sort of thing and that's classic patriarchal weirdness. It's like, this twelve year old boy is a threat to me because he has his mother's love, well I've seen that played out a million times and I guess the main thing is breaking down those gender roles and saying, 'You know what? Someone's bits don't define them, we're human first, we have a lot in common as humans, most of it.' And any conditioning that is shifting that is probably not productive, probably we should be treating people with equality and respect whatever their gender is, and sometimes it goes into this overarching anti-man thing - I don't accept that either, we're all part of this conditioning, we all have to work ourselves out of it and learn to have respect for non-violent relationships. And I do want to say that there's one other thing that happens inside, is that a lot of people generally - and a lot of people who've experienced trauma - have a fear of loss and they try to express that through controlling behaviours. I think we all need to have a deeper understanding of the way that works and how we can get a hold on it, because I see that playing out in a lot of violent situations is fear, loss, not being able to know that you'll be okay, that you're a self-sustaining person, that you've got a whole community that loves you, that sort of thing, but that's a deeper thing that affects all of us and I think any proper analysis needs to look at those three things: one is patriarchal hegemony, and the conditioning it's left us with which is inherently disrespectful, structural, it's not a conducive space to protecting children and giving them nurturing and so on. And I think the second thing is our society - particularly through the way we allocate money and resources and what work we value clearly indicates where our values sit, so we need to be responsible for that. And the third thing I think we need to be understanding is that people have inside of them, this struggle often between fear of loss and a fear of being left alone and learning the basic tools of respectful relationships which are a lot about letting go and giving people autonomy and freedom and not trying to control people because you're afraid. They're the only things I know, or feel that I know, but I would really love it if the Commission thought about those things.

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Interview Eleven

Interviewee: My story is a day in the life of myself whereon this particular afternoon I entered into a healthcare centre and with obvious wounds, bleeding from my head, I was turned away. I believe that that is not only physically harmful, but possibly fatal for some, and also has a psychological repercussion that has never left me. I think that the lack of community support, in not having anywhere to turn to in that crisis, is a failing there. I also think that healthcare professionals should have a duty of care to give people first aid to a person in obvious need. If someone is bleeding from their head, you should treat that wound. If someone is having a heart attack, you should help them, if you can't you should take them to a hospital, get an ambulance for them, anything. Anything but turn them away, because turning people away like I said, is physically harmful and can be possibly fatal, and like I said can have psychological repercussions.

Interviewer: Do you think that it needs to be the responsibility of all of the community or just the services that have been charged with that responsibility?

Interviewee: I think that it's the duty of care of the services charged with that responsibility but I also believe that there is an extreme lack of community support for these issues.

Interviewer: How do you think we can best make perpetrators responsible for their actions?

Interviewee: Harsher penalties - actually have a penalty, not just some four hour 'lock you up for a warning', but a real severe penalty. It should be treated as first hand crime, you are not allowed to walk up and knock somebody down in the middle of the street, you are not allowed to open your car door and knock somebody off their bicycle, if somebody has hurt another person and assaulted that person they should be held accountable for that crime. It shouldn't just be considered insignificant.

Interviewer: What strategies do you think would be effective?

Interviewee: I think having health care representatives, health care professionals should be able to do what they are supposed to be doing, providing a health care service, and if they are to administer first aid they should. If it's as simple as making a phone call to check somebody's identity, check their Medicare number they should do that and they shouldn't be turning people away.

Interviewer: Do we need to be doing more than just treating a wound?

Interviewee: Definitely, that's where community support is valid - having outreach programs, having places people can go to before a situation gets too volatile is crucial. Including having counselling services for people who are very aggressive and have so much anger, they've often grown up in it and have no other way of expressing their anger, and when they have nowhere to turn to and no counselling, no support for them. You've got people calling up phone numbers that are non-existent and not getting answered, therefore they don't have anybody to talk to them down or learn how to use other coping strategies for their anger. Therefore they take it out on everybody else and cause grievous bodily harm to people. I think with community support in that area specifically that would help somehow or another for people to have opportunities. If there is a support service there for them to access it, and having that there gives them a chance to help them take responsibility and accountability for

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their own actions and without that there, the system is failing and everything is falling apart. And cutting funding to outreach services that are already underfunded to me sounds ridiculous.

Interviewer: Do you think there is enough community awareness or do you think that there needs to be some investment in a community education campaign in and around family violence?

Interviewee: I think that it's been indoctrinated into society this sense of normalcy about violence, and people are very complacent and accepting of violence as an everyday day-to-day thing. So I do think there needs to be more community awareness and it's an issue and a topic people should be talking about at every chance they can. It is also a very difficult and sensitive topic for people to talk about which makes it really hard for people to be able to do that. So yes I would say there needs to be more community support and more awareness and a lot of factors in there, but we can't all be held accountable for what other people's actions are, people need to be accountable for their own actions, but we also need to help people before they get to this breaking point and do something wrong with their lives that changes and messes up everybody's life as a ripple effect.

Interviewer: What do you think could be some strategies for early prevention of family violence, what would you suggest to someone that has been through it?

Interviewee: I would say harsher penalties for perpetrators. I'd also say more counselling options available, for both a perpetrator and a victim, having real places there, real outreach programs there and having them there and accessible I think.

Interviewer: What about stuff in schools like education programs in schools? Before it comes to the point where people are actually just beating each other up.

Interviewee: Yeah I'd agree to that. I'd say that's a good idea.

Interviewer: Do you have any ideas about early intervention to identify and protect those at risk of family violence?

Interviewee: Like I said before, having counselling services in place to help people when they first need to reach out and having them accessible and having them available, like a toll free phone number that's actually staffed, that's actually manned, that will actually be able to take calls.

Interviewer: And support for victims of family violence? It seem like the government has put no extra money into family violence in the last budget that came down. What kinds of things would you like to see money put into to support women who have gone through or are experiencing family violence?

Interviewee: I'd say outreach resource, outreach services, outreach programs, there's a lot of domestic violence outreach programs at the moment that are crucially underfunded, that are understaffed, and the people who are working there are completely pushed to the maximum which makes it really hard for them to work with people in such a delicate situation. But we need these to be in place, not axed and chopped away, we need these to be supported, and if there is funding, funding should go to these programs to help people.

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- Interviewer:** Would you say that there needs to be simple things put in place where police believe victims? Is something as simple as that that we don't have to prove that I've been a victim, the onus is on the perpetrator to prove their innocence?
- Interviewee:** Yep, I'd agree with that, and also what I said about the harsher penalties, so someone's not just going to get a slap on the wrist and a warning because they've beaten someone up. If you actually had a harsher penalty for that and then people were put off from doing that in the first place, if it was treated like a real crime, if it was treated as severe as a car theft, you know people have their car stolen, that gets a lot more attention and that gets a lot more of a headline than what's actually going on in our homes and in the streets.
- Interviewer:** So what do you think we can do, cos these things happen to individuals and it happens to them by themselves in their houses, what would be a better more systemic response to this, apart from the additional workers and resources, can you think of anything else that might be of use in a systemic sort of way?
- Interviewee:** Maybe to protect the families, and to protect the family. For a lot of people it's really hard, when you've got kids, to leave a family home and walk away from everything and leave it all behind. And the fear of having your kids taken off you because you're leaving the family home, the fear of being ex-communicated from your peer groups, and possibly your religious circles, the fear of that excommunication because you want to leave the family home is so genuinely heavy that there's nothing in place at the moment genuinely supporting people to be able to leave and to get out, and we've got to stop as a culture, to stop blaming victims for staying, and saying, 'Oh well you should have left him ages ago before he broke your nose.' That whole sentiment needs to be thrown out the window and we need to look at this as what it is, and it is violence, and it's violence occurring everywhere, and if we take it seriously, as individuals and then if there's other things in place including more resources and programs but also with harsher penalties, if it's taken seriously and then a person can be protected in their homes then it would be safe to not have to leave the family home but to kick the perpetrator out and have them leave the family home and not allowed to come back, without the fear of having them come back and throw a brick through the window, to actually have some real protection there would be key and would be crucial in my opinion.
- Interviewer:** Do you think there would be merit in trying to establish a culture of non-violence to counter that – well you mentioned earlier that we've been indoctrinated with the idea that violence is a way to solve conflict – do you think we need to actively develop a culture of non-violence?
- Interviewee:** I do, I also see the difficulty in that. I do, but I see that as a long-term goal. I do, but I see how it can't happen overnight. I see that it takes discussing it - it takes people really working on effective strategies and solutions, rather than to just look the other way. It's something that, I can see it happening - I've got a positive hope in me that I can see that change being made, but it's going to be something that takes time.
- Interviewer:** That's really interesting. What would be in your mind an effective way of getting that dialogue happening between victims and decision makers?
- Interviewee:** That's a hard one. I'd like to believe that there's some transparency there and we could, and that even my words now could somehow help somebody open up their eyes to it, but that's me hoping for change.

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Interviewer: What are your thoughts about people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, maybe Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander communities where there may be different cultural understandings of violence in the home? Do you think we've done enough work in those sorts of areas as a community?

Interviewee: I think in general violence is violence, and there can never be enough work done.

Interviewer: You spoke earlier about long term, the idea about establishing a culture of non-violence being a long-term goal - what would be a short term or medium term goal?

Interviewee: Something quick right now that could help right now – the stuff I said before; not axing the outreach services that are in place but supporting them and continuing to fund them rather than axing them and getting rid of them; and as a second point, increasing the penalty, making it a harsher penalty so that if somebody hurt somebody they're accountable for that violent act, rather than it being just considered a domestic situation and it being considered not important. I think we need harsher penalties on that, that is my opinion and also, not axing the outreach program – domestic violence outreach programs at the moment are being axed, it's ridiculous and backwards and I don't understand how anybody can sleep at night letting that happen.

Interviewer: What about stuff like refuges and having to prove that you're down and out to be entitled to have a place in a refuge?

Interviewee: I think that just makes things worse. It makes people have to live through what they are already going through worse, it also takes away some dignity, it makes the whole situation more uncomfortable and if we could scrap some of that bureaucratic red tape and help somebody when they need help and not hassle them about why they're broken and bruised, I think that would be key, also crucial.

Interviewer: So, just to accept people at face value, 'I need some assistance' rather than going into the rights and wrongs of it?

Interviewee: Yeah, because for some people - I mean for me and my situation, and I was obviously injured – but for some people the psychological scars hurt more and last a lot longer, and for those people it might not look visible but the fact that somebody's turned up to a place saying they need help should just be taken for what it is rather than the questioning and asking them why.

Interviewer: Just in your own individual case, what would have helped, do you think? Looking back in 20/20 hindsight, what was the first sign – you don't have to tell me that but in your own mind you can identify that – and what do you think might have helped?

Interviewee: I think, as an example, on that day if I had have been treated with first aid that day, if somebody had have sat with me, helped clean up my wounds and said, 'I'll help you today, let's do this, let's get you away from this, you don't deserve to be beaten like this, you shouldn't be beaten like that.' If someone had have sat there with me and said that to me then I might not have walked away feeling like nobody gave a shit, and that there was some hope for me, and I was worth it as a human being to receive medical help. I walked away that day feeling insignificant and unwanted by society in general, I felt rejected by healthcare professionals and I felt like my wounds were nothing to them, I felt... on that day in

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particular, I went back. I went back to the relationship, I had nowhere else in my mind that I could go to and I thought where I was in my state of mind at the time is that nobody else cared about me anyway, nobody else cared about me and I really did believe that he loved me, and that he was going through a lot of problems and that he couldn't help it. There was no help for him either, there was no place for him to go to, there was no counselling number he could call, there was nothing in place to help him when his anger got so much the better of him that he didn't know what do with it or how to control it, and for me that day, that's where I went back to.

Interviewer: Explain to people why, in your own mind, you went back, because a lot of people, as you said earlier, don't understand why a woman stays or why she would go back. Can you educate people as to why you felt you needed to go back?

Interviewee: Yeah, and for me personally, I think this is a good example for that, that I walked away that day from that healthcare provider feeling like well no one cares anyway, I may as well just go back. And I was afraid of walking away from the tiny few possessions that I had. I was afraid of still walking up the street and people staring at me the way they were because I was bleeding from my head, I was afraid of the way I was being treated, I didn't want to just sit in the gutter and die, so I went back and, you know, spent eight hours in a bathroom trying to clear my wounds myself.

Interviewer: So another problem we have is that we have in Australia different states and each state has its own jurisdiction and its own laws; do we need to look at this nationally rather than state by state?

Interviewee: Yes, I think it should be a federal thing. This is something that should be looked at as a country. A violent crime is a violent crime and knocking people unconscious - that is a crime. You're not allowed to go around beating people up just because you're angry. These things need to be taken seriously and it shouldn't just be considered as nothing. And for all the people who say, oh well you should have just left, you see what happens to people like myself who try to leave - you go into a healthcare centre, and be turned away. That is detrimental to the cause and nobody really understands that unless they're going through that, and so it is really hard to get everyone to open their eyes, but there is a big failure there in our health care system of people who shouldn't be turning people away when they're in distress.

Interviewer: When you hear things on the news or read things in the newspaper that the federal governments and state governments are working together on stuff like ice and terrorism and national security, what does it tell you, what does it imply to you that they don't work together on things like family violence?

Interviewee: It does, it implies that they don't work together, but it also implies that they don't care. I also feel very left out and fallen through the cracks of the system and I feel that nobody cares, I still feel today like nobody cares.

Interviewer: I saw an interview this week with Fiona McCormack (I think) from Domestic Violence Victoria, and one thing that she said that really stood out in my mind was that there's no money from the budget that's gone into family violence, and most of the money that does go in comes from homelessness. What do you think we need to get people's attention?

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Interviewee: Well I guess I could go really out there and say something really radical like well if they were in that position, if Tony Abbott was going home for dinner tonight and he's made dinner for his wife and the peas touched the mashed potato and she got really cross and gave him a backhand across the face maybe then he would say, 'Oh well maybe this is a serious issue and maybe I shouldn't be treated like that'. I'm trying to smile and trying to put it out there, but the truth is that there is a failing in the system to recognise that it is a serious crime and I think that it's backwards and absolutely ridiculous that the funding is being scrapped from places like domestic violence outreach service. These places barely have enough as it is and are running on an empty can of gas and to axe them is just saying, 'Well, go back home'. It's another turning me away, to me; the whole government is just being the health care centre turning men and women away, who are turning up bloodied and bruised and needing medical assistance. And if I had been able to have my purse on me that day, I would have calmly gotten my medicare card out and all of that jazz, but it was impossible that day, I had no chance, it was taken from me, physically ripped from my hands and if they had just shown me some little bit of care that maybe I was worth to be treated and I was worth enough of a human being to look at my wounds, maybe I would have gotten some help maybe I would have left that relationship that day. Instead it took another year before I chose to walk away and for some people they don't make it that far. It's sometimes only that blow to the head that is fatal, or chocking someone until they're unconscious so many times until they don't come back to. It's terrible what's going on and it's terrible how many lives are lost while all this other money is getting thrown out on terrorism and all this extra metadata stuff when more women and children are being killed than we're going to have through any terrorism in the city. That's just my opinion.

Fin,

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