

Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

1 June 2015

There was heaps of violence as a child. I've been abused by my father, by my mum: physically, spiritually and mentally. Just because I was a girl – I wasn't good enough, I wasn't worthy.

At age [redacted] I got married (in [redacted]) – an arranged marriage. It was an abusive relationship. My ex husband was very abusive. He was so violent. I didn't know any better. I thought it was normal.

I tried to be nicer, more committed – for him to treat me with more respect. It sadly never happened.

After [redacted] years of marriage, and [redacted] kids – I had been hospitalised a number of times due to his violence – my kids told the police as they were afraid dad would kill mum (we had moved to Australia by this time).

I didn't give any statement against him – I was still protecting him. I thought it was better for kids to have dad and mum. But it was better for them not to have parents together and not to be witnesses to family violence. I didn't know that then.

[redacted] years ago, authorities said if I didn't leave my husband I would lose my kids. Of course I chose my kids. I started getting help. I got mental health treatment, a case worker, help from Centrelink, housing. I was getting the right help.

This time the dynamic was a bit changed. He knew he wasn't allowed to do this. He played another role – "sorry". After [redacted] years (and divorce) he persuaded me to go back. I thought he was a changed man. For [redacted] or [redacted] years I had waited for him to say sorry. He said it. We got back together and sorted the child protection matters. He had done some anger management courses etc. He had been directed (by child protection) to really show he was changed, was trying to change. He had done heaps of courses to show he had changed.

I was a changed woman. I was more independent, more confident. He thought I was still the same person. That created a problem again.

This time he bashed me so hard he broke my nose, smashed windows, table, everything. It was horrible. In front of the kids. They were hiding under the bed, crying, pissing themselves. I was very shocked and upset. After he left home I called a women's refuge.

They were so good. They said to go to the police station and they met me there. They got me and took me and the kids to a secure safe place. They were very helpful – they provided the basics (food, clothing). They found me housing and helped my kids to go to another school. They organised an intervention order on my behalf through the police.

We got back together after a couple of months. Again I took out an intervention order, [this time] so I could live with him.

He was changed. Physically he didn't hurt me again but mentally, emotionally, spiritually, he is hurting us, specially me. We were divorced by this time. We got married again, and divorced again.

Because I was tortured mentally and emotionally by him – and my parents as a child – technically I didn't have love. I had a hole in my chest nothing could fill. I was a hungry little girl seeking for love and attention.

I self harmed and attempted suicide a couple of times. I was welcome to any man who would say he loved me. For a little affection or love, in return I would give anything...my body.

After the second divorce I found a charming and respectful man. He said he loved me and wanted to marry me. I found out he was a jerk and lying. He had a wife and [REDACTED] kids. I stopped seeing him. And that broke my heart as well.

He said if I stopped seeing him he would expose me in the community. He had a video (I didn't know he had filmed me).

I was devastated and sad – couldn't see things clearly. I was so afraid and vulnerable about how my ex husband would react.

I asked my boss, my friend, for help – he was a [REDACTED]. He said don't worry about it, let's go to his house and scare him.

We entered his house – agg burg. I took his laptop and phone – that was theft. My [REDACTED] beat him up – that was intentionally cause serious injury. He (the [REDACTED]) was on drugs. He said let's get him in a car and scare him – kidnapping. It was a five minute drive but that was kidnapping, because he was forced to come.

So I ended up in jail. [REDACTED] minimum.

I was the last person to expect in my community to come to jail. I laugh about it – no point in crying. I've got [REDACTED] months to go.

I want to talk about prison.

A year ago I came to prison scared, shattered and angry. But I want to say – this is the best thing that ever happened to me. It gave me the time I needed to reflect on my life and on why I ended up in prison and how could I change.

First – when I came here I have done some of the wonderful programs run by Lan: Out of the dark, Tune into teens, Be your best. These programs were an eye-opener.

I believe that we need more services outside in the community to educate our young children from year seven when they start going to high school. It has to be part of education for boys and girls to acknowledge what is right and wrong. Then they know before they enter a relationship. To prevent family violence.

We could get programs in the community – at GPs, churches and government services. Where there are signs of abuse, they should be directed and helped at the earliest stages possible.

Second – around family and relationship counselling. Some people, for the sake of kids, might want to stay together. More money for counselling might solve heaps of problems. They will get to closure that way – either they can live with it in a safe and happy relationship or they get to closure that it's best for us not to live together.

You have to face the problem and try to resolve it.

My third opinion: when someone gets sentenced and the judge sees they've been abused and the person has mental illnesses, they shouldn't give a short sentence. They have to make it compulsory for the person to do certain programs. And get a certificate from psychiatry that she is mentally fit to go back into the community.

I have witnessed so many young girls coming for short sentences – they have been abused – they can't get programs because of the waiting list.

Prison is a place we should call transforming. Sending out a safer, healthier person to our society should be our goal. We need to provide more programs too. It has to be compulsory (programs) – otherwise people wouldn't do it. So many people are in denial.

My main point is education – educate your people inside or outside society.

Another suggestion – about a mother who comes to prison, for those vulnerable kids [left] in care or with family. Almost all my friends in prison were in foster care. They are the victims of the circumstances of their childhood. Somehow our system is failing. We need to minimise the foster care and put money and energy into sending the kids to boarding school where they feel normal [as there are no parents there]. They are getting enough education, have been disciplined. They are so innocent. They could also go to camping programs if they don't have mum or dad. These kids don't feel the pressure of discipline in foster care. But in a school environment there are rules they have to follow. These kids are our future. Why can't we just invest in them. At boarding school we can have social workers.

Let's try to break the cycle of those kids ending up in prison. All my friends who are coming and going they have been in foster care. They don't obey the rules because they are kids – “you're not my mum or dad” – but in school it's different.

I have been blessed. I have [redacted] beautiful children. My [redacted] is doing [redacted] at [redacted] with good marks. I'm a proud mum. I've got two beautiful [redacted] – they are doing extremely well at school. Their marks are over 95%. They want to become doctors. I have a baby angel – very special. She has a [redacted] but she's doing very well.

My ex husband has been changed. He's a responsible father. He's doing a great job with the kids. I really appreciate it. They are amazing. I see them every week. He brings them.

I believe it's god. Faith is a big part of my life. He will bring good out of the bad. Trust him. His trust is never broken.