

SOUTH WEST TRADES & LABOUR COUNCIL

31 Percy St. Portland, 3305 [REDACTED]

To the Royal Commission into Family Violence

I am writing on behalf of the South West Trades & Labour Council, a not-for-profit organisation based in Victorias Western District. Our membership is predominantly male. There are concerns that adult male, teenage sibling and aged parents are not being recognised as mainstream victims of family violence. We recognise that women and children are legitimately portrayed as victims but the lack of reference to others in the same situation adds isolation, embarrassment and marginalisation to their plight. I have kept my examples brief but am happy to provide further information if required.

Restraining orders

A counsellor who works from our premises asked for this submission to be sent. Her concern is that a disproportionate number of her male clients have been served with restraining orders when conciliation would have been a more suitable response. It is her opinion that a culture encouraging restraining orders and the use of police for intervention is developing in our region as a means of reprisal against former partners and that the claims are not always genuine. I note that the counsellor is not prepared to write a submission because of concerns of censure.

Teenage siblings

Apart from the above mentioned counsellor our office has also been contacted by three unrelated parents whose issues with their teenage children are not being addressed by any government body or other organisation. In each case they have older teenagers or young adults living at home. The stories are similar and are of a teenage sibling becoming violent towards a sibling, as a result of drugs and/or alcohol abuse. There are no immediate support services available and in each case the parents recognise that isolating the offending child will almost certainly lead them to jail or serious self inflicted harm. In each case the non-offending child left home and was encouraged by peers and teachers to view themselves estranged from their family. The few supports that are available only communicate with the client and presume that the parents have chosen to alienate these children.

Public Perception

A staggering amount of media and political language uses "women and children" as an all encompassing description of family violence victims. This is misleading and we ask that you consider implementing measures that encourage or enforce descriptions that are age and gender neutral. Please also consider removing the women only access to publicly funded phone support services and for support services for men to recognise that men can be and are victims. We were unable to find any local service that could offer free legal assistance in court or help with accommodation. These services are however available for women.

Regards

Margaret Donehue

South West Trades & Labour Council

