

Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence



9 June 2015

It started for me as early as I can remember. My parents. From my parents' marriage I went to what I thought was the opposite to my father. We had no violence in my marriage as such. He was passive aggressive and controlling – not straight out aggressiveness.

That marriage broke down – with very broken self-esteem I entered into a quite violent relationship and another one after that.

As far as anything that helped – there was nothing. I don't think IVOs are worth the paper they're on. They were broken over and over again. I've had to run out of the house naked a couple of times just through sheer terror.

Ice: it's just a whole other kettle of fish that's added to family violence. That's the situation I was dealing with in one of those relationships – someone who was ice affected.

Education is key: it all comes back to education. I've got two teenage children – they've had the non-smoking and sun smart message drummed into them from primary school. They are brain washed about those things. Education about respect, self-respect and boundaries. I saw a really powerful European ad – little boys being asked to hit little girls and they were saying no.

And there need to be much harsher penalties for men or women who break IVOs. Not just a warning. Come down like a tonne of bricks on them.

Kids need to have a greater voice – my mum left my dad a couple of times. I was so happy each time she left him, felt a great sense of peace. When she went back I felt such a sense of loss for our future. They're still together (they still drive us mad).

I've had a good think about what might help. We need to educate children about relationships across the board. Whether it's a friendship, someone you play sports with once a week – you've got to respect them, and then you have some self-respect as well.

The family violence has shaped and defined me in many ways. Having controlling people in my life – when people are controlled their true self is being suffocated, and when your true self is being suffocated you are not free. I feel freer at the moment in jail than I've been my whole life. With controlling people you don't just suffer at the hands of violence, you suffer at all parts of life.

If IVOs were acted on immediately that would help (short term). If you look at education, that won't come into play for 15 odd years. In the short term, where behaviours are well ingrained they need to deal with their behaviours in different ways. But you can't change people that don't want to change.

There needs to be a willingness to change. Jail gives you that opportunity, it's whether you choose to take it.

Penalties: There should be far harsher penalties, not fines, but a jail term. And a good portion of people who are affected by family violence won't have funds to pay a fine.

Against my partners, I've used violence. Two of them – it was self-defence. One, I took on the role of being the aggressor. He was a very passive person. I was used to being controlled so then I took on that role. I was used to a dynamic or pattern in my relationships – he was always looking to me for answers, hope, direction, guidance... it wasn't even (equal) as such. It was just a pattern.

Most definitely, the family violence contributed to why I'm in jail – I came in here as a heroin addict. I've got completely clean. I've just dissected my life and I have gone through some massive changes recently. The biggest trigger for me in my drug taking was control – I thought it was something I could control (when I had no other control). But they (drugs) ended up controlling me.

I'm definitely sitting here because of family violence. 100% I am. Not just violence – control.

Nothing or no-one can control you if you're honest. I'm just not being suffocated or silenced anymore. This is who I am. It's only taken me ■■■ years to get to that place.

I've got another ■■■ months here. Haven't seen my kids whilst I've been in here – my ex-husband is controlling. Control comes down to people's insecurities or issues they haven't dealt with.

It would be great to throw all this money into the mental health system. But a lot of people aren't willing to change. I don't know much about men's behaviour change programs. But I can't say I've come across a man who's been violent who's changed his ways. It's hard to change a lifetime of habits – our children are like computer programs. We fill them up.

It's taken me a lot of time (to change my habits). Everyone's got a time in their life – although some people never have a time. It all comes back to the individuals. It comes back to education.

The kids need a voice. I look at it from my perspective as a child – to my children now, who desperately want to see me but they won't come. Kids have a massive sense of loyalty to their parents. How do you give them a voice without them feeling completely and utterly torn?

We need to re-educate people – there's a huge level of acceptance with DV. There always has been. I can't for the life of me think why there wasn't ever a police car driving up my driveway. There needs to be a message sent out to the community – turning a blind eye is not OK. If you're hearing something from your neighbours you should call the police.

No-one's ever said anything to my father about his violence – his brother was very high up in the police force. He never said anything to my father. He tried to help my mother once – in an underhanded way. He organised a refuge for mum and kids but she chickened out. He did it in an underhanded way. He's scared of his brother too. He won't deal with my father head on but he'll go and arrest the likes of Martin Bryant. Go figure.

Maybe there should be compulsory education in so far as the effects of violence on children – in *Out of the Dark* (prison family violence program), it took me to my children. People forget in their moments of anguish that kids take on just as much or more. Maybe there should be compulsory sessions where they've got to sit and listen to the effects it's having on their children. I've ended up here lost in my grief and emotional anguish, forgotten about the █████ most beautiful people standing here before me. I was quite solid and responsible for their formative years – they are solid and responsible and quite happy. They will have more of their mum than they've ever had when I get out. Because I've got more of me.