

## The Royal Commission into Family Violence Submissions to address it Terms of Reference

### Question One

***Are there other goals the Royal Commission should consider?***

#### **Address the family court problems**

- Change to an open court so as Judges are held accountable by the media/public for decisions made regarding children.
- Children's right to safety to precede before parental rights. Currently this is suppose to be the case but in reality is far from it. Children are disclosing sexual abuse and other forms of abuse and the courts are not listening to anything that cannot be proven by physical evidence. Protective parents are being labelled crazy and bitter and angry and vengeful and children are given to their abuser to destroy for the rest of their lives. This needs to stop. Children should not be forced into visitation of any kind with a parent who has abused them.

### Question Two

***The Royal Commission wants to hear about the extent to which recent reforms and developments have improved responses to family violence, and where they need to be expanded or altered.***

- As a woman hiding in [REDACTED] as a domestic violence refugee from [REDACTED] I have found that the most help I have received is from a Refuge organisation, Salvo Connect, Homelessness organisations and food charities. The government has not helped me very much except for the small amounts they fund these bodies with. In this time I have lost access to a counsellor due to funding cuts. This impacted me very much.
- I am continuously harassed and stalked online by my ex husband. I have no support network in this state and the only support I have gained is through online domestic violence support groups. I feel isolated and scared a lot of the time. In cases such as mine where Domestic Violence can be proven, assistance with legally changing identity of myself and my children would help. I require legal help to do this and to also gain a divorce and obtain a court order for my children to reside with me, without having to be re traumatised by having to confront him in court. We need more protection and security.
- 1800Respect is difficult to get through to. We need to be able to access a counsellor urgently due to severe PTSD and panic attacks.
- CAHMS has been very limited in being able to help my children as they do not seem to be very qualified in working with traumatised children. I need counsellors for my children that are well trained in trauma counselling. They need help escaping the cycle of abuse. They need help building their identity and self esteem away from the influence of a narcissistic psychopathic father. More help for the children.
- Community support groups / centres where women can walk into for help 24hours a day.

### Question Three

***Which of the reforms to the family violence system introduced in the last ten years do you consider most effective? Why? How could they be improved?***

From my perspective as a [REDACTED] Refugee I came here because members of online DV support groups recommended that [REDACTED] was a safer state for women experiencing violence. I do feel DV is taken much more seriously here, however I continue to feel very alone and not

enough access to support specialising in PTSD and the longer term affects of DV. I am trying very hard to heal and move forwards and do this through further education and employment seeking. I feel disabled by my PTSD regularly by anxiety attacks and lethargy and hypervigilance. More assistance in this area would help.

#### Question Four

*If you or your organisation have been involved in programs, campaigns or initiatives about family violence for the general community, tell us what these involved and how they have been evaluated.*

#### Question Five

*If you or your organisation have been involved in observing or assessing programs, campaigns or initiatives of this kind, we are interested in your conclusions about their effectiveness in reducing and preventing family violence.*

#### Question Six

*What circumstances, conditions, situations or events, within relationships, families, institutions and whole communities, are associated with the occurrence or persistence of family violence?*

I currently reside in a housing commission area and what I have observed of domestic violence amongst my neighbours it is usually associated with drugs and alcohol.

Another problem I have observed is the attitude of our local high school principal. There is excessive bullying in the high school and my daughter was repeatedly called a slut by male students. When I approached the acting principle her response was "well you daughter is very developed for her age and young men don't know how to handle this". Furthermore, when my daughter was struggling with mathematics the same acting principal/teacher told her "you better learn maths or find a rich husband".

The pervasiveness of gender stereotypes throughout this community is strong. The high school administration is insensitive to what is sexual abuse and furthermore, do not help victims feel safe, I had to withdraw my traumatised daughter for a whole term last year. Education in schools for staff and students, age appropriate at all stages of school life, needs to be integrated into the curriculum to ensure safety of children in the home, and at school. Boys need to be educated on respect for females. Patriarchal mindsets need to be deprogrammed from year 1.

#### Question Seven

*What circumstances and conditions are associated with the reduced occurrence of family violence?*

EDUCATION!! - DV cannot be prevented until a person understands power play in relationships. A current Victim can not be saved until they are truly safe. And that Victim cannot become a survivor and rescue themselves from repeat abuse until they can calm their minds enough to learn. Victims of abuse will often get involved in 2<sup>nd</sup> or third or fourth relationships with predatory people due to their conditioning. This needs to be understood in DV crisis intervention and ongoing counselling.

Removal of violent adults from the home for longer periods/permanently has to be done. There needs to be education for the victims of abuse to understand how they have been programmed to rely upon their abuser for their sense of identity and they need help preventing



the abuser returning to their lives. Stockholm syndrome is real in Domestic Violence relationships and until the victim can be deprogrammed she will continue to take him back. There is no point in educating the abuser as much as it is to increase the self esteem of the abused. Less investment in the perpetrator and more into the victims/survivors. Prevention should start in childhood/school through deconstruction of the patriarchal paradigm.

#### Question Eight

***Tell us about any gaps or deficiencies in current responses to family violence, including legal responses. Tell us about what improvements you would make to overcome these gaps and deficiencies, or otherwise improve current responses.***

I feel currently 'imprisoned' due to the legal situation of our abusers belief that he has 'parental rights'. I need to hide us. He has sexually abused my children, and we approached the police in [REDACTED] and were interviewed, it took a year before they interviewed him. After they did they did not press for charges due to not enough evidence and my children not being credible enough.

Currently I cannot apply for a Domestic Violence Order because it will give my location away to him. If he has my location he can then issue court orders on me to start proceedings to gain access to the children. The children courts will allow him supervised visits to start and later unsupervised visits. He feels he can abuse me by email and on Face book because my [REDACTED] DVO expired. I currently have no legal protection for myself or my children and if I seek it out I feel like my children will suffer enormously by being forced to spend time with him.

This is not a gap; this is a Canyon of deficiency in legal protection and justice for my children and myself. Furthermore, we applied for victims of crime compensation in order to replace some belongings as we arrived in [REDACTED] with nothing but our dogs and cats and the clothes on our backs. We did not qualify. We were told Domestic Violence was not an actual crime.

Finally I feel that children with conduct disorder and showing signs of anti social behaviour at early ages should be identified and taught how to 'fake it'. In other words they cannot have empathy and are often born that way and should learn social skills in different ways than are readily taught to Neurotypical children. Buts lets not victimise Autistic people at the same time.

Maybe for a child with conduct disorder is abuse in the home and they are developing trauma related psychopathy of some type. This is where prevention begins. These kids need to be taught how to channel their personalities into socially acceptable roles. It is well highlighted in research that there is a place for such people. We need to stop being scared of these anti social conditions but rather guide these individuals at an early age into productivity.

#### Question Nine

***Does insufficient integration and co-ordination between the various bodies who come into contact with people affected by family violence hinder the assessment of risk, or the effectiveness of (early intervention, crisis and ongoing) support provided, to people affected by family violence? If so, please provide examples.***

I believe better case management specialising in Domestic Violence and Trauma would help. If it was not for my own ingenuity and much online research I would never have known what help I required to gain my own mental, physical and spiritual health back. I case managed myself during my complete mental breakdown a little over a year ago. I did this by approaching a GP for general health, Rehabilitation for Alcohol abuse which was due to the family violence, Rehabilitation for my mental health (PTSD), Mental Health back up through



the public system, joined AA, started education with Workskills, gained some employment and turned my life around as best I could for myself and my children. However, I think it is only due to my knowledge I have gained over my ■■■ years and research that I could do this.

Definitely DV related case management for long term rehabilitation would be valuable for many victims.

#### Question Ten

*What practical changes might improve integration and co-ordination? What barriers to integration and co-ordination exist?*

Barriers are feelings of **judgement and lack of trust** in the system. Even the most well meaning people in the services I found, scared me. I think there is not enough training on trauma. Most of us have **no self esteem** and are easily put off asking for help. We have **no faith in a system** that we believe could steal our children away from us if we show any form of weakness. We have **no faith in a court system** that continuously paints women/mothers are mentally deficient after experiencing trauma and our children handed to the other parent who is abusive or into foster care. These things have to stop. We need guarantees we will not lose our children.. we need real help. More home visits or practical help such as help with transporting our children to school or doctors appointments. **Motivating** us to ensure our children's needs are met even when we are experiencing panic attacks. Once again support groups for our children.

So **communication** has to be such that we **feel safe** from a system that robs us of our children. **Training from staff in trauma** so as they are not making us relive our stories over and over with each service giver we encounter. **Transportation to the services**, for many of us we do not have cars or money to buy one. In home visits or community groups in neighbourhoods may help. Helping women gain online access to support groups where they are **isolated**. If we enter the system, perhaps we can have an online account where we can manage our own services to reach a goals for our independence and freedom after domestic violence.

#### Question Eleven

*What are some of the most promising and successful ways of supporting the ongoing safety and wellbeing of people affected by violence? Are there gaps or deficiencies in our approach to supporting ongoing safety and wellbeing? How could measures to reduce the impact of family violence be improved?*

**Free medical** for people who have experienced violence across all sectors. During abuse the victims forgo much medical and dental and often are very unwell physically and mentally. In order to become well we need our bodies healthy. Its very expensive or its long waits to gain treatment. Children should be free. Currently my daughter broke her arm and required surgery which was free but the fracture clinic requires money from me at each visit. This is not acceptable, particularly for people who have experienced trauma. We have no money to spare.

I am risk of homelessness all the time. I am currently lucky enough to be in a DHS house. However my abuser claims that he knows my whereabouts. I am risk of having to pack up and run again. This will put myself and children in abject poverty and homelessness again. We need special circumstances for maintaining our DHS houses if we need to be away from the residence for extended periods of time (in refuges). Currently it is only a four week absence from a DHS which will cause them to evict you. Furthermore, private rental agreements need to be easily broken without any losses, debts, punishments.

One major thing that stopped me from leaving was my pets. He was abusive to them and I had no way of keeping them with us. Eventually I had to abandon them and he abused them. I was lucky enough to get back to them and re home them and keep four animals. Knowledge is power. If women in DV circumstances knew what to do with all these barriers to freedom it would help. More education in School newsletters would be good. Abusers screen all incoming information into the house. It is very difficult to get information on how to escape.

Long term ongoing psychological help which cannot be subpoenaed in court. We need to know our journey through healing from the insanity that abusers cause us will not be held against us in any family court. We are good mothers who are traumatised and we need help.

Employment is a big one for me. I want to work but I fear not being able to hold down a job full time as I quickly tire due to PTSD and anxiety. I have low self esteem and suffer from paranoia at times. I am exceptionally intelligent and do well in my TAFE course with high grades and have much to offer my community. I am finding it hard to access placement and I feel if I had an employment advocate who can understand my situation may help.

#### Question Twelve

***If you, your partner or a relative have participated in a behaviour change program, tell us about the program and whether you found it effective. What aspects of the program worked best? Do you have criticisms of the program and ideas about how it should be improved?***

Yes, I participated in cognitive therapy which I found very helpful to alter my black and white thinking. I learned to moderate my thinking and started to have more faith in others.

I also participated in a mental health rehabilitation programme which included equine therapy and self esteem/communication building class. I found these helpful mostly for the camaraderie of others who are also experiencing difficulties.

Furthermore, I worked with a DV counsellor who ran me through learning about boundaries which I found exceptionally helpful. I did not realise I had none. I came to understand why I repeatedly end up in abusive relationships.

I would have liked to have a support group of women who experienced DV / sexual abuse to connect with. I feel the most support I gain is online from other survivors. I would appreciate the same in my own community. Knowing I had support if I need someone to watch my children if I have an emergency etc.

#### Question Thirteen

***If you, your partner or a relative have been violent and changed their behaviour, tell us about what motivated that change. Was a particular relationship, program, process or experience (or combination of these) a key part of the change? What did you learn about what caused the violent behaviour?***

#### Question Fourteen

***To what extent do current processes encourage and support people to be accountable and change their behaviour? To what extent do they fail to do so? How do we ensure that behaviour change is lasting and sustainable?***

Current processes has not changed my ex husbands behaviour one little bit. After [REDACTED] years



away from him his behaviours are exactly the same. He is still alternating between love bombing and threatening/abusing me via email and FB. I have never responded to him and he still persists, using fathers rights as leverage. He is extremely sick in the head and continues to be an extreme threat to us and I have done all I can legally to keep us safe. Domestic Violence should be a crime full stop. He should have been put in gaol from the get go when the police carted him to lock up back in [REDACTED]. he got out and came home and nothing changed for the next [REDACTED] years. I do not know what else I can do and feel like a sitting duck.

#### Question Fifteen

*If you or your organisation have offered a behaviour change program, tell us about the program, including any evaluation of its effectiveness which has been conducted.*

#### Question Sixteen

*If you or your organisation have been involved in observing or assessing approaches to behaviour change, tell us about any Australian or international research which may assist the Royal Commission. In particular, what does research indicate about the relative effectiveness of early intervention in producing positive outcomes?*

#### Question Seventeen

*Are there specific cultural, social, economic, geographical or other factors in particular groups and communities in Victoria which tend to make family violence more likely to occur, or to exacerbate its effects? If so, what are they?*

I get nervous in my town as there is only one road in/out and at times I feel trapped. I try to tell myself that it makes it safer for me. I feel isolated and have no faith that the police will respond promptly if I need them. There is a lot of drugs in the remote town which would have a direct impact on the violence levels here. I do not feel my children are safe to socialise and I have no faith in the other teens in this town. We need more opportunities for our children to meet other children who are not on drugs. There is nothing here to do except sport clubs and my kids are not sporty.

So many parents here are neglecting their children and there are often children roaming the street after dark who are still in nappies. There are many problems in this town however I feel there is also a strong community spirit wanting to make changes for the better but do not know how. We just do not have the infrastructure and services to support people. I would like to see drop in centres for women and children and information at bus stops on violence prevention. Violence prevention information should be readily accessible in public places. I do not see it any where.

#### Question Eighteen

*What barriers prevent people in particular groups and communities in Victoria from engaging with or benefiting from family violence services? How can the family violence system be improved to reflect the diversity of people's experiences?*

Lack of them existing or knowledge of their existence. Once again I feel information/education through schools and in newsletters to be one good avenue for informing victims. However, risk of losing children to DOCS is a major fear for most people experiencing violence. This threat keeps victims quiet. We need a safe place to go for confidential drop in help manned by trauma / crisis trained staff.

Barriers in this town would be their drugs. They fear criminal prosecution and/or losing their children. Often times drugs/alcohol are forced upon a victim by an abuser to keep them from being able to stand up for themselves. This is a very real problem and was for me. My abuser forced me to drink alcohol and kept refilling my glass until I slept and then proceeded to sexually abuse my children; as I learned later.

So freedom from abuse needs to be inclusive for all people regardless of their situations. Most of us think we deserve our situations and need to have someone inform us that it's not ok and we have rights and that we can be helped. We were/are in extreme depths of despair and heavily judged for it. The level of shame within a victim is the paralyzing factor for many.

#### Question Nineteen

***How can responses to family violence in these groups and communities be improved? What approaches have been shown to be most effective?***

Breaches of Domestic Violence Orders need to be taken seriously by police. Even if the police officer does not think it is a major breach, these wily abusers skirt around the law to abuse their victims. If the victim is saying they are feeling fearful they should be believed. We are not delusional or imagining it.

Judges need to be hard handed with offenders in courts. If it does not change the offender at least it gives the victim more opportunity for recovery.

Ongoing long term Case Management following a victim's escape from DV. Supporting them psychologically for as long as possible rather than just through crisis.

#### Question Twenty

***Are there any other suggestions you would like to make to improve policies, programs and services which currently seek to carry out the goals set out above?***

The major factors of Finances, Pets, Psychological trauma, fear of losing children, no faith in a faulty and inadequate legal system, a necessity for changes to early childhood education to include reduction in the patriarchal paradigm to prevent violence and a feminist framework to recovery with long term support are the major focus points in my journey.

#### Question Twenty-one

***The Royal Commission will be considering both short term and longer term responses to family violence. Tell us about the changes which you think could produce the greatest impact in the short and longer term.***

**Short term:** I need to be able to deliver my ex husband a domestic violence order that prevents him from contacting me at all without revealing my location. I also need to ensure he understands that because he abused us his rights as a parent has ended. My daughters cannot possibly benefit from his input into their lives rather only be re-traumatized. I desperately need him gone out of our lives. As do many other women in the same situation as myself. Abusing the mother alone should negate any rights over the children. Abusing the children should cement that, but it does not.

**Long term:** Permanent Domestic Violence Orders need to exist. They also need to be federal so as that we leave our state we are still protected. Long term counselling is vital for myself and my children to navigate ourselves out of the cycle of abuse so that they can begin their lives without being victims themselves.