

Nothing off limits submission

Dear registrar,

Please accept my submission even though it is one day late. Due to family violence, I am a single mother of [REDACTED] children. I work part-time, study part-time and commute a lot of hours every week. I receive an overly modest amount of child support. I am tired and sick of the disrespect that comes out of our structures and laws. So that is my excuse for being late yet again to something that is important to me.

I wanted to not put in a submission but it has to be said. I don't want this happening any more to me, to some other woman or to my [REDACTED] Things have to change or us ex-family-violence women will just... I don't know... secede? So there are gaps in it because I just want my life back. I'm sick of repeating the story over and over until someone listens, or as a defence to the defamation my partner carried out (and still carries out).

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

<p>betraying your spouse, whom you love, whom you have forgiven over and over, and who has begged you for help. And it's 'wrong' for a woman to say she is being subjected to violence and then not leave; people would say I was lying, that it "wasn't that bad" (no it wasn't but it was still bad), a cluster of ideas around "put your money where your mouth is". Most of the news and discussion we read about concerning violence against women describes brutal beatings, life-long grindings down or murders. These are the extreme end of the violence and they happen. Every day.</p> <p>We don't hear about is the women who are abused every day of their married lives until they die, but who stay with their husbands and call it something else. But this violence enslaves women, too. And it has an interesting facet to it – extreme violence can be put down to psychotic episodes or childhood abuse and confused with other (valid) social problems, but constant, ubiquitous low-level violence is a pointer to only one thing - the status of women.</p> <p>We also don't hear about relationships that were 'okay enough' or seemed normal, and later changed when the woman's status changed. Women can exist indefinitely in a relationship where they aren't valued intrinsically without realising it (but are valued practically), and then suddenly discover their true status later (eg birth of baby, retirement)</p> <p>So even though I have enough feelings and information to write a whole book, I have chosen to write about the low-level stuff to ensure it gets some consideration, somehow.</p>	
<p>The first time</p> <p>In [REDACTED], I was in my [REDACTED]. My partner was what some violence works call an "intimate terrorist". Trippings-over followed by kicking in the ribs, doors slammed on fingers, back of legs kicked hard in bed, dinners thrown, hot iron 'accidentally' tipped on my hand, constant death threats and nasty phone messages about how my (soon-to-arrive) baby would turn out "a fucked-up monster".</p> <p>Repeated calls to the Police had to be carefully considered as he would run away and the Police would arrive and start getting annoyed. I was laughed out of [REDACTED] Police Station when I asked for an interim intervention order; they refused to even consider it ("paperwork").</p> <p>When my baby was [REDACTED] old and I got him to leave the first time, my girlfriends called me up and threatened to shun me en masse if I went back to my ex-partner. He asked to be forgiven so I let him move back in but it went back to business as usual straight away.</p>	

<p>After I got him to leave for the second time and things had settled down, I tried to get help from a psychiatrist but the psychiatrist wouldn't consider discussion of the violence – he acted as though I was mistaken about its importance.</p> <p>I started earning a very good income which helped to cover up all the problems; I still lost some friends though. People don't understand trauma. I didn't either. I just thought I was an inadequate person who needed to try harder. I had asked questions, but the answer seemed to just come back "You need to be less upset and earn more money".</p>	
<p>Background</p>	
<p>■ years later, after a lot of hard work raising my ■ on my own, I decided I deserved another go at having a partner and a family. I tried harder. I worked on myself – went to the gym, got another degree. I made new friends who were kind and sensible and funny. I took responsibility for my actions – went 'hyper-responsible' in order to make myself strong. I took on the philosophy that everything that I feel and all reactions are my responsibility.</p> <p>I vowed I would use extreme 'relationship hygiene' this time. I do absolutely nothing to make him want to leave or hurt me. He ended up doing both, alternating.</p> <p>I met him on the internet, although it's so common these days and doesn't really count for anything as I carefully checked out his friends, family and work situation to ensure he was a nice stable person. All okay. He lived ■ hours' drive away (we were both in country Victoria and it's not unusual for relationships to start out that way). We saw each other on weekends for the first ■ months. It was exclusive, with no funny business. All romantic and after a short period we looked forward to getting married. After ■ months he gave up his job and moved up to our town to move in with us. And I got pregnant.</p>	

Blood in the water

When we got to know each other, I told him about my past and he was very sympathetic – even angry at my former partner. He listened very carefully to details of how I got away, and later he used some of these details as part of his strategy to punish me. For example, I told him of how in [REDACTED] I didn't have a lot of support from my family – lots of physical support, but the philosophy was still basically "you made your bed, now lie in it", so I made sure that my GP and my maternal and child health nurse knew about the violence. My second partner, when he was angry at me, went to our GP (a small town one) and told him I was abusing him (he included in his definition of abuse me saying things like "You throwing me against the wall is completely unacceptable and it must stop at once or I will ring the Police"); my second partner then told me what he had done. That GP was also our baby [REDACTED]'s so I had to sit through session after session of this GP glaring at me, almost too furious to speak. Yet the damage was done – without specialist training, that GP would never have believed that it was the other way around.

It wasn't until much later and I was triaging how the whole thing had happened that I realised how carefully my second partner had gathered information (almost by instinct) about what happened with my first partner and my family's and friends' reactions and lack of support.

First incident

The first incident came about because he had been bullying my [REDACTED] from my first relationship – who was only [REDACTED] – about eating [REDACTED] dinner and finishing [REDACTED] homework. This was something that started after he moved in; before that he had kept his nose out of the parenting of [REDACTED]. I remember telling him to stop, that it was [REDACTED] bedtime, and that it was [REDACTED] home, too. I put [REDACTED] to bed then came downstairs and 'drew the line in the sand': that what he was doing was overstepping the mark. We started yelling at each other and he grabbed my shoulders and pushed me fast backwards over about six metres of floor until I was slammed up against the wall; he was so angry he lifted me off the floor when he did it and I was pinned there on my tippy-toes until he realised I was screaming and hurriedly backed off. I am pretty sure from court documents that he edited that incident in his memory to be me yelling at him, him giving me a little push, and then me sobbing uncontrollably in the shower with the door locked for an hour. If you asked him now, he would say it didn't happen at all and that I made it up.

For the next year or so there was an incident like this every month or so. Sometimes, he'd dig his fingers into my face by the cheeks so hard I couldn't smile for a week (doesn't bruise on the outside). Sometimes, he'd rant. Sometimes, he'd push me across the floor again. When our [REDACTED] was [REDACTED] days old, he launched at me on our bed, and started

choking me – I was holding [REDACTED] at the time. Another time, he pushed me onto a sofa and knelt on my chest, his full weight on me, covering my nose and mouth with his hands so I couldn't breathe – he did this in front of my parents; when they started to object, he jumped off, pointing to me and yelling "It's all her fault! She did it!" – he really thought his behaviour was down to me, and he also thought he was right (that the witnesses would agree with him).

In this relationship I call the Police three times. The first time, I knew the sergeant personally so it was very embarrassing (country town). In one way, he was very professional: I also knew his wife, and there were moments when she could have let on she knew, but I guess he never told her. In another way, he was dangerously unprofessional – later on, when I was dealing with magistrates' court and intervention orders, a Family Violence Liaison sergeant in another town read out the notes from that incident. Although I had fully reported the choking assault and said I was afraid of my partner, and asked the sergeant to warn him off, the official record said something like 'altercation'. For the two other Police visits, all of which were complaints about being assaulted, the notes said similar things. In other words, if later in Family Court we had subpoenaed those notes to prove I had been in danger, it would have looked as though I fabricated three incidents of serious and scary physical assault.

Life continued on this way for another year or so. I kept bargaining, threatening, pleading, reasoning with him but he always fell back on the excuse that he was depressed and stressed out (we were in severe financial hardship as neither of us had worked for some time). Several times I made him promise to tell his psychologist what was going on but he never did. Knowing what I know now, it would have been fairly easy for the psychologist to at least have a suspicion that he was being abusive at home but the psychologist was a nice man with no training in that kind of thing.

Escalation

Eventually, he got a part-time job and [REDACTED] months after that, I did, too. We were out of 'crisis mode' with our finances and things started to look normal. He started getting angry when I discussed him being depressed and how his recovery was going. He insisted he was no longer depressed. Well okay, I said, then it cannot be the reason for your violence –you really have to face it head on, because it now looks like you're doing it deliberately.

I started to call him to account in our arguments instead of letting him off the hook. If he started to be abusive, I offered to record the conversation so he could play it back to his psychologist and get some support. (On those occasions when I did record, our conflicts were resolved fairly quickly without rancour, a thing which kept me from going insane).

This accountability thing made him more and more angry. His physical assaults started to happen more often and were less careful, and whereas once he would apologise and cry after he'd been abusive, he stopped caring and simply smile

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to himself after each incident. He was contemptuous almost all the time we were alone together, so I avoided it.

Did I mention the other stuff? Like inviting four people over for a roast chicken dinner for my [REDACTED] birthday (I had looked forward to that special birthday for a very long time). That was all. No party. No present. No date. Nothing. You can't put that stuff down on a charge sheet. But it happens every day, all day, to women in that position.

<p>Leaving</p> <p>The last incident was precipitated by a discussion with a other person, lighthearted, about who was the primary breadwinner. At the time, it was me, and I said so, modifying it to say it would soon be him. After the person left, I knew it was going to get worse and worse until he'd eventually lash out. I had to get up early and go to work so I challenged him. It was getting on for 11pm and I needed to get to sleep. I knew he was ready to 'blow'. He 'blew', but it was worse than I thought. I called the Police for the last time, asked them to ask him to leave for the night, dropped the kids off the next day and went to the magistrates' court for an intervention order.</p> <p>I the time between filling in the application form and appearing before the magistrate, I sought help from a (qualified and experienced) counsellor at the place where I worked. I told her I needed to make a safety plan (and yes, she had plenty of time to google what that was before I got to her office). She told me that if I didn't leave him immediately, I would be putting the children in danger. She said because the children had witnessed his violence, I was harming them by staying there. She rang child services as she felt the mandatory reporting of child abuse rule applied. Trying to regain some control over the situation, I asked to speak to the child services officer myself. The child services officer informed me that if I didn't kick him out immediately, I would probably be investigated for being a non-protective parent. After that advice, I had no choice, even though, knowing him, it would have been safer to 'make up' with him that evening and leave when I'd done some proper planning and got some money. I tried to explain this to the counsellor, but she kept overriding me, saying the money wasn't important. I realised that if I chose to against their advice and something happened to me and the children, I would be blamed and the kids could be taken away from me. I later complained in writing to the counsellor about the dangerous and risky situation she forced me into, but she wrote back with a polite version of "that's your opinion". I am almost certain she made not a single phone call or googled a single term with regards to that episode but rested easy in the knowledge that she was an experienced and compassionate counsellor who had 'saved' some children from danger. If she only knew...</p>	<p>3, 5, 1b</p>
<p>After leaving</p> <p>We were in the middle of moving to a new town where we knew no-one when it all happened. My [REDACTED] was starting [REDACTED] at a new school. I was still new in my job (same job, different location). He signed the lease so I thought he intended to get his act together. I still didn't understand all the underlying dynamics of coercive controlling behaviour at that time. He live around the corner. He got worse. He got nasty. He got a lawyer and a new girlfriend. He refused to pay</p>	<p>5</p>

his way with the bills. He refused to offer regular childcare for our [REDACTED] whilst letters arrived from his lawyers demanding access. He stalked me at work. He refused to allow us to move to [REDACTED] so I could get enough of a salary to support the family. At the same time, he moved even further away (I later discovered) without letting us know. He told everyone who would listen a distorted tale of being abused by me. They pretty much believed him, including his boss. Because he was a 'nice' man who has a 'big heart' and breaks down in tears – why would he make something like that up?

Eventually, I got a great job in [REDACTED], moved my daughter from one school to another (including inspecting new school), found toddler the four day care places it took to cover the new job, found a house, moved all our belongings fast, fought the landlord in VCAT (landlord was nice but property managers didn't think they had to honour the family violence provisions in the Resi Tenancies Act), fought a prosecution by the ranger from our old local government area who had been abused and sworn at by ex-partner (I was registered owner of dog), answered massive, abusive affidavits filed by ex-partner in Family Court, got interviewed twice by possible mediation centres before turning down the idea because of history of violence, went to Family Court around ten times (including one time when Father plaintiff did not even turn up – he blamed my solicitor for not reminding him), Magi court around ten times (various intervention orders, including a retaliatory one by him), VCAT around six times (property managers + 'blood in the water' – glad I went, a total of about \$8000 in charges avoided), plus three sessions with a Family Consultant (with no training in family violence, who held up her hand in a 'stop' gesture when I tried to tell her about the violence). One time, my mother came to one of the hearings. Another time, I had help from the Tenants' Union of Victoria, another time, my friend, who does legal aid criminal defence came to help me; three times, my legal aid solicitor appeared for me. All the rest of the time, on my own, nobody with me, hurrying to get back to pick child up from childcare. Bullied by second/[REDACTED] employer because I had to take off so much time for court hearings and the University ([REDACTED]) did not have a category of special leave for that kind of thing and refused to invent one. One hearing with Fair Work Australia over the bullying; not a great outcome but I was exhausted – I only pursued it because I was worried my bullying boss would defame me to whatever recruiter rang [REDACTED] up – got a ruling that they had to pass on my (impeccable) work review notes.

I lost my job and tried to call in the insurance on my credit cards. But bank needed confirmation that I'm either depressed or have lost my job. (It can't be both). But if you're depressed, you have to be deeply depressed, or that doesn't count either. I couldn't access the hardship program at my bank because I had the insurance policy. The insurance company wouldn't process the claim. The bank claimed the insurance company – with the exact same phone number as the bank – was a separate entity and it had not control over it. The bank put a time limit on my claim for hardship and it ran out because the insurance company wouldn't process it. My old credit card debt is sitting there in limbo because I can't stand any more bullying. I just cannot have it or I will go around the twist.

All the above happened like dominoes. One thing causes the other. For example, for my first Family Court Hearing, I got a parking ticket, because I couldn't drop my toddler off at childcare any earlier and didn't have time to find a spot further away, and I didn't have money for a paid parking place; it turned into a sheriff's warrant, and I had to go to the registrar to get it put into a payment plan. Last time I looked at my debts, I calculated that 60% of the fines and 20% of the debt was there because the system is not realistic about how poor people cope (this RC is not about poverty, but sorry, wherever there's family violence you're going to find some form of poverty). Most things are little, but it all snowballs until you're permanently on the hop and in the meantime, there's you and your two children and all you want to do is to be left in peace to be a family and do the things you're supposed to do as a mother.

I have spent so much post-separation time just trying to cope with one bit of institutionalised bullying after another, it almost changed my personality. The only reason it didn't was because I chose to break down and cry instead of becoming a different, hard kind of person who doesn't care about reading to her kids and just 'processes' them. But then, how many times have those same children see me crying?

<p>Men's Behaviour Change programs</p> <p>The word on the street is, they don't work. Of course they don't – how could twelve weeks of being lectured to and having to look at themselves (and there's not a lot of self-love there in the first place if they're abusive) be helpful, particularly if his family and friends simply blow smoke up his behind ("But you're a great guy!") or join him in his less physical but possible more dangerous contemptuous attitudes?</p> <p>If the content and physical reality of the men's behaviour change program became a permanent fixture in his life – for example in the way that a significant amount of community service would become part of the landscape of an offender's life – perhaps the initial reactions would fade and be replaced by something approaching reality. But community attitudes are never going to allow us to force abusive men to go through six months of behaviour change, which is what experts like Lundy Bancroft think is appropriate.</p> <p>The Big However</p> <p>Even knowing that men's behaviour change doesn't really affect that much change, I still made a stand in our court case about him doing it. This stand made the case last longer, but it was important. After having been threatened with investigation by child services, I needed proof that I had done everything I could to protect myself and the children. At this point, there was still an intervention order in place with both me and the children on it. Naturally, lawyers involved thought I was making an unnecessary fuss, and I was judged as being slightly hysterical for insisting on this instead of settling quickly; and naturally, he retaliated further.</p> <p>Even though it was written into the orders from the outset (interim), he cheated his way out of it a number of times – including persuading a psychologist who offers anger management to 'fast-track' him through a 'men's behaviour change program'. The psychologist involved had no idea there was a difference between the two until I rang him, panicked and incensed, and explained that if it was a men's behaviour change program, his (the psychologist's) first priority would have been protecting our safety. Eventually, after three no-shows, my barrister resolved the impasse by writing the name, date and location of the chosen program into the interim orders. He went.</p> <p>It was really important for me to build the requirement that he attend into our agreement – he needed to know that even if he – and his family – didn't believe that his behaviour was abusive, the courts <i>did</i> think it was.</p> <p>Even if he was to be abusive in his new relationship (he will be eventually, there is nothing to stop it – there are already</p>	<p>3, 5, 1d</p>
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signs of controlling behaviours), he would be so knowing that many people, including police and courts, think he is doing the wrong thing. I was also signalling to his new partner that she needed to watch what was going on, but she ignored it and supported him in his vociferous pursuit of me. (Yet I know when she ends up in my shoes I will support her in some way – how else is the world to change?).

People don't understand that abusive men think they are just like every other man, only not as good at controlling their women or not getting caught. So to them, being busted by the police is a shameful thing because it shows them up as being out of control (not shameful because they hurt someone), as compared to other men, who think and feel the same way about their women but who manage to stay in control. They don't realise that most men genuinely like and respect their partners, and that if a man buys his wife a present it's because he wants to make her feel loved, rather than to earn brownie points against which he can abuse.

<p>Friends and family</p> <p>One after the other, I lost a lot of friends. I'd left him because I thought I'd have their support, but I didn't. These are nice, well-educated, middle class people with unexamined belief systems, for example, that there is such a thing as 'negative energy' for which you are responsible, or a lack of understanding of the laws of chance – for example, they might believe that a person can win the lottery twice but not accidentally be abused twice, therefore it probably didn't happen by chance, therefore it's probably her fault.</p> <p>They didn't want to be around someone who was still being routinely abused (via courts, via a whole lot of sly stuff), but they couldn't articulate their discomfort. For example, one time when I had to drive home from work but hadn't slept for 24 hours, I asked a friend if I could have a nap at her place before the long drive to pick up my toddler. She said, "You can have a sleep at our place but you have to be gone before the kids come home and see you. I don't want them to see you." Another friend had us over for dinner. Someone asked me how things were going, so I told them simply, although it was difficult, and said at the end "well that's enough about me and my trouble, it's better if I shut up about it now" and the hostess said "Yes, I think so, [REDACTED] That's enough." Why go? What's the point?</p> <p>They don't understand. The problem with family violence is that most people don't understand the underlying motives – they think the violence is provoked, and if you take the provocation away, the violence also goes. Because, for 'normal' people, that is how anger – even the worst kind – is resolved. Because there are cultural tropes like the 'vengeful woman' we don't see men as vengeful, yet in my experience of violence (twice) was worst in the vengeful phases, after the guy had been shown up and started to feel shame. But my friends had not had to examine this.</p> <p>Thus, people regularly use 'utility'-based motives to guide their questioning "why would he want to follow you around? What a waste of time! It's not very likely is it?" instead of questioning based on behaviour patterns eg he keeps turning up where she is, so he's probably following her. Extend this to "Well, we know he's followed you in the past, but who in their right mind would spend all that time bothering to do that now?"</p> <p>They think being pursued in court could not be for any other reason than he has grounds. Asking for help beyond escaping immediate danger is fraught with risks to relationships.</p>	<p>5, 1d, 1b, 1a</p>
<p>The future</p>	<p>1c</p>

The Court case is over, we live different lives in different cities, so you'd think that was the end of it. I recently realised he is possibly never going to stop punishing me for exposing him. I still get long emails from him where he quotes tracts of legalise from the orders with some kind of veiled demand that I admit that I'm inferior and promise to suffer a little bit; it still hurts and makes me vaguely worried. He asks for and expects flexibility around the orders but is punitive and outraged if we can't comply with every last letter. For example, he demands notice of every visit by our [REDACTED] to our GP, but hasn't even bothered to send me the details of his (our [REDACTED] in his town).

I don't think my ex would ever directly hurt our [REDACTED], but he can be reckless/careless to the point of being extremely dangerous. For example, he once left the handbrake off the car and it almost rolled into the pram containing our [REDACTED] – to my surprise, all he was worried about was that I might use it against him one day. When we left, he forced us to take an unroadworthy ute (with a steering wheel that was so loose it came off while I was driving it) with no air con in the middle of the summer, even though he knew it would be his [REDACTED] main form of transport. Whenever I think about somehow 'forcing' him to be fair, to pay more than \$15 per fortnight in child support, or telling his friends that he wasn't truthful to them about me, or anything like that, I just remember Robert Farquharson and Arthur Freeman, and how their former partners thought they wouldn't hurt the kids.

That is why women stay silent, and that is, miserably, why Rosie Batty was able to speak up.

Bystanders matter

This submission is about what happens in low-level-violence cases, so I thought I'd write down my experience of how bystanders contributed to the problem or ameliorated it. This is not comprehensive, just some insight.

Bystander	Effect	
White Ribbon organisation	Great message with some great ambassadors. Lousy quality processes that could bring it down and hurt a lot of women – for example, [REDACTED] University is a White Ribbon 'Partner', yet punished me for taking leave to deal with immediate legal threats. White Ribbon refused to consider asking about the university's processes, saying it was 'an HR	5

	issue'	
Our local GP #1	Was my GP, was my doctor throughout my pregnancy, delivered my baby. Would have loved to have tell him but didn't know if the practice could handle the information sensitively.	
Our local GP #2	Another GP in the same practice, he was my partner's (at the time) and my baby daughter's GP. My partner told him he was being abused by me.	
Psychologist at our local GP practice	I took my [REDACTED], who was [REDACTED] at the time, to see a counsellor because I was worried about her being exposed to the violence. I couched in it terms of 'adjusting to the new dad and new baby' while I tried to guage how she would react if I told her. I eventually said to her, when we were discussing the [REDACTED] adjusting, "I need to talk to you about the assaults. There have been assaults by [Partner name]." She waved it off, saying "Oh, that's something different. We'll talk about that later". But she never came back to it.	
Psychologists of former partner	I had only met one of them, who was a nice man who thought my partner was "a big man with a big heart". Former partner has had at least four psychologists and a psychiatrist, as far as I can tell. Also had himself checked into a residential facility for a while. Three of the psychologists were asked by former partner to write that he had PTSD but none of them did. Diagnosis was depression.	1d
Local council – [REDACTED] Shire	<p>(More blood in the water).</p> <p>A Shire Ranger (who had previously authorised the destruction of one of our family dogs for nipping a neighbour [REDACTED] years before) carried out a Moby-Dick-like pursuit of me across three local government areas, in the mistaken belief that my former partner, who had sworn and abused him verbally many times, was in fact in the same body as me, the registered owner of our dogs.</p> <p>Shire ranger was apprised of the family violence situation and separation, and went in harder, sending legal notices to home of former partner (where I had never lived),</p>	

	<p>having me arrested for not showing up to court due to legal notices not being delivered to me, and on and on.</p> <p>The misery and injustice this ranger caused my family is something I will never forget. If the ratepayers knew what he had done and how much money he had wasted in legal fees and travel costs, they would be aghast.</p> <p>He only stopped when I told his lawyer that my initial guilty plea had been in the middle of all the other family violence and if he chose to re-open it, this time I would plead not guilty and likely win.</p>	
Friends distancing	Middle class families believe 'experts' are needed and they need to stay out of it. "You really need to leave us out of it and call a professional"	5
The two [REDACTED] schools	Two [REDACTED] secondary schools were genuinely, deeply helpful and supportive of me and my children and my older [REDACTED] in particular, and I have no doubt that it was partly due to their commitment to living their mission. The first sheltered [REDACTED] and made [REDACTED] feel normal in a sea of trouble then helped me reach out to the second school. The second school accepted her as if it was perfectly natural to join year [REDACTED] mid-way through whilst your family's kind of on the run. The first never sent me the bill for her fees and the second has 'had our back' in every way possible. We have been treated with respect and kindness even when all our friends had disappeared. (And we're not [REDACTED]).	5
Police reports, police notes useless – and dangerous	<p>All three were grossly understated as 'altercation' when actual physical assaults had been perpetrated – could have been very dangerous if this had turned up during a live trial as I would have looked like I was exaggerating.</p> <p>Police would be reluctant to revise their notes later, even if they were inaccurate to start with.</p>	1d
Police Family Violence Liaison	The particular officer I dealt with made me feel safe, protected and believed. It took me about six visits to the Police station to discover that he even existed, however. Often professional people behave within a 'suspend judgement' mode, which is still not	

	completely a safe place to be, but the one I dealt with () was reliable, kind, a good listener and a genuine support. Once, he was there at the local court to support someone else and just sat down next to me when I was waiting to go into court and my former partner had been stalking me off to one side. He said not a word. He was just there.	
Police complaints	I made a complaint when I'd called Police and reported an assault (the third visit with my former partner). Young officers had gone around to my former partner's place – by this time he was living around the corner - and had decided not to proceed because "he was crying". They had special training after that.	
Family Consultant in the Family Court	<p>The Family Consultant I dealt with had no family violence training, making her easy to manipulate by my former partner, causing reduced delivery of just outcomes and potential danger to our . My second interview with the Family Consultant was the only time (except from the early interaction with Child Services) when I feared for my safety because of an institution rather than because of my partner's behaviour.</p> <p>This is particularly scary knowing that a person can't speak up about a problem FC without risk of being in contempt of court.</p>	3, 5
Presumption of grounds – Family Court	It is presumed that a Family Court action has grounds because this would be tested in a hearing, yet FC hearings can sometimes not be held until years of to-ing and fro-ing before the registrar, at which time anything can be said, no matter how nasty or untrue. So proceedings are regularly used to further the abuse of the woman, which is what happened in my case.	1d
Retaliatory intervention orders easy to get	Retaliatory intervention orders go down as 'real' ones when the case ends up in the FC. Police said to me: "it happens all the time; we have to serve them anyway". Faulty reasoning – "She has an IO against him, so it's only fair that he can have one against her"	1d

Centrelink	<p>Centrelink CSO person #1 told me to ring up and speak to a social worker. Centrelink CSO #2 got nasty, denied me an appointment with social worker because “everybody knows it’s not domestic violence if the two of you aren’t living together” > affected my access to special benefits</p> <p>Centrelink deals quite well with family violence generally but they are completely under-resourced.</p>	
My boss (#1)	The boss I had when everything about was great – but her previous career had been a social worker. (We can’t make policy to have all bosses be ex-social workers).	
My boss (#2)	<p>(More ‘blood in the water’) The boss I had when I shifted to [REDACTED] became irritated by the amount of time I had to take off to attend Family Court (not my choice), Magistrates’ Court (intervention orders and abovementioned ranger), VCAT (I stood to lose thousands of dollars I did not have) and the work in between to generate all the paperwork for it. I tried to get special leave for it but the HR department refused. Although my performance reviews were all great, my boss started disciplinary action, saying I wasn’t doing my job. I had proof that I was doing my job (it’s unusual, but in that role everything was documented in a massive computer program) but nobody would listen to me, saying I was too distracted by my recent trouble to be paying attention. In other words, she knew she shouldn’t get rid of me because of the family violence, but she didn’t want me there and so made up a narrative about how I was producing bad work. The union ([REDACTED]) fobbed it off. The [REDACTED] HR department pretended to help but gathered info for legal defence. The [REDACTED] hired outside counsel to represent it at the telephone hearing at FWA. I had no counsel because I had been told it was informal.</p>	5
My boss (#3) (Current)	Doesn’t know, and I won’t tell him. I’d rather fake an illness (I hate lying, but these last three years have been a learning curve).	

Child services	<p>Interaction 1 – threatened to investigate me for being a non-protective parent because I wouldn't leave partner immediately. Did not know what a safety plan was. Caused us to leave in straightened circumstances while partner was at the peak of his violence cycle. It also caused the Family Court Action to last much longer because I had to be extra careful to put protections in place in case something later happened to [REDACTED] and CS said I wasn't protecting her enough.</p> <p>Interaction 2 – my former partner rang them up and complained about me, so they called my daughter's Family Day Care educator to ask basic questions about her care. The FDC educator was pretty aghast. Nothing came of it. They never spoke to me. I have no idea what was said about me. Just another way of him abusing through institutions.</p>	3
Lawyers	<p>Legal aid lawyer: "You can't relocate, even if it's to earn money to support family. Even though we can't get him to respond. Even though he won't let you go. Yes he can move. Stop crying in my office. And don't bring your child."</p> <p>Firm number 2 (legal aid): "Don't be one of those 'access bitches'. That's what they call them you know". Didn't care about Child Services threats, history of violence etc. Just thought the intervention order, with both children on it, was prejudicial to our case.</p> <p>Firm number 3 (legal aid): Very competent and very helpful, but not very educated about violence and its dynamics.</p> <p>I think a lot of lawyers and other court officials think they understand family violence because they see it in their work, but they don't see the other parts of it or understand how it works.</p>	
Former partner's friends	<p>As part of the interim orders, my partner had supervised access with our [REDACTED] initially. He didn't understand it, and the registrar was kind enough to not make a big deal of it, but it was for my benefit to stop him being abusive in handovers and so on. His family would have just been proxy abusers, so when we were looking for people who could supervise, I suggested we ask friends of Family A and Family B, who were nice people who he knew well – his friends rather than mine. I thought maybe they could support him in getting his issues under control, model being good parents a bit etc.</p>	5, 1d

	<p>Family A and Family B were told the distorted story and swallowed it whole, as far as I can tell. I tried a couple of times to tell them about the abuse (not all of it, just enough so I didn't have to have contact with him and his new partner) but they blocked me both times. One of the men lifted his hand up in the 'stop' gesture and said "I don't want to know about it".</p> <p>I still don't understand why four university-educated people were asked to supervise a contact visit and chose not to ask questions of anyone but the actual perpetrator of the violence.</p> <p>They live in the same town as me, and every time I see one of them, I think "they think I'm one of those female abusers".</p>	
Former partner's new fiancée	<p>He has told her a complete narrative that is a kind of upside-down version of what happened. I have tried to warn her numerous times without telling her directly to get out – that would just put her back up. She basically believes everything that he or Dr Phil (TV show) say and so I know I probably can't help.</p> <p>She's actually the safety element to the contact arrangements. She's very old-fashioned, very maternal and although I don't like her, I trust her to protect the children (she and my former partner now have a child along with her [REDACTED] children from a previous marriage) and believe she would put the children before him in a crisis. She's a 'safe' step mother for our [REDACTED]. She used to write me long emails about what I was doing wrong.</p>	5
Child care centre	<p>My former partner showed up at our [REDACTED] childcare centres three times when he was not welcome. The first time, there was no intervention in place so it was basically meant to disturb me (he didn't even let me know he was going and had been threatening to me recently). The other two times, she had been listed on the intervention order and there was a safety plan in place. On the second occasion, the centre called security ([REDACTED]) and he drove away when he saw the security vehicle.</p>	

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	<p>The last time, he said he was going to take [REDACTED] anyway, regardless of what I or the court orders said, but I wasn't worried because it was [REDACTED] time, nobody was there and the childcare centre was closed. (I secretly hope he tried to carry out his plan).</p>	
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