

SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE

Please note that this is my second submission, addressing a separate issue.

INTRODUCTION

I have a suggestion for education to be offered by the police to early high school students, educating young people as to what constitutes “family violence.” I see violence being perpetuated in homes and passed down from generation to generation. A way of stopped this cycle is to educate children.

My idea has arisen from the following situation, which occurred in [REDACTED] in my own family.

CASE STUDY

My nephew has been struggling with anger management since the age of [REDACTED] when his parents divorced. He also experienced bullying and teasing from his father, resulting in a strong sense of rejection, which transferred into aggression toward those closest to him. He is highly intelligent, good looking and successful at school, comes from a middle-class family so he has all that he needs, but the anger has stayed with him at home. He received therapy when he was younger, but to varying degrees the anger continued. It was never a problem at school, but continued to manifest at home including verbal abuse (especially to his mother) and physical abuse (especially to his older sister).

The situation escalated recently, particularly with his father now living overseas. My sister and I concurred that something drastic needed to be done. He was getting stronger with weight training and clearly didn't know his own strength. He would isolate himself in his room for many hours, playing violent video games. His interactions with other family members outside the immediate home were also starting to become strained and even aggressive. My sister felt that nothing she did to reprimand his negative behaviour was having any effect whatsoever.

As a final resort, we contacted her local police station and asked for their help. Following lengthy phone conversations between my sister and the police, and convincing the police not to file an Intervention Order, two policemen came over to the house one evening and had a “chat” with my nephew, now aged 15, for about 30 minutes. This was the day after my sister came home to find her son overpowering his sister, punching her.

The police were fantastic, and clearly well trained in how to speak with teens about such issues. They explained to him that even though he feels he's defending himself when he damages items in the home or hits his sister or swears at his mother, Family Violence is a criminal offence and when he turns 16 it becomes even more dire legally. They praised him for being a good kid most of the time and for doing well at school, but pointed out that his violent actions toward family members (or anyone else) could get him into very serious trouble and could ruin his life. They also urged him to find a male role model as mentor since his dad is overseas, eg counsellor at school.

My sister and I were rather terrified of what might happen next, afraid that my nephew's anger might worsen and that he might retaliate. That evening after the police left, we had a huge verbal fight and he was very defensive. I tried to explain that we called the police not to intimidate him but because we care about him and didn't know what else to do to convince him that he was breaking the law by being violent.

Somehow it all got through to him. The VERY GOOD NEWS is that this visit from the police was a godsend. My nephew seems like his “old self” again. He is cheerful, respectful, and interacting more often with family. The violent outbursts have stopped. He gave me a huge hug yesterday and didn't let go for ages. I'm taking him and his mates rock climbing in a couple of weeks, and I've organised an outing to the footy with a couple of families. He gave his mum a Mother's Day card yesterday saying that she's a great mum and how much he loves her. The visit from the police served not only to educate him about his actions, but also to show him the value of what is good in his life. The police pointed out to him that he lives in a nice house with a mum and sister who love him and asked him if he wanted to throw that all away by losing control of himself. The results have been remarkable.

OBSERVATIONS

Having experienced such great results with this visit from the police – which was a “warning” instead of filing an Intervention Order – several things occurred to me:

- 1) PREVENTION IS MORE EFFECTIVE & EFFICIENT THAN CURE. We already know that Family Violence exists and is prevalent in alarming proportions. The preventative action the police took for my family has already helped prevent further violence and has had an amazing, immediate effect on my nephew and my family.
- 2) ALL FAMILIES NEED EDUCATION ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE - My family learned so much from the police visit about what constitutes family violence. I suspect most families would not know about this until it becomes an issue, which is often too late. **All families need to understand that Family Violence includes damaging property and verbal abuse, not just physical assault.**
- 1) OUR POLICE ARE A FANTASTIC RESOURCE – **they are already well trained in speaking with young people.** They can help prevent family violence. I've heard that the majority of calls to the police relate to family violence. If the police were to help prevent family violence, it could have an amazing effect on the entire system.

CONCLUSION

As an experienced high school teacher, I've seen police come to our schools regularly to speak with students about how to behave on public transportation, what will happen if they shoplift, and conversations about other forms of petty crime. The students are also well versed about what will happen if they assault a student or teacher at school.

What we *must* add is education in schools regarding the definition of and effects caused by Family Violence. Doing so will, in my opinion, help to prevent violence.

I suggest:

- 1) Mandatory visit by local police to speak with Year 7 classes annually.
- 2) Creation of short video presentations depicting different types of families and different types of family violence. Teenagers respond particularly well to video presentations as it's a medium they relate with fun and games.
- 3) Schools/teachers to follow up with discussion groups that may include parents as well.

The solution to Family Violence will be multi tiered I'm sure, but I wanted to share with you the excellent experience my family had with the police and offer this experience to others.

With greater understanding comes change.

Duly submitted by [REDACTED], May 11, 2015