

My 22yo daughter Rekihah O'Donnell was shot in the head by her ex-boyfriend Nelson Lai, on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 2013 (one of the 44 family violence related deaths in your statistics for 2013).

She was shot by him after enduring 14 months of abuse, including repeated bashings causing black eyes, bruised ribs and arms, and a gashed leg. There were repeated threats to kill her, threats to kill her family and friends, kicks to her stomach, knives held to her throat and no end of verbal abuse. His drug-induced paranoia caused him to repeatedly accuse her of cheating on him, causing her to lie and say that she did, just so he would be satisfied. When she tried to leave him he would track her down. When she wasn't with him, he would ring her family and friends non-stop. He also smashed all her possessions, including her car, computer, phones, etc.

As a family, we have been devastated not only by her death, but with all the circumstances surrounding the domestic violence responses and then with the outcome of the court case which has just resulted in this perpetrator being found guilty only of the lesser charge of manslaughter and not murder. I am going to address some of my concerns and suggestions here, and my son Jesse O'Donnell will make another submission relating to the outcome of the case and what has been termed "Rekihah's Law".

1. After we found out Rekihah was being abused by Nelson, we reported this to the police and asked if something could be done in regards to taking out an intervention order. The police told us that they couldn't act on our report, nor could we take out an intervention order on Rekihah's behalf unless she was willing to report it herself. She refused to get an intervention order because she was fearful of what he would do and said it wasn't worth the paper it was written on.
 

**Action:** **a.** Police should be able to act on reports from family members or friends and be able to take some sort of order out on behalf of that person who is usually too weak and fearful to do it themselves. It would at least be good to be able to have some sort of warning issued.

**b.** If an intervention order is taken out by a person, as soon as the perpetrator breaks it, they should be jailed for a period of time so that the victim knows that the order *is* actually worth the paper it is written on.
2. On one occasion when we feared greatly for Rekihah's safety after hearing an argument over the phone, we went over to where Nelson lived with his parents, never having been there before. When we arrived we got no response after knocking on doors and calling out. We rang 000 and asked for the police to come out. After several phone calls back and forth from police we were told they couldn't get anyone to come out, and one policeman actually asked us to go inside the house (through an unlocked door), to see if anyone was there! When we refused they finally decided to send someone out, after about 2 hours of waiting!
 

**Action:** The response from police needs to be much better than this. This man Nelson Lai had a record. They should have been able to see that he had a violent history and we should have been given an immediate response. It is also inexcusable

that we were told by a police officer to enter someone else's house. It could very well have been us that ended up dead !

3. Rekihah reported bruises and black eyes to at least 3 different doctors and a psychologist. There were also several reports to police about damage to her property.  
**Action:** I think there should be mandatory reporting by doctors, schools, community services etc. where domestic violence is suspected.
4. It was appalling to read in the Herald Sun recently of a report that said that a large number of boys think it's okay to slap a girl or force them to have sex.  
**Action:** Education in schools needs to be of utmost importance. It is all good and well to have other curriculum and say there is not enough time or money for this education, but these are women's lives at stake. Our boys and girls need to be educated at a young age about what is right and wrong in relationships, what a healthy relationship looks like. They also need to be educated about what domestic violence is so they can recognise it in their own homes and know where to go to get help if they need to. Particularly with so many different cultures, they need to be educated as to what is acceptable in Australian culture about how women should be treated.
5. Women need to know they have somewhere safe to go if they do report the abuse. They need to be able to easily access the help they need.  
**Action:** It is unacceptable that women who desperately need help are being turned away. The government needs to make funding for domestic violence a priority above anything else. 39 women have already lost their lives this year and this is unacceptable. We need funding for help lines, women's services and refuges. We need women to know that they are going to be able to access the help they need once they make that decision to get out.