

Submission for the Royal Commission into Family Violence, based on my personal experience.

I have found that the main barriers to a violence free society, reduction and elimination of family violence, the building of family relationships, community rejection of family violence and the support and safety of adults and children who have been affected by family violence are that those who have been violent are not accountable for their actions, and that something beyond behaviour change programmes is needed for those who refuse to change their behaviour.

At present, perpetrators of abuse may find they lose the privilege of living with their family, however, that is the beginning and end of all consequences.

Survivors are the ones who have to do the research, the child protection, the legal work, the proof, the counselling, the children's counselling, the family finances and welfare, the repairs of people and property.

Abusers fill their time with stalking and harassment, and if they keep it to a nuisance level, all they ever get is a call from the police asking them to stop. There is no arrest, even when they are breaching an intervention order.

When an abuser uses child access to harass other family members, and access is suspended, the survivors then have to give the abuser make-up time.

I found that whenever my child was on an access visit, any news report of a child's death was instantly my child. And the abuser [REDACTED] guessed this and delighted in using it to torment me for [REDACTED] years.

My child would say to me: [REDACTED]

The Family Court Final Orders state that parents have to actively encourage the child to visit the non-custodial parent. Parents cannot say anything negative about the other parent without breaching Final Orders.

In cases of Family Violence, a child sees a parent encouraging them to visit an individual they fear as a betrayal. I used to just hug [REDACTED] and cry.

There have to be separate Final Orders requirements in cases of Family Violence.

One amendment that I rejoiced in was that Final Orders now, technically, prioritise the safety of the child above the child spending a meaningful amount of time with each parent.

[REDACTED]

The way that I interpreted the Family Law act 1975 seemed that it should have protected children from an abusive parent but I, and so many others, were constantly aghast at the danger that we were legally required to surrender our children to.

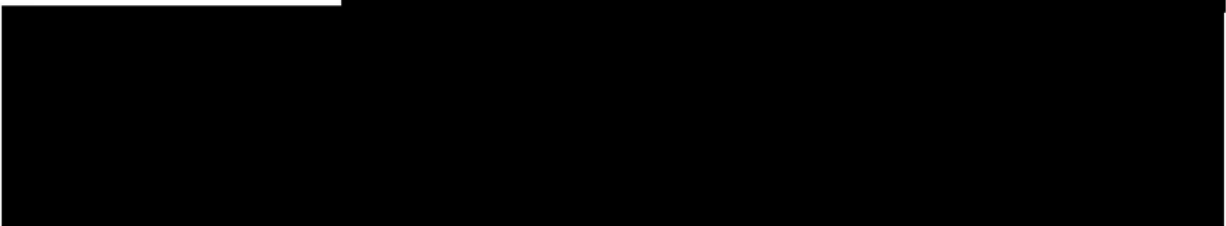

Survivors shouldn't have to prove that their children are in danger; abusers should have to prove that they will not be harmed.

Support and survivor healing are continually thwarted by the lack of consequences for perpetrators of abuse. The laws, as they stand, enable abusers to interfere with survivors working, children socialising and getting access to counselling. Survivors and their children are not currently able to fully extricate themselves from an abusive relationship.

Whilst the woman may escape the violence, her children are forced to spend unsupervised time with the abuser, without their mother there to protect them, leaving them to feel abandoned. This prevents many women leaving, because living in the same house as the abuser means that you can take the brunt of the abuse to spare your children. It means that at least your children have a chance of not being murdered.

Support systems with adequate funding can never be properly utilised whilst abusers are free to abuse from afar, abuse by proxy, utilise the law to continue abuse and constantly interfere with the healing processes of survivors and their children for sport.

My abuser's family were



However, they were very critical of anybody



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

My abuser's

mother wouldn't allow anyone to call Child Protection because she didn't want the child taken away. [REDACTED]

(When I escaped that relationship and the surveillance that went with it, I called Child Protection.)

My abuser's sister tried to get help through counselling and rehabilitation several times. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] laughed at her attempts and told her she'd never follow it through.

My abuser's sister [REDACTED] The family were unsympathetic. Her mother told her it was her own fault.

My abuser's sister made a few suicide attempts. The family laughed at her, and said she wasn't even really trying, just doing it for attention.

Visiting my abuser's parents house was like being dropped onto the set of "The Jerry Springer Show", I would sit there, stunned at the maelstrom that unfolded every weekend. I had never seen anybody behave in that manner before.

I would shepherd the grandchildren away from the abusive language, screaming and violence to a room at the back of the house where I would put on music, tell stories and draw with them. I would prevent them from trying to see what the "adults" were fighting about.

My abuser's mother confronted me about this. [REDACTED]

I told her that I thought they should never have to see it again.

When my child was old enough to put on and remove [REDACTED] own underpants, I told [REDACTED] that from now on, only [REDACTED] was to do it. If anyone else tried, no matter who they were, [REDACTED] was to yell: [REDACTED]

Again I was confronted by my abuser's mother. She was furious that I had taught [REDACTED] not to let anybody else remove [REDACTED] underwear. I explained that it was just to keep [REDACTED] safe and avoid confusion as [REDACTED] was too little to pick and choose who was safe. She just yelled [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He called his mother and told her to take the baby. I did not agree to this. I explained that as a new mother I just wasn't ready for anyone else to look after my baby yet, even my own mother.

My abuser's mother was insulted by this. Her and my abuser yelled at me, and then she grabbed my baby out of my arms, put him in her car and drove off.

I was distraught. I waited until my abuser fell asleep, then I walked through the night from [REDACTED] to be back with my baby. Somebody tried to lift me off my feet to sexually assault me on the way, ([REDACTED] [REDACTED]) but I was so angry already, and determined to be back with my baby, that when I yelled authoritatively at him to [REDACTED] he was stunned into releasing me! (Any other time I would have been frozen into silence.)

One of the times I left my abuser, I had actually gone to counselling seeking advice on how to avoid making him angry. I had tried working harder, being frugal, giving him the best food, buying him presents, not talking or offering opinions, being more punctual, working faster, complimenting him, never criticising him and waiting on him hand and foot. Nothing was working. He just got more demanding, and the demands got more and more contradictory. It was impossible to follow one rule without breaking another. The counsellor

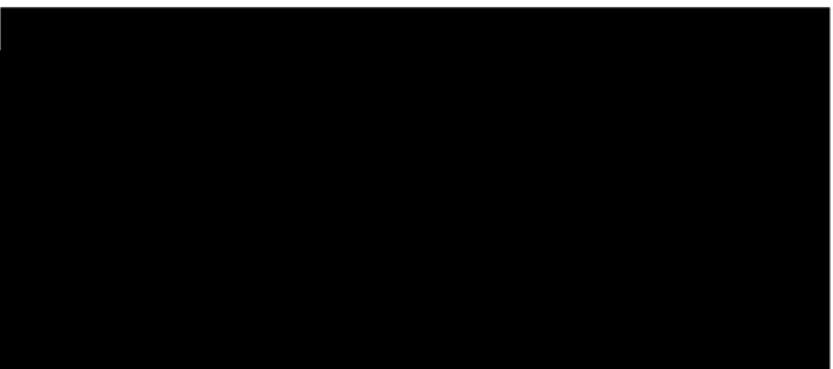
told me she didn't want me to return home that night and got two very kind police officers to speak to me.


Another time I left, I had no plan; I just knew my baby and I were safer on the streets than in the house.

The third time I left was after he was drunk and drug affected and strangled me until I nearly blacked out. I had made up my mind never to return and went to my parents' house. They believed me and were both very supportive.

However, my abuser continually called their house. I told my parents to tell him that I didn't want to speak to him. My father found it very hard, as he is a soft hearted man, and couldn't fully comprehend that anyone would truly behave as my abuser had done.

My abuser told my father that he had cut himself and had had to go to emergency. He was threatening suicide. I felt that it was a form of manipulation, but for the sake of my child, I agreed to return. I didn't want to hear that he had killed himself, and have to explain to my child that he had threatened it and I did nothing.

(He actually had cut himself, 

When my father and I arrived, I said that I would only return if he got on the phone there and then and called  (a men's support group I had seen pamphlets for). He did so,

and then my father took him aside and said: [REDACTED]

My abuser acted very contrite, and shook my father's hand.

As soon as my father had driven away, my abuser closed and locked the door behind me and said: "You realise it all gets worse from here."

I wasn't even shocked. I just whispered: "I know."

When I left the final time, my abuser woke me up in the middle of the night by screaming in my ear, [REDACTED] I refused.

He followed me around the house abusing me. I went outside, as previously he had tried to hide his abuse from the neighbours. He followed me, still yelling abuse and threatening me.

I realised a line had been crossed, and he no longer cared who knew what he was like behind the facade. I went back inside.

[REDACTED]

He kept it up until my child, who had been woken by the noise, came to the door to see whether everyone was alright. [REDACTED]

My abuser left the room to get ready for work. I quickly grabbed a camera, took photos of the carnage, hid the camera [REDACTED]

My abuser left for work.

I took my child and the camera to my neighbour's house for safekeeping. My neighbour was a very astute woman who had had her suspicions about my abuser.

It is because of my neighbour (*who had experienced Family Violence as a child*), her friend (*who had escaped Family Violence, but had to keep moving her children from one school to another, and was constantly on the run from her abuser*) a trusted friend of mine (*whose ethical workplace ran various yearly awareness campaigns and required all their staff to do a short course to understand that year's campaign. One of these was Family Violence Prevention*) and a family at my child's school (*who had a relative who was a Forensic Psychiatrist working in the prison system*) that I was put in contact with support systems, had abusive patterns of behaviour explained to me and was told about **sustainable** ways to escape my abuser.

I owe these people my life.

Support Suggestions

- *If victims are directed to a counsellor, or are given information about applying for an Intervention Order and women's support services, such as [REDACTED] when receiving medical treatment, there is a chance they may contact them.*
- *Victims need to be made aware that there is a service where their pets may be housed until they find safe accommodation. Pet abuse, or the threat of pet abuse, is a massive factor preventing victims from leaving a violent situation.*

- *If I had been informed when I first sought counselling about the various forms of abuse used by violent partners, and what support systems were available should I decide to leave, there is a chance that I would have been more able to have made that choice at that point. Instead I started thinking there was something wrong with me, because I was trying so hard, but my relationship wasn't working. I had logical reasons to be unhappy, but my abuser kept insisting it was my fault because I was unintelligent, naïve, incompetent and mentally unstable.*
- *It would be beneficial for there to be mandatory reporting from teachers, doctors, police, Centrelink workers, counsellors, veterinarians and charity workers. Family and friends of the victim contacting this service should also be taken seriously. This department should be run parallel to Child Protection, if anything went to Family Court, or to Magistrates Court (e.g. Intervention Orders) it should be given priority over any other consideration when orders are being drafted.*
- *If Child Protection attend a residence to check on a child's welfare, they **SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO INTERVIEW THE VICTIM WHILST SHE IS IN THE SAME ROOM AS THE ABUSER!***

When my child and I were still living with the abuser, Child Protection came to interview us, asking me questions about my safety WITH HIM RIGHT THERE, STARING ME DOWN AND SMIRKING, so naturally, I was not in a position to ask for help or relay my fears to them, as I knew there would be consequences, however I had no possibility of knowing what the severity or duration of those consequences would be.

There was no follow up call, or visit.

As a result of this, I concluded that there was no way out of my situation, and although the dangers escalated, I felt there was no point seeking assistance, as it may have proven fatal if my abuser knew I had told anyone in a position of authority.

I didn't seek assistance again until [REDACTED] years later, when the abuser's behaviour suggested that my death at his hands was imminent anyway.

- Women's shelters make use of hotels, whilst they are waiting for places to become available. Hotel staff who have been informed that abused women will be staying, need a background check and appropriate behaviour guidelines to follow. Women need to be aware that any behaviour they are uncomfortable with should be reported to women's shelter staff, and that nothing is too trivial to report, even if it seemed that the staff member's intentions appeared pleasant enough.*

I was placed in a motel whose manager, on the pretext of 'being nice' because he was aware

I had been abused, offered me [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I found his behaviour extremely predatory, and reported him.

- Women escaping violence have to be very selective about who they confide in about the abuse, because there are individuals out there who will use that information as a tool of coercion and control over people they recognise as vulnerable.*

- *I suggest that there should be a 'Pregnancy Retreat', service available. It could be suggested by Health Care workers/counsellors to pregnant women at any stage of the pregnancy. Abusers sometimes control victims' access to contraceptives, prohibiting their use, punishing the woman if she becomes pregnant; and prohibiting termination.*

A Pregnancy Retreat would give a woman respite from stressors at any point of her pregnancy (without visitors) in order for her to make autonomous decisions regarding her body and her future. This would include the option (through women's shelters/support groups) to not return to an unsafe situation.

- *It would be so helpful if there were a programme that assisted survivors to find work with an understanding employer.*

As a survivor, working is so important to feel strong and self reliant again. It is wonderful to be able to socialise and have some normalcy, to be able to have a task in front of you that is not associated with picking up the pieces, mourning the life that was wasted and legal paperwork.

The obstacles are that there are court days to attend, therapy appointments, legal appointments and sometimes PTSD affects work performance.

All workplaces should have Family Violence leave; and strategies such as security and privacy measures in place for dealing with stalkers.

Work needs to be a place where survivors can say they are going through/emerging from Family Violence without worrying that they will be discriminated against.

Legal Suggestions

- *Before Family Court proceedings are initiated, not only should it be mandatory that Mediation is attempted first, but that counselling/behaviour change therapy for all affected family members should be undergone prior to any form of decision being made relating to access. The victims should have had ample time (perhaps six months) attending a support group before anything goes as far as even Mediation.*
- *If the Behaviour Change Programme proves ineffective (as was the case with my abuser), then further measures need to be implemented to ensure the safety of victims. The Behaviour Change staff were supposed to keep me updated with the abuser's progress, so that I could assess my level of risk. They did let me know, but I had to be proactive and call them. They told me that he was basically a 'seat-warmer', like many others, and only turned up because he was required to. He wasn't interested in reform.*

He was also required to attend [REDACTED] and again, I called them, and again he wasn't interested in reform just fulfilling a requirement and ticking a box. This did nothing to affect Child Access, even though the results of his required drug tests had been inconclusive as he had ingested something to affect the test.

- *In cases of Family Violence, Child Access should only occur at a Child Access Service, and children should have ongoing counselling, with the Court/Mediation Service having a review after a few months to ascertain whether the Child Access is still appropriate to the child's needs and safety. Child handovers on Christmas Day, when McDonald's restaurants and Child Access Services are*

closed, are fraught with dangers, and abusers relish the opportunity to harass victims when they are isolated.

- *The abuser's family members should not be able to be the supervisors of child access. Either the abuser intimidates them into silence, or they are active participants in the abuse.*
- *Unsupervised access is used to intimidate the child. Without the protective parent present, the child is at the mercy of the abuser, and feels that nobody is on their side.*
- *Children who have emerged from family violence and are court ordered to attend access visits have difficulty socialising, as every second weekend is prohibitive (other parents do not want their child to be visiting an abusive individual's residence, and the abuser tends to invent excuses to exclude their child from social events in order to isolate them and harass the other parent.)*

Therefore, my child was unable to join any form of club which held events on weekends, as it could not be guaranteed that he would be permitted to attend on a regular basis.

- *Victims' cases should be automatically adjourned if they do not have a support person with them who is independent from their legal team.*
- *I found that my lawyers could not advise me of what course of action to take. Too late, I found the only way to protect my child was for me to be fully cognisant of the Family Violence Act of 1975 and its subsequent amendments. It then fell to me to make a decision, based on what I thought the Act protected my child from, but this was often stymied by lawyers informing me that "the Court doesn't do it that way", which made it appear as though the Act was a flimsy guideline which wasn't being taken seriously.*

- *I have had solicitors telling me that the Family Law magistrates operate on a circuit, and that I had little chance of altering my Final Orders through Change of Circumstances or other means, as the magistrate who had written them kept an eye on cases coming up, and if he spotted one that he had previously presided over, then he would ensure that he was the only magistrate dealing with those particular orders. I was told: "He doesn't like people messing with his orders, if you try to alter them; you risk your child having to spend extra time on access visits.*
- *When my child disclosed events or behaviours which frightened or disturbed him, I would inform his counsellor, my lawyer and Child Protection. It was always a Catch-22 situation. If I withheld access, then I was breaching Final Orders. If I allowed an access visit, then I wasn't acting protectively.*

If I had safety concerns, yet sent my child; then, my lawyer told me; the Court would take the view that my concern was not significant.

If I had safety concerns and withheld access, then there were legal consequences involving "make up time", which meant that my child had to attend access two weekends in a row, or for an extra week in the holidays. A larger block of time without a break from the abuser, was as distressing for my child as the event that caused me to withhold access.

Several people, including myself, contacted Child Protection with safety concerns. Child Protection said that if I had concerns about my child's safety, yet sent him on an access visit, then I would be the one under investigation for placing him in harm's way by complying with Final Orders, and sending him into an unsafe situation.

If I didn't send him, then I was being a Protective Parent, and Child Protection had no role. There was no scenario in which the abuser would face any consequence, or be investigated by Child Protection for harming the wellbeing of my child.

The only function Child Protection could perform was as an independent catalogue of complaints from various sources against the abuser, and I could only have access to them in written form if they were subpoenaed by the court. Otherwise, their hands were tied.

My lawyer told me that my child was too young to have a court listen to his fears. He would officially be too young until he was eighteen. However, the lawyer said for me to comply with the Final Orders, I only had to make sure that my child was available at child handover times at the correct venue. If my child did not want to go, he could simply refuse to go with his father.

My child said that if his father turned up at the school,

The teachers said that it was heartbreaking to see him pressed up against the window, waiting to see who was coming, and whether he would be safe, or have to run and hide.

There is no way that a child is emotionally capable of standing up to a manipulative, intimidating abuser, all alone. It is an abuse in itself, and grossly unfair and traumatic to put a child in that position, yet that is the only legally compliant option available.

- There should be a register of abusers which is accessible to police, Child Protection, Family Court and Magistrates Court. This register should record complaints about abusers, and list the number of complaints, the variety of sources the complaints come from and the number of victims attributed to each abuser.*

- *Perpetrators of abuse should be required to provide their current address, contact details and vehicle registration numbers (including work vehicles and vehicles they borrow/hire) to police. These details should be updated regularly.*
- *In cases of Family Violence, the Final Orders for Family Court should not include Equal Shared Parental Responsibility, as abusers almost exclusively use this to harass and stalk victims long after they have escaped the relationship. It gets used to track children in schools when they have moved away for reasons of safety. It gets used to deny children medical treatment and medication. It gets used to force the victim to keep children attending private schools which the victim cannot afford, and the abuser will not contribute to.*
- *Final Orders for Family Court should also not require the victim to provide email, address or phone numbers to their abusers. All of these details can be used to stalk the victim. Bluetooth on mobile phones can be used to track a victims movements, leaving them vulnerable. IP addresses can be found via knowledge of an email address/social media, again leaving a victim vulnerable.*
- *If a Child Counsellor finds that a child is having their trauma reinforced by having to carry the perpetrator's surname, then the protective parent should be able to change the child's name for them without having to seek permission from the abuser or having to alert the abuser to the fact that the child's name is to be changed.*
- *Teachers, Health Workers and Counsellors should be able to independently make statements regarding their concerns about a child's continuing access with an abusive parent and whether they consider it to be detrimental to the child's development.*

Legal advisers consistently told me that the court would disregard my child saying he felt unsafe visiting his father. I was told that due to his age, his assertions were unreliable. Yet how is anybody to know what is happening behind closed doors between a child and an abuser?

I was told that I 'just needed it in writing from an independent professional that contact with his father was directly harmful' for me to have a chance at protecting my child from unsupervised visits.

There were many education and health professionals who were deeply concerned for my child's safety and wellbeing, and were willing to do all they could to protect him, however, the Departments of Education and Health prevented them from providing any such assistance unless they were subpoenaed by the Family Court. Unfortunately, in Family Court, it seems that the opportunity for subpoenaing witnesses doesn't present itself.

- *Child Protection should reassess what is a 'normal' environment for a particular child after their Protective Parent removes them from a violent family life.*
- *In cases of Family Violence, Intervention Orders should not have to be renewed. It is traumatic enough to turn up to court at the same time as the abuser for the initial application. Abusers frequently use the court waiting room as an opportunity to intimidate the victim over and over, especially as both victim and abuser are waiting in the same building for up to eight hours. That's eight hours of the victim moving from chair to chair, and room to room, with the abuser following them.*

Arriving at, and leaving the courthouse are also dangerous, as the victim has no protection from the abuser at these times. Abusers use these moments to follow victims, prevent them from

entering the courthouse, find out what car they're driving and its registration and harass their support people.

Additionally, abusers tend not to grow tired of harassing their victim, sometimes going as far as to quit their jobs in order to obsessively pursue their victim. This behaviour can continue for many years. Abusers will often revert to directly harassing their victims the day an Intervention Order expires. (This happened in my case.)

- Intervention Orders, and Interim Intervention Orders in cases of Family Violence; should automatically include the victim's friends, family and associates, since abusers tend to target people around the victim once the victim leaves and takes out a conventional Intervention Order. Abusers will sometimes target the victim's family, friends, workmates and Safe House providers (such as [REDACTED] on the same day as an Intervention Order is taken out.*

It is an exhausting, expensive and unfair process, currently, when one abuser can cause a large number of people to have to individually take out successive Intervention Orders against them. Elderly people in my family were targeted, and were either not physically able to attend court to apply for Intervention Orders, or waiting for hours in a courthouse was incredibly painful.

- It should be illegal for the non-custodial parent to remove other people's documents (such as Birth Certificates) from the custodial parents' home. This is very common behaviour for abusers at the time of separation. They take children's Birth Certificates, Passports and Health Records, which are required by the custodial parent for the children's basic needs, such as schooling, childcare and immunisations. It is not done out of concern for the children, or because the non-custodial parent requires the documents. It is done as a form of control,*

and purely to maliciously inconvenience the victim. There is also the concern that these documents will be used for the purposes of identity theft.

- *All breaches of Intervention Orders should be taken seriously.*
- *Family Reports in cases of Family Violence should have victim and abuser interviewed on separate days. Equal time should be allocated to both parties. When I went to the Forensic Psychiatrist for my Family Report, my abuser went first, used up the bulk of the time allocated for both interviews, and I could hear him screaming and yelling from the waiting room, which had no lock. When it was my turn, I spent my interview frightened for the safety of my child (who was required to be there) and my support person, as there was nobody else in the building to protect them.*
- *Both victim and abuser should be required to disclose whether friends or family work for a government department. Anybody known to either should not have authority to access the victim's personal information. I am aware of instances where women continually had to flee their abusers because successive new addresses of theirs were repeatedly provided to abusers.*

Safety Suggestions

- [REDACTED] were BRILLIANT support. [REDACTED] Health workers were especially helpful and the [REDACTED] support group was excellent. I cannot speak highly enough of the [REDACTED] staff and volunteers, and have no doubt they have saved lives.

[REDACTED] organised guest speakers from Victims Of Crime, Financial Counsellors, Lawyers, Legal Aid, Men's Behavioural Change, Mentors and other women who had been through abuse and regained their independence. They also organised meditation sessions, housing, tai chi, counselling, advocacy, support people for court, a wealth of advice and a welcoming and encouraging place of safety.

Community Health Services are an invaluable resource, but until I started searching for counselling/housing, I had no idea that they existed, or what their purpose was.

- [REDACTED] also ran a mentoring course for women who had been through family violence and wanted to help lend their strength to others.

These mentors would advocate for vulnerable women to assist them in finding housing, financial advice, food, safety plans, privacy, whitegoods, and somebody to provide moral support for court cases and legal appointments and advocacy.

- I believe that if the idea of Security Anklets goes ahead, that victims should have a device that alerts them if the perpetrator is in their area, so that they can get to a place of safety.

- *I think that Public Toilets, Doctors Offices, Maternity Wards, Maternal and Child Health Clinics, Train Station Waiting Rooms, Libraries, Kindergartens, Playgroups, Schools, Universities, TAFEs and Counselling Rooms should have information on safety, phone numbers of support groups and services, and information on what constitutes abusive behaviour.*
- *If somebody purchases two mobiles on the one plan, the provider company should alert the secondary phone regularly that their calls and SMSs may have the number they originated from sent to the primary phone.*

On the day that I saw an Intervention Order Officer, a few of my friends called my mobile, which I didn't answer, suspecting that it was my abuser. Each of them later told me that seconds after they hung up, my abuser rang them, telling them I was fine. I had never passed on these numbers to my abuser, so it was not coincidental. This tactic put my friends through a lot of trauma, as they instantly assumed he had killed me.

Whilst I was applying for the Intervention Order, a security guard informed the officer and me that my abuser had entered the courthouse and was 'walking around like he owned the place, opening every courtroom door, demanding to see the Intervention Order Officer'.

I was told this was 'textbook' abusive behaviour, and that he'd probably used my phone to track my whereabouts.

- *When victims escape their abuser, they should be informed how to keep themselves safe.*

E.g.: Change mobile phone and sim; do not use Bluetooth, or disable it; get a private and unlisted phone number;

Alert landlord/mortgage lender about situation, and find new accommodation;

Alert essential services (water, electricity etc.) about situation, and change provider;

Remove self from electoral roll, become silent voter;

Close or cease to use social media;

Do not disclose any information about new contact details to anybody who knows the abuser, because anybody can be manipulated into telling the abuser information which can be used to stalk the victim;

Change doctors;

If victim has a vehicle, sell it and purchase another, or paint it and get a new registration plate;

Inform Centrelink of situation and ask to speak to a social worker. Disclose any incorrect information Centrelink/Child Support/Medicare may have as a result of the abusive relationship;

Alert bank to situation, change account details, pin numbers and passwords;

Get P.O. Box and redirect all mail there for a year to be sure that no private mail can be intercepted.

Education Suggestions

- *If there had been information sessions on Family Violence at my High School, I would perhaps have recognised this behaviour as manipulative. Instead I put it down to immaturity, social awkwardness and depression. Schoolchildren need to be informed about what constitutes abusive behaviour. They need to be informed that any abuse can be damaging, not just extreme forms, and that all abuse should be reported. Nothing should be minimised. If it feels wrong or uncomfortable to you, then it is not trivial. Whether behaviour is socially considered abusive is relative to people's experience and upbringing. What should be focussed on; is what is legally considered to be abuse.*
- *Neighbourhood Watch groups should have training in what organisations to refer concerned people to, and what constitutes Family Violence, so that they don't feel helpless to tackle this area. All they need do is report to police. At least that is more evidence to combat abusers, and could be helpful in the case of Intervention Orders and Child Protection.*
- *If my family and friends were aware of what constituted Family Violence and knew who they could contact for assistance and advice, then I may only have had to leave once.*
- *It is important for victims to connect with each other. Abuse and isolation make you socially awkward, and it is a relief to spend time in an understanding environment, and drop concerns about negotiating social mores.*

After I became more confident about revealing what I had been through, I spoke about it more with friends and acquaintances. My revelations led to others feeling more comfortable about talking about their own experiences. It was eye-opening to realise just how many people I knew had been sexually assaulted/had had abusive partners/had grown up with Family Violence and had never told anyone before, or had never reported the abuse.

A victim may not recognise an abuser's behaviour as abusive, because they are conditioned over time to believe that they deserve the abuse.

What they don't realise is that every time they suffer 'punishment', the abuser is immediately fantasising about the next punishment. The abuser just keeps pushing the boundary in order to gain ground and 'win' control, and see what they can get away with. The 'punishment' is the goal, the excuse for it is not important. This is why it is so hard for victims to work out what they are doing 'wrong'.

Sometimes it is not the blanket terms of what constitutes abuse which inform a victim they are being abused. However, an anecdote of specific behaviours or a particular turn of phrase of someone who has been identified as an abuser may trigger a spark of recognition in a victim that helps them identify abusive behaviours which are mirrored by somebody in their family. It can be a case of 'not seeing the forest for the trees'.

- *New Australians need to be informed of laws which protect them from/prevent them from committing Family Violence.*

- *Support workers for New Australians need to be informed about cultural differences and sensitivities, as well as the possibility that a woman's overseas family members may be under threat if she leaves due to them not being protected by law.*
- *I believe that perpetrators of abuse use the same methods of control that are used by cult leaders, and that is why it is so difficult for victims to recognise it as abuse.*
- *A victim's family, friends and support workers are all affected by helping her escape abuse. It puts them at risk of harm and harassment, traumatises them and affects their physical and emotional wellbeing.*
- *A theory has emerged about mammoths. A lot of female and infant mammoth skeletons show horrific wounds that were inflicted on them by male mammoths. The theory runs that primitive societies hunted the alpha males because they were larger, and one kill provided a lot more food than killing an inferior specimen. The alpha males used to ward off the undesirable males from the herd. Without the alpha males around, the inferior males attacked the females and infants for sport and dominance.*

I think humans are not too far removed from this behaviour. I think that young men and teenage boys need male role models who advocate kindness as a character trait of strength.

Perhaps ambulance workers, doctors, social workers, fire-fighters, SES volunteers, Community Legal Service workers, Lions and Apex members and other men who have chosen a compassionate, community-minded path in life could work with schools to provide mentoring groups to teenage boys. Reclaim what the term "alpha male" actually means.

Royal Commission into Family Violence Submission

I was in a violent relationship from [REDACTED]

I came from a non-violent family. My parents never argued. As children, my siblings and I were not physically punished. We were not wealthy. My parents are both very community minded, volunteering hundreds of hours over the years to local schools, churches and various beneficial organisations.

In [REDACTED] I met [REDACTED] through a mutual friend. He asked her to pass on to me that he was interested. I hesitated for some time as he was [REDACTED] years younger than me, but he was persistent, and I eventually went on a date with him.

After dating him for [REDACTED] months, I ended the relationship, as I found his behaviour disrespectful. All “jokes” were at my expense, and he repeatedly put me down verbally, and tried to physically dominate me if his friends were around. Although I requested many times that he desist, I was ignored.

He asked me to attend a concert with him afterward to “talk,” and started begging me to be his girlfriend again. I explained that I wasn’t interested, and tried to walk away, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In
desperation, I said that I would remain friends with him.

During the time that we were “friends” he would drop in unannounced at my workplace and home. He would interfere with my work duties, ignore requests not to touch me whilst I was at work and call me frequently.

At the end of [REDACTED] he invited me on a camping trip with a group of his friends. He assured me that several other people were coming. As the time of the trip approached, he kept telling me that one friend after another had "cancelled," until eventually only he and I were camping.

Whilst on the trip he told me that he had contemplated suicide the day that I broke off the relationship. He knew this would affect me [REDACTED]

The camping trip ended after he offered to let me practice driving in his car and I crashed.

In the few days after the accident we were again in a relationship.

We went back to the campsite to sort out transporting the vehicle, and he told me that I now owed him [REDACTED] for his car. I was stunned, as the car was worth [REDACTED] at most, but he said he had been working on it and that was the value he had added.

I started paying him back, but I was studying and only worked weekends, and couldn't pay much at a time. During the relationship the money he said I owed him was continually held over my head as a method of control.

[REDACTED] and would need to convalesce for at least eight weeks after surgery.

Although I repeatedly said that I wasn't comfortable with living de facto out of respect to my parents and upbringing, both [REDACTED] and his mother pressured me to move out of my shared house and into his flat. They argued that I wouldn't have to negotiate [REDACTED] stairs anymore, and he could take care of me whilst I was recovering. He also said: "I guess we're engaged, then," and encouraged me to announce it to all my friends and family.

- *If there had been information sessions on Family Violence at my High School, I would perhaps have recognised this behaviour as manipulative. Instead I put it down to immaturity, social awkwardness and depression.*

After my surgery, [REDACTED] came to visit me daily in hospital. I thought he was being caring. As I had no appetite, while I slept, he ate all my meals and the chocolates that visitors had brought for me.

The hospital staff instructed me to rest for a minimum of eight weeks as it had been major surgery.

[REDACTED] drove me back to his flat.

After a couple of weeks he started acting resentfully towards me, telling me I was lazy, that I should go back to work because it wouldn't involve heavy lifting. I reminded him that I had to follow what the hospital had told me, but after four weeks he told me it was my turn to go shopping. He was so unpleasant that I gave in. As I had no licence or car, I had to carry the groceries home. My stitches ripped.

After six weeks I couldn't bear the pressure and name-calling anymore and returned to work for a break.

When I returned to the hospital to have my stitches removed, they were suspicious about how they ripped and why I returned to work early.

- *If I had been directed to a counsellor, or had been given information about women's support services, such as [REDACTED] at this point, there is a chance I may have contacted them.*

I felt ashamed that I had let down my family values, trapped, because I had been rushed into a de facto relationship, announced an impending engagement to all and sundry (which seemed a huge mistake that was going nowhere) and embarrassed that I had been fooled into accepting a situation that I had never been comfortable with.

I was looking for a way out, but did not know how to go about it.

I was unhappy and unsure of myself. [REDACTED] made my friends and family feel uncomfortable to visit or call me, as he would refuse to sit down when people were visiting me, and if I was on the phone he would stand next to me and interject constantly, hijacking every conversation.

If friends invited us out he would refuse to go, and sulk, face down on the bed, so that I felt that there would be repercussions if I went out without him. He always insisted that he never forbid me from seeing my friends or family, or them from seeing me. However, there would always be some chore that he would insist I do which made me miss trains to visit family. He started displaying increasing resentment towards my friends and family insisting that they thought they were better than him.

Around this time he threatened to cheat on me if I didn't behave in the way he wanted. He would tell me how he planned to go about it and who he would do it with. I never knew whether it actually happened, but he told me that one of his workmates was obsessed with him and he had cheated on me with her a few times because she would do whatever he wanted.

He would use various means to humiliate me, and threaten to film me and put it on the internet if I didn't do as I was told. He kept telling me he didn't want to be in a relationship with me, but when I agreed to end it, he would change his mind and tell me he wanted me to stay. I was constantly off balance, and felt that if I left him, he would harass, blackmail and cause me to be ostracised by my friends and family.

I was miserable and isolated. I spoke to two different counsellors who both said I sounded unhappy in my relationship and that I should consider leaving.

- *If I had been informed when I first sought counselling about the various forms of abuse used by violent partners, and what support systems were available should I decide to leave, there is a chance that I would have been more able to have made that choice at that point. Instead I started thinking there was something wrong with me, because I was trying so hard, but my relationship wasn't working. I had logical reasons to be unhappy, but [REDACTED] kept insisting it was my fault because I was unintelligent, naïve, incompetent and mentally unstable.*

[REDACTED] always said he didn't want to be a father, yet refused to use contraceptives, and didn't want me to either. When I found out I was pregnant in [REDACTED] I decided to tell him, hoping that that would end the relationship seeing as he was so averse to children.

I was wrong. It was used as yet another method to control me.

During the time I knew him, [REDACTED] almost never drove without speeding. He would brag about the times that police stopped him and let him off with a warning. His method was to be self-deprecating and submissive. I twice witnessed him trick officers into letting him off without even a fine after reckless driving and speeding thirty kilometres over the limit.

He felt that he was superior and untouchable, and whilst I was pregnant, he liked to push his car to speeds of [REDACTED] I didn't feel as though there was any point in asking him to slow down or telling the police, as I felt that nobody would listen.

After my baby was born, [REDACTED] started using MDMA, binge drinking and smoking large amounts of marijuana daily. It was normal for him to consume a bottle and a half of [REDACTED] every night, along with a cocktail [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] would become more aggressive after becoming intoxicated. He was visiting two different doctors to get his medication, as well as bullying his mother into giving him his father's prescription medication. [REDACTED] had died from cancer, and he was also using her [REDACTED] (a cancer pain reliever) which he was also getting from his mother. As well as this, he was coercing me into going to different doctors to get him painkillers and Valium.

At one point I told his regular doctor, Dr. [REDACTED] that [REDACTED] was doctor shopping for painkillers and other medication. I disclosed how much he was drinking. I told the doctor about how when [REDACTED] was inebriated, he would [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I begged the doctor to stop prescribing [REDACTED] as he was using them as party drugs in conjunction with alcohol and I was frightened. The doctor said "That's very strange behaviour..." and proceeded to give [REDACTED] all the medication he asked for the very next time he saw him.

- *I think it would be beneficial for there to be mandatory reporting from teachers, doctors, police, Centrelink workers, counsellors, veterinarians and charity workers. I think it should be set up parallel to Child Protection, and that if anything went to Family Court, or to Magistrates Court (eg. Intervention Orders) that it should be given priority over any other consideration when orders are being drafted.*

- *I also think that before Family Court proceedings are initiated, that not only should it be mandatory that Mediation is attempted first, but that counselling/behaviour change therapy for all affected family members should be undergone prior to any form of decision being made relating to access. The victims should have had ample time (perhaps six months) attending a support group before anything goes as far as even Mediation.*
- *I believe that in cases of Family Violence, Child Access should only occur at a Child Access Service, and that children should have ongoing counselling, with the Court/Mediation Service having a review after a few months to ascertain whether the Child Access is still appropriate to the child's needs and safety.*

Before my baby was [REDACTED] I had tried to leave three times.

[REDACTED] had convinced me to allow him to set up my bank account for internet banking and was constantly siphoning money out of it so that I was constantly broke. He had also told me that we would be homeless and starving unless I told Centrelink that I was living alone with my baby. I felt I had no choice but to do as I was told, but I was ashamed to do so, as it went against everything I believed in, and I was certain that I was going to lose everything before long.

- *If Centrelink had required me to speak to a Social Worker in order to apply for Single Parenting Payment, if there had been some way that I could have ticked a box to say that I was being put under pressure to apply for it, then I would have. I would have felt too afraid to come out and say it, or even to write it down, however ticking a box is less confrontational.*