

My name is Belinda Spence and I am a survivor of Domestic Violence. Although my experience was not over a long period it has profoundly affected my life. I was subjected to abuse for just over 2 years, and my experience post the incidence has been less than appropriate from support agencies at all levels both government and community based.

#### Question 1.

The Family violence act states that it is not limited to Physical and sexual violence, but there are inadequate measures to take to help with the other forms of violence that the act covers. The police are unwilling to help with the incidence of stalking especially over social media. The impact that social media has over victims is profound. My abuser had over 21 different Facebook accounts and would request friendships with my children and other family under false names. He was able to follow my every move via these other accounts. Give the police the ability to help victims escape this sort of abuse.

There are inadequate housing facilities for victims escaping family violence. In my incidence I went to the local government aid agency and was told that because I had a job, as menial as it was, that I was not eligible for any sort of emergency housing. I am aware that this is not their fault, but that there is an inadequacy in Government support to provide this sort of support to victims leaving their situation. It was extremely hard to be told that because I owned a car there was no room for me at any shelter. I had fled my situation thinking that I would be able to get support. Despite this I spent 13 weeks in my car and couch surfing, before I had sufficient funds to be able to afford a private rental. In other states like Queensland there are organisations that victims can go to for help namely an organisation called Assist a Sista, they provide housing support for victims. By taking them from abuse situations and giving them housing solutions and aiding those victims to move past their abuse by giving them back their identity and sense of self-worth. Alternatively maybe the state government could look at providing sufficient monetary support to more aid agencies and shelters to help victims to get the required assistance.

Education of the community needs to also be a focus, and should be encouraged at a primary School level; many of these affected children are ashamed to tell anyone of their home situation and also too scared to ask for help. Education at this level may take the shame out of children talking about abuse, it also teaches children about the red flags to watch out for if violence is occurring amongst their family or amongst a friend's family. It may also help with other forms of abuse like bullying in schools.

#### Question 2

Responses to family violence may have improved, but the community based support agencies are inadequately funded to provide the support needed emotionally, physically and monetarily, to help victims escaping family violence. Bringing the incidence of family based violence by making the community aware of it via the media has had an impact on exposing how prevalent the incidence of family violence is, and I assume has actually saved some victims, but it has done nothing to provide support programs to help them leave their situation. The law and community support agencies should be focusing on responding to any report of violence and encouraging victims to come forward and feeling safe in doing so. I didn't feel safe leaving my situation nor was it made easy to do so.

### Question 3

Honestly there are very few reforms that supply sufficient aid to victims in this state. Funding has been removed from government run community support agencies for Domestic Violence. The government needs to restore funding to these agencies in order to save victims from continued abuse.

White ribbon day has had some positive effects on community. Making the population aware of the incidence and promoting that it is wrong to commit family violence on any level. It also provides abusers with the means to seek assistance to stop the violence. We need more initiative's like this one to make reporting or leaving the situation easier on victims. The Respect hotline is aiding this but I believe that the funding is again being pulled from this sort of support.

### Question 6

During my incidence of abuse many circumstances used to start the occurrence of violence. Often it was my inadequacy to complete tasks in the time allocated by my abuser, or that I had failed to complete tasks to his standard, even though my standards are quite high. A lack of money on my part, used to invoke abuse. My abuser used multiple types of abuse to hurt me, physical, mental, social isolation, financial and spiritual. This occurred multiple times over the course of our relationship and left me financial ruin when I finally ran. His persistence to attempt to track me down occurred until his death earlier this year. Many times I informed him that I would pursue an invention order against him, he responded with a threat to just tear it up and find me anyway. The use of invention orders against abusers as a means to stop family violence is inadequate, especially when the abuser deems them to be just a piece of paper with no follow up consequences. In order to make abusers liable to further consequences there needs to be improvements to the law. Orders need to be made tiered to include stronger and more stringent criminal proceedings for breaches of orders. Only this can be changed by the making of new laws and amendments to the act to include breaching orders.

Other recommendations that need to be addressed should include -:

1. The ongoing support of victims in the long term.
2. In providing support to the family, we need to include support to the family's animals. Many families have pets that also suffer as victims of Domestic Violence. Often offenders threaten to harm the family pets, possibly a fostering system for these pets to help maintain normality for sufferers, also to prevent the family further suffering from losing their pets.
3. To promote an Assist a Sista Model of support for victims to help them re-establish themselves, providing support to re-educate victims. Especially learning basic survival techniques like budgeting, minor house repairs, to help restore a level of confidence. We need to place a bigger emphasis on keeping victims from returning to their abuser.