

Royal commission into Family Violence – [REDACTED] – 19.05.2015

My Name is [REDACTED]

I am what is termed as a Survivor

Yes, I did survive. I was lucky enough to live. And looking back now, I am one of the lucky ones. Though the impacts from this survival, can be felt, and have an impact on my life every day.

My Story, which I chose not to disclose in full today, included a fatality. My husband from whom I had been estranged was shot and killed by my then partner, after yet again tracking me down and finding me.

I would like now to give back, to help others who are now experiencing this nightmare.

My concern, remembering being a "victim" is that I would not leave without my dogs. My dogs who were used as a pawn, threatened with horrible deaths. With the unconditional love they gave me, no matter what. I would not leave them to this fate.

If I had no-where to go where I could not take them. I would not leave.

I take in animals from families affected by family violence through local agencies, and care for them at no charge until they are able to get housing and have their animals back home with them. It is a huge thing for children especially. Often these animals are handed to the RSPCA [REDACTED]

This is played out day to day, every day in the lives of women, and sadly, their children. There is not enough accommodation for women and children, affected by family violence. There is much less, if anything, for women and children and their pets.

After my family violence experience, I put myself on the road to recovery. I fought tooth and nail to improve my education, and to improve my life. But always I had my dogs to support me at home.

I am a qualified [REDACTED]; business owner, I am an experienced [REDACTED]. I am currently undertaking a Diploma in [REDACTED] where I will specialise in family violence.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] is a new program. It is before the Chief Magistrate as I write this, with the intention of beginning a Pilot Program in [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] having an extremely high rate of family Violence. I am awaiting their response.

This purposely trained dog may help agencies in the future, agencies such as CAV, VAS, and possibly Vic Police.

"[REDACTED]" can help with family violence. She can give children a voice, and a sense of unconditional love and understanding. She has no conditions. She does not judge.

She could walk into a courtroom with unconditional support for the child she represents. A child possibly giving evidence regarding a violent crime against their mother, or siblings.

She could give strength to a single woman, who sits alone, scared.

She could sit quietly, representing Centre against Violence advocates, helping them to help the children remain calm and able to tell their story. Give better evidence as they relive their trauma.

It has been trialled and proven overseas that courtroom dogs have a positive effect in the lives of those traumatised by violent crimes.

"[REDACTED]" will train these dogs to be comfort animals before, during and after court appearances.

Often it is said that going through the Justice System is reliving the trauma.

"[REDACTED]" is offering a way to help with that trauma.

Facility dogs are trained to a high level of obedience, such as a service dog is. The difference is that the Facility dog works with many different people, not just one as a service dog would. The facility dogs would be "owned" by an agency and be on call when needed.

I have letters of support from agencies who deal in the "frontline" of domestic violence in our area.

[REDACTED] are offering to research and conduct evaluation on this pilot, should we have the permission to go ahead.

I am hoping you can see the positive impact this program could have on people whose lives have been traumatised through violent crimes. And also the positive impact these dogs can have on the people who work in this area. They need unconditional support too.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this program with you. Please contact me with any questions or comments you may have.

This has not been done in Australia. I would like to bring this program here and help those in [REDACTED] first. Should the pilot prove successful I can expand and help more victims of domestic violence.

[REDACTED]

To whom this may concern,

This letter is to outline [REDACTED] Health's formal support of the [REDACTED] Program Ms [REDACTED] is proposing in her letter to you.

[REDACTED] Health is funded to provide support across the [REDACTED] Region to victims of crime against the person, this service is known as the Victims Assistance Program (VAP).

The VAP provides flexible case management services tailored to the individual needs of victims of violent crime that aim to assist victims to manage the impact of violent crime against them, promote recovery, and minimise secondary victimisation sometimes associated with involvement in the criminal justice system and processes or being a victim of another crime.

The VAP is funded by the Department of Justice and works towards achieving these aims by meeting the following objectives:

- providing quality services that meet the practical, emotional and psychological needs of victims
- assisting and advocating on behalf of victims navigating the criminal justice system, and
- establishing and maintaining appropriate working relationships with key stakeholders to assist the delivery of seamless and accessible services to victims of crime against the person.

The VAP is hopeful that through a partnership with Ms [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] Magistrates Court, our case managers will be able to support our clients in court with the added resource of a facility dog through this pilot program.

As one can imagine, having to give evidence in court after being the victim of one or repeated heinous crimes can be an incredibly traumatic experience. Our case managers will often work with an individual for weeks and sometimes months leading up to a court case so that their mental state is such that they can provide clear evidence to the court.

The opportunity to be able to make this process less intimidating with the use of a facility dog as part of this pilot program is exciting for our Victims Assistance Program Case Managers. We see this program to have many benefits for our clients, whether child or adult, and for the court.

As Ms [REDACTED] has outlined, this program has seen great success in countries such as America and Canada and Animal Assisted Therapy can often see immediate positive therapeutic results. As stated previously, the Victims Assistance Program wholeheartedly supports this pilot program and would be very appreciative to be able to discuss this opportunity with the Benalla Magistrates Court.

Please feel free to contact me on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] to discuss.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]
Coordinator Victims Assistance Program



2/04/15

To whom this may concern,

This letter is written in support of [REDACTED]'s proposal to introduce the [REDACTED] program into the [REDACTED] region, with particular attention paid to providing support to clients accessing the legal and court system.

The Centre Against Violence is the specialist family violence and sexual assault service provider for the [REDACTED] district. A significant part of our advocacy work is in relation to the provision of court support for clients impacted by these crimes. Given the nature of such crimes, much of our work involves preparing clients to feel safe and as contained as possible when they move through the legal process. There is well documented research that tells us that victims of violent crime often describe being re-traumatized when accessing the judicial system.

As mentioned in the [REDACTED] program brief, the use of a facility dog as an additional support to our current therapeutic work around safety and containment for clients, would work to compliment this. Anecdotally, I would imagine any opportunity to increase a clients feeling of safety would also benefit them in terms of giving their evidence and work toward a more positive experience of the overall process.

Centre Against Violence would support the idea of a pilot project that would give an opportunity for a unique idea like this to be given the opportunity to have some of its effectiveness and outcomes measured in a planned and thorough way.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any further information that might assist you with this proposal.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

Centre Against Violence